PAST MASTERS 227

Mark Allerton
Edward Dyson
Stephen Leacock
Cosmo Hamilton
Hugh Walpole
Dolph Wyllarde
Robert Hichens
Mark Hellinger
F A M Webster

and more

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

7 July 2025

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1: Pin Money

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1900-1954

Daily Telegraph 10 March 1934

PETER BROMLEIGH stood, long legs a-straddle, back to the fireplace. His face, always rather grave and serious, was graver, more serious now. His hair, as long as Claire could remember him, had been touched with grey at the temples. It seemed greyer of late— just in the past six months. What he had gone through during the collapse of the stock-market and the winding-up of the brokerage firm of Peter Bromleigh and Company, only himself and his Maker could ever know.

Claire— slender, blonde, butterfly Claire— could guess at his troubles, but, as he had never brought them home to her, never tried to weep on her shoulder, she couldn't form a real idea of them.

"Is it pretty bad?"

He started. He smiled that slow, deliberate smile that had made her love him, fifteen years her senior, made her true and faithful to him with a truth and fidelity few of her friends ever believed to exist in -a nature so mercuric, so fond of laughter and frivolity.

"Not so bad," he said cheerfully. "I have something in view, darling- something that might prove a goldmine— or again, might be a flivver. I salvaged some thousands from the wreck. I'll try to make it grow."

She didn't question him further, she was afraid— afraid he might casually mention the two thousand dollars in bonds she was supposed to have, and didn't. Not that he would want to use her money or would scold her for having spent it. No, Peter wasn't like that. But she knew he thought she still owned those bonds and perhaps, felt, a certain security on account of that knowledge. But she had sold every last one of them.

Always she had gone over the ample allowance Peter had given her. She was always in debt, and by fifties and hundreds the money fron. the bonds had gone— for bridge debts, for house, accounts at the Golf Club, for a dozen and one things she might just as well have done without. She was glad when Peter announced that he had to go down town for a while. He wouldn't be long. Just a little matter of business; and he hoped she wouldn't be lonely.

Gently he kissed her wide, white forehead and looked into her eyes, blue, childlike eyes, that answered the love in his.

"Heads up, Claire," he said gaily. "Never say die, eh?"

"Never say die, Peter."

HE was gone. Claire sat where he had left her, thinking, wondering; for the first time in her young life, worrying. It seemed strange to worry. She had always had everything she wanted, first as the daughter of Phelps Morton, banker, then as the wife of Peter Bromleigh, broker. But Phelps Morton had died bankrupt, and now Peter— Peter. It was a shame. He had worked so hard, so honestly. He had played the game squarely, abiding by all the rules. But the dice were loaded, and things went against him.

"And I've spent that money," thought Claire, guiltily. "I was a selfish little beast. I've always been one. If only I could help him now— when he needs it most. But there's nothing—"

Strangely, then, like some evil djinn conjured up by the mere wishing, the dark, Levantine visage of Sol Isinger appeared before her— smiling, suave, with glittering black eyes and curved nose.

"Oh!" muttered Claire. "Oh, no— I— it wouldn't be right. It wouldn't. Peter would kill me if I did anything like that. But they always steal the designs some way; somebody gets the money— I won't— I won't even think of it."

But Claire Bromleigh stepped out of a taxi the very next morning, before the decision made in the sleepless, long-drawn night should weaken — out of a taxi and into the store of Sol Isinger. She looked, first, nervously up and down the Avenue, smiling at her silly fears that anyone of her friends would be likely to see her there.

"Ah! Mrs. Bromleigh!" Sol swooped down on her like a vulture, and conducted her with much ceremony and oily courtesy into the garishly-furnished office at the rear of his store. The sales-ladies, the women trying on dresses and wrangling over hats, paid her no attention; perhaps because the expensive dark tweed *tailleur* she wore could be duplicated pretty well in Sol Isinger's for a tenth of the cost— that lovely *tailleur* that had come from Claudette's, and had taken several of her bonds to pay for.

"I am dee-lighted to see you again, Mrs. Bromleigh," murmured Sol. . "I have not seen you since the time I was so fortunate as to be. presented to you. I— doubtless—" His olive-colored lids drooped— "you have long since forgotten our little conversation and the proposition I was so rash as to put to you—"

"I haven't," said Claire shortly. "I came about that. I— I'm ready to help you pirate those new models—"

Sol's lids lifted. For a moment he was speechless. He couldn't believe his ears. It cost him money— so much money that he lost sleep over it— to have someone steal those high-priced, French-imported ideas and sell them to him to pass on at a low figure to the throngs of stenographers and the like, who knew you could get "real Parisian models" at Sol Isinger Incorporated.

"You will! Say, that's wonderful, Mrs. Bromleigh. Look, I said I'd pay a hundred for each design you — er — told me about. I'll do better. If you can get

them from Claudette's I'll double that figure. I suppose It's just some pin-money for you."

"Yes," said Claire. "Just— just pin-money."

Sol rubbed his hands, and his eyes gleamed. Claudette's was one place that had pretty well defied his most subtle efforts at design-pirating. He had managed to get a few of their models, but the leak had been quickly stopped. Only the most exclusive of the most exclusive women, like Mrs. Peter Bromleigh, were numbered amongst Claudette's clientele. "Can you sketch those designs, Mrs. Bromleigh?"

"I— I think so," said Claire.

Her throat was dry, her heart beat uneasily. She wished now she had never come here, never leagued herself with this black, bright-eyed little vulture. But it was done now. She was going to a private showing of advanced Spring models, Imported by Claudette's direct from la Rue de la Paix. In two or three days' time the general public would be able to purchase almost the identical models at a fraction of their cost from Sol Isinger Incorporated. And Claire Bromleigh would be a lot richer.

She wasn't afraid of being caught. She was above suspicion. Everyone whom Claudette's invited to a showing was above suspicion— must be, or they wouldn't get in. Claudette's staff had been there for long years. Nothing ever leaked out of Claudette's. Oh, once or twice, maybe— but not for long.

Claire arranged to meet Sol Isinger's representative in the lobby of a quiet hotel, to detorlbe the designs and sketch them roughly.

"Just a hint," boomed Sol. "Describe a bow or a flounce to Morrie and he'll do the rest."

And Morrie would pay her cash. Two hundred for each design. Easy money. It frightened her terribly at first. She thought everyone at Claudette's salon must be able to guess, must see in her eyes, in the guilty look on her face, what she was about. She jumped if someone spoke to her and once, when Monsieur Alberic, the manager, touched her arm, she almost screamed. Folly. Monsieur Alberic only wished to show, her "ze verry special model, ze *plus chic* of any—"

Morrie gave her three hundred for that.

IT went on for a week, two weeks, three. Her bank account grew, passed the two thousand mark. She decided she'd quit now. She felt like a criminal. She didn't sleep well at nights. Once clear of that ugly business she told Sol she was through.

He shed tears. Business had boomed. Money was rolling in. He was winning a greater reputation among his own clientele than Claudette's was maintaining with the wealthy women who went there. Many had complained about seeing

their thousand-dollar ensembles strolling down Sixth Avenue and going into the subway. The news spread. The wealthy women ceased coming.

Claire was through now. She was a different person that afternoon, after she had said a cold farewell to Sol Isinger. Her eyes were bright. Peter could question her about the bonds now. She was all ready. She had the bonds, and money to spare.

But Peter didn't question her. He was sitting in the library when she came in, hands clasped in front of him, head bowed. Dejection, defeat, things she had never thought to see in him, written in his very attitude.

"Peter!" She dropped on her knees beside him."Peter— what is it— oh, what?"

He reached out an arm and put it about her shoulders. His cold hand patted her cheek. He grinned wanly. "Oh, just another flivver," he said. "I— well, I sunk all my remaining capital in Claudette's— a silly thing to do— Claudette's is finished."

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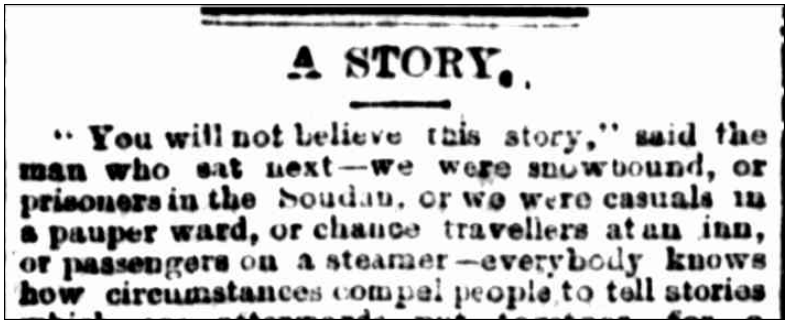
2: A Story

Anonymous

Oakleigh Leader (Victoria) 23 July 1892



A STORY.

"You will not believe this story," said the man who sat next—we were snowbound, or prisoners in the Soudan, or we were casuals in a pauper ward, or chance travellers at an inn, or passengers on a steamer—everybody knows how circumstances compel people to tell stories

"YOU WILL NOT believe this story," said the man who sat next— we were snowbound, or prisoners in the Soudan, or we were casuals in a pauper ward, or chance travellers at an inn, or passengers on a steamer— everybody knows how circumstances compel people to tell stories which are afterwards put together for a Christmas Annual. This is one of the stories cut down a little.

"I say," he repeated, because we were all yawning; the last story had been indeed dull, "you will not believe this story. Nevertheless, I mean to tell it. The time was Christmas Eve,"— he looked around with so much determination that those who thought of flight into the wild and frozen night, or across the hot and sandy desert, or to the wet and slippery dock, only sighed and shook their heads.

"Christmas Eve, I say, that season when heart meets heart, and… Well, but you have had that in other stories, and it is stale. I pass on. There was dinner— a copious dinner, with sherry, champagne, claret, and port. At midnight, tobacco and whiskey. At two, bed.

"What was it," he asked, but nobody moved, "that made me think of it? Forty years had passed since I heard of it. I was then a boy of nine or ten— I am now fifty. I heard of it because everybody talked about it. I was staying there for my holidays, my Christmas holidays. The diamonds were lost. That was it. On Christmas Eve there was a party. She wore those diamonds. In the morning they were missing. Now she had taken them off and put them in her dressing case, in the case that belonged to them, before going to bed. In the morning they were gone. The house had not been entered; nor had any one left it when the loss was discovered; every room was searched; every chest of drawers, cupboard, box, trunk, every pocket was examined. I believe they took up the carpets and prised up the hearthstones, and dived into the cistern, and swept the chimneys; in vain, the diamonds could not be found; they were worth about £2,000. The thing made a great impression upon my mind, because my own portmanteau was searched, and I remember wondering what would happen to me if the

horrid things were found there, and what I should have to make up in order to account for their presence. Besides, everybody in the house was talking about it, and everybody talked at once. Magpies were suggested; everybody was suspected; the cat was watched. For my own part, as soon as I found that the things wore not in my portmanteau I worried no more about the matter. Presently I went home, went back to school, and thought no more of it.

"Thought no more for forty years, when I went to that house again for Christmas, my host being the oldest son of the lady who had lost the diamonds— at the time of my visit, a young man of twenty-one.

"It was, as I said, Christmas Eve, when the Yule log had…. but you have, had that. I say, then, that at two o'clock I went to bed, full up with many kinds of drink, jovial, quite light about the heels and rather heavy in the shoulders; my fire was burning brightly; the room was pleasantly warm. I undressed, turned down the light and got into bed, and instantly fell asleep. That was a quarter-past two.

"I awoke alter what seemed to me a sleep of hours. It was half-past two. I was broad awake. Suddenly I remembered that old business of the lost diamonds. I had not thought about the matter since I left the house on my first visit to go back to school. Now the whole thing came back to me fresh and clear. I remembered the talk, the chatter, the, suspicions. I pushed up the pillow, and lay upon my back with my eyes open, remembering. There is a luxury in lying in a warm bed on a cold night, remembering, unless you begin to think how old you are getting. And then the thing happened. Oh, yes, it happened at a quarter, to three, because the firelight and the glimmer of the gas I could see the clock on the mantel shelf. It was a quarter to three. I was broad awake, mind-brimful of drink, if you like, but not drunk— peaceful and happy. Then the door, which I had locked, slowly and quietly turned on its hinges, as if opened with great caution, and a young lady appeared. I could not see her face, because she held her right hand up to her forehead as if trying to hide it. She was dressed in a long pink dressing gown; her feet were bare; her long fair hair fell down to her ankles: she had something in her left hand. She stood in the middle of the room looking round her as if in uncertainty or as if she was searching for something. Placed against one side of the room was a large armoire containing shelves, drawers in the middle, behind a full-length mirror, with doors for hanging dresses. On the top of the armoire, in the middle, was a bronze bust of Homer or Shakespeare, or somebody— a thing belonging by rights to a library rather than a bedroom. She drew a chair, mounted it, lifted the bust with great difficulty, for it was heavy, placed whatever it was that she carried in her hand on the top of the armoire, covered it with the bust, contemplated the arrangement for a few moments, withdrew the chair to its proper place, and left the room. The door closed after her. I sprang out of bed, examined the lock and

bolts— the door was fastened; I placed the chair where the girl had placed it: I mounted and lifted the bust. I found under it a jewel case; I opened the case; it was filled with diamonds. Then I understood.

"I knew who had stolen the jewels; it was the girl with the long fair hair; I had discovered the secret. So I got down, went back to bed not in the least surprised or terrified— just as if nothing extraordinary had happened, and fell asleep immediately. In the morning I remembered what I had seen. I mounted the chair again and looked under the bust. Now—" he looked round triumphantly, "no one will believe this. It is incredible, I acknowledge, but it is quite true. Nothing whatever was under the bust— not even the empty case."

"Oh! yes— yes— we all believe it, we all believe it," cried everybody.

"But that is not all. There is a sequel. Of course I began to recall the people who were in the house when the thing happened. There were the Squire, his wife, their two sons, and three daughters. There were the cook, the under cook, the lady's maid, the parlour maid, the housemaid, the footman, and the page. There were other visitors in the house— one boy besides myself, and two girls. Could one of the girls be my apparition of the fair hair and the pink dressing gown? Now the last thing that a boy of ten remembers or considers is a casual girl, or half-a-dozen casual girls. I could not remember. I resolved to get to the bottom of this.

"After breakfast I got a chance. We all walked to church; the young people divided themselves up into groups of twos and threes, the elders marched along behind. Presently I found myself with my host. 'Jack,' I said, 'I was thinking the first time that I came to this house— forty years ago— have you forgotten?'

" 'It was the Christmas when the diamonds were lost.'

" 'Of course I remember that Christmas. It was a deuce of a time. Yes. Those diamonds.' "

" 'Let me see. There was your own house party. Then there was young Blakiston.'

" 'He's dead. Killed in the Indian Mutiny when he had just joined.'

" 'Ah! And there were two girls— schoolgirls— do you remember them?'

"He laughed. 'One of them, certainly, I ought to remember.'

" 'To me they are shadows. I don't know why I think about them. One had long fair hair, and was tall for her age.'

" 'Yes. She was very tall then, and is so still.' Her hair was the most beautiful ever given to woman. She is walking in front of us at this moment, and she is my wife.'

" 'Oh!' This was rather a facer. 'And about the diamonds?'

" 'They were found after some years. They were found by my wife herself on her first visit after our engagement. She dreamed that they were under a bust— most remarkable thing! She could not fell us what kind of bust; we Searched in

the library and found nothing. Then someone thought of a bust in a bedroom—your present room; I think— and by Jove! There they were hidden away: two thousand pounds' worth of diamonds! The most wonderful thing in the world! They are here now, and I will ask her, as you were in the house at the time of the robbery, to wear them to-night. No-one was ever suspected or discovered. There's the last bell.'

"In the evening the lady did wear the diamonds. I leave you, gentlemen, to make what you can of this strange adventure."

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3: Drums

F. A. M. Webster

1886-1949

Voice (Hobart) 6 June 1953

BRUMP! Raddle-daddle-daddle-daddle-dad! Brrrnp! Brrr! Brr! Brr!

An impala buck, grazing close to a water-hole, raised its lively wide-horned head to listen.

It was the sound of a twig cracking, rather than the rumble of far-off drums that had alarmed the creature. Now a light breeze wandering through the bush brought a certain scent to the delicately twitching impala in a series of thirty-foot leaps. The ears of the animal were keener than those of the human beings, whose scent it had detected. They had not yet heard the muttering of the drums, although they had been listening long enough for that sound which they dreaded above all others.

Two men came out of the thick bush and made their way to the waterhole. The white man's haggard, filthy features bore the look of one who must be for ever listening. Eyes deep-sunken in hollow sockets, darted apprehensive glances here and there, Aluri, his huge Akamba gun-bearer, stood like a black graven image. He might have been a figure carved in ebony, save for the fact that his, wide nostrils twitched, as daintly as had done those of the impala buck.

"Nigoma, Bwana!" Aluri spoken in a deep bass voice and John North shuddered as he thought longingly of the guns that had been taken from them eight days ago. Then the white man heard it.

"Brrp! Brrp! Brrmp!" followed by a long staccato, rattle, and again, "Brrp! Brrp! Brrmp!"

"Mercy on us, but you are right, Aluri, it is the drums," gasped North.

"They have struck our trail again," volunteered Aluri.

North wondered how often he had been forced to listen to those alarming words during the last nightmare week of flight. They had baffled the hunters again and again, but still the relentless pursuit held on like blood-hounds on the trail, calling for human sacrifice. Calling and ever calling those maddening drums throbbed in the distance, now lost to sound, now heard again, but always for the blood of the white man who had robbed their tribal god of his ruby eyes.

"Bwana, come!"

But fast though the fugitives fled, there were faster beasts afoot.

First a troop of giraffe sailed by with an absolutely smooth slow-motion sort of action. Half a dozen wart hogs, rudders erect and running fast, almost left them standing. Then came buck of many species and zebra, while lions and leopards raced along, cheek by jowl with their natural prey, but neither giving the slightest heed to the other. That could mean but one thing.

Aluri threw, a glance over his shoulder as he ran, and a fierce cry burst from his lips, for half-a-dozen thin plumes of smoke hung above the forest they had left.

"Bwana, the Washenzi have fired the bush," he shouted. Now the drums were beating again, but soon even their insistent monotone was drowned by the crash of branches, the crackling of flames, and a mighty roaring as the fire swept through the bush.

Battered and bruised by maddened creatures that often knocked them down, half-stifled with smoke and scorched by the searing waves of heat that swept ahead of the fire, the fugitives staggered at last to the bank of a rushing torrent.

"*Mto Mamba*— Crocodile River— the most dangerous river in the whole country!" he shouted, and North heard him above the roaring tornado which they seemed to have out-distanced for the moment.

The white man turned away from the rushirig water with a weary gesture, but Aluri was already enlarging the opening, of an ardvaak's earth burrow with a sharpened stake. The ardvaak was not at home and, after his master had crawled into the burrow, Aluri ran quickly to the river into which he dipped his blanket. This he spread, cunningly out of sight, across the passage to keep out the smoke that might otherwise have suffocated them.

John North was already sweating as profusely as if he was in a Turkish! bath, for the stifling heat in that underground chamber was indescribable.

"Couldn't we have broken away to the left or right, Aluri?" he queried. "How long can we stay in this beastly hole if we don't die of heat stroke."

"Better that, Bwana," came the answer, "than to be roasted alive at the. stake, or pegged out to die slowly at the mercy of soldier ants. Let us sleep." Having said which the Akamba promptly put precept into practice and, within a few minutes, his master, despite the torturing discomfort of their situation, followed suit. Both men were utterly worn out with hardship and anxiety.

For a time the Washenzi warriors searched diligently, but found nothing; for Aluri had taken care tp obliterate with a brush of twig every, footprint made by his master and himself. After a while the hunters moved off down stream, and presently made their camp.

To east and west, where the trees swept down to the curves of the river, the forest fire was still raging. There could be no retreat to the north, for all paths were picketed. To the south lay the crocodile infested river which the fugitives could not cross to reach the, safety of Kenya Colony. No wonder the Washenzi thought they had got their quarry in the hollow of their hand.

Aluri realised those things when he emerged in the dark hour after sunset from the mouth of the ardvaak's earth, and saw that the forest fire still burned to the east and west.

When he returned at length and roused his master, the night was already far spent. John stretched instinctively to get the sleepy feeling out of his slight frame.

"What is it?" he whispered as Aluri's fingers ceased to press behind the wrist.

"It is time for us to be going, Bwana," the native answered.

Together they made their way to the east, which was in the opposite direction to the spot where the Washenzi were camped. Presently they came to the raft which Aluri, working entirely by sense of touch, had constructed while his master slept. He lay down on the two big logs, which had been bound together with creepers, and Aluri, laying down at his master's right side, pulled, over them a mass of branches and undergrowth which he had cut for the purpose. With one kick of his strong black leg Aluri launched that frail ark, and at once it was caught by the current and swept downstream to the west.

Almost within the space of minutes, or so it seemed to the white man, the watch-fire burning brightly in the Washenzi camp was in sight. Then he saw the sentry standing motionless upon the river bank and instinctively closed his eyes lest the glittering eye-balls should reflect the light, and betray them, despite the mass of undergrowth through which they had been peering.

Just when John judged that they were abreast, of the sentry, the raft rocked violently. John cursed inwardly and folded his arms beneath his breast, for he believed that a crocodile was doing its best to turn the raft over. The next thing he saw was the dying glow of the forest fire at the point where the river resumed a straight course.

For the best part of half an hour he continued to lay dormant. Then, having seen no crocodiles for a long time, and having failed to get an answer from Aluri, whom he believed to be sleeping after his night's work with a native's stoical indifference to danger, he put out his hand and paddled the raft from the now slackly running river to the southern bank. A moment later he stepped on to the safe soil of Kenya Colony.

"Come on Aluri, you old image," he cried joyfully, "we've made it after all, thanks mainly to you."

But Aluri. did not answer. His limbs lay very still and in his side was buried the broad blade of a spear. Maybe Aluri had not shut his eyes soon enough. The sentry must have caught a glimpse of the whites and thrown the spear.

That there was no cry must have convinced the sentry that he was mistaken and stopped him from raising the alarm.

The ruby eyes of the heathen god of the Washenzi burned like fire in the pocket of John North's bush-blouse as he turned away. They had purchased him the freedom he desired to return to England, but even now, in the quiet peace of the Homeland, there are times in the lonely night when he still hears the

dreaded throbbing of native drums calling for human sacrifice, and sees outlined against some fiery sunset in a darkened sky the fine black features of Aluri, the gun-bearer, as he saw them last in life, when the forest was blazing from east to west and a frail craft rocked to receive them in slack water by the bank of the racing Crocodile River.

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4: Trapped

Henry Leverage

David Carroll Henry, 1879-1931
Storyteller, Oct 1937
Voice (Hobart) 31 Mar 1951

JEAN was a trapper— a Northern nomad, half-French, half-Canadian, all thews and muscles. He stood looking down into the valley of the Porcupine, and his glance ranged over a box ranch: Gaston Babtist's ranch filled With choice black silver-grey and cross foxes. Gaston was most likely away at Fort Yukon drinking, and there at his ranch was a small fortune for a bold man to take.

Jean was bold, but he feared the law of the Barren Lands. Yet— if only more snow would fall to cover his tracks! Reluctantly Jean turned down the long slope and rebaited and inspected his traps, most of which were undisturbed. The animals he caught— a wolverine, two martens, a blue fox— he immediately skinned. Jean the trapper had an aim in life— a desire to give up trapping and go South, preferably to Quebec; but he wanted fifteen thousand dollars before he left. As things were now he had only eleven thousand, which a girl at Fort Yukon kept for him. She loved Jean, but she also loved Alaska and did not want to leave.

Outside Fort Yukon, Jean stopped at a trading station, bartered his furs for gold, and at another station drank heavily. The next day he walked soberly through the Arctic twilight, finding Sitka at the dance hall where she sang.

"You've been drinking!" she said. Jean sat down at a table., "I've not been drinking, m'cherie. This morning I stop at MacKeenon's and sell my furs— I got two hundred and twenty dollars. Here it is; put it with ze rest."

Sitka's brown eyes took in Jean's flushed features.

"You must not lie to me, Jean," she said warningly.

Jean shrugged his shoulders. "Was Gaston Babtist around?" he asked.

"I didn't see him at MacKeenon's."

Sitka sensed a purpose in Jean's somewhat evading question.

"He was here last night; I spoke to him. Why?"

"He has it so easy, Sitka. I walk eighty miles and back eighty miles— trap two hundred and twenty dollars' worth of skins; he raise one fox, a silver-grey or a black, and he get a thousand, two thousand for it. I've never caught a silver-grey or pure black fox."

"That's what I've said. Stop trapping, Jean, buy yourself a business here, or at Circle City; and we'll get married."

Jean shook his head. "Fifteen, sixteen thousand will be enough. Then we go to Quebec and live like big people."

The door opened, a man lurched in and fell into a chair. Jean glanced at the familiar figure— Gaston Babtist, who had been drinking for a week at Fort Yukon. Jean began putting together the idea he had in mind.

"Let's eat!" he said to Sitka. "Then to-night I go back."

"You mustn't go to-night. It's snowing."

"So much the better," the trapper said. "If it snow, it get warmer."

Jean was practical, also there was the idea concerning Gaston's choice fox pelts.

"When I come back next time," he whispered to Sitka, "I come take you away. You got my money; I trust you; we get married by ze priest."

"You've just looked at your traps, Jean. Why look at them so soon again?"

"There are some I haven't looked at, Sitka," Jean lied.

Midnight, found Jean ready to leave the dance hall. As he looked back Sitka was walking in the direction of Gaston Babtist, who sat hunched in a silly stupor. Jean closed the doors against a gale, put. down his head and strode off.

Ten miles from Fort Yukon, Jean climbed a winding trail leading towards Gaston Babtist's fox-ranch. Along the trail were five shacks, where were stored provisions, steel traps, clothing and skin garments. Jean rested at each shack and plotted against any chance failure. At the last shack he waited ten hours, until snow came swirling from the east, covering the land with an additional white blanket; then he exchanged his snow shoes for a set of skis, cut himself a ski-pole and crossed the Porcupine River.

He descended the river and crept upon the snowed-in fox-ranch. A single guard lay sleeping in the cabin when Jean pushed . open the door and crawled over a dirt floor. This guard was a Crow-Eskimo, who never knew whose strong fingers constructed his throat or who bound him so skilfully. Jean went outside, broke through wire fences, reached for the foxes with thick-mittened fingers and killed them with a trapper's skill. His haul was worth six thousand dollars. Jean put on his skis, made many false tracks, and then looked back for. a last view of Gaston Babtist's ruined ranch. The pelts on the pack were all that remained of Gaston's fortune.

Jean went towards Fort Yukon and, after having removed his caked snow-shoes, went info the dance hall.

"M'cherie," he whispered to Sitka, "I've had great luck. We go to Quebec, where big people live. I run my traps no more. I find not one, not two, nor three good fox skins, but ten of zem."

"Did you kill the foxes?"

"Certainly! I always kill zem."

"But they would have been worth much more alive, Jean."

"I know zat, but I am not a fox breeder; I kill zem and have zem made into a grand coat. Come outside. I show zem to you. Zen to-morrow we leave for Quebec."

"We'll never go to Quebec, silly. All our fortune is here."

Jean saw the girl draw out a legal-looking paper stamped with a seal.

"See, Jean," she said, "I bought a fox ranch with the money you saved up—we're going to make a big fortune raising foxes—"

"Whose ranch did you buy?" Jean gasped.

"Gaston Babtist's!"

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5: Love Lies Round the Corner

Mark Allerton

William Ernest Cameron, 1881-1939

Observer (Adelaide) 10 Nov 1928

A VERY COMMONPLACE question that passes one's lips is:— "I wonder why she never married?"

One answer to the question is that she was never asked. Yet she is prepossessing, has money of her own, has charming manners, and many accomplishments. One wonders if the men she met were wearing blinkers. Sometimes— but not so often as one might think— there is a page in the past that is turned down, a page of fierce emotion branded, of hopes scattered to the winds, of tender thought disappointed.

Agatha Parsons was one of these women of whom one asked, "Why on earth isn't she married?" It must be admitted that a girl called Agatha is almost certainly doomed to be an old maid. There is much in a name, and parents ought to remember this.

Agatha was 40 and good to look upon. Her private income of two thousand a year enabled her to dress herself to the best advantage, and she did so, paying frequent visits to Hanover square and the Rue de la Paix. She lived in a tiny but very expensive flat in Mayfair. She rejoiced in the fact that she had but one relative— her nephew John.

She liked John, who was 24 and clean and wholesome, and whose laugh was good to hear. He had very merry blue eyes, and a complete command of the slang vocabulary invented since 1914. Also, he dressed himself with care, having due regard to the colour of his socks, so that it did not clash with his tie. Altogether, thought Aunt Agatha, he was a very presentable boy to be seen out with, often they had tea together in the West-End. It was Aunt Agatha who paid, for John was admittedly broke to the wide.

Sometimes his state of hard-upness would obtain an ascendancy over his normal high spirits. Aunt Agatha recognised these moods, and ignored them. Once she had offered him money, but never again. He had gone white to the lips.

"I wouldn't have told you," he had said, "if I had thought you would take it that way. We're pals, aren't we? I'm not going to cadge on a pal. Besides, I'm bound to get a job one day."

Aunt Agatha was not so sure. Poor John was one of those countless youngsters whose progress had been interfered with by the unfortunate tendency to aggressiveness on the part of the Hun.

One afternoon, in Rumplemayer's, he told Aunt Agatha all about it.

"I called about a schoolmastering job this morning," he said, "but, you see, I had to leave Trinity before I got my degree. *Pas bon*. No bally good. Then I called at a place where they wanted a clerk, but when my turn came at the end of the queue they explained that I must be able to do shorthand and typewriting. Likewise *pas bon*. Next please! Next I called at a place in Bond street, and after waiting for about an hour I found that the lad they wanted must be able to tune pianos. Nothing about tuning pianos in the advertisement. Dirty trick, I call it."

Aunt Agatha laid her hand— a very pretty and well-manicured hand— on his for a moment.

"Courage!" She smiled upon him. "You never know what is waiting for you round the next corner."

He gripped her hand.

"You're an awful brick. Aunt Agatha," he said, impulsively. "You're absolutely one of the best. I wish I weren't your nephew."

"Why?"

"Because you'd make such an awfully jolly wife. I say "

"Don't be a goose! What were you going to say?"

"Why nave you never got married, Aunt Agatha?"

There was a queer smile on her lips when she replied.

"Shall I tell you the honest reason?" she asked.

"Please do. Unless— of course, unless it's something you'd rather not talk about." John was nervous.

"No, dear lad. I've no hidden romance. I've never got married simply because— nobody has ever asked me to marry him. I'm not a huntress— I prefer to be one of the hunted. Got me?"

John's eyes narrowed.

"Yep," he said (he had been reading American fiction), "I've got you. There must be a whole lot of darned fools about "

Aunt Agatha drew in a quick, quivering breath. Then she pulled herself together. These were, memories, hopes, and a big disappointment too poignant to dwell upon

She was able to laugh gaily.

"The world is full of them, John, lad," she said.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to divine the secrets of a woman's soul. When Aunt Agatha lent John £2,000 to obtain his partnership in Weatherby's, the estate agents, she took no thought. of the security he gave. She was glad that at last he had found an anchorage. The business was of high repute, and with big possibilities.

But, two months later, after John had become junior partner of Weatherby's, and had negotiated the sale of a ducal estate for something approaching a million, she received a letter from him, and she saw red.

The letter told her that he was going to get married. The girl's name was Winifred Carter.

Aunt Agatha knew Winifred Carter. She had met her at various tennis parties, and so on. She was a slip of a thing, moderately good looking, a typist in some office— Weatherby's, no doubt.

The news of John's engagement made of Aunt Agatha a rebel against all that rules our destinies. She thought of herself alone. She had stretched out her hands to grasp the happiness that beckoned to her, and it had been snatched from her.

She went to her mirror and examined herself as a critic, asking herself why nobody had ever fallen in love with her. She was wearing a graceful robe that suited her to perfection. The bloom of youth had not yet left her cheeks. Her white arms were as slender and as delicately moulded as those of a young girl. Her breath came in quick gasps.

"Twenty years ago," he said, half aloud, "I was young. I was. really beautiful. I was rich. I could sing and dance. Yet no man ever turned his eyes upon me as a lover would. Why? Why? Why?"

A sense of the passing of the years came upon Aunt Agatha. She thought of the clouds in a wind-swept sky. These were the years, the dusk would come soon.

A hatred of this Winifred came upon her. Why should she have the big prize of life which was denied to herself?

Her reply to her nephew caused him some bewilderment. It was curt and terse, and lacking in the enthusiasm he had expected. After wishing him all happiness, Aunt Agatha intimated that she regretted she would not be at the wedding, as she had accepted an invitation to visit friends on the Continent.

Even the kindest and most amiable of people have their moments and their moods when they find it impossible to contemplate the happiness of others, denied to themselves, without a feeling of resentment. Unreasonably enough, Aunt Agatha felt that she had a distinct grievance against John. He had been more to her than a nephew. He had been her friend, her comrade. Their relationship had been more like that of brother and sister. Now, of course, that was all over and done with. This Winifred girl would receive all the confidences that he had been used to give to her.

She had no friends on the Continent to visit, but she carried out her resolution and went to Brittany, where she spent a miserable fortnight in an hotel which seemed to be occupied solely by honeymoon couples. She scarce dared to enter a room without first making a minatory noise with the door handle.

After dinner, once, she talked to one of these couples. The pretty young girl and the handsome man drove her to boredom. They had nothing to say.

"Ethel, dearest, won t you have some more coffee?"

"No, thank you, Jim darling."

Things like that. Nothing more. They made Aunt Agatha very angry. She wondered if John were behaving in the same foolish and ridiculous fashion.

Aunt Agatha left the hotel and went to Paris where she bought out of sheer exasperation, many expensive frocks which she knew she did not need. Then she went back to London to find, awaiting her in her flat, a budget of letters. They were mostly catalogues. One, from her banker, respectfully drew her attention to the state of her current account, and wanted to know whether the fault was his or her's. There was also a letter from John.

"Dear old bean," it ran. "I don't know whether this will find you or not. You never let me know where you were going or how long you would be away. But we're having a sort of house-warming on the 15th. My boss, the big noise of Weatherby's, is coming. Winifred is all out to give you a big feast, for you've been so jolly decent to us. So, if this catches you on the right side of the channel, do toddle along. We mustn't let the clutch slip simply because I've gone and been and got married. Winifred is a peach. So are you, you priceless apricot. Ching, ching, yours ever, John."

Aunt Agatha read the letter several times and with quivering lips. The slang, which she had listened to so often with tenderness now offended her. She found a sudden objection to being called "old bean" and a "priceless apricot." She felt that certain respect, due to her from a nephew whom she had financed, was lacking.

Now, here students of character may pause and consider. Aunt Agatha was annoyed because she had been addressed as a priceless apricot. Also was she jealous because this Winifred person had been called a peach. She took a sudden dislike to apricots and peaches and vowed never to eat one again.

Still, to avoid the sowing of the seed of a family feud which Aunt Agatha, as a woman of the world, detested and despised. it was necessary for her to accept the invitation. A letter from Winifred accompanied it.

Before she wrote her acceptance Aunt Agatha opened the last letter.

The envelope was of the costly variety. Aunt Agatha, experienced in the affairs of the world, defined that it had come from a money lender. It was from her solicitors and the formal message was to the effect that the company which her father had engineered and from which she derived her income had gone into liquidation. It told her, baldly; that she could draw no more money. The writer, very politely, asked for instructions.

Aunt Agatha had cause to read this letter several times also in order to digest its meaning. Only for a few minutes was she dismayed. During these minutes she appreciated the fact that her income was gone, that she had saved

nothing, confident of steady supplies. She realized also her age, her lack of knowledge of any of the arts that fit one for a business life.

Then she drew herself erect, and took in a deep breath. At that moment there could have been few braver women than Aunt Agatha.

"I can carry on for a month or two," she told herself. "I shan't. tell John— not yet, anyhow. I mustn't spoil his spree. Afterwards— I wonder if I'll get a job as a charwoman "

Sardonically, she went to her wardrobe and examined the purchases she had made in Paris. They represented close on live hundred pounds. She did not regret the spending of the money. At the time, the buying of the pretty models had suited her mood. She did not know then that in a week or two she would be penniless.

She called next day on her solicitor and the news was confirmed. The solicitor was very grave and precise. He began to talk technicalities. Aunt Agatha interrupted him.

"That's all right," she said. "I understand. I've lost my income. You don't happen to want a charwoman, do you?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Charwoman. Somebody to clean up this dirty old office. I've got to get a job, you know." Aunt Agatha spoke briskly.

"My dear lady!" The solicitor's glasses fell off, and he had some difficulty in finding them.

"My dear man," said Aunt Agatha. "I've lived nearly 20 years on the money that came from my father's estate. I've never exceeded it, but I've spent every penny of it. I've given a good lot away— we needn't go into that— but I've been extravagant."

"My dear lady—!"

"Oh, 'don't keep on calling me that!" cried Aunt Agatha. "I am an old maid. I've been living in luxury and now I'm up against things. Well, I'm not the sort to whine. I'll get a job of some sort. Perhaps you can help me in that. I can't type or shorthand or anything clever, but I can scrub a floor to beat anybody, and—"

"My dear lady "

"You've said it again! Don't do it," Aunt Agatha spoke with extreme irritation "It will take me about a week to set my affairs in order. After that I shall be glad to hear if you've got a job for me, I'm willing to do anything."

Adversity seemed to bring to Aunt Agatha renewed youth. She left the solicitor's office with a buoyant step and a confident smile. There were all sorts of lives to be lived. She had lived one. The life of lonely luxury. Now another opened its doors before her. The spirit of ad venture seized Aunt Agatha. What she! said to herself was:—

"I don't care if it snows ink," and she added, "I'm most awfully glad I was able to give John that money before the crash."

For John's dinner party she put on her prettiest frock. It was black, and her arms and neck and back shone ivory white in contrast. She looked ten years younger than her age. She did not mean that this; Winifred girl should take the wind out of her sails.

She arrived early at John's little flat, and was greeted timidly by Winifred and boisterously by John.

"By Jove, you look spiffing, Aunt Agatha!" said John.

"Just sweet. And you've been so, so good to us. You dear!"

At this point Winifred kissed Aunt Agatha.

Aunt Agatha returned the kiss and then, for a fleeting moment, held Winifred at arm's length, her eyes upon her. She saw a very pleasant, ordinary sort of girl, with moderate good looks, and no indication of brains. This was the girl John had fallen in love with! A nice girl, obviously, but—

Yet this was the sort of girl who loved and was loved, who got married and lived a sheltered, guarded life, who bore bonnie babies and who, at Aunt Agatha's age, was pleasantly content with her home, her husband, her family.

Aunt Agatha glanced into a mirror in John's drawing room and laughed. He asked her what was the joke and why she replied that she did not know. She had laughed because she had seen a very beautiful woman of the world; perfectly gowned, having the reputation of riches, and she dared not cash a cheque for so much as a pound!

She was determined to make John's party a success

"How many people have you asked? Who is this Weatherby man? Am I to be particularly nice to him?"

"Please, Aunt Agatha. There are three partners. He is the chief and I'm the sort of office boy. But the fellow above is selling out and starting for himself, and so I may step into his shoes. See?"

"I see! Good luck to you, John."

"All my good luck 1 owe to you. Aunt Agatha. If it hadn't been for you I should never have been in Weatherby's at all. Then I shouldn't have been able to marry Winifred."

"You are very happy, John?" Just trace of lines appeared round Aunt Agatha's eyes as she asked the question.

"I am the happiest man in the world. Do you know Aunt Agatha, Winifred is— Hullo, here she comes."

Winifred re-entered the room. She had gone to the kitchen to supervise. She came in with a smile.

"I think you'll like your dinner," she said. "It smells awfully good. I'm hungry, aren't you?"

She spoke with the zest of youth. Hearing her, Aunt Agatha experienced again that pain at her heart. Yes; she was hungry— hungry for all that life denied her.

There was a ring at the outer door.

"That'll be Melton," said John, and arranged his tie.

"Who?" Aunt Agatha spoke sharply.

"Melton, my chief."

"Lord, no! Didn't you know? Weatherby's only a name, I shouldn't

"I thought you said he was Weatherby." think there's been a Weatherby in Weatherby's for a million years. Richard Melton is our big noise. Everybody calls him Dick. You'll like him. Awfully good sort— Hullo, Melton, old man! Dashed decent of you to turn out on a rotten night like this. You've met my wife, haven't you? Aunt Agatha, let me introduce you to Mr. Melton— Miss Parsons."

Aunt Agatha had the feeling that the floor was slipping from under her feet. Here, before her, was Dick Melton, the dear old Dick of 20 years ago when the world was young, when tennis had been played on summer evenings in a country town.

"Agatha— you!"

The rather stout, middle-aged man, clean shaven and with the jaw of a pugilist, took her hand with a gasp. "Are you this youngster's aunt?"

"I have that privilege. And you his senior partner?"

"Yes. I didn't know—" Then Richard Melton pulled himself together. "It is good to meet you again," he said very gravely.

"Then you knew each other?" John butted in, in bewilderment.

"I should think we do," was Melton's reply. 'Your aunt and I won the Suddicumb Tennis Cup—how many years ago?"

Aunt Agatha raised a protesting hand. "Let us forget ancient history," she said.

"I don't want to forget it. I am living on my ancient history. When I really want to enjoy myself," said Melton, "I recall the days when I was caned at school and kicked on the shins by other boys, when I earned my pocket money by selling stamps from dealer's sheets. Ancient history. Gad, I'm only 42. How old are you, Agatha?"

"I'm 40, too," she said. It was good to bear him call her by her Christian name.

"I can't believe it. Twenty years ago. Say, Agatha—"

"Dinner is served," announced the maid servant.

As they made their way to the little dining room John drew his wife aside.

"I think," he whispered, "that we are going to take a back seat in this act. Something seems to have happened. And I'll take odds on that something is going to happen."

The dinner was a complete success. Richard Melton enjoyed it so much that afterwards be could not have told what he had eaten, which is the real test of a good meal. John and Winifred were utterly neglected, until, with the port, Richard Melton was left alone with John.

"Why the devil didn't you tell me that Agatha Parsons was your aunt?" he demanded.

"Heavens, man, why should I? I believe I've got another aunt as well, but I don't know whether she's alive or dead. I'll find out if you like," replied John.

"Was it your Aunt Agatha who bought your interest in our business?"

"Sure thing. It was."

"Pots of money, hasn't she?"

"Rolling in it."

Richard Melton sipped his port. "Rotten," he murmured. "Eh?"

"Rotten, John, lad. I believe your aunt would have married me 20 years ago if I hadn't been broke to the wide, and she an heiress. I didn't dare ask her... It's different now. I've made good. I say, John, old son—"

"Yep."

"I'm going to see your aunt home. Arrange it. Have you got me?"

John looked at his senior partner, the man who sold estates for dukes, and so forth, and nodded, bewildered slightly.

"I think I've got you," he said.

Richard Melton's Rolls-Royce arrived for him at 10 o'clock. His formal invitation to Aunt Agatha was pleasantly accepted. They drove off together. Richard Melton looked at his watch.

"It'll take me about a quarter of an hour to reach your flat," he said, "so there's no time to waste. Will you marry me, Agatha? You knew, years ago, that I loved you. I have loved you ever since."

Her big eyes were upon him in wonderment.

"Yet you wasted all these years?"

'You were rich, I was poor. I had no choice."

"Was it because I was rich that you— you didn't tell me?"

"Yes. Perhaps I was a young fool. I've got to know the real value of money now. It simply doesn't count— in comparison with other things. I'm a rich man now. Agatha, and I want you. Oh, my God, all these years I've wanted you so badly!"

She put her hands on his cheeks and drew his face towards her's.

"And I've wanted you, too— oh, so badly! Dear old stupid Dick!"

He kissed her passionately.

The love that lies round the corner had come to them.

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6: Lavender Luck!

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1900-1954

Australian Women's Weekly 26 May 1934

"NOW, this coat is a beauty, sir," said the fat, dandified young man in Korwin's after Perry Wade had strolled over to a rack on which was displayed a new selection of topcoats. "Admirably adapted, I should say, to your type," continued the fat, dandified young man, looking Perry over with appraising eye and holding an affectionate hand on a lavender topcoat with a bizarre her-ringbone stripe of black.

"Yes, it's rather nice," said Perry Wade. "Individual." He had come to buy handkerchiefs, but he liked the coat.

"Exclusive," corrected the salesman with a smile. "The only one of its kind." Which was a wopping lie.

"Would you like to try it on? It's just made for you." He held the coat invitingly out to Perry Wade, who slipped out of his and into the extravagant creation of lavender and black herringbone.

"Magnificient!" The salesman's rapture got the better of his English. "Especially designed for you. To wear a coat like that it requires— well, not every man could get away with it."

"I'll take it," said Perry Wade, with a final look in the glass. "Lavender's my lucky color."

"You betting on Lavender, sir?"

"I'll say— everything."

The salesman nodded dubiously. Lavender was a pretty long shot. But Perry Wade wasn't dubious. Penny had given him the dope— Penny, who had the low on every horse-race, from Epsom Downs to Tia Juana. Lavender would win. Lavender had to win.

Perry Wade's eyes narrowed and his hands clenched with nervous tension as he thought of what Lavender's win would mean to him— or rather, what would happen to him if Lavender lost. Everything— yes, more than he owned — had gone on Lavender. Five thousand of his company's money, quite unknown to the company itself, was staked on the six to one pony. If Lavender came through Perry Wade would be on Easy Street; if not he'd be in gaol.

"Lavender for luck!" The fat sales-man grinned apishly as he handed Perry the parcel.

"Right," said Perry. Twenty dollars remained to him when he had paid for his purchase. "But we'll know this time to-morrow."

It loomed like a life sentence ahead of him, that twenty-four hours. There would be another day to live through at the Amalgamated Trust, another day of

trying to look his fellow-employees in the eye, of constant dread lest they get at his books and find the shortage. Five thousand— they'd jump him hard. Even when Lavender had won and he could pay it back they'd want to punish him. But no use to worry. They wouldn't bother him for a few days yet. And to-morrow night — in just a little while more— he'd collect. Five thousand at six to one.

"Pretty, pretty," he mused on the way home to his boarding-house to supper. "I'll be sitting on top of the world. Penny's always right, I'd trust his tips any day."

WADE stayed home this evening. Twenty dollars wouldn't take him far, the way he spent money. But to-morrow night he'd make up for it. He painted mental pictures of what he would do, the liquor he'd have to drink, the women to caress. Yet there had been, there still was, worry— plenty of it. He dreaded the thought of going to the Amalgamated in the morning. A long day to-morrow would be. It would put a terrible strain upon him. But Lavender would win and all his cares be over.

There were many cares, the shortage in his books not the least of them. There were debts galore, for Perry Wade had expensive tastes and, up to the time he left college, plenty of money with which to gratify them. The money belonged to Lewis Garnet, Perry's uncle, for Perry was an orphan, and only the old man's kindness had saved him from the rough ways of life.

Was Perry grateful? Not he. When he finished his course he didn't want to work. He revealed himself to the man who had done so much for him as spoiled, selfish and lacking all those good qualities that Lewis Garnet hoped to see developed in his sister's son. Sullenly, Perry Wade had gone to work— to play at work. He was clever enough. He got by, but inside of a year he had wandered into such a quagmire of debt and dissipation that he would go to any length to save his skin and be able to keep those Sybarite vices and petty lusts that were life itself to him.

Lavender must win. Lying awake through the greater part of the night, he told himself that. All the next day, going about his duties in the office, he repeated it over and over, and when at last the news came in he had a hard job to keep himself from singing and dancing, from shouting his triumph into the ears of his con-freres and of the customers in the tiled lobby of the Amalgamated. Lavender had won. Thirty thousand dollars to play with, enough to enable him to cut loose from this work that he con-sidered drudgery. The money wouldn't last long, he knew, but while it did last he could forget that there'd ever be an end to it.

Lavender for luck. He gave the new topcoat an admiring glance as he put it on. Not even the whispered rumors of an audit disturbed him. Let them audit

away. He'd be in early next morning to put back what he'd taken. Nothing to worry about there.

HE left the Amalgamated with quick, eager step, his head held high, shoulders back. He could almost feel the thick roll of yellow backs in his pocket, snuggling against his hip. Never a thought of eating. He'd go at once to find the bookie and collect his winnings. Thirty thousand— it would wring Solheim's heart, having to pay out all that money. But he'd pay. Oh, yes. Solly was good for it.

But Perry Wade's heart did a flip, a sickening pain struck down into his vitals when he joined the crowd besieging the bookmaker's quarters. There was cursing, shouting. The door was splintered. Men were surging into the place, wrecking it.

Perry Wade seized a man frenziedly by the lapels and screamed in his contorted face.

"What's up? What's all this?"

"He's skipped— Solheim's gone— the— !"

Perry Wade's fingers lost their grip, his body became inert. He wanted to cry, but he joined the cursing, milling crowd. Surely it couldn't be true. There must be a mistake. Solly would come and fix it all up, pay out the money, thirty thousand to him. Solly had to come through. Why, if he didn't—

But Solheim had gone. They'd never catch him. Too slick, the rotten welsher. Anyway, he wouldn't have enough money to pay what he owed, even if they did get hold of him. Many others besides Perry Wade had been gypped cruelly. But none— none could see ahead of them the hideous thing that he saw— black bars making an ugly pattern of God's sunlight, shining gyves on his wrists, the State's jewel-lery, its gift to thieves and murderers.

Perry Wade went home, a broken, dejected figure. He couldn't think. He didn't dare to think. No hope now. The audit— they'd be after him in the morning. They'd get him, unless—

There was one hope. It was the first Tuesday of the month, on which day it was his custom to go and have dinner with Lewis Garnet. The old man might help him. No harm try-ing. Lewis Garnet was a queer old chap, miserly in many ways. But his sister's child had some claim on him. Perhaps he'd loosen up, if it meant keeping his own nephew out of prison.

It was only a faint hope, but it was all Perry Wade had to cling to now. He hurried home. He wanted to get it over with. He didn't dare stop to think of the mess he was in. To think of it made his heart quail and sent that nauseating stab deep down into him. He must not give way to panic. If his uncle wouldn't help him he could skip out. Yes, he reflected grimly, but how far with twenty dollars!

He dressed carefully. The old man was a stickler for dress, though he lived frugally and kept only one ser-vant. Perry Wade donned his tuxedo and took pains to look every inch the gentleman. His face was a bit pale, his eyes furtive, but he surveyed with feeble approbation his reflection in the mirror. He looked like his mother; that was why the old man had been so good to him. Perhaps now he would stretch out a hand to help.

Perry Wade slipped into the lavender coat. It might yet bring him luck. He wouldn't give up so easily. There was hope. He began to feel better, to think of what he would say to make his transgressions seem less grave. No use to make a clean breast of it. He'd have to lie and lie cleverly. But he'd get what he was after— yes, get it at any cost.

TWO hours later Perry Wade left his uncle's house. He looked back fearfully at the dark old place and could not resist glancing at his hands though he knew there were no stains upon them. He felt bloody. It was a rotten way to kill a man— with a paper knife, a blunt knife that required such brutal force to drive it home. God, it had been awful, the way the old man slumped down in the chair, the way the blood trickled down the white bosom of his shirt.

But he shouldn't have refused so harshly, he shouldn't have called names and said his nephew was a disgrace to the mother who bore him. He shouldn't have said, "I wouldn't give you a cent, you damned profligate, to keep you from the gallows!"

He had goaded Perry Wade, already driven by fear to the breaking point. Perry had gone mad. For a moment he had wanted only to kill, to strike and stab at this hard, accusing man who treated him so ruthlessly— to kill him, take what money he could find and get away. The quarrel had oc-curred after dinner was over, when Sulis, his uncle's servant, had gone off for the evening. There was no chance of the body being discovered for some hours. By that time he would be in hiding. If only he had some money. But he had found no more than a few dollars on the old man's person and the safe in the library baffled him. Anyway, Lewis Garnet never left much money about the house.

Perry Wade trembled like an aspen in the wind. He rubbed his hands together. Maybe there was blood on them. He wiped them on the hand-kerchief in the pocket of the lavender coat. But they were dry and clean, he knew. It was all nonsense to think there was blood upon them.

He wanted drink, something to brace him up, to give him courage. His nerve was gone, but he wasn't through yet. Not beaten; he wouldn't lose his head now. But he wanted liquor, much liquor.

Curzetti's was the place. It didn't take much of the stuff they sold to make a chap forget, to bolster him up or knock him out. Perry Wade went there and

drank, as a man who has wandered thirsty for a day on the desert swills the cold waters of a spring.

He was pretty drunk, too, but not so far gone that he couldn't realise it was time to go. Past midnight. Curzetti's was a wild place. He'd never seen so much drinking, so much mad-ness. People didn't seem to care any more about anything except having a good time— what they called a good time.

Perry Wade walked unsteadily down an alley bordered by palms. Dozens of coats, hanging in the shadows. No mistaking his coat— lavender with odd black herring-bone stripes— exclusive. A page-boy, grinning, helped him into it. He put his hat on crookedly and walked out into the street where the air was pure.

THE hectic atmosphere of Curzetti's still clung around him. His head spun. He walked swayingly, drunkenly. A cruising taxi sailed up to the kerb. Yes, that was the wise thing to do— get into it, find a place to sleep, a place where he would be hidden. Perry didn't forget the need of concealment. To-morrow they would find Lewis Garnet, find the shortage in his books. They would look for him. Well, there were lots of places, but he couldn't think of one just then. He wanted to close his eyes, to sleep, to forget everything.

The driver, with a knowing grin, helped him into the cab, dipped into the breast pocket of the lavender coat and found an address scribbled on a card, which he read in the dim light of a street lamp that blinked overhead.

"Hey, you, wake up!" Unceremoniously he reached in and shook Perry Wade. "You wanta go to this address?"

Perry only grunted. His head sagged helplessly on his chest. Clearly, it didn't much matter to him where he went. Mike Clancy, in his long years of transportation service, had seen many such cases. Obviously, the only thing to do was to take this bird to the address written on the card.

MIKE climbed in and the car slid away from the kerb, gathered speed, raced across the city while Mike mused on the folly of youth and debated with himself whether or no he'd take the ten dollar bill that he'd found in his fare's pocket or make change honestly. Which goes to show that Mike Clancy was an exceptional man.

The taxi stopped before a dingy brick building in a district that Mike Clancy was not over-familiar with, a rough-house district that Mike, who was not at all adept at dodging stray bullets, usually avoided. Barnitz Hotel was the name painted on the white globe of a light over the gloomy door-way. Mike looked dubiously at it for a moment before climbing out and pulling the door open.

"Here y' are sir," he announced "Barnitz Hotel. D'ye hear me?"

No answer. Perry Wade, slumped down in a corner of the hard, leather-cushioned seat, slept soundly, soddenly. No use to question him. Mike put a

practised hand under his shoulders, thought of something, withdrew it, and shoved it instead into Perry's pocket, fishing out a crumpled ten dollar bill. After a brief struggle he took a five spot from his emaciated roll and put it where he had found the ten. Then he jacked Perry from the cab and toted him easily across the sidewalk to the door of the Barnitz Hotel.

A pock-marked young man in a shiny blue suit leaned on the counter, his head supported by his hands, read-ing a newspaper. He looked up with scant curiosity at the spectacle of Mike and his unconscious burden. He grinned, giving a really startling dis-play of gold teeth.

"Guy belongs here." grunted Mike. "Picked him up at Curzetti's. Found this card in his pocket."

He flipped an oblong of white paste-board on to the scratched wooden counter and looked around with marked disapproval at the grimy, taw-dry splendour of the Barnitz lobby. What a den, mused Mike, regretting that he had left that five spot for someone else, probably for this rat-eyed fellow who, after reading the card, was pok-ing over the register.

"Yeh. Belongs in Room 27," announced the clerk. "Here, Roxy! Take this fellow to 27— "

A negro who had been sitting quietly in the shadows by the stairway, shuffled slowly over, relieved Mike of his charge, and carried Perry Wade up into the gloom.

"Get yours, Irish?" demanded the clerk with a knowing grin.

"Go to Hell!" said Mike, cordially, with an intonation that took in the Barnitz Hotel, its executives and share-holders. Then he stamped out of the lobby, giving the door a bang that made the inkwell jump on the scratched counter.

PERRY WADE blinked his eyes open and stared about him in the grey light of the room. His eyelids felt as if they had been gummed, his head as if it had been cracked with a pick and the rest of him in like manner. He strove for a moment to think where he was, gave it up, and contented himself with an appraisal of his surroundings. There was a cheap yellow oak dresser, matching the bedstead, a brown carpet inlaid with the dust of ages, skimpy curtains veiling an almost opaque window that looked out on a grimy well that never saw the sunlight.

Slowly, Perry Wade recalled the events of the preceding day— the flight of Solheim, the trip to Lewis Garnet's, the fear of blood on his hands — Curzetti's liquor in impossible quan-tities, the taxi outside the door.

But what was this place? Had he picked it out himself and was it a good spot for hiding? It looked all right. His roving eyes spied a push-button on the wall to his left. He pressed it, wondering if in some dis-tant place it caused a buzzing, or made a light flash on. He waited impatiently, and had almost given up hope

when a dragging, leisurely tread sounded in the hall outside, and someone tapped at the door.

Perry groaned a request to enter. A tall, gangling negro came in, placed a pitcher of ice-water and a glass on a stand beside the bed, threw a news-paper on the dirty counterpane, and started to walk out with never a word.

"Hey," said Perry. "Where— what place is this?"

"Ba'nitz Hotel, Mistah Shilton."

"Barnitz Hotel— Mr. Shilton," re-peated Perry vaguely. What was the man talking about. "Where is the Barnitz Hotel?"

"Shucks. It ain't on Lake Shore Road." grinned the darkey. " 'Tween the Sisson an' the Coopah-ca'lton. Sho' yo' know wheer at it is, Mistah Shilton. Yo' all ain't that bad."

He chuckled, and left the room be-fore Perry could question him further. Wade groaned with the splitting pain of his head, and cursed fluently for a moment. What was that black fool talking about— calling him Shilton, making fun of his ignorance of the location of the Barnitz Hotel? Perry Wade had never heard of such a place. The whole business was too much for him.

He drank copiously of the ice water, dipped his fingers in it, and sluiced some over his hot forehead. He felt better. Eagerly, he picked up the paper and squinted his eyes to read. He laughed.

"Damn!" he said. "They don't fool, those reporters. Not so's you'd notice it. That's a pretty good picture of me, except that I wore a moustache then. And they've found out about the shortage and about the old man's death, and— my God!— what's this!"

The headline read— "Fate Wreaks Hideous Vengeance on Criminal."

Below it Perry Wade read the recital of his crimes— his books had been examined last night and his theft disclosed, Lewis Garnet's body had been found at midnight— and the mutilated body of Perry Wade had been discov-ered about an hour later on the tracks of the Illinois Central, and identified by a lavender topcoat and an initialled linen handkerchief purchased by the murderer at Korwin's Gents' Furnishings Store that very afternoon.

No wonder Perry Wade laughed and tossed in his bed with mirth. Fate— that was the thing that had saved him. He was a favorite of Fate. That blessed coat on the chair. Exclusive! — hell! The hat was a soft grey felt, much like his. Fair exchange. Probably the other fellow had thought so, too, unless he had been like Perry— too drunk to think, but able to tell his coat when he saw it.

The engine and a string of cars had passed over him. Perry Wade, who had gazed on old Lewis Garnet's body with many a qualm, shuddered when he thought of what this man must have looked like after the juggernaut was through with him.

Korwin's label, the initialed hand-kerchief, perhaps, were the only things to give a clue to the identity of the victim. A man doesn't ordinarily carry much in the pockets of his tuxedo— change, cigarettes—

Anyway, Perry Wade, murderer and embezzler, was dead. And Mr. Shilton lived. But who was Mr. Shilton? Clearly, he hadn't been long a guest at the Barnitz Hotel when the porter didn't know him. The wise thing to do, Perry Wade decided, would be to get away as quickly as possible, before anyone who really knew Shilton happened along.

He rolled out of bed and stood groggily, surveying his rumpled and wrinkled tuxedo. There was a basin in the room, a brush and comb, a whisk. He could raise a few dollars some way. He wasn't worrying. Freedom was the big thing. And he was free. The cops wouldn't bother him. There'd be no lookout kept for Perry Wade, because Perry Wade was dead.

He picked up the lavender topcoat and searched through the pockets. A packet of cigarettes— a brand he never smoked— matches, a card with the name Robert Shilton engraved on it and Barnitz Hotel scribbled on the back of it.

Perry Wade smiled with rare delight. That explained how he had come to this place, some shady hangout, no doubt. The wrong topcoat— that cleared up everything. Luck— Lord, he had been lucky to buy that coat. Lucky lavender. Fate had used him decently.

Hadn't he always known it would? He had never worried. Take things easy— that was the way to get along. Perry Wade was dead. He, as Robert Shilton, a free man, could walk out of the Barnitz Hotel and lose himself some-where in the city. Suppose some of Shilton's friends should come looking for him. Perry was sure he could bluff them. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Perry Wade stripped off his upper garments and let the magic of clear cold water have its effect upon him. It cleared the cobwebs from his brain, the ache from his eyes, took the parched dryness from his throat. He hummed musically as he performed his ablutions, and told himself over and over, because the repeated telling rejoiced and strengthened him, that Perry Wade was dead, dead, dead.

Just think of it— he could begin life with a clean sheet, take a new name, find a job, have all his fun over again. Carefully he brushed and smoothed the wrinkles from his tuxedo, combed his hair and looked with approval at his reflection in the mirror. He picked up coat and hat, hesitated—

Well, why not wear the coat? Nothing to fear. He could wear it as far as a second-hand store, anyway, and trade it there for a less conspicu-ous one, and get something to boot. He hadn't a cent— that was matter for regret, but there was his watch. He wouldn't starve.

Confidently, then, Perry Wade walked downstairs. There were a few men in the lobby. The clerk, a pock-marked fellow in a shiny suit, was arguing sleepily

with a cab-driver. He glanced at Perry, smiled and nodded. Said "Good morning, Mr. Shilton."

"Good morning" answered Perry Wade. Nothing to fear— nothing.

Perry Wade stepped through the doorway of the Barnitz Hotel. Forgotten was the big hiatus in the books of the Amalgamated, forgotten the pitiful death of the good old man, Lewis Garnet, forgotten the mutilated victim of the juggernaut. All those things were of the past that had been blotted out. He was a free man.

Ah, but the air felt good. The warmth of the sun on his face. Life was sweet, life was precious, and Fate had decreed that he should enjoy life, that—

A mud-streaked sedan turned into the narrow street and came towards Perry Wade. It sped along, came abreast of Perry Wade— Perry Wade in the lavender coat that was not quite exclusive. There were shots, quick spurts of flame, and Perry Wade crumpled up on the pavement. When men came running from the doorways where they had taken refuge they found him dead. Three bullets had reached him where one would have sufficed.

A little ferrety man fumbled through the poekets of the lavender coat and pulled out a card. Others crowded around— furtive men who belonged to the world of which murder was a part.

"It's that guy, Beau Shilton," said the ferrety man. "See— here's his monniker— Robert Shilton. Fool he was ever to come to Chicago. He's the guy that made Pete Lazoni's sister kill herself in New York. Guess maybe that was Pete in the sedan. Hell! What a target a guy'd make in a coat like that!"

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7: Country Boy

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Argus (Melbourne) 26 Oct 1937

YOU and I could have taken Eddie aside and pointed out any number of reasons why he should have gone back home to the country. In the first place he had a job waiting for him. More, his two-week vacation in New York had done plenty of damage to his bank-roll. And most important he didn't like New York anyway.

BUT all the arguments we advanced wouldn't have done us any good. Eddie stayed on for one reason— and that reason had very dark hair and very blue eyes and a very sweet smile. And believe me boys and girls you can not reason with a man whose reason is a reason like that!

The girls name was Ruth and she was a specialty dancer in the Cafe Inferno. She was pretty enough, although I'd haste to say that she was as beautiful as Eddie thought she was. I'm afraid that would have been impossible.

Ruth shared an apartment with two of the other girls in the show. Naturally she had an occasional date. But she was a very choosey lady

With Eddie however the case was different They had met at the Cafe Inferno but Eddie had a nice honest face and a polite manner. Ruth didn't meet many boys who had nice faces, and polite manners were as foreign to her as Ethiopia.

But after he had camped on her door-step for a week Ruth realised that Eddie wasn't exactly as she had imagined at first. He insisted on taking her to all the late sports He finished the bank roll frequently. Ordered champagne whether she wanted it or not and displayed all the evidences of being a Broadway playboy. You and I know the reason, even if Ruth didn't. Eddie was in love. He wanted to create a big impression.

He wanted Ruth to admire him— to fall in love with him as soon as possible During his vacation in this strange city he had learned that most people laughed at what they termed the sticks. According to the girls in the Cafe Inferno people from out of town were hicks and rubes. So by the time the pair had reached the point of swapping personal histories Eddie had his answers all ready. and none of them was true.

"Me," he told the girl, "I've always lived in the big town is still you can; roll up the rest in the country and trips it into the East River as far as I am concerned. I'll take New York any day in the week. Always lived here and always I expect to. How about you?"

"Me too," Ruth nodded "We seem to agree on everything, Eddie. Even liking this crazy town."

"You bet." Eddie was thinking of how well it must be back home in the country right now How quiet and sane and peaceful.

THAT night he told Ruth that he loved her. His voice shook a little.

"I'm nuts about you baby," he stated in what he believed was the very best Broadway manner. "Think you could like me well enough to march down the middle aisle with me?"

"Give me a little time," Ruth smiled and placed a hand on his arm. "How long have I known you— two weeks? Its too soon Eddie. You're a nice boy but I've got to be very very sure before I take the big step."

That was all right. It was in fact much more than he had hoped for. He would give her all the time she wanted and stick around for ever If necessary and do everything that was humanly possible to make her fall in love with him

I and maybe even a few things that women t

He knew then that he was not going back home The job would have to BO along without him The money had saved would hold him over a time although not very long at the rate he was travelling He didn't mind so much about the job or the money But it was tough to keep thinking about the old town— and to know that he wouldn't see it again for a long long time

Still, it was for Ruthie. And at the stage of the game nothing else was terribly important. For her sake he might even be able to forget how much he hated the city

Meanwhile, when he wasn't with the girl Eddie was job hunting. The presents and the champagne were making his savings look extremely ill.

Strangely enough by one of those miracles that happen only in short stories Eddie found a job. It was in a down town office and the pay wasn't bad at all. He and Ruthie could live very nicely on that salary.

THEY hadn't discussed marriage since that first occasion. Eddie had been a trifle too worried about finances for that. But now with the new job and a comfortable future in sight he raced at top speed to the Cafe Inferno.

When they were alone at a corner table he clutched her hand and gazed at her pleadingly.

"Honey," he begged, "we don't have to wait any longer do we? You ought be sure by this time. When are we gonna get married?"

Ruth drew her hand away. She shook her head.

"I'm sorry Eddie was her reply. "Honestly I am. But I can't marry you. You're sweet and I wish that things were different. But they're not different, and I can't marry you."

The boy appeared stunned. "But," he protested "I thought you were beginning to love me. I—"

An idea struck him suddenly. "Say you weren't going with me just for those present and things were your? You—"

The girl shrugged.

"It does it matter now does it?" she interrupted. I'm not going to marry you and that's final. So good bye Eddie, and lots of luck."

He stood up and walked from the club without quite realising what he was doing. He walked around aimlessly for hours. He kept thinking of Ruth and the job and once he laughed. That was when he remembered how much he had given up for a gamble.

"Women," murmured Eddie from the bitterness of his heart. "City or country they are all alike."

RUTH sat on the floor and gazed at a jumble of wearing apparel heaped on top of a suitcase There were tears in her eyes

"So I thought I might take a chance and tell him," she confided to the room mate who sat with her. "Honest I was crazy about Eddie. It almost killed me to give him up."

"You were a fool," the other girl said. "You don't meet his kind every day in the week. He was generous and decent— Yes and nuts about you too."

"That is just it," Ruth sighed. "If I told him what the doctor said yesterday about how I've got to go to the country and rest and take things easy for a long time, Eddie would probably have insisted on us getting married and taking care of me, so I didn't tell him about being sick. Because I know he wouldn't know what to do with himself out in the country!

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8: The Cave Of The Baboons

William J. Makin

1894-1944

Mine, April 1935

Argus (Melbourne) 1 Aug 1935

ONE OF the boy's hands lingered the grey rock for a sure hold. Cautiously he began to climb from the ledge along that fault in the rock that led to the Cave of the Baboons. Above him the sun shone out of a cloudless sky. For once Table Mountain was without its tablecloth of cloud. But Timothy knew that when the evening come that misty avalanche would roll across the summit and tumble slowly down the rocky cliff. He had got to get to the cave before that happened. Panting a little Timothy reached out for another hold. This climb was a secret adventure. It had formed itself in the boys mind when he heard his father, Chief Commissioner of Police at the Cape talking with two subordinates on a stoop of the house

"He's a dangerous man," his father was saying. A regular black bandit. Four burglaries to his credit, and half the people here scared at the very mention of his namesake. You've got to find him. He's hiding somewhere on the mountain."

"We've been at it four days sir," explained one of the subordinates. "Searched most of the caves. We've even tried hunting him with police dogs But it's no use. Iboko is like a black shadow and it will take a month to scour that mountain thoroughly."

"Well, get to it," the Commissioner had snapped, and ended the brief conversation.

While the Commissioner was engaged upon a moody breakfast Timothy, his 12 year old son, was in the kitchen persuading the coloured cook Katie to prepare him some sandwiches.

"You going on a picnic, Massa Timothy?" asked the cook

He had nodded, grabbed the packet of sandwiches, and run off before his father or mother could ask him searching questions. He felt sure he knew there Iboko was hiding. Few people except the natives knew of the Cave of the Baboons. Timothy had stumbled across it one day by accident had attempted to explore it but had been scared away by a troop of hairy barking baboons who hid themselves there in the day time. Even from the ledge from which he was now climbing the cave was cunningly hidden. Nobody would guess its existence unless they had once crossed its threshold. And it was not easily reached, as the sweating, panting Timothy had to admit clinging to the grey face of the rock. Just the place for a black bandit to hide himself.

Another couple of feet and he would be there the toes of his boots were groping for a foothold. He found it, hauled himself on to another ledge and lay gasping but triumphant at the entrance to the cave

But even as he lay recovering his breath a grinning black face was peering down at him. Iboko was a powerful black Kaffir. He wore only a pair of tattered trousers. His feet and chest were bare. Timothy started up in alarm but a big black paw descended upon his shoulder and held him.

"What for you climb up here, boy?" asked the Kaffir. Trembling but defiant the boy faced the native.

"Because I expected to find you here," he replied. "You're Iboko, aren't you?"

The native narrowed his large liquid eyes with suspicion.

"What else do you know?" he demanded of the boy.

Timothy did not hesitate.

"That you're a black bandit, and the police are searching for you," he shrilled. "My father—"

"Eh, who is your father?"

"He a Chief Commissioner of Police, and he's going to get you," declared Timothy bravely

"Is he now?"

A chuckle rumbled deeply in that black chest The wide mouth opened in a grin. Then his eyes narrowed again as he caught sight of the rucksack. "What you got in that bag, white boy?"

A quick snatch of his black paws and he had torn the rucksack from Timothy's shoulders. The boy struggled vainly. He even kicked at that disreputable pair of trousers, but Iboko only laughed, and with a push of his powerful hand sent the boy sprawling into the cave.

Timothy went spinning to the ground. Even as he fell he knew that something had smashed in his pocket. It was a little mirror which he had found when rummaging in the lumber-room at home the other evening. Half-stunned, he lay there in the Cave of the Baboons, while the black bandit plunged a hand into the rucksack. With a deep chuckle of joy the Kaffir found the packet of sandwiches.

"You be hungry, too, eh?" he said. Timothy bravely shook his head.

"Here, take one anyhow," said Iboko, thrusting one of the sandwiches forward. "You got to stay here some time, white boy."

Feeling a little tearful, Timothy slowly lunched at the meat sandwich prepared by Katie. As for the Kaffir he examined the food into his mouth like a vicious beast. Obviously he had nothing to eat for a long time. Timothy felt a little sorry for him. In less than five minutes all the sandwiches were consumed

and the Kaffir seemed in a better mood. He stretched his powerful arms and yawned. Then he gave a sidelong grin at the boy

"So long as you are here white boy, I'm safe. Nobody knows of this Cave of the Baboons. And now I'm going to take a sleep for one hour or two. But don't be thinking you can escape. I sleep with one eye open and my ear to the ground."

With a genial grin he nodded to the boy and stretched himself across the entrance to the cave. With a few gains he crouched himself into a comfortable posture and in a few minutes was asleep. Hardly daring to breathe, Timothy watched him. The sleeping man seemed like a black rock. Timothy rose to his feet and measured the distance with his eye. A short run and he would be free But even as he thought of it, one eye of the Kaffir regarded him suspiciously Timothy sank back to his sitting position.

An hour passed by. The sun swinging over the horizon to set in the sea was now gliding the grey face of Table Mountain with the afternoon Claw A shaft of sunlight was creeping into the Cave of the Baboons. Fascinated the boy watched it. It reached his toes, lifted slowly to his waist. In a few moments it would be shining in his eyes.

Then the great idea came to him He almost shouted aloud. Quietly, and with many furtive glances at the sleeping Kaffir, he fumbled in his pocket for a piece of the broken mirror. Slowly he brought the piece forth. He valued it so that the shaft of sunlight caught It family Somewhere on that mountain the men were scouring the rocks for the dangerous black bundle. Timothys father had ordered the hunt. And he the boy was going to signal to them. Already his cracked piece of mirror was flashing across the heights. If only the searchers could see it

He entered the distress signals of ships: SOS. Three dots three dashes and again three dots. If searchers on the mountain caught that signal they would realise that something wife. Alone. Cautiously he began three short flashes three long ones and again three short ones.

Iboko gently snored.

But the shaft of sunlight was lifting. In another ten minutes it would be cold and dark in the cave. Desperately the boy flashed his signals. Then, as the last ray of sunshine disappeared tears came to his eyes. He could do no more.

The minutes passed… Another half-hour. Suddenly the sleeping Kaffir stirred. One eye opened. He lay still in a listening attitude. A stone had been dislodged and was falling down the grey face of the cliff.

Someone coming he muttered and eject the boy suspiciously Timothy gulped.

"It must be the baboons," he said.

"Be quiet!" warned the Kaffir

Slowly, snake-like he wiggled to the edge of the ledge. But even as he reached it there was the thud of falling feet and the command of a stern voice.

"Up hands, Iboko!"

One of the Cape Police was standing there it revolver in his hand.

Iboko looked round wildly for a chance to escape. At that same moment another policeman came climbing to the ledge along the same route taken by Timothy; he too had his pistol drawn. Shrugging his shoulders the Kaffir raised his black paws.

"You got me white men," he said. "Wonder how you discovered this cave?"

Timothy came scrambling out of the shadows.

"Why, its the chief's son," said one of the policemen in surprise. "How did you get there, sonny?"

Timothy drew himself up proudly.

"I came for the black bandit," he said. "I guessed he would be in the Cave of the Baboons."

"Then it was you who sent that helio call across the mountains?"

Timothy nodded and brought the cracked piece of mirror from his pocket.

"Well, that's fine," granted the policeman. "A chip of the old block, eh?" he said, turning to his companion.

"Ach! These white boys are too clever for me," spat the black bandit, holding out his paws for the handcuffs. "Let me get down into gaol. I'm hungry."

"And so am I," said Timothy.

The policeman grinned.

"I'll bet you have the best meal of your young life to-night, sonny. Come along!"

And the two policemen, and their captive, with Timothy proudly bringing up the rear, began to climb down to their homes that lay on the slopes beneath.

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9: Appointment for Vengeance

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Sunday Times (Perth, W. Australia) 16 May 1943

IT was as cold a night as the winter had known. Lefty stood on the street corner, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. His left hand closed around the barrel of his revolver.

Lefty didn't mind the cold at all, because, in a few minutes now, the biggest plan of his life was about to succeed.

He was meeting his old pal, Duncan, by appointment— and then he was going to empty his revolver into Duncan until Duncan was very dead, indeed...

Standing there and waiting in pleasurable anticipation, Lefty thought back to the night when he had met Duncan for the first time. It must have been 15 or 16 years ago. They were practically kids. Both had wandered into the same pool room. Lefty suggested a game. Duncan agreed. And while they were playing a kid at the next table flashed a 20-dollar bill.

"That's a lot of dough," Lefty observed quietly.

Duncan shrugged.

"Depends entirely on who has it," he returned.

The job was a cinch. They nailed the kid half-way down the block and took the twenty with ease. One swift punch to the right temple by Lefty did the trick

After that the two men became partners in crime. They both had the same yen for easy money, and they enjoyed spending it in the same manner. They began on a worked their way up to the bigger things.

Came the inevitable day, though, when their lock ran out. They were caught on a juicy burglary job, and both were in gaol before they quite knew what had struck them. Duncan realised first. And right then and there he decided that confession was good for the soul— and the skin, too.

He squealed loudly and long. The police didn't have too strong a case against Lefty before that. But when Duncan was through singing, away went Lefty for a solid six years.

Well, Lefty may have been a bit slow in his mental processes, but he wasn't exactly dumb. He began his plan for vengeance by writing long and forgiving letters to Duncan, who had been handed only a year because he sang so sweetly.

At first Duncan was suspicious. He knew that Lefty had every reason to hold murder in his heart. But the latter's letters contained so much sweetness and light that Duncan began to believe them.

"After all," Lefty wrote, "we often said it was every man for himself in our game, and when they gave you the chance to turn State's evidence and get off lightly you'd have been a dope not to do it.

"That was your break, and I'm not sore. Sure I was sore at first. Good and sore. But now that I've had the chance to think it over, I can see where I'd have done the very same thing.

"When you get out try to send me some cigarettes now and then. They cost a buck a pack up here, and I'm none too well heeled. Keep in touch with me by mail like this, through the right channels. And try to keep your nose clean till I get out. Then we'll really go! Regards, Lefty."

Yes, Duncan began to believe those letters— and Lefty was happy.

THROUGH those long years in gaol he schemed and figured the best method for evening the score with Duncan. Eventually the best method turned out to be the simplest. He would meet Duncan on a busy corner. They'd walk around a bit and talk over old times. And then, on a dark side street, Lefty would murder Duncan. Swiftly and completely.

It never occurred to Lefty that what he was about to do was ratty in itself. The sneaky element in his plan for vengeance' never bit him at all. Now that the big moment was at hand, the thought never struck Lefty that had their positions been reversed he would have ratted to the police about Duncan to save his own hide.

Duncan rounded the corner suddenly and walked right up to Lefty. Lefty swallowed hard, then grinned. The two men shook hands and patted each other on the back. Just two grand old buddies.

"You're lookin' swell, Lefty," said Duncan.

"So do you," Lefty enthused. "Never saw you looking better." He glanced around cautiously and lowered his voice. "Let's take a walk. It's plenty cold, and that copper on the corner has been eyeing me ever since I got here. How goes the world feller? What's new?"

They talked as they walked. Duncan said he felt rotten about having turned State's evidence the way he did but Lefty told him to forget it

Lefty casually steered Duncan into a side street. It was very dark, and the gun in Lefty's pocket was practically against Duncan's hip. This was going to be a cinch.

He was about to pull the gun when he noticed a high-powered car coming up the street. No sense taking a chance on witnesses. He'd wait until the car passed.

After all, when a man has waited as long as Lefty had, another minute or two doesn't make much difference.

AN HOUR LATER three men sat in a midtown office. One sat behind a desk, vaguely cleaning his nails. He was a fat, mild-mannered man.

"Well, boss," said one, "when they turned down this side-street the job was as good as done.

"We stepped on it, and turned around the block so that we'd be comin' up against them. Our orders was to get Duncan, and we got him, all right. But we couldn't help ourselves, boss. We hadda kill the other guy too."

The boss nodded slowly.

"That's okay, boys," he observed, reflectively. "What's gotta be, has gotta be. And, no matter who the other guy was, he musta been no good— or he wouldn't of been hangin' out with a rat like Duncan!"

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10: Red Dennis and the Walnuts

Con Drew

Conway T. Drew, 1875-1942
The Lone Hand, 1 July 1920

Before Australia switched its currency from Pounds, shillings and pence to dollars and cents in 1966, there was a colorful slang for the coins and notes. In this story "deaner" and "bob" both refer to the shilling coin. The author was variously a bookmaker, playwright and short story writer.

"BY CRIKEY! the game's to a bubble," said Tiger, as he and Thirsty stood in Park Street one day. "The races are on to-morrer and we ain't got a bean in the world."

Thirsty glared belligerently at a passing constable. "That's right," he admitted. "We couldn't afford a deaner to see an earthquake."

"It's them flamin' coppers; that's what it is," said Tiger, savagely. "They hunt a man about and won't let him earn a shillin'. Give us a match."

"Can't," answered Thirsty ruefully; "I struck the last three yesterday."

Here they were joined by another man, an unsavory-looking person in a battered bowler.

"Hello, Spider!" exclaimed Thirsty. "How's the game?"

The newcomer removed his headgear and scratched his egg-shaped dome. "No good,"

he answered. "Do you know where a man can fence a sack of walnuts?"

"Walnuts!" echoed Thirsty. "Where did you pinch 'em?"

"Never pinched them," returned the other. "I got them off a bloke who was taking them to the tip."

"I see," said Thirsty. "What's wrong with them?"

Spider replaced his headgear and expectorated profusely. "Thefe's nothin' wrong with them as far as the outside of them, is concerned," he replied, "but their insides has dried up and they've got no kernels."

"H'm," said Thirsty. "That don't sound too bad."

There followed a pause.

"I was wonderin," said Spider, presently, "if you'd care to.unload them on someone."

"Me?" said Thirsty. "They ain't my walnuts."

"I know that," rejoined Spider, "but you know pretty well everyone."

"Yes, and pretty well everyone knows me," chuckled Thirsty. "Anyway, they ain't in our line."

"What odds," said Spider. "You'd easy be able to swing them on to someone. Will you give it a go?"

Thirsty hesitated. "I ain't ever done no walnut sellin'," he protested.

"That don't matter," persisted Spider. "I'll share the sugar between the three of us. What do you say? Is it a wager?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Thirsty, resignedly. "A man'll have to try and break it somewhere."

THAT SAME afternoon, Red Dennis Ryan sat behind his bar at the Erin Hotel alone. The room, with its one window, stood level with the street, and, through the window gauze, he could see across the roadway and over to Murphy's Hotel, which stood upon the opposite corner. Dennis hated Murphy, and cursed him accordingly. Before the advent of Murphy his own bar would not have been empty at that hour of the afternoon. True, he mused, the trade was generally slack. Still, Murphy was doing business. He could see the people going in and out of Murphy's door. And some of them were Dennis' old customers, that was the worst of it.

Muttering curses on the head of Murphy and all the thieving Murphys that were to follow, Dennis rose from his chair and was about to get himself a drink, when the door burst inwards to admit an unsavory-looking man who carried a sack on his shoulder.

"Thirsty," muttered Dennis; "another thieving loafer like Murphy."

The newcomer crossed over to the bar and placed his burden thereon. "I'll have a pint," he ordered.

Dennis drew a pint of beer and placed it on the counter. He had about as much love for Thirsty as Ned Kelly had for the police; still business is business.

"It's a fine day," he said, conversationally.

"Not bad," admitted Thirsty. "How is business goin'?"

"Fair," answered Dennis, "but it could be a good deal better."

There was silence for a space, during which Thirsty sipped his beer meditatively. "I suppose you ain't got a hammer about you?" he asked casually.

Dennis nodded affirmatively.

"Well, you might lend it to me," said Thirsty. "I'll give it back to you in a second."

Dennis rooted beneath the counter and, producing a hammer, handed it across. "You wouldn't be wantin' a pound of two-inch nails or nothin'?" he questioned sarcastically.

"Oh, no," said Thirsty, who was fumbling with the mouth of the sack, "A hammer'll do me nicely."

Diving his hand into the sack he drew forth a brown-looking object, and, placing it on a near-by stout case, cracked it open.

"What's the game?" asked Dennis, who had been watching interestedly. "You're mighty mysterious this afternoon whatever."

"Walnuts," said Thirsty with his mouth full of nut. "I always like a walnut with me beer."

"H'm," said Dennis. "Ye don't carry that sack of walnuts round to every pub you go to surely."

"No, and by cripes I don't have no need to," answered Thirsty. "I could sell them any time I wanted to. Walnuts are as scarce as brumbies in Pitt Street these days."

"Is that a fact?" said Dennis. "I thought they was very plentiful."

"Well, forget it," said Thirsty, "for I don't think there's a ton of walnuts in the town. That's why Murphy is givin' me such a good price for this lot," he added.

Dennis jerked himself erect. "Murphy!" he snorted. "What does monkey-whiskers Murphy want with walnuts?"

Thirsty looked at him, pityingly. "Well, you're a fine, up-to-date publican to ask me a question like that," he jeered. "Why he wants them for his counter-lunches of course. His customers bump their heads together tryin' to get in."

Dennis fingered his beard. "Well, I did hear tell of them flash up-town pubs puttin' on walnuts for their counter-lunches," he rejoined, "but I never knew that Murphy was doin' it."

"Oh, well, he is," said Thirsty, "and he ordered this bag especially for the football banquet to-night. But I suppose I'd better be goin'." He tied up the neck of the sack and was about to place it on his shoulder when Dennis stopped him.

"You say them walnuts are terrible hard to get," he said. "What makes them so scarce?"

"It's the shippin'," answered Thirsty. "You see the English boats ain't got no space for cargo. They don't grow walnuts here."

"And couldn't a man buy himself a sack of walnuts if he wanted to?" questioned Dennis. "Surely they ain't as scarce as all that."

"Well, he might," Thirsty returned, "but he'd have to order them a couple of weeks in advance. They do say there'll be a few of them here in a week or two."

"H'm," muttered Dennis. "So Murphy wants them for his football banquet to-night, does he?" He drummed on the counter with his fingers meditatively for a while, then turned to Thirsty.

"Tell me this," he said. "How much is Murphy givin' you for them nuts?"

"A quid," lied Thirsty glibly.

"Well, I've an idea for puttin' walnuts on for counter-lunch meself," said Dennis. "Suppose I give you twenty-two and six for them. How would that suit you?"

Thirsty shook his head slowly. "It couldn't be done," he returned. "I've practically sold them to Murphy."

"Sold 'em," snorted Dennis. "He ain't paid you for them, has he?"

"No," replied Thirsty, "but he wants them for the banquet to-night and I can't disappoint him."

"Bah!" snorted Dennis. "Them football chaps won't lay awake all night if Murphy don't give them walnuts. How would twenty-four bob do you?"

"I can't," wailed Thirsty. "Murphy's expectin' them, I tell you. I called over there a while ago, but he wasn't in. I'm goin' to take them back directly."

"Nonsense," said Dennis. "If a man don't look after his business it's his own fault. How will twenty-five and six do you?"

Thirsty thought for a moment, while Dennis watched him anxiously, "I'll tell you what I'll do," said Thirsty, presently; "I'll strike a bargain with you."

"Yes, yes," said Dennis eagerly.

"I'll sell you them walnuts for twenty-six bob if you promise not to tell Murphy I sold them to you. Will that suit you?"

Dennis extended a huge hairy paw across the counter, which Thirsty grasped. "Certainly it will," said Dennis. "The walnuts are mine."

When Thirsty had departed, Dennis lifted the sack in his arms and placed it behind the bar. "They're pretty light," he muttered, "or else I'm extra strong these days. So Murphy uses them for his counter-lunches does he? Well, I'll crack a few of them now and have them ready for to-morrer."

Opening the bag he grabbed a handful of walnuts and placed them on the counter. Then, siezing the hammer, he started out to crack them. The first one squashed as easily as a peanut shell and Dennis scratched his head, "That was an empty one," he muttered. "I'll try another one."

The second one was as empty as the first, and the following five or six were also empty. Then Dennis set out to investigate.

Emptying the walnuts into a tub he picked some out haphazard, but they were all as empty as the promise of a politician and of kernel there was none.

For a full minute Dennis stood silent, while the veins in his huge, scraggy neck swelled to bursting point. Then emitting harsh and unbeautiful sounds, he seized the tub. Raising it above his head and steeling his muscles, for the purpose, he heaved it with all his might. With unerring aim it sped through the open doorway; there was a loud crash as the tub of walnuts hit the pavement, then, wheeling on his heels, Dennis left the bar.

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11: The Silo

George Allan England

1877-1936

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THE roaring of the eight horse-power gasoline engine and the voracious ensilage cutter, out there in the yard, blending with the windy chatter of the cut corn as it skittered up the pipe and whirled down into the dark silo, masked the coming of Lucky Ruggles. Pownall swung up from broadcasting a shovelful of ensilage that he had dug out of the swiftly growing mound under the pipe, to find himself confronted by the man he feared and hated more than any in this world.

Ruggles grinned, and spat tobacco. An absurd figure to be afraid of— a slouching hobo, with an old cloth cap on, a long black coat possibly stolen from some scarecrow, and torn trousers tucked into a pair of worn-out high boots that a farmer's wife had given him. A weak figure, unshaven and watery-eyed; but packed with potential dynamite for Pownall, none the less.

"Hello, there, Powdy!" the hobo greeted the proprietor of the farm. He swaggered a little, with dirty hands deep in trouser pockets, and scuffed his boot-toes into the soft ensilage. "Glad t' see me, ain't you? An' I'm sure glad t' see you! This is my lucky mornin'. They're all lucky mornin's to Lucky Ruggles. That's me!"

Pownall could only stare, with fallen jaw. The inwhirling fodder, shot down from the curved pipe high aloft, flicked him with bits of corn-leaf and stalk. At his side, now that he had stopped shoveling, swiftly rose the pile of chopped corn. Only unceasing toil with the shovel and with trampling feet could keep it level in the silo.

"Well, aint you glad to see an ole friend like me?" demanded Ruggles, squinting with that evil, watery eye. This eye gladdened at sight of his victim's fear. Not even the vague light from the hole in the roof, where the pipe came through, could mask the lines and hues of terror on Pownall's bearded face.

"How— how the devil did you git here?" stammered Pownall. He raised the shovel as if to strike. s

"Lay off on that rough stuff!" commanded Ruggles, his stubbly jaw stiffening. "You ain't never gonna hit me, see?"

"Git outa here!"

"When I'm damn good an' ready! I didnt' come here to—"

"You got no right on this here farm. Git!"

Lucky Ruggles only laughed.

"You got the nerve, I must say!" he gibed. "After what I'm wise to about you! Now, looka here, mister. I'm gonna have a little privut talk with you, see? We got a few minutes all to our lonesomes. This here's a swell place fer a privut talk,

ain't it?" He glanced appraisingly about the silo. "Nobody seen me come. Nobody knows I'm here. So it's all hunky-dory. Some luck, hey?"

"Cut that out!" retorted Pownall. "I got nothin' to say to you!"

The men's voices were hardly audible over the droning roar of the machinery, the whirring of the corn. This racket had kept Pownall from hearing Ruggles as the hobo had climbed the ladder into the silo.

Unseen by the workers in the yard, Ruggles had crept up through the meadow, skirted the stone wall and gained the south side of the barn. Here a door had admitted him. The rest had been easy. Now, with that grin of conscious and cruel power, he confronted the gray-faced victim of his blackmail.

"What d'you want o' me?" Pownall demanded.

"Oh, you don't know! Oh, no! My letter— you got it, all right."

"T'hell with your letter, an' you, too!"

"You ain't gonna come across with that thousand?"

"Git out o' here!"

"All right," grinned the tramp with yellowed snags of teeth. "Suits me! But I'm goin' right from here to them insurance people. An' they'll slip me a few, fer wisin' em up. I'm playin' in luck, either way. Lucky Ruggles, that's me!"

"They won't believe no bum like you!"

"We'll see about that, mister. An' when you're doin' a five-year bit you'll reckon a thousand bucks is pretty small money to be holdin' out on me. A man what I stay in the big house ruther'n cough up at the rate o' two hundred bucks a year, ain't *much*!"

"I'll say you set the fire! Ta-ta, mister!"

Lucky Ruggles turned to go. Pownall struck.

ii

A SHOVEL-BLADE may be a murderous weapon in strong hands of hate and terror.

The hobo crumpled forward. He fell, face-down, in the soft ensilage. Immediately a storm of tiny fragments of corn sprayed itself over his motionless body.

Pownall recoiled against the sweeping curve of the silo wall, his eyes white-rimmed with horror. He dropped the shovel. Flat against the wall his calloused fingers extended widely. His back pressed that wall, as if he were trying to push further away from the silent figure.

"Ruggles!" he cried.

No answer. Then Pownall laughed explosively.

It came as a relief after all. Now that the thing, often dreamed, was really done, the farmer felt a vast lightening of his soul's burden. It wasn't hard, was it,

to kill a man? Why, an ox required twice as hard a blow! And a man— but was this blackmailing snake a man?

"Damn you!" mouthed Pownall, and stumbled toward the body.

Already it was half hidden by the tornado of ensilage. Pownall understood where his own safety lay, and laughed again. No one had seen the tramp. No one knew. And here, actively at hand, was burial.

He dragged the body, still face-downward, more into the direct line of discharge of the pipe. He stood up and watched the swift drive of the cut fodder over it. Then an idea whipped him to the quick. What if somebody had happened to see, to know?

That might be possible. Somebody might have been in the barn. Might be there, even now.

Pownall's heart thrashed, sickeningly. An obsession clutched him that somebody really was in the barn. Quivering, he recoiled. He must know!

He stumbled to the tall row of openings that, one above the other, extended up one side of the great cylindrical pit. Through one of these openings— later to be closed by doors, as the silo should fill— he swung himself to the ladder. His legs shook so that he could hardly clamber down. His hands felt putty-like and lax. He dragged himself out to the barn floor. Horribly afraid, he peered up and down.

His terror had him as a dog has a rat, shaking him. But in spite of everything he felt the surge of an immeasurable gladness. Ruggles was dead! Dead, and well punished for all his threats of blackmail, ruin, imprisonment.

"He was a skunk, anyhow," thought the farmer. "I kill skunks on sight. Damned, egg-suckin' skunks! He's only gittin'? what was comin' to him!"

Pownall was sick and weak. His mouth felt baked. He swallowed hard. What he wanted was a drink. Water! He walked unsteadily to the faucet that supplied the horse-trough near the big barn door. He drew a dipper of water, and gulped it. The water slopped down his neck and chest, wetting his beard, his shirt. That felt good! He smeared his mouth with his hairy hand, and grew calmer.

"It was comin' to him all right," he repeated, and blinked at the October sunshine, golden through the crimsoned maples by the roadside. ' Comin' to him!"

What made Pownall's head feel so queer? He wondered dully. For a few minutes he stood there at the door, breathing hard. No one passed along the lonely road. He could hear the engine and the cutter still at work back of the barn; the shouts of a teamster, bringing up still another load of corn from the field. He grinned, crookedly. He couldn't think very straight; but still he realized that he was safe and that Ruggles had only got what was coming to him.

"Lucky Ruggles!" he gulped. " He played it once too often. Out o' luck fer once. Huh!"

It struck him as something of a joke after all. A grim jest. He was laughing a little as he turned back into the barn.

Was there anybody onthe barn? Of course not! What an idea, eh? This was a relief. The empty stalls and stanchions peered at him vacantly. The haymows listened. But no human face was visible. In the silo the corn was still rattling down the pipe whickering on to the pile.

"Only a tramp," thought Pownall. "Got no home, no folks. I'm a damn fool to worry!"

He breathed deep, and returned to the silo. He felt so glad! Glad it was all over and done with. Glad he was free at last.

"An' it was comin' to him all right!"

He approached the ladder, up along the staring row of openings into the silo. The four lowest openings were closed by doors, each two feet high. That meant eight feet of corn already lay in the silo. He squinted up the ladder, past the haymow, to the roof, where the pipe came through.

"That's great stuff, that corn," he realized. "It'll bury him in no time. Gosh, but this is lucky fer me!"

He felt calm now. The first nervous shock had passed. A great coolhess was possessing him. What danger could there possibly be? No one had seen, no one knew. And already the body would be hidden. Even without packing down, the avalanche of corn would bury it. Was there ever such wondrous fortune?

He remained there at the foot of the ladder, thinking. There was no hurry. Let the corn pile in, more and more! The hobo's threats of a year's standing pictured themselves with what vivid detail! How distinctly Pownall remembered that July night on the other farm, the old Marshfield farm! A year ago? More. Fifteen months!

"That place was no good anyhow," said Pownall, and bit tobacco from his plug. Yes, a chew would do him good. He never remembered tobacco tasting so fine.

The old farm had been isolated, played out, unproductive. A losing proposition. Even his: housekeeper— old, crabbed Mrs. Green— had not wanted to stay there. He had so longed for a fire, for his insurance money, so that he could get away and buy a place elsewhere! And then that night when Mrs. Green had been gone— that high wind, and the crashing thunder-storm at eleven o'clock. The lightning had struck an elm, close to the barn. Half stunned, Pownall had blinked from the house, out into the deluged dark, the flashing dazzle.

God! Why hadn't that lightning struck the barn?

The thought had imed into inspiration, whiter than the lightning. A match had done the rest. But the tramp in the haymow had seen. Had understood. Only fifty dollars had shut the tramp's mouth and had got him away into the

night before the old hand-tub had come pelting up from the village, dragged by long lines of drenched, panting men in disarray. Strange sights in the blinding glare of the flamesheets from the barn. Pownall could still hear the lowing of the terrified cattle he had released. Could still hear the thudthud-thud of the pump-bars.

Nothing had availed. The house. connected with the barn by a low shed had gone, too, Pownall had toiled, sweating and rain-soaked, with the others. He had labored to exhaustion at the pump-bars. No use! The well, sucked dry by the old leathern hose, had made no impression on the howling flames, storm-driven, that had reddened the whole countryside. The house and barn had gone flat in an hour. No one had suspected. anything.

Everybody had been kind. Had commiserated him. Later the insurance company had paid to the last penny, without question. For the policy had covered lightning.

Three thousand dollars. Cash. In place of that useless old set of buildings. Then he had sold the land for eight hundred. He had bought this newer, better farm. He had prospered there.

At first he had been afraid. But in a year, in fifteen months, fear had died. Nothing had remained of it but a few words. The words spoken by the hobo as he had slouched away with the fifty dollars toward the blackness of the wood-lot:

"Mum's the word fer now! But if I need kale, I'll write. My name's Ruggles. Lucky Ruggles. You'll mebbe hear from me ag'in. An' if you do, you'll be nice to me, won't you? An' shoot me a few bucks? I'll say you will! S'-long!"

For a whole year, no word of the hobo. Maybe, Pownall had hoped, he had got into jail somewhere, or been killed by a freight. So Pownall had ceased to be afraid. 'Then the scrawled letter had come, demanding a thousand. Pownall had not answered, but his soul had wilted with the blight of a very great fear. And the hobo had come back, just a few minutes ago. And now—

Now the man he had so cringed from, in terror, was lying dead in the silo. And no one knew. "God!" exclaimed Pownall. " Ain't that great, though?"

He climbed the ladder; and as ie climbed panic struck him again. That shovel! It might have blood on it. Somebody might have climbed into the silo while he had been getting a drink, and might have found it. Might have found the body, too. His mind leaped to those possibilities. He knew that no one had entered the barn, and yet—

His hands shook as he scrambled up the ladder and sprawled into the gloomy damp of the silo. The little doorway into the silo was green. A kind of subconscious vision touched his mind of another little green door. The door of the room where the electric-chair was waiting. With a dry throat and hot pulses

the farmer stumbled into the soft masses of the chopped corn, not now evenly spread or trampled down.

His relief was immediate, vast. Nobody was there. The shovel still remained just where he had left it, against the curving silo wall. Its blade was already buried deep in the drift of flicking ensilage. The pipe, far aloft, was still whirling corn with a roar and rattle, in stinging blasts. A heap, five or six feet high, now filled the center of the silo. The heap slanted down on all sides to the level of the corn at the walls. This level itself was about eight feet from the cement bottom of the silo.

"God!" grunted Pownall again, and rubbed his palms up and down along his dirty overalls, as if cleansing them of something. Blood, perhaps. But there was no blood on his hands. Nor on the shovelblade either. It looked quite' clean and bright.

Pownall was not an imaginative man. He was a hard-fisted, cold-livered New England farmer. He set to work now, once more spreading and trampling down the corn. At his third thrust of the shovel, he encountered something hard. He prodded, poked away the corn, and saw a boot-heel.

He laughed then and fell to his task with a good heart.

Quite as if nothing had happened he labored. With sweat and a great joy, he completed the burial of Lucky Ruggles. Pownall was not afraid any more. Not horrified any more. Only glad. Supremely, triumphantly glad!

The feeling of the corn under his feet, under his shovel— green grave, that for long months would hold its inviolable secret till that secret could be well and finally disposed of— afforded him a kind of terrible joy.

He worked without effort, upborne by calm powers. Sweat streamed down his face and body. He revelled in it as in the roar of the engine, the clatter of the ensilage in the pipe, the cascading flood of corn still shooting down.

As the silo filled, he closed another door. Later, still another. Soon, four feet of packed corn, neatly on a level, lay above the body of the hobo. By noon this had increased to eight feet and more.

The noon whistle, shrilling far from the village sawmill, shut down the corn-cutting and brought the laboring teams and men to rest. Still Pownall worked on, leveling, stamping down, oblivious to the cessation of the floods of corn. His work seemed to have become mechanical, involuntary. His hands and feet toiled, but his brain took no cognizance of that toil. It was busied with the greatest happiness that it had ever known.

When the man from the engine came into the barn to see what progress had been made in filling the silo, and clambered up the ladder, he found Pownall still shoveling, still tramping the corn. This was now sixteen feet above the cement bottom.

"Hey, there!" the engine man laughed, elbows on the bottom of the door into the silo. "What's the matter o' you, anyhow? Time to quit. Fine mornin's work!"

Pownall started, seemed to waken as from a dream.

"You betcha!" he answered, leaning on his shovel. "We'll pack this to the roof by night. A fine morning's work is right. The best *I* ever done!"

iii

OVER and over, all that autumn and half the winter, Pownall calculated everything to a nicety. He did not brood with any regrets, any compunction over the killing. Insensitive, conscienceless, he lost no sleep. But many of his waking hours were devoted to the approaching last chapter of the story. No detail was overlooked.

"He'll keep fine," thought the farmer with exultation. An enduring happiness was his now that the sole witness to his arson and his insurance fraud had vanished. "He'll keep, same as ensilage keeps, in the middle o' the silo. There's tons o' corn on him, an' it's reekin' with alcohol." The alcohol had, indeed, been so plentiful in this corn that some of it had even run out at the bottom of the silo. "He's pickled, that's what he is. He'll be in good shape when I git down to diggin' him out. But I got to be ready fer that, too."

He planned everything to a 'T'. There had been thirty-six feet of corn in the silo, covering eighteen doors up the side. Seventeen cows would eat about three-quarters of the ensilage in four months. The body of Ruggles lay about eight feet from the bottom of the silo. Thus, in the natural course of events, Pownall would exhume the body about the middle of February.

"But I ain't goin' to wait exactly fer that," decided Pownall. "By February fust I'll git him out, an' plant him. That 'll be the safest way."

He arranged every detail, even to having his housekeeper, Mrs. Green, plan on a visit to her married daughter in Haverhill, about that time. He thought even of the blanket he intended to take with him into the silo, to wrap and carry the body in.

Nor did he forget that he would dig the grave in the barn cellar, and then install a pig-pen over it.

"There ain't no possible way fer a slipup," said he to his soul. "This here farm is way off the main road. Nobody much comes by here but the R.F.D. man; an' of a Sunday ve don't come. With the barn door shet, an' workin' early of a Sunday mornin', it 'll go through. Sure as death an' taxes!

"In the books they allus gits ketched. But *I* won't git ketched. Nobody knows he was here. He ain't got no folks, ner nothin'. There couldn't be nothin' safer!"

He carried out his plans with the cold accuracy of a machine. On Friday, February 2, Mrs. Green departed for Haverhill. She left him a pantry full of cooked victuals and an infinitude of directions about household details. When he had driven her to the desolate railroad-station and had seen her depart, he returned home, ready for his task. The frozen solitude of the farm did not appal him. It only cheered him with assurances of complete and final success.

That afternoon he built a pig-pen in a dry corner of the barn cellar. So far, so good. He slept well that night. Next day, Saturday, he dug a deep, ample grave in the pig-pen. Again he slept well. Things were going forward, eh?

Sunday his alarm-clock awoke him very early. His nerves were steady as a church, ready for the finis of his book.

He fortified himself with a hearty breakfast and two cups of hot coffee. By lanternlight he went out to the barn, where the blanket was already waiting. A crisp winter morning, long before dawn. Hard stars and a steely, gibbous moon surveyed him as his alert form crossed the yard. His boots creaked the frozen snow.

He foddered and grained the cattle, watered them, and milked, all as usual. Then he tossed the blanket into the silo, climbed up there with his lantern, took his fork and began digging. l

The lantern hung on a nail driven into the silo wall, betrayed no anxiety on his bearded face. What anxiety could he feel? So far, all his actions had been quite natural, without suspicion. He reckoned that it would take him only an hour to exhume and carry the body into the cellar, bury it and turn the pigs into the new pen. His chances of discovery were, practically speaking, just nil. Not once had anybody called at the farm so early. No one would call this particular morning.

"Dead easy!" he grunted as he dug.

Pownall was in no sense an emotional man, nor was he given to introspection. The job ahead of him did not even strike him as particularly unpleasant. It was just something that had to be gone through with as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

The empty silo doors, ranged in a vertical tier, gave him his exact location. Twelve of these doors were now visible. That meant twenty-four feet of the corn had been used. Counting up from the cement floor of the silo, he knew the body lay opposite the top of the fourth door, or about eight feet from the bottom. Pownall had reviewed this fact unnumbered times, and felt as -positive of it as of life itself. There could be no slightest question about it. Pownall would have gambled his existence on the fact that Ruggles was about four feet below the present level of the ensilage.

Digging down four feet into a tightly packed mass of fine-cut corn is a fairish job, but not formidable.

"I'll have him out o' here, an' buried, inside of an hour," Pownall assured himself. He spat on his hands and fell vigorously to work.

Steadily, unemotionally he toiled, his breath steamy on the chill air. His shadow, huge, grotesquely distorted, rose and fell as the smoky lantern— specially filled for the occasion— cast it against the opposite wall. Above a huge black vault peered down at him from the snow-covered, conical roof.

Only familiar sounds came to him from the barn— the lowing of a cow, the trampling of a horse. Outside, silence. And inside the dim wooden cylinder, silence, too; silence, save for the deep breathing of the farmer, or an occasional thud as a forkful of ensilage struck the wooden wall.

Pownall labored for perhaps twenty minutes, in the remembered spot where he had seen the cascades of fresh ensilage— now brown and reeking of fermentation— whirl down on Lucky Ruggles, burying him. In spite of the February cold, sweat began to runnel his face and trickle down his beard. He stopped now and then to smear it off, and spit. Resting on his fork, which he plunged into the corn, he eased his back and recovered his wind.

"I'm 'most down to him now," he reckoned. " Cal'clated to of found him afore, if I'd knowed where to look exactly. But I'll git him now, in a few minutes."

He still felt calm enough, ough his heart was beginning to trip a little. After all, hed rather be working at something else. But— well, it had to be gone through with, hadn't it?

Again he dug.

"Ha!" he grunted with a leap of the heart. " There's a boot now!"

He stooped and tugged at the boot. He pulled hard. There was no resistance. The boot came right up, free, in his hand. He all but tumbled backward.

"*Huh*! That's funny!"

Furiously he shoveled, breathing hard. Another boot— also empty.

"Lord! What—"

He remained there, peering down at something he could not understand.

He stumbled over to the lantern, his face gray. He unhooked the lantern, carried it to the trench he had dug in the ensilage. Its smoky red gleam revealed the terror on his face. Panting, now, with sweat clabbering on his forehead, he swung the lantern down into the vacancy of the empty trench.

"Jest two boots, an' that's all!" he mouthed. "But— God— it can't be so! It *can't*! He was here an' I killed him. An' buried him. A dead man can't git out of his boots an' dig through tons o' fodder, an' git away! He can't. He *can't*!" :

Pownall hung up the lantern again with sick hands. He hurled the boots to one side. Half blind with horror that could not reason, he flung himself once more into his labor.

As he dug he wheezed. Disjointed words came gulping from his throat, a throat constricted as by a cold and lifeless hand:

"A dead man can't—he can't— *he can't*—"

They found him, late that night, still digging.

The mooing and trampling of the untended cattle brought a couple of passing neighbors into the barn. A gleam of light from the silo, and the sound of laughter, drew them thither.

A great mound of ensilage had been tossed out, on to the barn floor. Tons of it. They climbed this, to the open door, and peered in.

Below their level, they looked down on the madly toiling figure of a man who dug aimlessly, tossing the fodder back and forth, sifting it, sometimes even scraping to the very bottom of the silo. This man dug, staggered, laughed, wept, dug again, and led with horrible blasphemies on the name of God to witness that a dead man cannot move.

By the smoldering rays of the expiring lantern the sight appalled them.

"Hey, Pownall! Hey, you, Pownall!" shouted the bolder of the two neighbors. "Whatcha doin'? What's the matter o you?"

Pownall answered nothing. It seemed as if he could not even hear them. Haggard, with sweat-blinded and ghastly face, he labored aimlessly. A creature wounded to the death, a mole that perishes even as it digs, he groveled in the corn. He flung himself on hands and knees, shoved his arms into the fodder, pawed and clutched and cursed, prayed, laughed again. The laughter was worst of all. That froze the neighbor's blood.

Suddenly the lantern shot a sick flame up, quivered and went out. Utter dark fell in the silo. Through the dark the curses and laughter echoed.

The men recoiled, horror-stricken. Clinging to each other, they stumbled down the pile of ensilage, and to the door. To the blessed freedom of the wintry night.

"Gawd A'mighty!" quavered one, his face twitching. "He's went plumb crazy! Run fer Dr, Abbott!"

"I— I dassen't go alone, Ed! *You* come too!"

Thus quaking to the roots of their souls they ran through the snow for help. And as they ran a horrible voice echoed dully through the blackness of the silo of the barn:

"I got him, anyhow! He's somewheres here— if I— could only find him. A dead man can't— he can't— *can't*—"

iv

THE old newspaper, wrapped round the "hand-out" that a good wife had given the hobo at a Connecticut back door, furnished that knight of the road a few minutes' literary diversion.

Seated by a little fire of chips alongside the railroad, in the afternoon sunshine of late April, he read the paper as he leisurely devoured the good wife's meat and bread.

All at once he grinned, with narrowing eyes that watered rheumily.

"Well, by the livin' jing!" he grunted. "That must be *him*! John W. Pownall—that is him!"

With keenest interest and enjoyment he reread the article, then glanced at the dateline of the paper.

"Two months ago, huh? An' nutty! An' in the nut-foundry at East Bridgewater. Incurable! I allus thought the squirrels'd git him if he didn't watch out!"

Ruminatively, the hobo pondered. He swallowed the last of his snack, wiped his unshaven lips on his sleeve, and produced part of a cigarette from a formless pocket of his black coat. He lit the cigarette with a blazing chip, and inhaled smoke. His mind worked but slowly. He was conscious now of mingled pain and pleasure.

"There goes all my show of ever gittin' that thousand," he cogitated. " But I'm even with him fer this, anyhow." He rubbed an ugly scar on his thick skull.

"That was *some* wallop, believe me! Almost knocked me out. Lucky fer me I had sense enough fer to lay still an' do the 'possum act. What?"

He smoked out the fag, and tossed it into the fire, then laughed with ugly tusks.

"Nutty!" said he. "*Sure*, he's nutty now, an' he must o' been then. A guy what'd bean a feller just fer asking fer a thousand must o' been plumb bugs.

"Gee! I got out of it easy, I'm thinkin'. If he hadn't of went outa that there silo, an' gave me a chanst t' slip off me boots an' pussy-foot it up that ladder inta that haymow, an' lay there all day till I could make my getaway that night, God— he sure might o' bumped me off!

"Lucky, I calls it. Lucky! Lucky Ruggles, that's *me*!"

———

12: Tarnhelm

or, The Death of my Uncle Robert

Hugh Walpole

1884-1941

Liberty, 28 Dec 1929

Collected in: *All Souls Night*, 1933

I WAS, I SUPPOSE, at that time a peculiar child, peculiar a little by nature, but also because I had spent so much of my young life in the company of people very much older than myself.

After the events that I am now going to relate, some quite indelible mark was set on me. I became then, and have always been since, one of those persons, otherwise insignificant, who have decided, without possibility of change, about certain questions.

Some things, doubted by most of the world, are for these people true and beyond argument; this certainty of theirs gives them a kind of stamp, as though they lived so much in their imagination as to have very little assurance as to what is fact and what fiction. This 'oddness' of theirs puts them apart. If now, at the age of fifty, I am a man with very few friends, very much alone, it is because, if you like, my Uncle Robert died in a strange manner forty years ago and I was a witness of his death.

I have never until now given any account of the strange proceedings that occurred at Faildyke Hall on the evening of Christmas Eve in the year 1890. The incidents of that evening are still remembered very clearly by one or two people, and a kind of legend of my Uncle Robert's death has been carried on into the younger generation. But no one still alive was a witness of them as I was, and I feel it is time that I set them down upon paper.

I write them down without comment. I extenuate nothing; I disguise nothing. I am not, I hope, in any way a vindictive man, but my brief meeting with my Uncle Robert and the circumstances of his death gave my life, even at that early age, a twist difficult for me very readily to forgive.

As to the so-called supernatural element in my story, everyone must judge for himself about that. We deride or we accept according to our natures. If we are built of a certain solid practical material the probability is that no evidence, however definite, however first-hand, will convince us. If dreams are our daily portion, one dream more or less will scarcely shake our sense of reality.

However, to my story.

My father and mother were in India from my eighth to my thirteenth years. I did not see them, except on two occasions when they visited England. I was an only child, loved dearly by both my parents, who, however, loved one another yet more. They were an exceedingly sentimental couple of the old-fashioned

kind. My father was in the Indian Civil Service, and wrote poetry. He even had his epic, *Tantalus: A Poem in Four Cantos*, published at his own expense.

This, added to the fact that my mother had been considered an invalid before he married her, made my parents feel that they bore a very close resemblance to the Brownings, and my father even had a pet name for my mother that sounded curiously like the famous and hideous 'Ba.'

I was a delicate child, was sent to Mr. Ferguson's Private Academy at the tender age of eight, and spent my holidays as the rather unwanted guest of various relations.

'Unwanted' because I was, I imagine, a difficult child to understand. I had an old grandmother who lived at Folkestone, two aunts, who shared a little house in Kensington, an aunt, uncle and a brood of cousins inhabiting Cheltenham, and two uncles who lived in Cumberland. All these relations, except the two uncles, had their proper share of me and for none of them had I any great affection.

Children were not studied in those days as they are now. I was thin, pale and bespectacled, aching for affection but not knowing at all how to obtain it; outwardly undemonstrative but inwardly emotional and sensitive, playing games, because of my poor sight, very badly, reading a great deal more than was good for me, and telling myself stories all day and part of every night.

All of my relations tired of me, I fancy, in turn, and at last it was decided that my uncles in Cumberland must do their share. These two were my father's brothers, the eldest of a long family of which he was the youngest. My Uncle Robert, I understood, was nearly seventy, my Uncle Constance some five years younger. I remember always thinking that Constance was a funny name for a man.

My Uncle Robert was the owner of Faildyke Hall, a country house between the lake of Wastwater and the little town of Seascale on the sea coast. Uncle Constance had lived with Uncle Robert for many years. It was decided, after some family correspondence, that the Christmas of this year, 1890, should be spent by me at Faildyke Hall.

I was at this time just eleven years old, thin and skinny, with a bulging forehead, large spectacles and a nervous, shy manner. I always set out, I remember, on any new adventures with mingled emotions of terror and anticipation. Maybe *this* time the miracle would occur: I should discover a friend or a fortune, should cover myself with glory in some unexpected way; be at last what I always longed to be, a hero.

I was glad that I was not going to any of my other relations for Christmas, and especially not to my cousins at Cheltenham, who teased and persecuted me and were never free of ear-splitting noises. What I wanted most in life was to be allowed to read in peace. I understood that at Faildyke there was a glorious library.

My aunt saw me into the train. I had been presented by my uncle with one of the most gory of Harrison Ainsworth's romances, *The Lancashire Witches*, and I had five bars of chocolate cream, so that that journey was as blissfully happy as any experience could be to me at that time. I was permitted to read in peace, and I had just then little more to ask of life.

Nevertheless, as the train puffed its way north, this new country began to force itself on my attention. I had never before been in the North of England, and I was not prepared for the sudden sense of space and freshness that I received.

The naked, unsystematic hills, the freshness of the wind on which the birds seemed to be carried with especial glee, the stone walls that ran like grey ribbons about the moors, and, above all, the vast expanse of sky upon whose surface clouds swam, raced, eddied and extended as I had never anywhere witnessed....

I sat, lost and absorbed, at my carriage window, and when at last, long after dark had fallen, I heard 'Seascale' called by the porter, I was still staring in a sort of romantic dream. When I stepped out on to the little narrow platform and was greeted by the salt tang of the sea wind my first real introduction to the North Country may be said to have been completed. I am writing now in another part of that same Cumberland country, and beyond my window the line of the fell runs strong and bare against the sky, while below it the Lake lies, a fragment of silver glass at the feet of Skiddaw.

It may be that my sense of the deep mystery of this country had its origin in this same strange story that I am now relating. But again perhaps not, for I believe that that first evening arrival at Seascale worked some change in me, so that since then none of the world's beauties— from the crimson waters of Kashmir to the rough glories of our own Cornish coast— can rival for me the sharp, peaty winds and strong, resilient turf of the Cumberland hills.

That was a magical drive in the pony-trap to Faildyke that evening. It was bitterly cold, but I did not seem to mind it. Everything was magical to me.

From the first I could see the great slow hump of Black Combe jet against the frothy clouds of the winter night, and I could hear the sea breaking and the soft rustle of the bare twigs in the hedgerows.

I made, too, the friend of my life that night, for it was Bob Armstrong who was driving the trap. He has often told me since (for although he is a slow man of few words he likes to repeat the things that seem to him worth while) that I struck him as 'pitifully lost' that evening on the Seascale platform. I looked, I don't doubt, pinched and cold enough. In any case it was a lucky appearance for me, for I won Armstrong's heart there and then, and he, once he gave it, could never bear to take it back again.

He, on his side, seemed to me gigantic that night. He had, I believe, one of the broadest chests in the world: it was a curse to him, he said, because no ready-made shirts would ever suit him.

I sat in close to him because of the cold; he was very warm, and I could feel his heart beating like a steady clock inside his rough coat. It beat for me that night, and it has beaten for me, I'm glad to say, ever since.

In truth, as things turned out, I needed a friend. I was nearly asleep and stiff all over my little body when I was handed down from the trap and at once led into what seemed to me an immense hall crowded with the staring heads of slaughtered animals and smelling of straw.

I was so sadly weary that my uncles, when I met them in a vast billiard-room in which a great fire roared in a stone fireplace like a demon, seemed to me to be double.

In any case, what an odd pair they were! My Uncle Robert was a little man with grey untidy hair and little sharp eyes hooded by two of the bushiest eyebrows known to humanity. He wore (I remember as though it were yesterday) shabby country clothes of a faded green colour, and he had on one finger a ring with a thick red stone.

Another thing that I noticed at once when he kissed me (I detested to be kissed by anybody) was a faint scent that he had, connected at once in my mind with the caraway-seeds that there are in seed-cake. I noticed, too, that his teeth were discoloured and yellow.

My Uncle Constance I liked at once. He was fat, round, friendly and clean. Rather a dandy was Uncle Constance. He wore a flower in his buttonhole and his linen was snowy white in contrast with his brother's.

I noticed one thing, though, at that very first meeting, and that was that before he spoke to me and put his fat arm around my shoulder he seemed to look towards his brother as though for permission. You may say that it was unusual for a boy of my age to notice so much, but in fact I noticed everything at that time. Years and laziness, alas! have slackened my observation.

ii

I HAD A horrible dream that night; it woke me screaming, and brought Bob Armstrong in to quiet me.

My room was large, like all the other rooms that I had seen, and empty, with a great expanse of floor and a stone fireplace like the one in the billiard-room. It was, I afterwards found, next to the servants' quarters. Armstrong's room was next to mine, and Mrs. Spender's, the housekeeper's, beyond his.

Armstrong was then, and is yet, a bachelor. He used to tell me that he loved so many women that he never could bring his mind to choose any one of them.

And now he has been too long my personal bodyguard and is too lazily used to my ways to change his condition. He is, moreover, seventy years of age.

Well, what I saw in my dream was this. They had lit a fire for me (and it was necessary; the room was of an icy coldness) and I dreamt that I awoke to see the flames rise to a last vigour before they died away. In the brilliance of that illumination I was conscious that something was moving in the room. I heard the movement for some little while before I saw anything.

I sat up, my heart hammering, and then to my horror discerned, slinking against the farther wall, the evillest-looking yellow mongrel of a dog that you can fancy.

I find it difficult, I have always found it difficult, to describe exactly the horror of that yellow dog. It lay partly in its colour, which was vile, partly in its mean and bony body, but for the most part in its evil head— flat, with sharp little eyes and jagged yellow teeth.

As I looked at it, it bared those teeth at me and then began to creep, with an indescribably loathsome action, in the direction of my bed. I was at first stiffened with terror. Then, as it neared the bed, its little eyes fixed upon me and its teeth bared, I screamed again and again.

The next I knew was that Armstrong was sitting on my bed, his strong arm about my trembling little body. All I could say over and over was, 'The Dog! the Dog! the Dog!'

He soothed me as though he had been my mother.

'See, there's no dog there! There's no one but me! There's no one but me!'

I continued to tremble, so he got into bed with me, held me close to him, and it was in his comforting arms that I fell asleep.

iii

IN THE MORNING I woke to a fresh breeze and a shining sun and the chrysanthemums, orange, crimson and dun, blowing against the grey stone wall beyond the sloping lawns. So I forgot about my dream. I only knew that I loved Bob Armstrong better than anyone else on earth.

Everyone during the next days was very kind to me. I was so deeply excited by this country, so new to me, that at first I could think of nothing else. Bob Armstrong was Cumbrian from the top of his flaxen head to the thick nails under his boots, and, in grunts and monosyllables, as was his way, he gave me the colour of the ground.

There was romance everywhere: smugglers stealing in and out of Drigg and Seascale, the ancient Cross in Gosforth churchyard, Ravenglass, with all its seabirds, once a port of splendour.

Muncaster Castle and Broughton and black Wastwater with the grim Screes, Black Combe, upon whose broad back the shadows were always dancing— even the little station at Seascale, naked to the sea-winds, at whose bookstalls I bought a publication entitled the *Weekly Telegraph* that contained, week by week, instalments of the most thrilling story in the world.

Everywhere romance— the cows moving along the sandy lanes, the sea thundering along the Drigg beach, Gable and Scafell pulling their cloud-caps about their heads, the slow voices of the Cumbrian farmers calling their animals, the little tinkling bell of the Gosforth church— everywhere romance and beauty.

Soon, though, as I became better accustomed to the country, the people immediately around me began to occupy my attention, stimulate my restless curiosity, and especially my two uncles. They were, in fact, queer enough.

Faildyke Hall itself was not queer, only very ugly. It had been built about 1830, I should imagine, a square white building, like a thick-set, rather conceited woman with a very plain face. The rooms were large, the passages innumerable, and everything covered with a very hideous whitewash. Against this whitewash hung old photographs yellowed with age, and faded, bad water-colours. The furniture was strong and ugly.

One romantic feature, though, there was— and that was the little Grey Tower where my Uncle Robert lived. This Tower was at the end of the garden and looked out over a sloping field to the Scafell group beyond Wastwater. It had been built hundreds of years ago as a defence against the Scots. Robert had had his study and bedroom there for many years and it was his domain; no one was allowed to enter it save his old servant Hucking, a bent, wizened, grubby little man who spoke to no one and, so they said in the kitchen, managed to go through life without sleeping. He looked after my Uncle Robert, cleaned his rooms, and was supposed to clean his clothes.

I, being both an inquisitive and romantic-minded boy, was soon as eagerly excited about this Tower as was Bluebeard's wife about the forbidden room. Bob told me that whatever I did I was never to set foot inside.

And then I discovered another thing— that Armstrong hated, feared and was proud of my Uncle Robert. He was proud of him because he was head of the family, and because, so he said, he was the cleverest old man in the world.

'Nothing he can't seemingly do,' said Bob, 'but he don't like you to watch him at it.'

All this only increased my longing to see the inside of the Tower, although I couldn't be said to be fond of my Uncle Robert either.

It would be hard to say that I disliked him during those first days. He was quite kindly to me when he met me, and at meal-times, when I sat with my two uncles at the long table in the big, bare, whitewashed dining-room, he was always anxious to see that I had plenty to eat. But I never liked him; it was

perhaps because he wasn't clean. Children are sensitive to those things. Perhaps I didn't like the fusty, seed-caky smell that he carried about with him.

Then there came the day when he invited me into the Grey Tower and told me about Tarnhelm.

Pale slanting shadows of sunlight fell across the chrysanthemums and the grey stone walls, the long fields and the dusky hills. I was playing by myself by the little stream that ran beyond the rose garden, when Uncle Robert came up behind me in the soundless way he had, and, tweaking me by the ear, asked me whether I would like to come with him inside his Tower. I was, of course, eager enough; but I was frightened too, especially when I saw Hucking's moth-eaten old countenance peering at us from one of the narrow slits that pretended to be windows.

However, in we went, my hand in Uncle Robert's hot dry one. There wasn't, in reality, so very much to see when you were inside— all untidy and musty, with cobwebs over the doorways and old pieces of rusty iron and empty boxes in the corners, and the long table in Uncle Robert's study covered with a thousand things— books with the covers hanging on them, sticky green bottles, a looking-glass, a pair of scales, a globe, a cage with mice in it, a statue of a naked woman, an hour-glass— everything old and stained and dusty.

However, Uncle Robert made me sit down close to him, and told me many interesting stories. Among others the story about Tarnhelm.

Tarnhelm was something that you put over your head, and its magic turned you into any animal that you wished to be. Uncle Robert told me the story of a god called Wotan, and how he teased the dwarf who possessed Tarnhelm by saying that he couldn't turn himself into a mouse or some such animal; and the dwarf, his pride wounded, turned himself into a mouse, which the god easily captured and so stole Tarnhelm.

On the table, among all the litter, was a grey skull-cap.

'That's my Tarnhelm,' said Uncle Robert, laughing. 'Like to see me put it on?'

But I was suddenly frightened, terribly frightened. The sight of Uncle Robert made me feel quite ill. The room began to run round and round. The white mice in the cage twittered. It was stuffy in that room, enough to turn any boy sick.

iv

THAT WAS the moment, I think, when Uncle Robert stretched out his hand towards his grey skull-cap— after that I was never happy again in Faildyke Hall. That action of his, simple and apparently friendly though it was, seemed to open my eyes to a number of things.

We were now within ten days of Christmas. The thought of Christmas had then— and, to tell the truth, still has— a most happy effect on me. There is the

beautiful story, the geniality and kindliness, still, in spite of modern pessimists, much happiness and goodwill. Even now I yet enjoy giving presents and receiving them— then it was an ecstasy to me, the look of the parcel, the paper, the string, the exquisite surprise.

Therefore I had been anticipating Christmas eagerly. I had been promised a trip into Whitehaven for present-buying, and there was to be a tree and a dance for the Gosforth villagers. Then after my visit to Uncle Robert's Tower, all my happiness of anticipation vanished. As the days went on and my observation of one thing and another developed, I would, I think, have run away back to my aunts in Kensington, had it not been for Bob Armstrong.

It was, in fact, Armstrong who started me on that voyage of observation that ended so horribly, for when he had heard that Uncle Robert had taken me inside his Tower his anger was fearful. I had never before seen him angry; now his great body shook, and he caught me and held me until I cried out.

He wanted me to promise that I would never go inside there again. What? Not even with Uncle Robert? No, most especially not with Uncle Robert; and then, dropping his voice and looking around him to be sure that there was no one listening, he began to curse Uncle Robert. This amazed me, because loyalty to his masters was one of Bob's great laws. I can see us now, standing on the stable cobbles in the falling white dusk while the horses stamped in their stalls, and the little sharp stars appeared one after another glittering between the driving clouds.

'I'll not stay,' I heard him say to himself. 'I'll be like the rest. I'll not be staying. To bring a child into it....'

From that moment he seemed to have me very specially in his charge. Even when I could not see him I felt that his kindly eye was upon me, and this sense of the necessity that I should be guarded made me yet more uneasy and distressed.

The next thing that I observed was that the servants were all fresh, had been there not more than a month or two. Then, only a week before Christmas, the housekeeper departed. Uncle Constance seemed greatly upset at these occurrences; Uncle Robert did not seem in the least affected by them.

I come now to my Uncle Constance. At this distance of time it is strange with what clarity I still can see him— his stoutness, his shining cleanliness, his dandyism, the flower in his buttonhole, his little brilliantly shod feet, his thin, rather feminine voice. He would have been kind to me, I think, had he dared, but something kept him back. And what that something was I soon discovered; it was fear of my Uncle Robert.

It did not take me a day to discover that he was utterly subject to his brother. He said nothing without looking to see how Uncle Robert took it; suggested no plan until he first had assurance from his brother; was terrified

beyond anything that I had before witnessed in a human being at any sign of irritation in my uncle.

I discovered after this that Uncle Robert enjoyed greatly to play on his brother's fears. I did not understand enough of their life to realise what were the weapons that Robert used, but that they were sharp and piercing I was neither too young nor too ignorant to perceive.

Such was our situation, then, a week before Christmas. The weather had become very wild, with a great wind. All nature seemed in an uproar. I could fancy when I lay in my bed at night and heard the shouting in my chimney that I could catch the crash of the waves upon the beach, see the black waters of Wastwater cream and curdle under the Screes. I would lie awake and long for Bob Armstrong— the strength of his arm and the warmth of his breast— but I considered myself too grown a boy to make any appeal.

I remember that now almost minute by minute my fears increased. What gave them force and power who can say? I was much alone, I had now a great terror of my uncle, the weather was wild, the rooms of the house large and desolate, the servants mysterious, the walls of the passages lit always with an unnatural glimmer because of their white colour, and although Armstrong had watch over me he was busy in his affairs and could not always be with me.

I grew to fear and dislike my Uncle Robert more and more. Hatred and fear of him seemed to be everywhere and yet he was always soft-voiced and kindly. Then, a few days before Christmas, occurred the event that was to turn my terror into panic.

I had been reading in the library Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, an old book long forgotten, worthy of revival. The library was a fine room run to seed, bookcases from floor to ceiling, the windows small and dark, holes in the old faded carpet. A lamp burnt at a distant table. One stood on a little shelf at my side.

Something, I know not what, made me look up. What I saw then can even now stamp my heart in its recollection. By the library door, not moving, staring across the room's length at me, was a yellow dog.

I will not attempt to describe all the pitiful fear and mad freezing terror that caught and held me. My main thought, I fancy, was that that other vision on my first night in the place had not been a dream. I was not asleep now; the book in which I had been reading had fallen to the floor, the lamps shed their glow, I could hear the ivy tapping on the pane. No, this was reality.

The dog lifted a long, horrible leg and scratched itself. Then very slowly and silently across the carpet it came towards me.

I could not scream; I could not move; I waited. The animal was even more evil than it had seemed before, with its flat head, its narrow eyes, its yellow

fangs. It came steadily in my direction, stopped once to scratch itself again, then was almost at my chair.

It looked at me, bared its fangs, but now as though it grinned at me, then passed on. After it was gone there was a thick fœtid scent in the air— the scent of caraway-seed.

v

I THINK now on looking back that it was remarkable enough that I, a pale, nervous child who trembled at every sound, should have met the situation as I did. I said nothing about the dog to any living soul, not even to Bob Armstrong. I hid my fears— and fears of a beastly and sickening kind they were, too— within my breast. I had the intelligence to perceive— and *how* I caught in the air the awareness of this I can't, at this distance, understand— that I was playing my little part in the climax to something that had been piling up, for many a month, like the clouds over Gable.

Understand that I offer from first to last in this no kind of explanation. There is possibly— and to this day I cannot quite be sure— nothing to explain. My Uncle Robert died simply— but you shall hear.

What was beyond any doubt or question was that it was after my seeing the dog in the library that Uncle Robert changed so strangely in his behaviour to me. That may have been the merest coincidence. I only know that as one grows older one calls things coincidence more and more seldom.

In any case, that same night at dinner Uncle Robert seemed twenty years older. He was bent, shrivelled, would not eat, snarled at anyone who spoke to him and especially avoided even looking at me. It was a painful meal, and it was after it, when Uncle Constance and I were sitting alone in the old yellow-papered drawing-room— a room with two ticking clocks for ever racing one another— that the most extraordinary thing occurred. Uncle Constance and I were playing draughts. The only sounds were the roaring of the wind down the chimney, the hiss and splutter of the fire, the silly ticking of the clocks. Suddenly Uncle Constance put down the piece that he was about to move and began to cry.

To a child it is always a terrible thing to see a grown-up person cry, and even to this day to hear a man cry is very distressing to me. I was moved desperately by poor Uncle Constance, who sat there, his head in his white plump hands, all his stout body shaking. I ran over to him and he clutched me and held me as though he would never let me go. He sobbed incoherent words about protecting me, caring for me... seeing that that monster....

At the word I remember that I too began to tremble. I asked my uncle what monster, but he could only continue to murmur incoherently about hate and not having the pluck, and if only he had the courage....

Then, recovering a little, he began to ask me questions. Where had I been? Had I been into his brother's Tower? Had I seen anything that frightened me? If I did would I at once tell him? And then he muttered that he would never have allowed me to come had he known that it would go as far as this, that it would be better if I went away that night, and that if he were not afraid.... Then he began to tremble again and to look at the door, and I trembled too. He held me in his arms; then we thought that there was a sound and we listened, our heads up, our two hearts hammering. But it was only the clocks ticking and the wind shrieking as though it would tear the house to pieces.

That night, however, when Bob Armstrong came up to bed he found me sheltering there. I whispered to him that I was frightened; I put my arms around his neck and begged him not to send me away; he promised me that I should not leave him and I slept all night in the protection of his strength.

How, though, can I give any true picture of the fear that pursued me now? For I knew from what both Armstrong and Uncle Constance had said that there was real danger, that it was no hysterical fancy of mine or ill-digested dream. It made it worse that Uncle Robert was now no more seen. He was sick; he kept within his Tower, cared for by his old wizened manservant. And so, being nowhere, he was everywhere. I stayed with Armstrong when I could, but a kind of pride prevented me from clinging like a girl to his coat.

A deathly silence seemed to fall about the place. No one laughed or sang, no dog barked, no bird sang. Two days before Christmas an iron frost came to grip the land. The fields were rigid, the sky itself seemed to be frozen grey, and under the olive cloud Scafell and Gable were black.

Christmas Eve came.

On that morning, I remember, I was trying to draw— some childish picture of one of Mrs. Radcliffe's scenes— when the double doors unfolded and Uncle Robert stood there. He stood there, bent, shrivelled, his long, grey locks falling over his collar, his bushy eyebrows thrust forward. He wore his old green suit and on his finger gleamed his heavy red ring. I was frightened, of course, but also I was touched with pity. He looked so old, so frail, so small in this large empty house.

I sprang up. 'Uncle Robert,' I asked timidly, 'are you better?'

He bent still lower until he was almost on his hands and feet; then he looked up at me, and his yellow teeth were bared, almost as an animal snarls. Then the doors closed again.

The slow, stealthy, grey afternoon came at last. I walked with Armstrong to Gosforth village on some business that he had. We said no word of any matter

at the Hall. I told him, he has reminded me, of how fond I was of him and that I wanted to be with him always, and he answered that perhaps it might be so, little knowing how true that prophecy was to stand. Like all children I had a great capacity for forgetting the atmosphere that I was not at that moment in, and I walked beside Bob along the frozen roads, with some of my fears surrendered.

But not for long. It was dark when I came into the long, yellow drawing-room. I could hear the bells of Gosforth church pealing as I passed from the ante-room.

A moment later there came a shrill, terrified cry: 'Who's that? Who is it?'

It was Uncle Constance, who was standing in front of the yellow silk window curtains, staring at the dusk. I went over to him and he held me close to him.

'Listen!' he whispered. 'What can you hear?'

The double doors through which I had come were half open. At first I could hear nothing but the clocks, the very faint rumble of a cart on the frozen road. There was no wind.

My uncle's fingers gripped my shoulder. 'Listen!' he said again. And now I heard. On the stone passage beyond the drawing-room was the patter of an animal's feet. Uncle Constance and I looked at one another. In that exchanged glance we confessed that our secret was the same. We knew what we should see.

A moment later it was there, standing in the double doorway, crouching a little and staring at us with a hatred that was mad and sick— the hatred of a sick animal crazy with unhappiness, but loathing us more than its own misery.

Slowly it came towards us, and to my reeling fancy all the room seemed to stink of caraway-seed.

'Keep back! Keep away!' my uncle screamed.

I became oddly in my turn the protector.

'It shan't touch you! It shan't touch you, uncle!' I called.

But the animal came on.

It stayed for a moment near a little round table that contained a composition of dead waxen fruit under a glass dome. It stayed here, its nose down, smelling the ground. Then, looking up at us, it came on again.

Oh God!— even now as I write after all these years it is with me again, the flat skull, the cringing body in its evil colour and that loathsome smell. It slobbered a little at its jaw. It bared its fangs.

Then I screamed, hid my face in my uncle's breast and saw that he held, in his trembling hand, a thick, heavy, old-fashioned revolver.

Then he cried out:

'Go back, Robert.... Go back!'

The animal came on. He fired. The detonation shook the room. The dog turned and, blood dripping from its throat, crawled across the floor.

By the door it halted, turned and looked at us. Then it disappeared into the other room.

My uncle had flung down his revolver; he was crying, sniffling; he kept stroking my forehead, murmuring words.

At last, clinging to one another, we followed the splotches of blood, across the carpet, beside the door, through the doorway.

Huddled against a chair in the outer sitting-room, one leg twisted under him, was my Uncle Robert, shot through the throat.

On the floor, by his side, was a grey skull-cap.

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13: The Walnut

Evelyn Everett-Green

1856-1932

Queenslander, 22 May 1915

Prolific British romantic novelist, author of more than 350 books.

"YOU POOR LITTLE DEAR. I'm so dreadfully sorry I can't find you a partner. You see, we were disappointed of so many of our dancing men. It's always the way—and generally just at the last, too. Perhaps by-and-by—"

The hostess looked vaguely round the room. The floor was full of revolving couples, and she saw her own three daughters enjoying themselves to the top of their bent. That was always the way nowadays. In her younger days the daughters of the house saw that their guests had partners first, before thinking of themselves; but all that is changed now. She wondered what she could do for this pretty child, alone and forlorn at her first dance. She had been brought by somebody; but nobody looked after their charges now. And, somehow, the elder women with more go in them got the partners. Several girls were sitting out. But this poor child had not danced once.

Mrs. Ryley was sure she had seen the glint of tears in the soft hazel eyes.

"Oh, please do not mind," said Muriel, " It is all so pretty to watch. And I love the music and the flowers."

That might be ; but for all that there was dew on the long, curling lashes, and the wistful child-eyes roved round the walls against which sundry men were leaning in idleness. Most of these were elderly, with daughters in their charge. But the tallest of them was scarcely past his youth— a notable figure, with a keen, interesting face, and eyes of magnetic brilliance. Muriel had looked at him once or twice with an unconscious longing in her glance. The eyes of the hostess followed hers, and as though she divined the thought in the girl's mind, she shook her head and answered it.

"Oh, he is no good. The wonder is that he is here at all. I don't think I have ever seen him dance. He is what the boys call a walnut."

Mrs. Ryley sailed away, vaguely talking about "doing something"; but Muriel felt that she had watched the gay scene long enough as a spectator merely, her feet almost aching with longing to dance, her pretty frock, over which she had taken such pains, wasted, all her vague, delightful hopes about her first ball and its glorious possibilities of excitement and happiness slowly dying and dwindling beneath the wilting disillusion of hard facts.

She was a stranger, and nobody wanted her. She was young and immature, and people were bored by immaturity nowadays. Her pretty lace frock, cut from one of her dead mother's beautiful dresses, did not look like the tight, close

gowns of the other girls. It might be much prettier and more graceful; but it was not smart or up to date.

Muriel felt the sting of rising tears in her eyes, and, horribly afraid of being found crying— a weeping wall-flower— she slipped away into a big conservatory, into which occasional couples strayed from time to time, but which was empty now, and where she quickly found a sheltered nook, which she resolved to make a hiding-place until it should be time to go. The flowers were very sweet, and the air was fresh and scented.

Steps came and went; but nobody came very near her, and Muriel sat on and on, looking down into a little basin where goldfish sleepily swam to and fro. She was wondering whether goldfish ever slept, and amusing what life could be like lived in a stone basin a few feet wide. Was not her own life rather like that— lived in a groove, without variety and without any real liberty? Her guardian tried to be kind, but his wife thought it a great bore to have a girl to look after and take about.

Muriel, in fact, was very little taken about, and, after this experience, she did not think that she would care about going out again. She would live like the goldfish, going round and round and round—

"Have you counted how many there are? I never can."

Muriel looked up with quite a big jump. She met the eyes of the tall man from the ballroom looking down at her with a friendly light in their depths.

"Did I startle you? I beg your pardon. I did not know you were so lost in thought. Please make room for me to sit down. I am long, but not so very wide. Thank you. Yes, that is quite comfortable. Well, tell me which do you find more amusing to watch— men and women going round on a polished floor, or fishes going round and round in a basin?"

She looked up at him shyly through the dark fringe of her lashes.

"I came to watch the fishes because I wanted so badly to be one of those going round and round on the polished floor. And I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"There were not partners to go round. And I didn't know anybody."

"That was hard lines, rather. Unless you are blasé with too many dances."

"This is my first. And I don't think I shall dance at all!"

"Perhaps that was why our hostess gave me such an austere regard, just now, as she stood talking to you. What did she say about me?"

"She said you were a walnut. But I don't know what she meant."

The tall man put his head back and laughed in a way that made Muriel's dimples begin to show distractingly, and the light awoke in her eyes. She had to laugh, too, out of sheer sympathy, and when Muriel laughed she looked a darling.

"A walnut—that is delightful! A walnut and a wallflower!— Is that it? And here we are together in this cosy little nook. Ah! that reminds me of a tale which you won't know. You are too young to remember the Spoonerisms, as they are wont to be called. How one of them saw a friend of his sitting, as you and I are doing here, and called out to him, 'That's a nosey little cook you've got there!'"

Muriel's laugh rang out clear and sweet, like the trill of a bird. The tall man looked down at her, and then leant forward and took from her fingers the blank programme which dangled from its silken cord.

"Isn't it dreadful?" she asked, dimpling again. "I did think of putting imaginary names all down—just to make believe, you know. Oh! what are you doing?"

"Violating my principles. We all do that sometime. The world would be a duller place than it is if we didn't."

He continued to write, and then, with a bow, he handed her back the card, which she scanned eagerly, the light coming and going in her eyes. Half the programme had been danced through, but the other half still remain-ed. And for the remaining dances names had been set in alternation:

A. Walnut, A. Weymouth, A.W., A. Walnut, A. Weymouth, A.W., and so on to the bottom.

And as Muriel read and lifted her half-puzzled eyes to his, he rose and gave her his arm.

"A. Walnut starts. I hear the dance just striking up. May the walnut have the pleasure?"

"Oh! but do you mean it! I thought you never danced?"

"I vowed I would never dance again as long as hobble skirts held the day. But when I have the honour to meet a lady who has the good sense and good taste and courage to wear what is pretty and graceful— and becoming—"

Muriel's face flushed from brow to chin. Her eyes sparkled.

"Oh, how nice of you to say that. I was so afraid that everybody was laughing at me— or would laugh if I began to dance. That was the only thing that consoled me for being a wall-flower—"

"Let 'em laugh if it pleases them. We men laugh enough at those hideous hobbles, and the way the girls have to slither and mince. Are you ready?"

Then they glided off upon the polished floor, and Muriel felt she had never known before just what was meant by the poetry of movement. They scarcely paused, they hardly spoke, but it was the most delightful experience for the girl, and when he bowed to her at the end of the dance she was aware that quite a number of eyes were fixed upon her and her partner, and that his next movements were followed by a wave of expectant curiosity.

A few moments more, and Mrs. Ryley approached, a rather puzzled expression on her face, but an amused smile in her eyes. Behind in her wake was the tall man whom she had designated a walnut.

"Muriel, my dear, Sir Austin Weymouth wishes to be introduced to you. Sir Austin Weymouth, Miss Quentin." He bowed with all appropriate ceremony, his eyes alone betraying him.

"May I have the pleasure, Miss Quentin?"

And they were off once more.

Sir Austin was more talkative than A. Walnut had been, and his remarks and comments during the pauses of the dance were delightful. Muriel was quite aware that she was having a little triumph of her own, and she enjoyed every minute of it, as her sparkling eyes and charming smiles showed. She could also hold her own in talk when once her shyness had worn off, as her companion was quick to note. She was no society doll, nor mere games girl, but observed and thought for herself.

When the next dance struck up and "A.W." claimed her, she found him a most enlivening companion. He was rather like a big schoolboy out on his own; and the dance went with a swing and verve that flushed her cheeks and gave to her an aspect at once so radiant and so vivid that other men came up to ask for the favour of a dance, but were quickly sent to the right-about by the walnut.

"This lady's programme is full, I regret to have to inform you. You neglected your opportunities when you might have had them. Now it is too late. Miss Quentin, this is our dance, I believe."

And so things went on. She seemed to have three partners, yet all the while she knew that it was only one, and that all the room was watching and talking of it. But if he did not care, she did not. It was a perfectly enchanting experience, and she did not mind what anybody thought.

He took her in to supper, though his hostess plainly had other intentions regarding him. But Sir Austin seemed to be a man who pleased himself, and with whom it was better not to meddle.

Muriel's chaperon joined them at supper, and was charming to them both, and he to her. By this time he knew that Muriel lived with a guardian and his wife, and had surmised that the wife was not best pleased at the arrangement.

"May I have the pleasure of calling to know how you are after your fatigues of to-night?" he asked; and Mrs. Mannisty beamed upon him radiantly. She had meant to rebuke and caution Muriel, but she found herself unable.

"My doing— my fault entirely," Sir Austin told her, as he led Muriel away at length back to the ballroom. "I'm made like that— everybody knows it. I have my moments of determination, and I'm like a baulky horse— no one can move me. It's in the blood, I believe. When I've made up my mind it's made up for

good and all. I want to dance with Miss Quentin till we are both tired. Are you tired yet?" and he flashed a look at her that made the blood tingle in her veins.

"Not a bit. I feel as though I could dance all night."

"Good! So do I."

They pretty well did this, for the morning was breaking before the music finally ceased, and Sir Austin Weymouth put her into the carriage beside the young matron, who beamed on him with indulgent gratification.

"*Au revoir*. To-morrow I will call. No, to-day. That is all the better. Go to bed and sleep till noon, little partner; and then, before so very long, it will be time for you to look out for me, coming on my tall horse!"

"Really, Muriel," said Mrs. Mannisty, as they drove away, "I didn't think you had it in you! However did you manage it? Sir Austin is the catch, and also the despair, of the whole neighbourhood! Very few people get him to their houses at all. I've never seen him dance before. He made you tremendously conspicuous, and every tongue will be wagging. But, of course, if it's going to be a case of love at first sight— why, then—"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Muriel, shrinking back into the shadows, her face burning. "It was only that he was so kind to me when nobody had asked me. You mustn't think anything else. He made me have a simply delightful time; but, of course—"

She did not even try to finish the sentence. It was dreadful to have the bloom of her shy, sweet happiness brushed off like that. When they got home and the tale was told to Mr. Mannisty, he laughed, his jovial, fat laugh of entertainment.

"Austin Weymouth— the wily Weymouth! Ah! it's always that kind that play the fool most heartily once they let themselves go. Well, my dear, I'm glad you had a pleasant evening. But don't go dreaming about Austin Weymouth! He's not the kind to play King Cophetua to your beggar-maid— however pretty you may be!"

Muriel ran away with burning cheeks, and tears in her eyes. How horrid these worldly-minded people were! As though she had ever thought of anything but just his kindness to a lonely little girl at her first ball! Why need they try and spoil it all by saying such horrid things?

But when husband and wife were alone together; Mr. Mannisty said more gravely:

"Of course, if young Weymouth wants to call here you can't stop him. But I don't want ideas put into that child's pretty head. He's not a marrying man, by all accounts, and my impression is that if he were to change his vogue there'd be pretty bad trouble with Lady Dane."

"Lady Dane! Why, she's old enough to be his mother!"

"Not quite. About ten years his senior, I believe, and in her husband's lifetime Austin Weymouth was much at Danecourt, doing a lot of things there for the poor chap after that hunting accident. People talked. I don't say there was anything in it. Austin's a straight, clean-living man, and was a straight, square young one. He's all right. But my impression is the woman was set on him— is now, perhaps. So long as he's a confirmed bachelor she lets him alone; but if he were to try the other tack—well my idea is there'd be ructions."

"Oh, well, that's no affair of ours. If Sir Austin wants to come here—"

It seemed that Sir Austin did want. He began to come rather often. There was a certain gnarled apple-tree in the old orchard from which Muriel used to watch for his comings. When she sighted him her cheek would glow, her soft eyes would light. One day he sighted her in her leafy nook amongst the pink and white blossoms. He tied his horse to a sapling and joined her. They sat together on a swinging bough. He told her of the kingdoms of the earth and the glory thereof. He had been everywhere, as it seemed to her, and had seen everything. She listened with parted lips and eyes that shone like stars.

"Some day, perhaps," he told her once, "we will see some of these things together."

She did not ask his meaning, but her heart thrilled like a harp swept by a master hand. It seemed to her as though some great glory was coming nearer and nearer. She did not ask for it to come too quickly, the dazzle and splendour might be too great. It was enough that each day was crowded with blissful moments and happy memories. She lived in her dream by day and by night. Up in the apple tree she watched and waited. He did not come every day, but every day she perched herself there to dream and to watch.

Something was coming along the road. But it was not her knight. Its approach was heralded by a whirling dust-cloud which could only mean one thing. And Sir Austin Weymouth owned no motor-car. She was glad, for she, too, hated them. But what did this big car mean by taking this little back lane when it turned off from the main road? What a stupid mistake for any driver to make! And why did it stop at the orchard gate? And who was this fashionably-arrayed personage, all black and silver, who was mincing her way along over the orchard grass? What in the world could the fashionable and gay Lady Dane be doing in this valley?

Muriel slipped to the ground, and went forward. She had never spoken before to this great lady of the district, but she knew her by sight.

"Ah, little one," spoke the personage with an outstretched hand, "I was just wanting a few words with you, and I knew from Austin where you were generally to be found, watching and waiting— like a maid of the past— for her lover."

Muriel's face suddenly flamed. Some unexplained force within her gave her dignity both in aspect and in word.

"I do not think that you have any right to speak such words to me."

"Oh, child, do not try the high horse with me! I come as your friend, to give you timely warning. You should be thanking me for caring enough for womanhood to do so. Austin has told me of all these idyllic meetings, as he tells me everything. You think he is— what, shall I say?— never mind, we will not give it any name. Men are all like that. They will amuse themselves. Sometimes others have to suffer for their amusements. I don't want you to suffer. That is all. Just show him that you understand—that you have no use for that kind of thing. He is very proud. He will be quick to take the hint—"

"And by what right do you offer hints in matters that are no concern of yours?"

"Hear the child! But I like spirit; I always did! No concern of mine!" She laughed lightly, with narrowed eyes, pulling her sparkling silver gauze draperies more closely about her. "Well, I suppose it is some concern of mine when the man I am going to marry shortly spends his time philandering under the apple blossom with a pretty girl who takes him seriously."

She stopped suddenly, for Muriel was not looking at her, but beyond her, and into those rather wonderful hazel eyes an extremely vivid light had sprung. The girl pulled a white scarf from her neck, and it fluttered in the breeze. Lady Dane whisked round, and saw Weymouth tying his horse to a tree. He came straight up to her, and her colour ebbed and flowed.

"You told me you were going to London for the day."

"I changed my mind. Something told me that you meant mischief. Suddenly I guessed what the mischief might be. Hence my change of plan."

He looked her full in the eyes. Then he turned his gaze upon Muriel, who stood quivering beside the gnarled old apple tree, her heart torn with the tumult of her feelings, yet beating, nevertheless, a triumph march in her breast.

He held out his hand to her with the smile she knew so well.

"I do not know exactly what has happened here," he said, "although I can partly guess. Nor do I know what she has told you; though I partly surmise. I will tell you exactly how matters stand between us. I was her husband's friend, and when she was left a widow I was sorry for her. There was a time when I thought that perhaps we might marry. But then she had other views. Later on I discovered that it would have been a great mistake. Friends of a kind we have remained, but the tie between us is slack. Why she has thought fit to try and come between you and me I do not know. What I do know is the desire of my heart. Muriel, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Lady Dane swept round, her haughty head held high.

"Austin, you insult me! I will make your name infamous throughout the country. I will—"

"You will go back to your car, and go back home and think it all out," he answered quietly; "and I do not think that you will care to play the part of the spiteful, disappointed woman, either in this county or any other!"

When she was gone Austin turned upon Muriel with such a tenderness of glance and gesture that before she was well aware what had happened she was sobbing in his arms. "Tears, my little partner! But that will never do!"

"Oh, Austin, I am so happy—I can't help crying! Have we been very unkind to her? I can't help pitying her."

The "we" was music to his ears, he bent and kissed her long, dew-damp lashes. "She will get over it very fast— she always does. These crises come to her at regular intervals, and during the interludes she thinks that she can whistle me back! It was never love: but once good-comradeship made a tie between us, and we were both lonely. I was never keen; but it might have come off once— only she let me see too clearly that it was a case of *faut de mieux*."

"Oh!" cried Muriel, "as though any body in the world were like you!"

He looked down into her sweet, wet eyes and laughed.

"After all, I must not quarrel with those tears, for it was that glint of tears in those same pretty eyes which drew me first towards their owner, on that memorable occasion when she was playing the part of the wall-flower, and I was posing as that insufferable being— the walnut!"

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14: A Tragedy in Wax

Ernest O'Ferrall, as by "Kodak"

1881-1925

Smith's Weekly (Sydney) 12 Nov 1921

I, HERBERT CYRIL CHIFFON, lately shopwalker at Messrs. Goliath & Co., solemnly and sincerely declare (a) that I am not insane, and (b) that Lady Cleopatra de Vere, lately posing as a wax figure at Messrs. Goliath's, came to life like Galatea and formally promised to marry me. When I get out of the Fuzzy Park Asylum, in which I am at present wrongfully detained, I guarantee to prove both these facts up to the hilt. Meanwhile I insist on wearing the deepest possible mourning— including black frock coat, bell-topper and spats— for the Lady Cleopatra, now unhappily deceased.

In recognition of my long and honourable association with Messrs Goliath & Co., the directors provide me free with these requisites of gentlemanly grief— a valuable gift which I hereby gratefully acknowledge. And now to my story.

Two years ago, at the age of 47, I was in charge of the first floor. It was a responsible position, requiring practically ambassadorial tact. In fact it used to help me greatly during any departmental crisis to imagine myself the British Ambassador to France. The young ladies and gentlemen were very high-spirited and critical, and at times I had cause to suspect that they occasionally ridiculed me behind my back. I have always contended that a good assistant can show respect to the fair sex by treating their images with the same deference he would show a distinguished customer.

I enlarged on this point one morning to a boisterous young man whom I caught jazzing disgracefully with a valuable blonde figure he was carrying from the underclothing department to the bathing gown window. The fellow listened to me with apparent respect and' attention, then suddenly burst out laughing and remarked, "Oh, rats!"

Several silly girls who had been listening tittered, and I took the opportunity to read them a lecture and point out that they might learn , a great deal by imitating the reticence and ladylike repose of the elegant creatures on which we displayed our goods. I how realise that it was this speech which started the ridiculous story that I was in love with all the figures in the shop and earned me the offensive nickname "Waxworks."

When Mr. John Goliath returned from his visit to London in 1919, he informed me that he had ordered six superior wax ladies from Paris. They had all the latest improvements and would be adaptable to all departments. He was most enthusiastic about them, and when they arrived and were unpacked, I saw my ideal of feminine beauty at last! I could scarcely restrain a cry of joy when

Mr. John unveiled the first and said, "This, Chiffon, is Number One. What do you think of her?"

I gazed at the majestic white brow, the lustrous blue eyes, the lips slightly parted showing teeth like pearls, the beautiful, rounded adjustable arms, the splendid shoulders and bust— but why particularise? Her beauty reduced me to adoring silence.

"Number One!" I whispered. "Oh, I cannot bear to call you that! You must have a name— a title! You are— yes, I have it! You are the Lady Cleopatra de Vere."

The name was an inspiration. (I often have them. Once in a flash I named a line "Sunrise 7 Socks." We sold thousands of pairs. But I digress). Lady Cleopatra's name was so real to me that, instead of answering Mr. John, I started to tell myself her family history— how her father, the aged Marquis, his income sadly reduced by the heavy taxes imposed after the Great War, had given up his country seat and town house and gone abroad to live. Her brothers, Lord Clive and the Rt. Hon. John Egbert; being in the Navy, the Lady Cleopatra had courageously decided to go Into trade and had joined us. What superb courage!

I was awakened from my daydream by a hearty slap on the back.

"What's the matter, Chiffon? Why you're staring at her as if you were her sweetheart!"

I stammered some sort of reply; but an impertinent junior whom I had reprimanded that morning, overheard Mr. John's joking speech and at once put it into circulation. Next day all the silly girls and boys were telling an idiotic story that all the other wax ladies in the place were going to sue me for breach of promise. Worse still, some girl heard me repeating Lady Cleo's name (I used to call her "Lady Cleo" after the first day or so). The whole place buzzed with this news, and later I overheard them referring to me as "Sir Herbert Chiffon."

The title pleased me. It seemed in a way to be the realisation of my dreams— it brought me nearer Her. But, on the pretext of an untidy counter, I sharply rebuked a vulgar lout who once called me "Duke of Socks Coburg-Gotha."

A period of great happiness followed the induction of Lady Cleo as first evening dress figure, though I had several brushes with young Henponds, our chief window-dresser. The first time was when he wanted to put her into a midnight blue gown with cerise trimmings. I insisted that she be given the gold dress to which her rank entitled her. The argument at last grew so heated that Mr. John himself came down to arbitrate. In my excitement I referred to Lady Cleo by name, and only realised my indiscretion when I noticed the look of blank amazement on their faces.

"Lady Cleo!" puffed Mr. John, looking about him and then at me. "What d'yer mean, Chiffon?"

I bowed respectfully towards Lady Cleo. "There, sir!"

Mr. John turned and stared rudely at Lady Cleo, then turned and stared at me.

"Nonsense, man!" he growled. "Get' these ideas out of your head! You're overworked— need a holiday. I'll see the manager about it at once."

He walked away rapidly and that afternoon I received a note informing me that I might begin my annual leave on the following Monday.

I determined to tell Lady Cleo. the news and that afternoon opened the wood-panelled back of the evening-gown window and whispered to her that there was a scheme afoot to part us. She listened to me with the deepest attention; but an old busybody who had watched me from the street made it her business to come in and complain that "one of the assistants" (imagine anyone mistaking me for an assistant!) was talking to one of the wax figures in the window. I was unaware of this interference until the back of the window opened suddenly and Mr. John appeared.

"What's all this nonsense, Chiffon? Are you playing a silly practical joke on me, or do you really believe that thing to be alive?"

"Sir," I replied, "I believe far more than that— I believe and know this lady to be an Englishwoman of title."

I bowed respectfully to Lady Cleo and came out.

I think this act of courtesy impressed Mr. John, for his manner became kinder at once and he questioned me closely. I confided in him and begged him not to mention it to others in the establishment. He promised me he would not, but asked my permission to report the matter to a couple of eminent scientists. I said "Certainly, sir." He then asked me to consent to a meeting with these gentlemen, and I was glad to do so. It was arranged for the following day, and I spent a pleasant half-hour telling the deeply interested experts all about Lady Cleo.

I have been Informed since that my removal to the Reception House was fixed for the next afternoon. But that arrangement was upset by the fire— the disastrous fire which broke out at 5.45 and utterly destroyed the magnificent six-storey premises of Messrs. Goliath & Co.

I remember distinctly how it started. A mere wreath of smoke in the lace department; then a scream and a couple of girls running; after them a lady customer.

I put up one hand and called "Order, ladies! Order, please! Someone telephone to the Brigade!"

After that chaos it shocked me deeply to see how a mere alarm of fire could upset one of the best-ordered establishments south of the line. By this time the

lifts were running express up and down, emptying screaming women into the ground floor aisles. I stood in a commanding position on the haberdashery counter indignantly ordering everybody to pass along in silence.

My conduct at this stage has been described as "gallant in the extreme" and one of the evening papers headlined me as "The Hero Shopwalker."

I dislike such sensationalism and consider that I was only doing my duty. Just when the smoke was filling the place as with fog, I found firemen running up the shop and dragging hoses with them. Somebody tugged at my leg. I looked down and saw Mr. John, out of breath and sadly dishevelled.

"Come on, Chiffon!" pleaded Mr. John. "I won't forget what you've done to-night!"

There was a sudden commotion at the lift entrance and the officer called, "Someone wanted to work this lift!"

"Here!" I shouted and ran forward into the smoke. The liftman was carried past, apparently insensible.

"Three girls on the fourth floor," instructed the officer, as I entered the cage with two firemen. I pushed the lever over and up we went express. The smoke was stifling. We found the girls huddled against the wire of the lift-shaft. We dragged them in and went down. They were taken from us on the ground floor and rushed out to the air.

"All out now?" I found the officer in charge grasping my elbow.

"All but the Lady Cleopatra de Vere, sir!"

"Lady Who? Where is she?"

"In the window, sir! I will save her."

"Don't take any notice of him!" (It was Mr John speaking). "He is speaking of a wax dummy."

"Sir!" I protested. "Mr. John, this is ungenerous of you! "

Mr. John fairly dragged me towards the door. But, as we reached the street and I saw the shop with the rolling clouds of smoke and leaping flames, I caught sight of Cleo fainting in her window. (The people who contend she was melting are wrong; the poor girl at that stage was fainting).

Breaking from my employer's grasp, I ran back to the shop, fought my way somehow to the back of the window, opened it and gathered up my poor darling. I had planned to leave the shop again by the door through which I had entered; but a pile of burning woodwork fell and blocked the exit. I turned back and dashed for the staircase at the far end of the shop, intending to get out to the verandah top by one of the first floor windows; but, on reaching the first floor, I found that the fire had got a good hold. There was no escape that way. I rushed up another flight to the second floor. It was stifling there, but I smashed a window with a chair and climbed out on to a broad window ledge.

The street was pink with fire-lit faces and a great cheer went up as I appeared. Smoke was pouring from the broken glass behind me, and I could hear the roar and crash of the fire on the floor below. Every now and then a great tongue of flame licked up towards the ledge from the broken first-floor windows. It is said that the firemen were wonderfully quick with the escape ladder; but it seemed hours before it leaned over like a thin tower and a fireman ran up through a drenching cloud of spray to rescue us.

"The girl first!" roared the crowd. "Take the girl first!"

As the fireman stretched out his right arm to take the Lady Cleo., a sheet of flame swept up between us and the most beautiful woman in the world lost her shape in an instant. I almost swooned and a great cry of horror went up from the spectators. I believe they thought I was rescuing a lady customer or a shop girl who had fainted!

I refuse to sully this fair page by setting down what the fireman said to me. Though a brave man, he was a person of no culture and seemed to think that I had attempted to play a practical joke on him. He handled me quite roughly as I scrambled on to the ladder, holding the precious remnants of Lady Cleo. On the way down I was forced to stop several times and remonstrate with him.

I pass over the silly, press-led hero worship of the crowd, the stupid and irreverent jesting about the heroic rescue of a wax lady, and the very painful interview with Mr. John and his scientific friends, in which, they endeavoured to persuade me to take the view that Lady Cleo had never lived.

Because I held to my belief, I am wrongfully detained here in Fuzzy Park Asylum. But, although my friends and my old employer misunderstand me, I am grateful to them for many kindnesses and visits, and for the deep mourning supplied gratis by Goliath & Co.

At least, in my enforced retirement, I am able to fittingly honour the memory of a noble and beautiful lady.

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15: "Q." A Psychic Pstory of the Psupernatural

Stephen Leacock

1869-1944

The Novel Magazine Nov 1911

Collected in: *Nonsense Novels*, 1911

I CANNOT expect that any of my readers will believe the story which I am about to narrate. Looking back upon it, I scarcely believe it myself. Yet my narrative is so extraordinary and throws such light upon the nature of our communications with beings of another world, that I feel I am not entitled to withhold it from the public.

I had gone over to visit Annerly at his rooms. It was Saturday, October 31. I remember the date so precisely because it was my pay day, and I had received six sovereigns and ten shillings. I remembered the sum so exactly because I had put the money into my pocket, and I remember into which pocket I had put it because I had no money in any other pocket. My mind is perfectly clear on all these points.

Annerly and I sat smoking for some time.

Then quite suddenly— "Do you believe in the supernatural?" he asked.

I started as if I had been struck.

At the moment when Annerly spoke of the supernatural I had been thinking of something entirely different. The fact that he should speak of it at the very instant when I was thinking of something else, struck me as at least a very singular coincidence.

For a moment I could only stare.

"What I mean is," said Annerly, "do you believe in phantasms of the dead?"

"Phantasms?" I repeated.

"Yes, phantasms, or if you prefer the word, phanograms, or say if you will phanogrammatical manifestations, or more simply psychophantasmal phenomena?"

I looked at Annerly with a keener sense of interest than I had ever felt in him before. I felt that he was about to deal with events and experiences of which in the two or three months that I had known him he had never seen fit to speak.

I wondered now that it had never occurred to me that a man whose hair at fifty-five was already streaked with grey, must have passed through some terrible ordeal.

Presently Annerly spoke again.

"Last night I saw Q," he said.

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated. I did not in the least know who Q was, but it struck me with a thrill of indescribable terror that Annerly had seen Q. In my own quiet and measured existence such a thing had never happened.

"Yes," said Annerly, "I saw Q as plainly as if he were standing here. But perhaps I had better tell you something of my past relationship with Q, and you will understand exactly what the present situation is."

Annerly seated himself in a chair on the other side of the fire from me, lighted a pipe and continued.

"When first I knew Q he lived not very far from a small town in the south of England, which I will call X, and was betrothed to a beautiful and accomplished girl whom I will name M."

Annerly had hardly begun to speak before I found myself listening with riveted attention. I realised that it was no ordinary experience that he was about to narrate. I more than suspected that Q and M were not the real names of his unfortunate acquaintances, but were in reality two letters of the alphabet selected almost at random to disguise the names of his friends. I was still pondering over the ingenuity of the thing when Annerly went on:

"When Q and I first became friends, he had a favourite dog, which, if necessary, I might name Z, and which followed him in and out of X on his daily walk."

"In and out of X," I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes," said Annerly, "in and out."

My senses were now fully alert. That Z should have followed Q out of X, I could readily understand, but that he should first have followed him in seemed to pass the bounds of comprehension.

"Well," said Annerly, "Q and Miss M were to be married. Everything was arranged. The wedding was to take place on the last day of the year. Exactly six months and four days before the appointed day (I remember the date because the coincidence struck me as peculiar at the time) Q came to me late in the evening in great distress. He had just had, he said, a premonition of his own death. That evening, while sitting with Miss M on the verandah of her house, he had distinctly seen a projection of the dog R pass along the road."

"Stop a moment," I said. "Did you not say that the dog's name was Z?"

Annerly frowned slightly.

"Quite so," he replied. "Z, or more correctly Z R, since Q was in the habit, perhaps from motives of affection, of calling him R as well as Z. Well, then, the projection, or phanogram, of the dog passed in front of them so plainly that Miss M swore that she could have believed that it was the dog himself. Opposite the house the phantasm stopped for a moment and wagged its tail. Then it passed on, and quite suddenly disappeared around the corner of a stone wall, as if hidden by the bricks. What made the thing still more mysterious was that Miss M's mother, who is partially blind, had only partially seen the dog."

Annerly paused a moment. Then he went on:

"This singular occurrence was interpreted by Q, no doubt correctly, to indicate his own approaching death. I did what I could to remove this feeling, but it was impossible to do so, and he presently wrung my hand and left me, firmly convinced that he would not live till morning."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "and he died that night?"

"No, he did not," said Annerly quietly, "that is the inexplicable part of it."

"Tell me about it," I said.

"He rose that morning as usual, dressed himself with his customary care, omitting none of his clothes, and walked down to his office at the usual hour. He told me afterwards that he remembered the circumstances so clearly from the fact that he had gone to the office by the usual route instead of taking any other direction."

"Stop a moment," I said. "Did anything unusual happen to mark that particular day?"

"I anticipated that you would ask that question," said Annerly, "but as far as I can gather, absolutely nothing happened. Q returned from his work, and ate his dinner apparently much as usual, and presently went to bed complaining of a slight feeling of drowsiness, but nothing more. His stepmother, with whom he lived, said afterwards that she could hear the sound of his breathing quite distinctly during the night."

"And did he die that night?" I asked, breathless with excitement.

"No," said Annerly, "he did not. He rose next morning feeling about as before except that the sense of drowsiness had apparently passed, and that the sound of his breathing was no longer audible."

Annerly again fell into silence. Anxious as I was to hear the rest of his astounding narrative, I did not like to press him with questions. The fact that our relations had hitherto been only of a formal character, and that this was the first occasion on which he had invited me to visit him at his rooms, prevented me from assuming too great an intimacy.

"Well," he continued, "Q went to his office each day after that with absolute regularity. As far as I can gather there was nothing either in his surroundings or his conduct to indicate that any peculiar fate was impending over him. He saw Miss M regularly, and the time fixed for their marriage drew nearer each day."

"Each day?" I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes," said Annerly, "every day. For some time before his marriage I saw but little of him. But two weeks before that event was due to happen, I passed Q one day in the street. He seemed for a moment about to stop, then he raised his hat, smiled and passed on."

"One moment," I said, "if you will allow me a question that seems of importance-did he pass on and then smile and raise his hat, or did he smile into his hat, raise it, and then pass on afterwards?"

"Your question is quite justified," said Annerly, "though I think I can answer with perfect accuracy that he first smiled, then stopped smiling and raised his hat, and then stopped raising his hat and passed on."

"However," he continued, "the essential fact is this: on the day appointed for the wedding, Q and Miss M were duly married."

"Impossible!" I gasped; "duly married, both of them?"

"Yes," said Annerly, "both at the same time. After the wedding Mr. and Mrs. Q—"

"Mr. and Mrs. Q," I repeated in perplexity.

"Yes," he answered, "Mr. and Mrs. Q— for after the wedding Miss M. took the name of Q— left England and went out to Australia, where they were to reside."

"Stop one moment," I said, "and let me be quite clear-in going out to settle in Australia it was their intention to reside there?"

"Yes," said Annerly, "that at any rate was generally understood. I myself saw them off on the steamer, and shook hands with Q, standing at the same time quite close to him."

"Well," I said, "and since the two Q's, as I suppose one might almost call them, went to Australia, have you heard anything from them?"

"That," replied Annerly, "is a matter that has shown the same singularity as the rest of my experience. It is now four years since Q and his wife went to Australia. At first I heard from him quite regularly, and received two letters each month. Presently I only received one letter every two months, and later two letters every six months, and then only one letter every twelve months. Then until last night I heard nothing whatever of Q for a year and a half."

I was now on the tiptoe of expectancy.

"Last night," said Annerly very quietly, "Q appeared in this room, or rather, a phantasm or psychic manifestation of him. He seemed in great distress, made gestures which I could not understand, and kept turning his trouser pockets inside out. I was too spellbound to question him, and tried in vain to divine his meaning. Presently the phantasm seized a pencil from the table, and wrote the words, 'Two sovereigns, to-morrow night, urgent.' "

Annerly was again silent. I sat in deep thought. "How do you interpret the meaning which Q's phanogram meant to convey?"

"I think," he announced, "it means this. Q, who is evidently dead, meant to visualise that fact, meant, so to speak, to deatomise the idea that he was demonetised, and that he wanted two sovereigns to-night."

"And how," I asked, amazed at Annerly's instinctive penetration into the mysteries of the psychic world, "how do you intend to get it to him?"

"I intend," he announced, "to try a bold, a daring experiment, which, if it succeeds, will bring us into immediate connection with the world of spirits. My

plan is to leave two sovereigns here upon the edge of the table during the night. If they are gone in the morning, I shall know that Q has contrived to de-astralise himself, and has taken the sovereigns. The only question is, do you happen to have two sovereigns? I myself, unfortunately, have nothing but small change about me."

Here was a piece of rare good fortune, the coincidence of which seemed to add another link to the chain of circumstance. As it happened I had with me the six sovereigns which I had just drawn as my week's pay.

"Luckily," I said, "I am able to arrange that. I happen to have money with me." And I took two sovereigns from my pocket.

Annerly was delighted at our good luck. Our preparations for the experiment were soon made.

We placed the table in the middle of the room in such a way that there could be no fear of contact or collision with any of the furniture. The chairs were carefully set against the wall, and so placed that no two of them occupied the same place as any other two, while the pictures and ornaments about the room were left entirely undisturbed. We were careful not to remove any of the wall-paper from the wall, nor to detach any of the window-panes from the window. When all was ready the two sovereigns were laid side by side upon the table, with the heads up in such a way that the lower sides or tails were supported by only the table itself. We then extinguished the light. I said "Good night" to Annerly, and groped my way out into the dark, feverish with excitement.

My readers may well imagine my state of eagerness to know the result of the experiment. I could scarcely sleep for anxiety to know the issue. I had, of course, every faith in the completeness of our preparations, but was not without misgivings that the experiment might fail, as my own mental temperament and disposition might not be of the precise kind needed for the success of these experiments.

On this score, however, I need have had no alarm. The event showed that my mind was a media, or if the word is better, a transparency, of the very first order for psychic work of this character.

In the morning Annerly came rushing over to my lodgings, his face beaming with excitement.

"Glorious, glorious," he almost shouted, "we have succeeded! The sovereigns are gone. We are in direct monetary communication with Q."

I need not dwell on the exquisite thrill of happiness which went through me. All that day and all the following day, the sense that I was in communication with Q was ever present with me.

My only hope was that an opportunity might offer for the renewal of our inter-communication with the spirit world.

The following night my wishes were gratified. Late in the evening Annerly called me up on the telephone.

"Come over at once to my lodgings," he said. "Q's phanogram is communicating with us."

I hastened over, and arrived almost breathless. "Q has been here again," said Annerly, "and appeared in the same distress as before. A projection of him stood in the room, and kept writing with its finger on the table. I could distinguish the word 'sovereigns,' but nothing more."

"Do you not suppose," I said, "that Q for some reason which we cannot fathom, wishes us to again leave two sovereigns for him?"

"By Jove!" said Annerly enthusiastically, "I believe you've hit it. At any rate, let us try; we can but fail."

That night we placed again two of my sovereigns on the table, and arranged the furniture with the same scrupulous care as before.

Still somewhat doubtful of my own psychic fitness for the work in which I was engaged, I endeavoured to keep my mind so poised as to readily offer a mark for any astral disturbance that might be about. The result showed that it had offered just such a mark. Our experiment succeeded completely. The two coins had vanished in the morning.

For nearly two months we continued our experiments on these lines. At times Annerly himself, so he told me, would leave money, often considerable sums, within reach of the phantasm, which never failed to remove them during the night. But Annerly, being a man of strict honour, never carried on these experiments alone except when it proved impossible to communicate with me in time for me to come.

At other times he would call me up with the simple message, "Q is here," or would send me a telegram, or a written note saying, "Q needs money; bring any that you have, but no more."

On my own part, I was extremely anxious to bring our experiments prominently before the public, or to interest the Society for Psychic Research, and similar bodies, in the daring transit which we had effected between the world of sentience and the psycho-astric, or pseudo-ethereal existence. It seemed to me that we alone had succeeded in thus conveying money directly and without mediation, from one world to another. Others, indeed, had done so by the interposition of a medium, or by subscription to an occult magazine, but we had performed the feat with such simplicity that I was anxious to make our experience public, for the benefit of others like myself.

Annerly, however, was averse from this course, being fearful that it might break off our relations with Q.

It was some three months after our first inter-astral psycho-monetary experiment, that there came the culmination of my experiences-so mysterious as to leave me still lost in perplexity.

Annerly had come in to see me one afternoon. He looked nervous and depressed.

"I have just had a psychic communication from Q," he said in answer to my inquiries, "which I can hardly fathom. As far as I can judge, Q has formed some plan for interesting other phantasms in the kind of work that we are doing. He proposes to form, on his side of the gulf, an association that is to work in harmony with us, for monetary dealings on a large scale, between the two worlds."

My reader may well imagine that my eyes almost blazed with excitement at the magnitude of the prospect opened up.

"Q wishes us to gather together all the capital that we can, and to send it across to him, in order that he may be able to organise with him a corporate association of phanograms, or perhaps in this case, one would more correctly call them phantoids."

I had no sooner grasped Annerly's meaning than I became enthusiastic over it.

We decided to try the great experiment that night.

My own worldly capital was, unfortunately, no great amount. I had, however, some £500 in bank stock left to me at my father's decease, which I could, of course, realise within a few hours. I was fearful, however, lest it might prove too small to enable Q to organise his fellow phantoids with it.

I carried the money in notes and sovereigns to Annerly's room, where it was laid on the table. Annerly was fortunately able to contribute a larger sum, which, however, he was not to place beside mine until after I had withdrawn, in order that conjunction of our monetary personalities might not dematerialise the astral phenomenon.

We made our preparations this time with exceptional care, Annerly quietly confident, I, it must be confessed, extremely nervous and fearful of failure. We removed our boots, and walked about on our stockinged feet, and at Annerly's suggestion, not only placed the furniture as before, but turned the coal-scuttle upside down, and laid a wet towel over the top of the wastepaper basket.

All complete, I wrung Annerly's hand, and went out into the darkness.

I waited next morning in vain. Nine o'clock came, ten o'clock, and finally eleven, and still no word of him. Then feverish with anxiety, I sought his lodgings.

Judge of my utter consternation to find that Annerly had disappeared. He had vanished as if off the face of the earth. By what awful error in our preparations, by what neglect of some necessary psychic precautions, he had

met his fate, I cannot tell. But the evidence was only too clear, that Annerly had been engulfed into the astral world, carrying with him the money for the transfer of which he had risked his mundane existence.

The proof of his disappearance was easy to find. As soon as I dared do so with discretion I ventured upon a few inquiries. The fact that he had been engulfed while still owing four months' rent for his rooms, and that he had vanished without even having time to pay such bills as he had outstanding with local tradesmen, showed that he must have been devisualised at a moment's notice.

The awful fear that I might be held accountable for his death, prevented me from making the affair public.

Till that moment I had not realised the risks that he had incurred in our reckless dealing with the world of spirits. Annerly fell a victim to the great cause of psychic science, and the record of our experiments remains in the face of prejudice as a witness to its truth.

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16: Body-stealing Extraordinary

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 13 Nov 1897

The Elder Backford's Story

February 5.

THOSE who persist in saying that I, in any way consented to the experiment, either lie deliberately, or are entirely ignorant of the circumstances. Bletchford could bear me out in this if he chose! but he is only anxious to evade all responsibility, although he was the prime mover in the matter.

My younger brother Francis had always been weak and delicate, and possessed a highly imaginative disposition. This did not assist him to regain health and strength; his mind was too vigorous for his body, and was gradually wearing it out. Many times, when we were boys, have I had to follow him through the house to see that he did not come to harm during his somnambulistic rambles.

Gradually he grew out of this habit; but became a confirmed visionary, always attracted by any new speculations on the occult and the unknown. Fortunately he had too keen a brain to permit of his becoming a prey of the vulgar impostors calling themselves mediums; but where the theory appeared rational and logical he pursued it with avidity.

The separation of the soul from the body during life had a peculiar fascination for him; and he used to fast and experimentalise on himself to see if he could attain the desired object of leaving his body at will. In vain I remonstrated with him, and pointed out how he was undermining his health when he had none too much to spare. He only laughed at me, and told me that because I was robust and found my pleasure in outdoor sports, I was not capable of appreciating such deep and abstruse questions as occupied his time.

It was just then that Bletchford came on a visit to us. At this period I was 36 and my brother 30. Our parents were dead; we had each a small private fortune, and lived together for the sake of company. Bletchford was an old friend, and I hoped that his coming would rouse my brother, and lead to his interesting himself in less morbid pursuits.

In this, to my great disgust, I was greatly disappointed. Bletchford had caught the craze and was deeper in the study of occultism than my brother. Instead of weaning him from his studies he encouraged him to continue in them, and, disgusted and sick at heart, left them to themselves, and sought my own diversions.

About three weeks after Bletchford had been with us he came to me, and, taking my arm confidentially, said:

'We have completely succeeded, at least in the case of your brother. I am too gross, apparently, to enter into the higher circle.'

'Higher humbug,' I replied, rudely. 'What does all this tommyrot mean?'

'It means that your brother can enter at will into the spirit world, leaving his body apparently lifeless.'

I forget what I said, but it was something very personal and offensive, but Bletchford took it quietly.

'As yet,' he said, 'your brother has made no sustained effort, and instead of there being any injury to his health, he looks better and stronger. To-night we are going to prolong the experiment. Will you be present?'

I told him hotly that I would not countenance any such sinful folly. Then I went to my brother and sought earnestly to dissuade him from dabbling with things better left alone.

He only smiled good-naturedly, and told me he was surely old enough to judge for himself. I departed in anger, and left them to continue their experiment by themselves. I declare that I did my best to stop it, and failed. I saw neither of them again that night, but at breakfast next morning Bletchford turned up looking very white and, haggard.

'Where's Francis?' I asked.

'He's lying down,' he said. He spoke very little, and I concluded that their precious experiment had failed, and that they both felt ashamed of themselves. Breakfast finished I rose, intending to go see my brother, when Bletchford stopped me at the door.

'Are you going up to Francis?' he asked.

'Yes, I am,' I answered. 'Don't be alarmed, but he's still unconscious; but it will be all right directly. The experiment was only to last three hours, but his soul has not returned yet.'

I shook his hand off, and hastened upstairs without a word. My brother lay on his bed fully dressed, his countenance was calm and placid, but there seemed no sign of life about him. Hastily brushing past Bletchford with a very strong oath, I called our man servant and told him to go directly for a doctor. Bletchford tried to speak to me while we awaited the doctor's arrival, but I refused to answer him.

The doctor came and made an exhaustive examination of my poor brother's body.

'He is not dead,' he said, when he had concluded. 'It is more like a cataleptic trance than anything else. The pulse is extremely weak, but steady. He must be watched continually, and at the first indication of returning life the vitality must be carefully nursed with restoratives.'

After a few more instructions the doctor departed, and I got everything ready against the return of life, Bletchford wandered about with a hangdog look on his face, but I felt no pity for him. All at once there was a movement in the inanimate body. A deep sigh escaped the lips, and I hastened to follow out the doctor's injunctions to the letter. With joy I noticed that I was successful. The life seemed to grow while I watched. In a short time he sat up, and looked wonderingly around, then at us in a dazed sort of way.

'Where am I? What's the meaning of this?' Francis said. Bletchford and I looked at each other, dumb with astonishment.

My brother, although so delicate, had a strong, manly voice. The voice that asked the above questions was the soft and rather pleasing voice of a young girl. Then I looked in the eyes, and they were not the eyes of Francis.

'Now, is this some trick?' went on the voice. 'Why am I here dressed in man's clothes? It's a very poor joke, and not one gentlemen would indulge in.'

'O, great heavens!' said Bletchford, sinking on a chair, with a look of despair on his' face. 'There's been a mix up somehow, and the wrong soul has come back. A girl's soul, too!' and he covered his face with his hands.

'Gracious! What's the matter with him?' said, the new Francis. 'What does he mean about the wrong soul coming back? Let me think a bit.'

We all remained silent. The situation was too tremendous.

'I remember flying headlong out of the buggy,' went on the girlish voice, after a while. 'Then sparks, and nothing more. What's today?'

'Thursday,' I answered, finding my voice at last.

'That was on Tuesday. Where am I?'

'In one of the suburbs of Sydney,' said Bletchford, speaking up like a man for the first time.

'From what you say you were thrown from a buggy and rendered senseless?'

'Yes; Jessie Carter bet me a new hat that I couldn't drive the buckboard over a three-foot log.'

'Where did this happen?'

'Why, where we live, at Jamestown, in South Australia.'

'Let me explain,' went on Bletchford. 'While you have been unconscious, your soul, absent from your body, has entered the body of Francis Backford, then lying in a trance. His soul, therefore, cannot get back to its rightful body, but I think I can put matters straight. If you will permit me to put you into a mesmeric sleep, the soul of Francis Backford will regain its shell, and you will be able to do the same.'

'Who am I, after all?'

'At present you are my brother, Francis Backford,' I answered. 'You have eight hundred a year of your own, and, as my brother was not an extravagant man, I expect there is a balance in the bank. Now, I think you will see the reason

of submitting to Mr. Bletchford's mesmeric powers, and get rid of a body which must be only an encumbrance to you, and make way for the rightful owner, whom you are keeping out in the cold.'

Our strange visitor pondered, and presently raised her— no, I mean his— head, and I saw a wicked gleam in his eyes.

'Now I'm here, I think I'll stop here. I've often wished to be a man— they have much better time than women. Now I have a chance to try what it is like.'

'But,' stammered Bletchford, 'that would be unfair, preposterous, unwomanly—'

'I'm not a woman,' interrupted Francis, 'and I intend to stop.'

'But,' I said, 'your people will bury your real body.'

'Let them; I've got this one. Now, a last word. I'm your brother, and you can't deny it, and this is my home. Is this my room?'

'It is,' I sighed.

'Then I'll trouble you to go out. I want to overhaul my new wardrobe, and get the hang of these masculine garments.'

We left, and I was too downcast even to reproach Bletchford.

March 5.

It is just a month since the new Francis arrived, and my hair is rapidly turning grey. Bletchford has deserted me, and she— no, he— has been going on in a way to blast my brother's character for ever. Whether it is owing to the new vitality infused in the body of my poor lost brother or not, I cannot say; but it has developed an appearance of health and strength really wonderful. Every girl in the neighborhood is in love with him, and I have received countless letters warning me that he would get his bones broken if I didn't stop him from interfering with other men's girls; but he only laughs. His innate knowledge of the sex, I suppose, renders him perfectly, irresistible. Didn't Olivia fall hopelessly in love with Viola?

March 9.

He informed me to-night that he had joined a 'push.' Says he never imagined that men had such jolly times of it; wouldn't be a girl again for anything. I'll advertise for Bletchford; he left no address. At least he must see me through, for I cannot stand it alone much longer.

March 15.

Three communications from different lawyers, stating that unless compensation is forthcoming, writs for actions of breach of promise will be at once issued. Only three, I expected a dozen.

March 16.

Had to bail him out of the lockup last night. Thank heaven Bletchford has written to say that he will be here to-morrow.

Bletchford's Story

BACKFORD has told the tale of our unhappy experiment, and has asked me to write the sequel. But, first, I want to state that I have solemnly renounced all accursed dabblings with things that are wisely hidden from us; and I earnestly entreat all others to do the same lest they go through the tribulation we have gone through.

Old Backford welcomed me with effusion. Poor fellow, he looks ten years older. The new Francis didn't seem to like my coming at all. I see a gleam of hope. This racketting about has upset his nervous system, and if I get the chance I'll soon have him under control.

Francis has come back. Yesterday a tall, gaunt, powerful man, with a broken nose, came to the door, and inquired for Backford. Soon afterwards . I heard my name loudly called, and going downstairs found the two standing hand in hand.

'This is Francis— my Francis!' said Backford, with tears in his eyes.

I held out my hand in doubt and astonishment.

'Yes, Bletchford,' said the man in a deep, hoarse voice, with a villainous accent which I won't reproduce; 'I got tired of hanging round waiting for that vixen to let me have my property back, so I collared the first body that came to hand. I'm Boko Ben, a pugilist, at present. Knocked out senseless in a glove fight at Melbourne the other night.'

We both were delighted, and at once proceeded to discuss our plans.

'Supposing I pick a quarrel with him, and knock him senseless?' said the real Francis, bringing his leg of mutton fist down on the table.

'Never do; he wouldn't fight,' said his brother. 'He'll only scratch and pull your hair.'

'Well, we must wait and watch for an opportunity,' said the real Francis, alias Boko Ben.

The new Francis did not seem to enjoy the advent of Ben at all; somehow he seemed instinctively frightened of Him. So things went on for nearly a week, Francis still continuing to pursue his wild career; whilst poor Ben groaned to witness the way in which his body and reputation were being treated.

I never have seen Miss Sophy Humber in her own proper person. She might-possibly be well-behaved and fascinating; but while she was masquerading in her stolen body, there never was such an incarnate spirit of evil, nor one more cordially hated by the three of us. We'd have poisoned her willingly; but that would only have spoiled everything. During my absence I had learned her name

from the papers, the incident of her lying at her parents' residence in a cataleptic state having naturally aroused much interest.

We were at dinner one evening, the three of us, when the door opened, and in staggered the new Francis— drunk. This was his first outbreak in the drink line, and my heart gave a bound as I thought that at last my enemy was delivered into my hand. He held on by the back of a chair. and laughed foolishly.

'Givesh glassh wine,' he said. I arose, approached him, and got his eyes under my control. He seemed to get uneasy, and muttered something about 'an old ape,' and 'knocking my blooming head off,' but I saw with joy that the fumes of drink were passing away, and I had him in my power.

I made some quick downward passes, throwing all my energy into them, and at my command he relinquished his hold of the chair and walked steadily over to the sofa, and laid himself down.

'Quick,' I said to Ben. 'Put all your will into it, and. be ready to slip into your body directly there's a chance.'

I very soon had him under my influence, and Boko Ben, an apparently lifeless shell, lay inert in an armchair. I went over to the other, and throwing all the psychic force I possessed into my work, willed the soul of Sophy Humber out of the body of Francis Backford.

The eyes were open, and gradually light and life went out of them, and I knew that she was gone. There was an oppressive silence while Backford and I watched with intense anxiety. Then life kindled again in the eyes, the breath returned, and as Francis sat up his proper self I dropped fainting and exhausted on a chair.

When I was restored to my senses the brothers were standing by me and Boko Ben was sitting up in the armchair.

'I say,' he said, 'that was a mean trick to take advantage of a man when he was screwed.' We all three burst out laughing.

The girl's voice coming from the frame of the broken-nosed bruiser was too funny ; the soul of Sophy had taken refuge in Ben's body.

I was about to offer to mesmerise her again, and give her a chance to go back to her own body, which was getting tired of waiting; but Backford whispered to me, 'I think four and twenty hours in Ben's body would do her good.'

I nodded assent, and Backford turning to the sham pugilist, said, 'Here, be off as quick as you can; you've got money, in your pocket, and can get a lodging elsewhere.'

'What do you mean? I'm not going to be turned out.'

'Yes, you are, if you don't go quietly; you've no business here.'

'But I won't go. I'm big enough to smash the three of you, and I'll do it.'

'No, you won't. You have the size, but only the spirit of a girl inside it. Now go!'

'Send me to sleep, and let me get back to my own body,' said Ben, turning to me.

'Not to-night; I'm too tired out,' I replied. Ben rose, he saw there was no help.

'Have a look at yourself in the glass before you go,' suggested Backford. Ben approached the mantelpiece, and looked. He gave one heart-broken wail and went out. The disfigured face and broken nose were too much for the soul of Sophy Humber. For the first time I felt pity!

Next morning about 12 o'clock Ben appeared again, a dilapidated ruin. From what we could learn he had sought to drown his sorrows in drink, obtained in threepenny pubs., had passed the night in the police cell, and had only been just released

I was about to take pity on him, when Backford stopped me again.

'Supposing Ben's spirit does not come back for his body,' he said, 'we don't want the apparent corpse of a pugilist in the house.'

I took the hint, and made an appointment with Ben to meet me elsewhere. To make a long story short, I released the soul of Sophy, and as I saw about her wonderful recovery in the paper, I infer that she got back to her body safely. What became of Ben's husk I know not, but as I've heard nothing of a startling discovery, I presume the rightful owner appropriated it again.

The Backfords had to sell their house, and go to Victoria. Sophy had made it altogether too hot for them. The actions were squared, and altogether it was a most costly experiment.

17: Illilliwa

"Waif Wander"

Mary Helena Fortune, 1833-1911
The Australian Journal, Jan 1883

I, MARK SINCLAIR, had been closeted with the chief of our department for some time and had received ample instructions for my guidance on the duty on which he was about to send me.

"I have chosen you because you are old enough to hold your tongue, Sinclair," he concluded, "and also because you have some little acquaintance with the locality. Are you quite certain that you understand fully the line of action I wish you to carry out and not to diverge from?"

"Quite certain, sir. I have made ample notes."

"To carry with you?" he questioned sharply.

"Yes; but there is no danger of them appearing against me, sir, for I always make my private notes in a cipher of my own invention."

"Oh, that's all right then."

"When am I to start, sir?"

"Today," he replied. "Go by train as far as Gunbar. At the police station there you can supply yourself with a horse, and proceed as circumstances direct."

So that is how I became mixed up in the tale I am about to relate to you.

I made my preparations and took my seat in the train within two hours of the time I left our inspector's office. I was in plain clothes, and had my rugs in a strap, and my valise under my seat. I had also a revolver, you may be sure, nor had I neglected the usual pair of steel bracelets, while my detective card was securely stowed away in an inner breast pocket.

During the long journey I had ample time to think over my instructions, and arrange my ideas concerning them and how I should best carry them out. At the different stopping places travelers came and went into and out of the carriage in which I sat; but though I was in reality watching everything and every one, I took care to seem so engrossed with my book that no one suspected me of undue curiosity, nor do I suppose that there were any among the passengers who had occasion to dread the watch of a detested.

At a lonely little country platform, however, there entered into my car two persons who interested me, though there was nothing in their appearance to suggest any connection with my private notes. They were a much muffled and very frail looking old woman, who was supported, and indeed half led, into a seat by a very young and not tall gentleman, whose devotion to the old person was displayed with the greatest activity in both word and deed.

The old woman was seated opposite to me, and I had ample time to see all that was to be seen of her, but that was little after all. Although it was summer, and the day warm, she was wrapped in a large mantle, the cape of which was drawn over a close black satin bonnet in hood fashion. Of her face nothing was visible save a portion of a wrinkled forehead, on which rested the borders of a widow's cap, and a pair of dull, sunken eyes that appeared to have little speculation in them, I made some few attempts to cultivate the old lady's acquaintance, but they were not responded to by even a reply.

"Pray excuse my mother," the young gentleman explained. "She is in very poor health, and quite unfit for conversation. She has had a severe paralytic seizure, and is not yet quite recovered."

"Ah, indeed? I am sorry I annoyed her by speaking."

"Oh, it doesn't annoy her, poor soul! Only so far as she feels greatly her incapacity for properly replying to kindly meant attentions. Are we far from Gunbar, do you think?"

"We are close on it," I replied, as I consulted my time table; "the station we have just passed is the last. Are you going much farther? Can I be of any assistance in helping?" and I glanced inquiringly toward the old lady.

"No, thank you all the same, our journey goes to Illilliwa, but a trap will be sure to meet us at Gunbar."

A "trap" met me too, but it was one mounted on a good horse, and leading another by the bridle. It was the trooper in charge at Gunbar and a horse he had brought for my accommodation.

"Hallo! Is it possible that it is you, Maurice?" I exclaimed, as I recognized an old chum; "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

"Surely you heard the name of the man at Gunbar?" he asked in rather a disappointed tone. "I knew it was you as soon as your coming was notified to me."

"I did hear that Constable Brennan was here, but how could I guess that it was my old chum Maurice Brennan? I'm heartily glad, however, that it is so, for you and I know how to work together."

As I was speaking my fellow-travelers in the train came slowly along the platform, the young man carefully supporting the feeble steps of his mother. They both appeared to be looking anxiously toward the road where Brennan and I were preparing to mount.

"You see the old woman and young man?" I asked, as I was strapping my valise on the saddle.

"I have been observing them, but they are strangers to me. Here, however, comes one who appears to know them."

An odd-looking trap was being rapidly driven toward us by an odd-looking yet gentlemanly man. The driver was not over forty, tall and thin, and with a

clean-shaved face. He wore a suit of white duck from neck to heel, and a broad Panama hat, from which a monstrous puggaree floated, shading his well-cut brown face and hair black as night. As he drove his pair of excellent bays a large diamond flashed in the sunlight on his left hand, but the diamond was set in a heavy and somber-looking mourning ring.

As for the conveyance he drove it could not be assigned any name in the nomenclature of known vehicles. It was a hybrid between an American express wagon and a hawker's cart, or a furniture van on a small scale. The springs were easy, yet strong, and the covering impervious to weather, but of the accommodation inside no idea could be formed, as the vehicle had no visible entrance.

"What a strange turn-out!" I said as it dashed past us, and the driver nodded easily to my friend Maurice. "How the deuce do they get into it?"

"From the front I have heard; but you will see presently, for he's come for your fellow-travelers, I see."

"Who is he? He saluted you, I noticed."

"Oh yes, there are not many unacquainted with 'the man in charge;' but is it possible that you don't recognize him by description? That is Mr. Hewston, of Illilliwa."

"What! Well, then, all I can say is that he must be as good at making up as I am myself. Where's the black beard and the heavy moustache?"

"Oh, he always shaves in summer, though most men think the beard a protection even in summer; but he's an odd man altogether."

We mounted just as Mr. Hewston was, with some difficulty and the assistance of the younger gentleman, getting the old lady into the van-like vehicle.

"And you have no idea who the visitors may be?"

"I have just remembered that, when we were up at Illilliwa the other day for forage, Hewston said a word or two about expecting his sister-in-law and nephew—I suppose these are they."

"Um-m! We must keep our eyes open, Maurice. Ay, and our mouths shut, so don't say a word of any kind of business until we are safe in camp. By George, it's well a trooper's horse can't speak, as Balaam's ass did!" The vehicle in which we were interested soon made up with us, and, to our surprise, Mr. Hewston pulled up and spoke.

"I'm keeping that hay for you, Brennan—when will you send for it?"

"As soon as we get our stock of wood in, Mr. Hewston. Will it inconvenience you to keep it for a week or so?"

"Not at all. I have just been to meet my nephew and his mother, who are going to keep me company for a little at Illilliwa. Am I acquainted with your

friend?" and he bent from his seat to get a good look at me, for I was hidden partially behind the vehicle.

"No, Mr. Hewston, you can hardly know Mark. He is an old schoolmate of mine going to stop at the camp for a day or two."

"Ah! Well bring him to Illilliwa in one of your rides. I shall be glad to see him and you. Gunbar is a dull hole, and even a visit to the station will be a change," and, with a bow to me, the odd looking gentleman drove off. "It's a pity he saw you so close," Maurice said shortly.

"Why?" asked I.

"Why! What a stupid question. You don't want him to know you have anything to do with the police, do you?"

"Ha! Ha! Maurice, my dear fellow, it's easy seen you have never been a D. I can disguise so that even you wouldn't know me."

"Where's the material?"

"There," I answered, as I laid my hand on my valise.

Evening found Maurice and me seated on the little verandah of the solitary police camp, with each a comforting pipe and a certainty of no listeners. The foot-policeman, who did duty as assistant mounted man under my friend Brennan, was engaged in and around the stable at the back, and no one could approach the station without being seen by either him or ourselves.

"Now let us talk this matter over," I began. "In the first place, how far is it to Illilliwa?"

"Three miles."

"Only a nice walk, so far so good. And now, how far have you really been initiated into the case on which I have been sent up?"

"Not very far. I have received instructions that a notorious forger named Blewett, with half a dozen aliases, had eluded the police so successfully in Melbourne that no trace of him could be found. His description was forwarded, and I was ordered to keep my eyes open in my district."

"Yes. What description did they give you?"

"Forty-five, middle sized, thin and wiry in build. Has sharp features, and pale blue or grey eyes, short brownish hair, and a slight impediment in his speech, also a noticeable Yorkshire accent."

"Yes, that's it."

"That was the first communication I got from headquarters; and the second stated that, in consequence of a suspected and intercepted postal card, an acquaintance between Blewett and Hewston of Illilliwa was suspected, and I was urgently recommended to watch the latter closely, as well as to scan all addresses on his correspondence so as to recognize Blewett's writing if the forger should address anything to Illilliwa; and then your coming was intimated, and that's all I know."

"Well, there is little more to know, but after you got that last notice another post-card was intercepted—I have it here, you can read it for yourself," and I extracted the card in question from my pocket-book and gave it to Maurice. It was addressed to:

"A. HEWSTON, ESQ.,Illilliwa, Gunbar"

and contained the following words:—

"I have safely shipped the piano and gunny bags as per order, and hope you will receive both consignments safely on or before the 13th inst."

There was no signature.

"That is all, and it was what sent me up in such a hurry."

"Well, I must own that I can make nothing out of it. What did they want you to do?"

"Intercept the piano and gunny bags, I guess, and discover if they may not have some contraband articles packed up with them," I returned, with a smile.

"Oh, you're at your old games, Mark; but I don't see any use in your trying to blind me. I could have watched for the goods well enough myself, and it's not that which has brought you to Gunbar."

"No. I am here to watch Hewston himself, who, as you know, is suspected of some communication with Blewett. Still there may be some trick about the goods—it would not be the first time a man escaped concealed in a piano. Once at Illilliwa, nothing would be easier than for Blewett to make tracks to the sea border."

We talked a good deal before retiring, and who could dream that the Jew hawker who tramped over the boundary of Illilliwa station on the following morning was Detective Sinclair; or that the crisp, black, curly wig under the felt helmet covered the short, fashionably cut hair of a member of the Force who has had as much experience as most of his fellow D's. in this or any other colony?

My name was "Leir," of course, and I put an "Isaac" before it. My clothes were such as you may see on any Jew hawker, and as seedy and dirty as was requisite. My stock-in-trade was contained in a cedar box, covered with black American cloth, and consisted of the usual to be easily seen Brummagem jewelry, and window glass, spectacles, etc., with a not easily to be seen or got at collection of real jewelry, and valuable jewelry too. Oh, that was easily managed, bless you! You should see our display of unclaimed stolen goods at the Detective Office.

On the borders of Illilliwa estate a belt of bush land ran along by the main road, but through this bush there was a footpath that led across the paddocks and up to the station, which saved me a good two miles' round of a walk. Maurice had told me that on the Illilliwa side of the trees there was a hut in

which an old station hand had his abode, and from a few dropped hints of this man I was determined to see him, and so kept a good look-out for the hut.

It was easily seen. Under the overhanging boughs of a great peppermint tree it stood, a rough, weather-beaten tint, with the usual attempt at a chimney, and a few bush tools laid against the slab walls; and what was better than all, to my idea, was the form of a worn-looking man, who was sitting on a stone outside the door, busy in trying to patch in the one glass of a broken pair of spectacles, the object of mending which was evident in the greasy newspaper, at his feet, which the warm breeze was lifting and rustling fitfully.

He looked up at my step, but showed little interest in the wrinkled, discontented-looking face, with the deep set eyes, the high, sharply ridged nose, or the almost toothless mouth, so firmly sat under a grizzly grey moustache; he only resumed his attention to the broken glass. I drew the belt of my box over my shoulder, and set the precious article on the grass at my feet, as I sat down on a log at the distance of a few feet from him.

"I'm tired, mate, and I don't think you will mind me resting here for a spell."

"Oh no," he grunted; "that path's allays looked on as a thoroughfare. Be ye goin' up to the house?"

"I was making that way. Do you think I have a chance of doing any business there?"

"Depends on what ye got to sell. There's a good many hands o' one sort an' another; but I don't think the Super himself will trouble ye. Ye hain't got anything flash enough for his lordship, I guess," and a cruel look came into the old man's eyes, though they were bent on his one-eyed spectacles.

"Here I am, blind, and can't even see the bit of news without my spectacles; but he wouldn't think o' that, though he's been twice to town since I broke 'em, damn him."

There was an intensity of passion in his utterance of the muttered curse that assured me it was from his heart, and I went on in hope of making something more out of the feeling.

"When a man's eyesight begins to fail, he's helpless without his glasses," I said; "but, poor as I am, I won't see you stuck up for want of spectacles. Take a pair to suit you, and I'll make you a present of them."

The old chap looked at the handful of wire-rimmed glasses I laid on the ground beside him, and then he looked into my face. The look was a keen one, and the expression that accompanied it in the old visage was one of suspicion and doubt.

"You look as if there was Jewish blood in you," he said: "but I never heard of a Jew making a present unless he wanted something five times as vallyable back for it. Now, what may ye be wantin' from me?"

"Nothing," I replied, with a light laugh. "After all, even a hard Jew might give a pair of these without being generous; they only cost a shilling or two a gross."

He shook his head, but was not proof against the temptation, no matter to what it might tend. One by one he lifted and tried the spectacles, holding the soiled paper at arm's length or nearer until he had satisfied himself of the respective merits of the respective glasses, and only then he spoke as he removed a pair from his nose.

"I'll take them, and thank ye, for they're first-rate; but the Super must pay ye for them."

"Who is the Super? I mean by what name am I to ask for him?"

"Mr. Hewston, of course—Allan Hewston."

"Not the Mr. Hewston of Illilliwa they talk about in the township?" I asked, in unfeigned surprise.

"Just him."

"Why, I thought Illilliwa was Mr. Hewston's own property."

"Ha, ha! So does many a one, and so he likes them to think; but he's only the Super for all that, and he knows that old Jim knows it too! Just ye tell him that old Jim took a pair of specs, and that he's to pay for them. That will be enough; oh yes, that will be enough."

The triumph of the old bushman's tones was so evident that no ordinary ears could fail to detect it, and my ears, not being ordinary ones, gave me evidence that in this man, could I secure him, I should gain an invaluable informer on the doings at Illilliwa station.

"Well, I'll tell him," I said, as I refastened my box and again slung it over my shoulder. "Have you seen anything of the visitors that came to the station yesterday?"

"Visitors? Yesterday? I saw no visitors."

"Some came, then, for I saw them myself. They came up in the train, and Mr. Hewston met them with a trap."

"What kind were they?" was the eager question.

"An old sick lady and a young man. I heard say they were Mr. Hewston's nephew and his mother."

"He has no nephew hasn't Allan Hewston," the old man said, with a contemptuous twist of his mouth. "I know all about him, and he has no nephew. But I'll find out very soon what visitors he's got, and let him know he don't have any on the sly without old Jim knowin'"

With these strange words about his employer on his lips, the old man got up and lifted his axe. "It wants grinding'," he muttered, "and I'll go up and grind it," and so, without taking further notice of me, he marched sturdily up the slope toward Illilliwa, with the axe resting on his shoulder.

I followed him slowly, trying to think out any probable hold this man might have on Allan Hewston; for that there was a something I was positive. All I could do was, however, to trust to the chapter of accidents that had so often professionally benefited me, or, in other words, to "trust in Providence and keep my powder dry."

Illilliwa was a cattle station, and a homestead not of the pretentious class so frequently observable on sheep stations. The house was of wood, "a thing of shreds and patches," that is to say, a collection of addenda in the shape of rooms built on here and there to the original building, and embowered in an overgrown six or seven acres of orchard and shrubbery amalgamated. At the back, though at the distance of a hundred yards or so, was a perfect village of outbuildings for various uses, and in the middle of them a large yard; toward this yard old Jim shaped, and I followed him.

The odd vehicle I had seen at Gunbar on the previous day stood in the yard I speak of, and a man was engaged in mopping and generally polishing it up. My new acquaintance of the spectacles stopped and spoke to this man.

"Cleanin' up Noah's Ark be ye? Where's he bound for this time, Mat?"

"Nowhere, as I knows on. He was down at Gunbar yesterday, and I'm a jest cleanin' her up a bit."

"Ay, ay, I'd forgotten. Ye've got some visitors I hear?"

"I believe so. Relations I think."

"Relations?" repeated old Jim, sneeringly. "Where are they now?"

"I don't know, sprawlin' about somewhere in the aristocracy quarters I suppose. Hallo! Who's this?"

The question applied to me, for the man had only just observed me, though I was within a few yards of him.

"I am a peddler, my friend, and will be glad to sell you any little thing in my way."

"Sell me anything? God help your innocence, man! No one ever has money on this station."

"What?"

"Oh, if you don't believe me, ask old Jim there."

"It's quite true, mate. Mr. Hewston keeps a store here, and sells to the hands so readily that when pay day comes there's nothing to draw. Ha, ha! Allan Hewston knows how to work the oracle."

"I suppose I must try himself," I returned. "Will you tell me the most likely place to see him?"

"On the front verandah, with a pipe in his jaw and a glass of liquor by his side," was the prompt reply; "and you can't go wrong if you go in that little gate and follow your nose. Don't forget what I told ye to say about the specs."

It was the old man that spoke, and to whom I returned, in a low voice—

"If they sell spirits here you will be able to get a bottle. Take it to your hut, and I will see you again."

From the gleam in his eyes, and the quick grasp at the coin I slipped into his hand, I saw at once that my bait had taken, and went on my way rejoicing.

Following the way indicated by old Jim, I found myself very soon in the shaded front of the house, or rather houses, and in the almost immediate presence of Hewston and his visitors.

Hewston was lounging in a verandah chair, occupied precisely as old Jim had foretold; a cigar was in his mouth, a glass half emptied on the floor of the verandah by his side. My fellow-traveler, the old woman, was propped up with pillows and rugs on a lounge, and her son, in loose linen costume, was sitting on the floor with his back against a post, and a heap of tangled vine leaves half hiding his laughing face.

For they had all been laughing. As I came in view and Hewston caught sight of me, he started and took the cigar from his mouth; but what astonished me more was the sudden movement of the invalid, who got on her feet with an agility I should not have given her credit for, and then fell back again and hurriedly drew up the rugs her movement had disordered.

"What's up?" asked the young man whose back was to me. "What are ye all pumping at? Is it a snake?" And he got up and saw me. "Oh, a peddler, eh?"

"A travelling jeweler, sir. Can I do any business with you today?" I said, as I unslung my box and laid it on the verandah, which was a couple of feet higher than the gravel on which I stood.

Mr. Hewston replaced his cigar between his lips, but I could see that his keen deep-set eyes were closely scanning me as I unhooked my box and exposed the trays with their glittering contents. The young gentleman had advanced with an eagerness that augured well for my hopes of at least an inspection of my wares.

"Jewelry!" he exclaimed contemptuously, as he lifted and examined some of the ornaments. "Do you call this jewelry? Why it's all Brummagem or at best gilt."

"True, sir; but I have wares to suit all purses," and as I spoke I unlooked my private compartment and exposed its really valuable contents.

"Ah, that's something like the thing," the young gent cried. "Just look, mother, it would do your heart good just to see it."

"As the lady is an invalid, I may carry the box nearer to her?" I half questioned. And as there was nothing said in disfavor of my proposal, I stepped on the verandah and put the box at her feet; nor did I fail to observe how, as the old woman bent forward and gazed at the glittering objects in my trays, her eyes themselves seemed to glow with a red fire that might have been borrowed from the carbuncle scarf-pin I had lifted and was holding for the young man to view.

"That is a splendid pin, sir. Any gentleman might wear it."

"What do I want with a scarf-pin?" the young fellow cried with a light laugh. "Let me see some pretty rings, or lockets, or brooches."

"You talk like a fool," said Hewston, speaking for the first time, and speaking sharp and angrily. "What will your mother think of you if you talk of buying presents for young ladies? Let me look at that scarf-pin, you peddler."

I handed him the article and watched the hot flush that mounted up to the young fellow's face. I saw easily that it was anger that occasioned the color and no feeling of awkwardness, for there was a fierce look flashed from his bright eyes at the apparently unconscious Hewston as the young figure was quickly turned with its back toward the Super.

"Have another look at this pin, Frank," said Hewston, as he noted the young man's anger and seemed anxious to soothe it. "It's very fine, and if you think it will suit me I shall buy it for myself."

"I have no opinion, please yourself," was the pettish and contemptuously spoken reply.

"Well, well, purchase a nag or something pretty. I suppose young men must be young men."

"Yes, Mr. Hewston, and young women will be young women. I will buy nothing since I cannot choose as I wish," retorted the young chap Hewston had called Frank, and, as he spoke, he turned and stared right into the Super's face with what I judged to be a threatening look.

While this but half-hidden disagreement was taking place, the old woman had exhibited great symptoms of uneasiness; now she coughed and sat upright.

"I should like to go into the house," she said in a voice that was muffled by a thick handkerchief she held to her lips as she coughed, "I—I am not very well."

"To be sure, to be sure," cried Hewston, rising with alacrity and returning the pin to me. "We have forgotten how weak your poor mother is, Frank; come and help her to the parlor."

"Your patient can do without help from me," was the sulky reply, and the speaker stepped from the verandah and strutted down the garden.

"You may go, my good man," said Hewston to me. "I do not think we are likely to deal with you to-day."

But I had one card yet to play.

"If you please, Mr. Hewston, I want payment for a pair of spectacles," I said coolly.

"A pair of spectacles! What do you mean?"

"One of your men selected and kept a pair of spectacles, and he told me to get payment from you."

"Damn his impudence!" he exclaimed with a sudden explosion of rage, "How dare he! I'll pay for no man's spectacles, and he'll get his discharge for his cheek. Who was the man?"

"He calls himself Old Jim," I replied; "and he seemed very positive indeed that I should have no trouble about the money when you heard the articles were for him."

For a moment Hewston's aspect changed and I saw that the old man's name had not been without a certain effect; but just then a laugh that was jeering and insulting in its tone rang out from behind me, and I saw when I looked that "Frank' had paused and overheard what had passed between Hewston and me.

"Pay for the spectacles!" he cried in a sneering manner. "They're cheaper than a lady's ring, and you may lose something by refusing!"

"I'll not pay for them! I'll be at no man's beck or call, or at a woman's either! You may go to the man himself for the value of your spectacles!"

I threw my leather belt over my shoulder and, with my box, was moving off when Hewston called me. He had been exchanging a few whispered words with the invalid.

"Will you remain any time on the station?" he asked anxiously. "The lady would like to look over your jewelry, but is not well enough just now."

"I do not quite know, sir. Are there any other residences in the neighborhood? If there are I may call again as I come back."

"Oh yes; if you go in that direction," and he pointed eastward, "you will find several farms, and you could easily be here again before night. If you think well of it, I could see you had a bed for the night."

"Well, sir, I'll see," and I went off by the way I had come in, with plenty of puzzles to con over and discover the likely answers to.

As I passed through the yard, I could see nothing of the old man Jim. Mat was still cleaning the vehicle, but I passed on and out into the paddock without exchanging a word with any one. The path I had gone up by, and which led through a great pasture and luxuriant meadow, branches into two about half-way between Jim's hut and the homestead, and, with some idea that he would be awaiting me with the bottle, I turned to the right and sat down under a tree to have a good think before I joined him.

My interview at Illilliwa had given me some strange ideas that were so incongruous as to sadly require arranging and assorting. That there was some mystery in the connection between Hewston and his visitors, and that my jewelry had been the cause of a disruption, was patent; but all else was a puzzle to me, unless one of the strangest ideas I hardly dared to form should prove correct. Yet I was afraid to foster so outré an idea, knowing, as I did, my own tendency to discover, what afterwards proved in some instances to be, "mares' nests" of the first water. Dear and faithful readers of the "Detective's Album," do you remember the circumstances under which I was presented with a leather medal some twenty years ago, and which I related to you so long ago in these pages?

When, remembering the likely impatience of the old man, and how possible it was that he might be of great assistance to me in my object at Illilliwa, I got up and walked toward his hut, I had formed a sort of plan in my head if I could only work it out; and I had determined to exert every effort, fair or unfair, to secure old Jim as an ally; but I found myself in difficulties at the very commencement, for Jim was exceedingly cross, having been honest enough to leave the bottle untouched until I came.

"And I put on a bit o' steak and chops," he said; "for I saw ye coming down the paddock. Where have ye stopped on the way?"

"My box didn't hang right somehow, and I sat down to arrange the straps," I replied; "but I'm here now, so pour us out a drop and let us drink one another's health."

Nothing loath, the old fellow quaffed his grog and put his viands on his dirty table, and while we ate and drank we talked, but our talk soon verged towards the point I aimed at, for I brought in the topic of the spectacles.

"Bah! I think very little of your Hewston, Super, or whatever he may be; he did not take a pennyworth off me."

"But ye got paid for the glasses, I'll warrant."

"No, I didn't; not a penny."

"Did ye ask him?" Jim questioned, as he looked at me ominously and set down his pannikin without imbibing.

"Yes, I did, and got no for an answer."

"Did ye say it was me sent ye?"

"I did, of course."

"Old Jim? Did ye mention old Jim?"

"Oh yes."

"And he refused?"

"Yes, and went into a regular rage over it."

"Tell me what he said, word for word, as ye remember. Tell me what he said."

I paused to recall the exact words. "He said, with an oath: 'I'll not be at any man's beck or call, I'll not pay a penny for them!' As well as I can think those were Hewston's words."

The old man rose to his feet and raised a knotty, clenched fist, "Let Allan Hewston say that to my face, and by Him that made me I'll make him repent it within four stone walls."

The words were uttered in such an intensity of passion that the wrinkled face was transformed as it were, and I could recognize for the first time in his features the remains of personal vigor and beauty, as well as of the fierce temper that had perhaps been his bane in youth.

I attempted to soothe him, for I wanted no outbreak at that early stage of my duty.

"Bah! The glasses are not worth mentioning, and I may sell something to make up for them tonight, as he has asked me to call again. And, besides, he was put out at the time."

"How put out?"

"There appeared to be some quarrel or disagreement between him and the young man he calls his nephew."

"He has no nephew, I told ye."

"That may be, but I heard him call the young fellow both nephew and Frank."

"Frank, eh?"

"Yes, Frank."

"What like is the young chap?" asked the old fellow with great curiosity evinced in his eyes as he fixed them on me and resumed his seat.

"He is, I should say, not over twenty or so, medium sized, and well though not stoutly built. His hands and feet are, as I observed, particularly small, and he is a good-looking beardless lad."

"His eyes and his hair—what are they like, eh?"

"His eyes are very fine, but treacherous looking black ones; and his hair is curly, though with such eyes it is unusual to see chestnut hair, but chestnut it is."

"No, it isn't, it's red; say red at once, and be done with it!" the man cried excitedly.

"No, not red; auburn maybe, but not exactly red," I persisted.

"Oh, I know; it's the old dodge. I wonder what deviltry is up now?"

He spoke these words as to himself and with his eyes fixed on the ground. "But I wonder who Frank's mother is;" and then he sat silent, with a hand on either knee, for some minutes.

"Look here!" he cried at length, as he suddenly dashed his fist on the shaky table, "that schemer Hewston is playing me some trick, or he would not dare to hide anything from me! He was glad enough to get my help before he had any one else to depend on—now who is that old woman up there?"

That was a question I was powerless to answer, but should like to have been able to reply; as it was, I shook my head and smoked my pipe in silence. The man's next question "put," as the saying is, "the stuns on me."

"Did you ever hear tell of Slick the Demon?"

The cattle stealer of '53—the man whose rough-riding and audacity were the wonder of the colonies—the criminal for whose apprehension a heavy reward was offered in vain, and who has not been heard of for ten years? I should think I had heard of him, and I said so.

"I could lay my hand on him in twenty minutes," the old fellow roared fiercely, "and Allan Hewston had better mind how he treats me."

"Let me see," I murmured, without seeming to take any special notice of his threats, "I have almost forgotten what particular crime it was that increased that reward for Slick the Demon—there was blood spilling in it, I think."

"He shot down a mate in a fit of passion, and the man never rose from where he fell; but what did it matter? The dead man was only an outlaw like himself," and old Jim relapsed into a thoughtful silence.

Now, what was to be my next step? It would never do for me to hang round Jim's hut until time to go up, as Hewston had suggested, for I might be observed and my object frustrated; so I decided on taking a temporary leave of my host as soon as I could decently go.

"Are there any women up at the homestead?" I asked. "I know Hewston is a single man, but I didn't see even a female servant up there."

"There's only one," was his answer, as he roused himself from deep thought with an effort. "But who told ye that Hewston was a single man, eh? Ha, ha! That's a good one, too. Ye'd better tell 'Frank' that Hewston's a single man, an' there'll be wigs on the green."

"I think I'll go on a mile or two farther," I said again, "and see if I can do any business. What time are you likely to be home tonight?"

"I don't know, but you can get into the hut any time, for it's never fastened. But I can tell you the fencing will not go much ahead with me today, for I won't rest till I know who the old woman, Frank's mother, is. They needn't think to blind me, old as I am. Are you going? Well, so long. I'll go, too, but it's up to the house I'll go, and if I get a chance to see the musical instrument believe me I'll get a tune out of it."

"The musical instrument!"

"Ay, the piano."

"Have they a piano then? Who plays?"

"Hewston plays. Oh yes! And I would take heavy odds that the young gent you call 'Frank' plays too. Ho-ho-ho! What a lark! So long; I'll have the money for the glasses when you come back—never you fear."

I tramped back till I got once more to the main track, and there, before I had gone half a mile, which I passed in a perfect bewilderment of wonder and guesswork, I was glad to see Maurice Brennan riding quickly toward me.

"I never was so glad to see you in my life, man," I declared, as he drew rein beside me.

"It's mutual, Mark, my boy," returned he. "Have you any news?"

"Yours first," I said, "for I see you've heard from town."

"You're right, that came after you left. I suppose they were not sure that you would be at the station, and sent it to me."

I took the official document, opened and read it. There was but little to read, but that little was of consequence.

"Blewett left town for Lampton by rail on Saturday last. Disguised, supposed in female attire. Keep close watch at Gunbar."

"By the lord Harry I've treed him if that's correct," I shouted, as my thoughts reverted to Hewston's invalid visitor. "Let us get a corner in the bush and sit down, Brennan, for I've a lot to tell you."

"What about your dinner, Mark?"

"I've had it. Come, turn in here, I see a log and shade."

So we sat down, and I retailed my experience of the morning.

"I knew old Jim," my mate observed when I had made him acquainted with the particulars of my visit to Illilliwa. "He's a rum old card, but that he has some hold on Hewston I think very probable, for I've heard that he bounces the Boss most unmercifully. I have seen Hewston regularly shut up by him more than once myself; but as to this idea of yours that Hewston is Slick the Demon who has been so long wanted, I think the suspicion is too far fetched."

"The old man's hint was broad enough and plain enough," I replied; "but our business is not the arrest of Slick, but of Blewett. What is your opinion as to the identity of my old lady with the forger."

"It may be. Criminals, especially experienced ones, are up to no end of dodges; but I can't see any sense in him getting safe so far and stopping at Illilliwa."

"I can. How could he escape from this? But if he could manage to lie by at Illilliwa as an old woman visitor until the watch is slackened a bit, there would be a chance of taking passage from Melbourne to 'Frisco, or elsewhere."

"That's true," assented Maurice. "But what is your notion about this Frank?"

"What's yours?"

"Now, Sinclair, that's not a fair question; you have had a personal experience. Do you think the young man is a young woman?"

"What would you say to his being Hewston's wife? That is my suspicion, and that it was through her cleverness Blewett has got so far safe."

"That would involve some connection between Blewett and Hewston, eh?"

"May not Blewett have been one of Hewston's old gang if he really was Slick?"

"He may; but, Mark, it's all may be with us yet."

"Everything has been 'may be' before it 'was'; but if my idea should prove anything near the real facts I could readily account for the post-card sent to Illilliwa—you know, about the arrival of the piano and gunny bags?"

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, Hewston's wife plays and the piano is an allusion to her, while gunny bags means Blewett in petticoats."

"Oh, you're far too smart in the may be for me, Mark, and I'm sure I'd never make a Detective."

"Don't fret over that, mate, for there's no credit in being a D. nowadays, when some of the black sheep are doing us so much discredit. Now, your advice, mate, how are we to proceed?"

"What's the use of asking me such a question when you have it all cut and dried in your mind already? Detail your plans and you shall have my opinion on them, though it would have no more weight with you than a mosquito bite on my saddle there."

But I have no time to give you my conversation with my old friend in its entirety, nor would it amuse you to read it. We talked for long, and when I returned to old Jim's hut the sun was getting toward the western horizon; but I was glad to see a line of smoke creeping from the chimney and the door standing open, as an indication of the old man's presence. He saw my approach and met me with a triumphant grin on his wrinkled face that assured me he had, or fancied he had, got the better of his supposed employer.

"Any luck?" he asked. "I take it you're ready for a nip out of your own bottle anyhow. Put down the box and sit down."

"Well, how did you get on at the house?" I asked as I obeyed. "You look as if things had prospered with you."

"Prosper? Ha, ha! It's easy to prosper on a journey when ye have a good horse under you and a pocket full of money. There's the money for the glasses."

"Poof! I don't want the money, what odds are a few pence? And here I am going to eat your supper."

"And here I am drinkin' your grog. Well, wonders'll never cease, they say, for ye're the first Jew ever I heard of refuse money."

"Oh, I'm not a full-blooded Jew—perhaps that accounts for it; but how did you get on with the Boss?"

"Meanin' Hewston? That reminds me that he's dreadful anxious for ye not to fail in being up at the house as ye promised. I got strict injunctions to watch for ye, and tell ye not to fail."

"Isn't that strange?" I asked.

"Not a bit to me, man. I see through it as plain as I see your box yonder, and ye may thank the said box for it. Ho-ho-ho! Heaven help the man that has to propitiate a woman for the sake o' keepin' her tongue still!"

"It's a woman, then? The old one?"

"The old one? Faugh! Hewston doesn't care the snap of his fingers for her. No; it's a young one, and she's taken it into her head to hang some more diamonds around her, or lay them by for a rainy day—that's my opinion of it, mate."

"Well, I had better go up, for the sun has set. Hewston said he would find me a bed if necessary, but if I should come down to you I do not suppose you will be against my camping in front of your fire."

"No, no, you'll be welcome, and I wouldn't wonder if ye'd be glad to come; for, by the signs o' the weather, I think there'll be a storm at Illilliwa before the air clears."

"A storm, eh? What do you mean?"

"Never mind, least said's soonest mended. So ye're off, well we'll hear the news when ye get back."

I have said the sun had set, but it was not yet by any means dark but in the shadow of the shrubberies and trees; the lights in the front windows of Illilliwa showed under the verandah as vividly as though gleaming into a moonless night. I met no one, and made my way across the yard and through the little gate I had entered in the morning and so to the front verandah and the door, at which I knocked loudly; but I had to repeat the knock, for as I reached the door, practiced hands were rolling peals of music from a piano, and then a grand female voice burst into a hunting song with a rattling chorus. It was at the end of the first verse that I knocked again.

This time I was heard, and Hewston opened the door himself.

"Ah! It is you? I am glad to see you. Just come in here, will you."

I followed him into a room on the right hand of the entrance where were two females; one was the invalid, the other a stranger to me, an elegantly made, handsome woman of about twenty-five, dressed in the richest and most fashionable attire, and decorated with all the ornamental frippery that women of a certain taste affect. As we entered she turned round her face and laughed, as I thought, mockingly.

"Oh! The peddler! I hope he likes music, since we are obliged to entertain Jews."

If I had been a peddler or a Jew in reality, it is on the cards that I might have taken offence at the rude words; but, being neither, you see, I simply laughed in my sleeve and bowed humbly.

"Stop that damned noise!" exclaimed Hewston, with such a look of terrible rage in his white face and glittering dark eyes, that I began to realize truly how little such a man would shrink from crime were he only once roused.

She stopped, turned round on the music stool, and looked at him fixedly.

"Were you speaking to me?" she asked, with a dangerous curve of her beautiful lips.

"You know I was; don't be such a fool, Frances, but come and look at the man's gewgaws."

"I don't want any of the man's gewgaws," she said, with a hard intonation and a lowering brow; "nor am I a fool, for I know that it was not to sell gewgaws you brought that man here."

Hewston's countenance was terrible in the ill-repressed anger that was at white heat.

"Mind your tongue, woman, or I'll stop it for you!" was what he said as he made a stride toward her.

"You dare to dare me, do you?" she cried, as she stood up and faced him without an apparent fear. "I, who with one word could lay you in the dust?"

"Say it!" he shouted, but he raised his arm as he spoke.

The invalid, who had been lying back in a chair, and well wrapped up in shawls, here rose suddenly and staggered between the belligerents, but Hewston waved her back.

"Don't interfere, this woman wants a lesson; let her get it. Now say that word you are threatening," this to the girl he had called Frances as she stood defiantly before him.

"Do you think I'm afraid of you? Liar, coward, thief, murderer, do you think I am afraid of you?" and her answer was a blow that felled her to the carpet as if stricken down by lightning.

Not a hand was lifted to raise her. I made a step forward, but Hewston stopped me.

"Let her be," he said hoarsely; "I will send some one to her. Come, both of you, with me," and he looked from me to the seeming invalid, who seemed helplessly entangled by the unaccustomed drapery around her.

I once more took up my blessed box and did as I was bid, leaving the insensible woman lying on the carpet. He led the way to a smaller and more plainly furnished room that, from the pipes scattered about, I concluded to be a private sitting-room of his own. Here he handed me a chair, and placed another for the pretended invalid, who was entering with a wonderfully firm and quick step, and then he rang the bell and gave some whispered instructions to the servant that answered it, and then he seated himself and spoke to me quickly and determinedly.

"You have been kept too long in the dark, and we must not waste your time without giving you a due equivalent for it; take that in the meantime."

He laid a five-pound note on the table before me. I looked at the note and at him alternately, but I spoke not a word.

"You will guess that we want assistance from you that has nothing to do with your occupation. Are you willing to earn easily a handsome sum of money?"

"Yes, of course I am, sir, so long as it doesn't get me into any trouble with the law. I'm a poor man, but I'd rather be poor and free than rich and not certain that any hour might not bring a policeman's grip on me."

I saw that even Hewston winced, and that the pretended invalid got as white as a sheet.

"What we want you to do could not in any way reflect on yourself," Hewston replied; "and to let you see that it could not, I will explain. I have a friend under a cloud, that is to say, he has got into trouble with what you are afraid of, viz., the police, and wants to get out of the country, but being watched on all hands cannot get a chance to do it. I have been thinking you could help him."

"How?" I asked, as he paused to observe the effect of his words.

"If he was to dress himself in your clothes I think he could pass as a travelling jeweler, indeed, as yourself; for in complexion he is not at all unlike you, or in build either, and your box over his shoulder would be an excellent disguise."

"But there is value in my box, and the jewelry is not mine," I declared, to gain time and information; but I was only telling the truth, for indeed the jewelry was far from being my personal property.

"I see, you are travailing for a firm, and I am aware that persons of your profession have often a very valuable stock with them. Well, we can come down handsomely for your own benefit, but cannot afford to buy jewelry into the bargain. You could keep your employer's stock and sell the box, which you could easily replace. What do you say? Will you earn fifty pounds that way?"

"What else would I have to do for the money?"

"Very little. My friend could leave early in the morning, and walk to Carlyle, a railway platform a few miles off, in time to catch the first up train. You might supply him with any information regarding your business that might be useful to him if he should happen to be questioned, and perhaps you could give him a hint as to where he could get quiet lodging for a bit, until he secured a passage in some outgoing vessel."

"I could do all you have said," I replied, with very great seriousness; "but is that all I should have to do?"

"All, only that we should want you to stop here at Illilliwa until we had received intimation that our friend had sailed."

"I see, that is for fear I might take the money and turn traitor afterwards?"

"Just so; you are a stranger to us you know."

"And you are a stranger to me; yes. Well, before I give you an answer, has the man you want to get out of the country blood on his hands? If he has, not a finger of mine is lifted for him, and I would not handle the money of a murderer though I was starving."

Hewston became actually livid, and his hands trembled as he rose and steadied himself on the table between as; but the woman that I well knew was no woman rose up and spoke vehemently—

"No, I thank God for that at least, there is no blood on my hands! I shall never see a dead face peering at me in the awful darkness of a murderer's night!"

"Are you the man?" was my apparently astonished cry.

"Yes, I am he, and you may take my money freely, for it is not stained with blood—quick now, do you agree?"

I looked toward Hewston; he had reseated himself and let his face fall forward on his arms, which were crossed on the table. A look of absolute and despairing misery was in every abandoned curve of his figure; an extremity of hopeless woe might be guessed from the utter mental prostration that had so suddenly attacked the man who, in his terrible rage, but a little before had felled a beautiful woman to the ground.

Before I had time to make a reply, I was astonished to see old Jim standing at the door he had unceremoniously opened, and with his rough visage expressing wonder and concern. He did not seem to notice any one but Hewston, whom he touched quickly on the shoulder. The man started up as though he had been galvanized.

"Whatever's up?" asked the old man, "ye are looking awful and white. I say, what's the matter at Illilliwa?"

"Nothing that I know of, that is, nothing fresh. Do you mean to say that you have come up at this hour only to ask what is the matter? Nonsense! You know something, so out with it!" Hewston's face had regained its color, and his eyes their fire. He stood erect and firmly grasping the back of a chair, as he desperately faced the danger he felt assured of, though he did not know in what form it was coming.

"I know nothing but that she's off," the old man replied; "but I saw her face, and it boded no good."

"Who's off? What do you mean?"

"The woman Frances; she's off toward Gunbar like a flying mad thing. She passed down the path like a flash of lightning, without hat or shawl or covering of any kind. Is there treachery afloat, do you think?"

"We are trapped like dogs!" cried the supposed female, as he looked round as if for immediate arrest; "that woman will never forgive a blow. You were a fool to strike her, Hewston. She has gone to inform the police, and I am ruined as well as you."

"What need you care? You have not murder to answer for," That is what Hewston said as he left the room, followed by old Jim.

My heart was thumping anxiously, and my ears were strained to listen. Had the woman's information at the camp interfered with the arrangements Maurice Brennan had made with me, or would he not keep the appointment he had made? I had asked myself the question over and over again ere I saw that

Blewett had divested himself of his female robes and was pushing them piecemeal into the fire that burned largely on the broad hearth. A comical object he looked too, as he pranced around in white cotton drawers, brandishing a poker in one hand as he occasionally prodded the burning clothing to accelerate its destruction.

"Quick! Off with your togs, man, and hand them here!" he shouted as he almost forcibly pulled off my coat. "That is Hewston's room, and you will find plenty of clothes in it. If I don't get disguised before the police come I am undone!"

Disguised? In another few moments, at the rate he was going on, my disguise would cease to exist, so I temporized by going into the indicated room and substituting Hewston's apparel for my own, which Blewett donned in a wonderfully short space of time; yet still I heard no sounds of Brennan's approach.

"What if she has recognized me," I thought, anxiously, "and has only gone to put Maurice op a false scent? A man never knows how he has a woman; I've known them to die under the blows of a man they could have hanged with a breath from their lips."

"Tour best plan would be to leave the house," I said to the forger, for whose arrest I was quite capable single handed; "and then, if they come to catch you, you will have evaded them at least until daylight."

"They are not coming for me, but for Hewston," he said; "but I should be recognized all the same, so your advice is good. I am ready to go," and he opened the door to peer out into the deepening gloom.

To the better arrangement of my tale of Illilliwa it is well that I return to the woman whom Hewston's blow had left stunned on the drawing-room floor. Stunned, I have said; for the vitality, as well as the courage and determination of the unfortunate creature, was of the most powerful quality, and it was not many seconds before she had recovered consciousness and got up to her feet; but feeling faint and dizzy though she did, her hot blood was boiling with a fierce rage, and every pulse panting for revenge. With Frances Yokes to be insulted was to be avenged without consideration of obstacles or danger; and getting up after a moment's rest she opened the window and slipped out.

"He thinks I am half killed, I suppose," was what she thought; "but he will soon try to stay my purpose, so I will go before I am missed, and woe be to the man who drives me out in the lone night to become an accursed informer!"

Down the paddocks she ran, as old Jim had said, and she was close on his hut before she thought of avoiding it. The light from the opened door frightened her into diverging so as to seek the shelter of the bush as soon as she had passed it, but not before Jim had seen and recognized her, as you are already

aware; then she took to the main road and, in semi-darkness, for it was now starlight, ran or walked towards Gunbar.

Her object, as you have guessed, was what old Jim had predicted—she was going to the police camp to give up the man she had ruined herself for, and whom also she had loved with the fierce love of an ill-regulated nature. As she sped on her unholy errand the pain of Hewston's blow burned on her temple, but it stung her heart with a far more unbearable pain. Her long silk skirts clung to and clogged her feet; her light, high-heeled shoes were totally unsuitable to the uneven surface of the bush track; but she felt nothing of the discomfort, she only knew that Hewston had struck her and that she would be revenged if she died for it.

If she died for it? Poor soul, if she could only have looked a little beyond her! If she could have known how near was the punishment of her own sin, would she have almost flown to secure the punishment of the sins of another? If she had realized that Death stood gauntly in the way before her, would she have turned back? Only He who knows all knows that.

She had gone nearly a mile when one of the sudden windstorms so common to Australia began to come roaring through the far-off forest like a mighty sea of waters, rolling nearer and nearer and bringing with it and before it a cold air that seemed to pierce the very marrow of her bones. Louder and louder roared the overwhelming storm, and crashing trees and giant limbs fell and broke as it passed and crushed them as trees and limbs of glass. An awful horror took possession of Frances Yokes, and she drew to the opposite side of the track, as if the intervening road could protect her from what she feared.

Then came growling distant thunder, and sudden flashes of lightning that darted across the dark, ominous clouds, and as the woman bent her head and tried to cover her eyes from the lightning she feared, the jewels on her white fingers flashed in rivalry to the gleams of electricity. There was another and a fiercer volume of storm-hurled wind, and her ears were for a moment deafened by the crashing of breaking timber, and wild dashing of leafy boughs, ere she was stricken to the earth by a heavier blow than had ever been struck by the arm of living man.

Through the wind-storm came Maurice Brennan and the other constable who was stationed at Gunbar, to keep the appointment made with me during our interview earlier in the day. As the storm increased and the crashing of fallen trees and broken timber made a horrid accompaniment to the war of the elements, the horses stopped short and seemed inclined to retrace their steps.

"The animals have more sense than we have," Constable White cried; "for they know they are risking their lives. Why, don't you see it is tempting Providence to be in the bush in such a wind? We don't know the moment a limb may be down on us."

"I know Sinclair will have some kind of news for us, and will keep to his time and place, so I will be there, storm or no storm. If you are afraid, you can go back."

Before White had time to retort a tree, not far in advance of them, seemed to part with some of its branches that came down with a crash, but it was too dark for them to see the exact spot.

"That's on the road," cried White; "didn't you hear the thud of the butt on the hard ground?"

"Yes, and I thought I heard a cry. Push on a bit farther." They urged forward the unwilling horses, who shortly after intimated their knowledge that their progress was barred by stopping short and refusing to move another step.

"Get down, White; there's a limb of a tree right across the track, and I am certain I hear moans."

Both men alighted, and as the fierce blast that had swept over the forest with such destructive violence seemed to have spent itself as suddenly as it had gained power, no doubt could be longer felt, for the moans of a suffering human being were plainly to be heard on their right.

"This way, the branch has fallen on some one. God forbid that it is Sinclair! White, you have the lantern-alight it."

To obey, White bent in the shelter of the fallen mass of foliage and struck a match. As the match caught the wick of the lamp and it ignited slowly, the first rays flashed full into the face of a woman—a face awful with pain and terror, a face in which the terrible eyes gleamed with a fearful and never-to-be-forgotten dread—the face of Francis Yokes.

"Lord, have mercy on us, it's a woman!" cried the horrified policeman. "Come here and lift, White; this branch is lying right across her body. Courage, you'll soon be free."

"Free! Yes, I shall soon be free indeed," she gasped, as the branch was lifted and she was gently raised to a more natural position. "For the mercy of Heaven, don't move me; it is torture. I am dying."

"Here, try to swallow a drop of this," urged Maurice Brennan, as he put his flask to her lips; "it will revive you. No, no, you are not so much hurt as you think. The branch was not a heavy one, after all."

"Heavy enough," she murmured when she had swallowed a few drops of the stimulant; "heavy enough, for it has killed me. Are you policemen?" she asked, as the lamplight fell on the buckle of Brennan's cartouche belt.

"Yes, we are policemen. Hold up now, and we will soon rig up something to carry you where medical help can be got."

"Policemen, and I was going to them! Well, it is just; I suffer the death of an informer."

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" questioned Brennan eagerly, for he saw by the light which he held close to her face that the woman was sinking fast. "Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"Ask at Illilliwa," was the faint reply, as a convulsive shudder made her limbs tremulous ere they rested for ever.

"She is dead," said Brennan. "Ask at Illilliwa. I wonder who she is. She is dressed elegantly, and look at the jewelry. I never heard of Hewston being married, but I have heard of a lady visitor who stayed for months sometimes. Ah!" and Maurice let fall the left hand of the dead woman, on the third finger of which there was no plain gold ring, but only a diamond hoop, worth a trooper's year's pay.

I now return to Illilliwa. When Blewett and I left the house I was occupied almost entirely in wonder and conjecture as to the best way of disposing of my unconscious prisoner until I could meet Brennan. In the meantime he was exhibiting the most disgusting cowardice. Holding me by the arm, he stumbled on beside me, pulling up short every now and then as he fancied approaching sounds, existent only in his own imagination.

"Listen! I hear horses' feet. They're coming. O, a curse on the woman. Couldn't she have waited an hour or two till I was out of it? I hear them! Give me that box, quick I so that I will not be suspected if we meet them in the teeth."

But the box I would not part with, though I cursed it, as well as its valuable contents, for they hampered my movements.

"No; you can't have the box now, it is far too heavy, and you could not get along in the dark with such an encumbrance. There are no horses coming, it is only your fancy."

"Where are we going?" he asked, as I struck across the paddock toward Jim's hut, the lights of which were as yet hidden by the dark trees that intervened. "Do you know of any place to hide, or must we stop in the bush all night?"

"Old Jim is a decent fellow, and I am sure he may be depended on. I'm going to his hut."

"Oh, that's all right; and it's not on the track, so we will not be suspected in the dark. I wonder where Hewston is."

That was one of my own wonders, but I did not let him know that.

"He's gone to look after the young lady," I said.

"Not he," was the reply. "He's cleared out, damn him! And left me without a shilling in my pocket to fly with."

"Cleared out? What would he clear out for! He has nothing to dread the police for, has he?"

"Hasn't he! Allan Hewston would give his right hand, ay, and his left, to be in my shoes even though there is a heavy reward for my capture! But see him I must before morning somehow, or how can I go?"

"Here's Jim's hut at all events," I returned, as we rounded the bush and saw the open door from which the light was plainly visible. "You can stop here while I go and try to hunt up Mr. Hewston. Perhaps Old Jim may know where he is as he went with him."

Of course it was my intention to leave him while I kept my appointment with my friend Maurice. I was, however, saved the awkwardness of leaving, even for a little, my prize unguarded, for even as I spoke I heard real horses on the beaten track used from the Illilliwa traffic.

Blewett heard them too and shrank into himself, as it were, while his eyes glared around the hut for some means of shelter. I all at once heard the sounds of hoofs dulled as they met the grass and knew my mates were coming, but what could have made Brennan come instead of awaiting me? Was it the sudden windstorm whose passage we had awaited in the shelter of the homestead ere we left it?

"They are troopers' horses," he whispered, casting looks of terror toward the door; "I am sure of it!"

"And so am I," I returned, with such a change of manner as attracted my victim's suspicion so that he stared at me instead of at the door. "And now that my mates are at hand I arrest you, John Blewett, for forgery."

At the touch of my hand he shrunk back and showed his set teeth like a dog.

"Trapped, by God!" he yelled. "Oh, you cowardly villain to deceive a man so! By Heaven, if it was in my power, I would tear your heart out where you stand!"

"I daresay you would. Well, to prevent your being so obliging, pray wear those bracelets—they are far more valuable to me than any of the jeweled ones in the box you wanted so badly."

Handcuffed, and in the hands of the law, he fell back to a bench and leaned helplessly against the wall, even as I heard the voice of Maurice calling to me.

"Mark, are you there?"

"Yes;" and I went out to see lying on the grass the dead body of the woman I had seen not so long ago in the pride of determination and beauty, as she flouted her destroyer to his face. "Good heavens! Is she dead?"

"Yes. Do you know her, Mark?"

"It is the 'Frank' I told you of, and suspected of masquerading in male attire. How did it happen?" And then all, as far as they knew it, was explained to me.

"I brought the body here on account of her last words, for when I asked who she was or what had brought her there, she answered me, 'Ask at Illilliwa'. Where is Hewston and the other, eh?"

"The 'other' is here and my prisoner; but where Hewston is I cannot tell you, save that he went out of the house above an hour ago in company with old Jim that lives in this hut. It will be best to send Blewett to the lock-up in White's charge, while you and I remain to hunt up Hewston. Mount the prisoner on one of the horses; you can get another at the station."

"Yes, that will be best; but see that he don't give you the slip, White."

"Ay, I'll see to that; but no horse for him, don't you believe it. Mr. Blewett goes behind me on old Jack, and with a well-fastened strap around us both. I am so fond of him that if he bolts he must take me with him."

And so it was done. Amid the gloom of the night the forger was mounted behind Constable White and securely fastened to him, and, with a volley of curses on his lips, Blewett was borne away and disappeared, leaving Maurice and I standing in front of the hut with the body of the dead woman lying at our feet.

"I don't think Blewett noticed the corpse at all," said my friend.

"Oh yes, he did, for he made a kick at it as we led him past. Old Jim guessed she had gone to the camp to inform, out of revenge for Hewston's blow, and the forger heard him say so."

We carried the body into the hut and laid it on an old rug we took from the old man's bunk. Of course, we knew that there must be an inquest, but our immediate anxiety was the arrest of him who had been Slick the Bushranger, and whose crime of bloodshed was not yet atoned for. We were discussing the best mode of procedure, when old Jim himself suddenly entered the hut.

You will remember that the old man knew, as yet, nothing of my individuality as a member of the Force, or of the awful death the woman had died; but he saw the still form on the floor, and stooped to look into the dead face.

"God bless us and save us! Have ye made a morgue of my hut after all? Eh me! Why it's Frances Yokes! How came this about? Did she bring you here?"

The question was asked of Maurice, for he did not suspect any collusion between us, and my friend's reply seemed a great relief to him.

"No; we found her lying on the road with the limb of a fallen tree across her body. Was she coming to us?"

"I don't know; I think it likely, for she'd been quarrelling with the Super, poor soul."

"Is she a connection of Hewston's?"

"Ay, ay, a connection—just a connection."

"Not his wife?"

"No, no, not his wife."

"We'll have to see him about it. Where is he?"

"That's more than I can tell you. He gave me the slip in the darkness, and I think it most likely that he went after the woman to stop her in time. Eh, sirs, but this is an awfu' warld of ups and downs! Are ye going, peddler? I thought ye were for stopping all night. Dinna forget the box. I paid ye for the specs."

I'll swear I heard that old man laughing derisively after us as we went up to search for Hewston; and as we came back unsuccessful and passed his place, we met him coming out of the hut, of which he had shut the door and extinguished the light.

"Ye needna think," he roared at us, as he relapsed into his vernacular, "that I'm gaun to stay in the hut wi' a dead woman. I'm not sae taen up wi' living ones. So I'm aft to the house, and ye may mak a kirk or a whistle o' th' auld shed for me!"

"Heartless old wretch! He doesn't care one rap for the dead woman or the living man," said Maurice.

"The latter I'm not so sure of," I returned. "I think if we want Hewston, we had better set a watch on old Jim."

A watch was set, but vainly; no tidings were ever got of the wanted Hewston. I left with my prisoner the next day, and safely lodged both him and the peddler's box in town; and in a few weeks I had the pleasure of seeing Blewett marched out of court to a seven years' term of penal servitude. But the astounding conclusion of the affair at Illilliwa I relate to you as Maurice told it to me by letter long before the forger was sentenced.

The inquest on the body of the woman known as Frances Yokes was duly held, and a verdict of accidental death duly recorded, ere the unhappy creature's remains were hidden in the grave; and, about a week after her funeral, a slight and sharp-looking gentleman, who carried a japanned tin case in his hand, entered Brennan's office and made him a very polite bow.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Senior-Constable Maurice Brennan? Good. I have called, at the request of my client, the owner of Illilliwa station, to request your presence at the reading of some papers of importance. I am Charles B—, solicitor, of Melbourne."

"The owner of Illilliwa? I think to know who is the owner of the place is just now one of the greatest anxieties of all the employees on it."

"Just so, and naturally, seeing that no one appears to have charge since the unexpected disappearance of Mr. Hewston. Well, the papers I bring will set the matter at rest, and, besides, the owner will present himself in person when the documents are being read."

"When do you intend the formality to take place?"

"Tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock. My client wishes the utmost publicity to be given to his ownership, and every one of any standing will be requested to attend. A luncheon will be provided."

"Oh, that'll draw!" Maurice said, with a laugh. "I'm not proof against a luncheon myself, especially if it if a champagne one. I'll be sure to be there."

"And so I was, Mark," he wrote in his letter; "and so was a good thirty as well as myself. When we were all gathered together, station hands, servants, visitors, and what not, there wasn't a room in the house would hold us, and we were marched into the barn, where the lawyer fixed himself at a table, with some documents before him, and began to 'ahem' like fury, as a sign he was going to begin.

"Old Jim was standing well to the front, with the oddest grin on his dirty old face. I don't believe the same face had tasted soap or water for a week, and his clothes were a neat match to his face.

"'I am here at the express wish of your employer,' the lawyer began to the hands who were all in one corner of the place together; 'for now that his late Super has in so sudden and mysterious a way disappeared from Illilliwa, he thinks it is time you should all know where to look for your wages and seek for your orders. I am not personally acquainted with the gentleman on whose part I have so long acted, but I received a letter from him in which he intimated his intention of being here today. Perhaps, however, Mr. Douglas would wish me first to read his titles to the property,'—and then, Mark my boy, he rattled a heap of parchment through his fingers, and a string of lawyer gibberish off his tongue, in which I heard very often the name of James Douglas, Squire, and the words 'property' and Illilliwa, so that when he stopped I was quite aware that an unknown person, lawfully and legally called by the name of James Douglas, was undoubted owner of Illilliwa station and all its belongings.

"'And now,' winds up the little chap in black, 'if my respected client is present, may I request him to make himself known, in accordance with my instructions from himself?'

"There was a silence of expectation and a gasp of awful wonder that stopped short of words, for who do you think stepped forward to the table and faced the crowd? Why, old Jim, our friend of the hut!

"He was enjoying a very guffaw of a laugh, and the lawyer was glaring at him in the utmost disbelief when I recovered my senses, but the old cheat handed to the man his own epistles addressed to 'James Douglas, Esq., Illilliwa.'

"'You can hardly believe that a man would live and work on his own land as I've done!' he cried; 'but Scotsmen know how to keep their cash as well as to make it, and any man that can't do both need expect no work on my property.'

"'Bosh!' cried some one irreverently; 'stow all that brag and bounce and show us your lunch!'

"'Lunch, eh? Ye'll get no lunch frae me, my man! I never ate bite or drank sup at my own expense when I could eat and drink at any one's else, that's true;

but if ye think I'm the man to give ony ane a chance to do the same at my expense, ye's find yersels sorely mistaken.'

"Now you have the finale at Illilliwa, Mark, and you may be sure old Jim has plenty of sycophants, even though he's as stingy as any miser. I have never seen the old villain since but once, and then he asked me, with the grin of an old gorilla, when my friend the peddler would be up again; for 'the specs had not turned out so well as he expected, and he didn't like being cheated.' That's one for your nob, Mark, my lad!"

So far in Maurice Brennan's words; but in mine I have nothing to add, save my repeated conviction that James Douglas, Esq., helped Hewston's escape, and is well aware of his distant whereabouts at this very moment; that is if he has time, for I understand he is contemplating matrimony about the beginning of the year, and to a young lady of the ripe age of sixteen. "Music hath charms" indeed! 'Tis money that has charms, and that "makes the mare go" all the world over, as well as at Illilliwa.

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18: The Devil's Model

Ray St. Vrain

John Louis Berry, 1867-1923

10 Story Book, May 1922

ERIC ROHN was that rarity, a rich artist. His studies in the female nude had made him famous. Critics often likened his flesh tones to those of that other rich artist— now gone to his reward— the indefatigable Bouguereau. They were pink-and-white— always like Bouguereau's. Beautiful certainly, too beautiful; like Bouguereau's again. But they sold amazingly.

Eric Rohn was a big blond handsome Thor of a man who had come to New York from the Scandinavian North. With success sweetening his days, still he was not happy— even in the somewhat phlegmatic way that characterizes his race. He had moved from his modest Greenwich Village studio to a palatial artists' apartment house uptown and thence to his Italian Renaissance mansion on the Drive; his great vogue had won him a wealthy and beautiful bride, the socially prominent Rosanne Van Pruyn, a member of the historic old Dutch family of that name... yet he was not happy.

"Why?" asked everybody.

His wife, who had dipped persistently into Bohemia before her marriage, supplied the answer:

"Poor Eric is so idealistic ; he has never yet painted a picture that suits him. He has been unfortunate in having only models with pink-and-white flesh— never one with those exquisite green undertones that seem to have been the copyright of the great Henner. Really, it's his consuming ambition to become Henner's recognized successor; but where is he to find a model ? He had searched everywhere without success."

Eric Rohn had an artist friend from the Pacific Coast, Ernie Clark, who was younger and less well-known than himself. Oddly enough, Ernie, a rather ingenious and attractive sort, was a victim of the same hypnosis that dominated Rohn— the eternal search for a Henner skin. When, therefore, it was whispered he was to exhibit an impressionistic Psyche at the forthcoming Independent Artists' Exhibition that would prove to be decidedly Henneresque, connoisseurs and the art-loving public alike were startled and incredulous.

Where had he found his model?

"Right here in the Village," Ernie laughingly answered his inquiring friends. "She's a supernal little blonde who has lived in the neighborhood of Sheridan Square for some time; but no other artist has seemed to notice her, not even the great Eric Rohn, who's crazy for that kind of skin. Her name? Say, do I look imbecilic enough to tell? Vm going to cache her away! Seriously, when you see the picture maybe you can guess who she is."

Ernie did not disappoint his admirers. His Psyche, a life-sized nude, was the sensation of the exhibit. It much resembled a Henner masterpiece, rivalling the master's paintings in the Metropolitan Museum in the green fantasy of the flesh color scheme.

On the first night of the exhibition Eric Rohn and his wife met the successful artist in front of his picture. Both graciously congratulated him.

"Well, Ernie, you found your model," said Rohn. "Henner himself couldn't have asked for a better one. May I inquire her name ?"

Ernie flushed boyishly. "I don't want to be stringy, but isn't that asking a little too much?"

"Oh, I don't know. Don't we brother artists share our models?"

"As a rule, of course; but Burne-Jones kept Lenore White all to himself— and there have been many other instances—"

Eric Rohn, scowling, shrugged. "As you like. Come, Rosanne." And they moved away to look at the next picture.

"My dear Eric," said Rosanne, "why take it to heart so? Your fame is established— "

"So was Bouguereau's for time. Now what do people think of his peach-bloom nudes? They laugh at them— and so will they at mine. I shall search New York from end to end until I find Ernie's model."

ii

HE DID.

He combed the Village, the entire Washington Square district, the uptown ateliers, the theatrical boarding-houses and dingy superseded hotels, the latter two for show girls who sometimes "double up" as models; then after weeks of futile effort he found her in West Fourth street, not a stone's throw from Ernie Clark's studio. He recognized her by her perfect resemblance to his friend's Psyche. Besides, she frankly admitted she had been Ernie's model.

She was Ruby Giddings, a little girl from the provinces, quite demure, quite unknown. Eric Rohn asked her to pose for him, she promptly agreed to do so; and the arrangements were made at once. That night Rohn told the good news to Rosanne, who felicitated him on his find.

"Don't congratulate me too soon," he said. "I have a suspicion she may not be a Henner after all—"

"What! when you recognized her as Ernie Clark's model— and she herself admitted it?"

He shrugged. "There's a mystery connected with it. I'm having her here tomorrow to fathom it."

The next morning little Ruby Giddings appeared at the Drive mansion on time, tripped into the vast studio, then disrobed and stepped upon the dais with all the calm assurance of the "altogether" specialist. The moment the dull north light fell upon her Eric Rohn, at his easel frowning, realized that his suspicions were verified. The model was not a Henner at all. No subtle green undertones made an artistic ravishment of her flesh. Instead it was a commonplace pink, opaque, uninspiring. Ernie Clark had simply used Ruby's face for his Psyche; some other model had supplied the figure, the Henner tints. Rohn, resorting to an excuse, dismissed the g^rl, paying her for a week's work.

The following morning came the great, the undreamed-of discovery. Rohn and Rosanne were at breakfast when a stray sunbeam, slanting through the high half-shuttered window, fell upon her velvety cheek.

"The Henner green... !" he cried.

She gave a start and then laughed it off. "Nonsense, my dear. There are certain green shades in every skin, as you know, but certainly mine can't lay claim to more than the average. I a Henner? I only wish I were." She pushed her chair back out of the sunbeam.

"Why do you do that?" he exclaimed angrily. "Do you begrudge me the happiness that tint in your cheek gives me?"

"What a wild imagination you have, my dear!"

He leaned on the table heavily. "Rosanne... will you pose in the nude for me ?"

"Eric...!" she gasped.

"You say you love me. Now prove it."

She had grown quite white. "Not that way ! Eric think. It's because I love you that I can't do this awful thing. If I were a professional model— But I'm your wife. You must credit me with some of the finer feelings. To stand up before you, nude... Oh, Eric!"

He fixed her shifting gaze with his glowering one. "Have you ever done it for any other man?"

She sprang up. "Your question is an insult—"

"Would you do it for any other man, Rosanne?"

Without answering she hurried from the room.

iii

ERIC ROHN, staring into space, leaned over his futile breakfast a long time.

Why had he never noticed the Henner green in Rosanne's skin before? She had always used a great deal of cream, powder, rouge, more even than the average New York woman— and this morning she must have forgotten to apply them. Besides, the peculiarly wan quality of the sunbeam had accentuated the

unprotected green... Had she deliberately been trying to hide her flesh tones from him?

He gritted his teeth, clenched his fists as he thought of Ernie Clark, of his Psyche, which had just been sold to a visiting Italian prince at a record price...

That day Rosanne kept to her room. But the next morning at breakfast she was her old amiable self. Her husband, however, was not permitted to see the Henner green in her cheek. She was powdered and roughed more heavily than ever.

Weeks went by and it was rumored in the studios that Ernie Clark, who notwithstanding his brilliant success still elected to live in the Village, was at work on another Henneresque nude, an impressionistic study of a lady lying on a rug.

"Who is his model?" asked everybody.

"The one who posed for his Psyche, of course," was the unanimous answer. "She has the only real Henner skin in New York."

Eric Rohn, scowlingly belligerent, called on little Ruby Giddings and bluntly deriianded the truth. Quite unhesitatingly she admitted she was posing for Ernie.

"The altogether?" queried Rohn.

"Why, of course. You doubt it?"

Rohn favored her with one of his rare smiles. "No, indeed. But my friend Mr. Clark, much as I admire his talent, can't do you justice. I am going to do a nymph. Will you pose for me?"

She seemed delighted and promised readily. He gave her money for flowers and bonbons and left in high good-humor.

For three mornings he watched the entrance to her lodgings in West Fourth street and was rewarded by seeing her issue forth each day at a few minutes before eight. His interested gaze followed her the short distance to Sheridan Square where she disappeared in the doorway of an old detached dismantled building which was occupied by Ernie Clark. Here were his lodgings, exhibition rooms and studio.

The fourth, fifth and sixth mornings Ruby Giddings did not appear. Evidently Ernie had finished with her; he had the face for his lady on the rug.

About this time Rosanne developed a penchant for motoring in Central Park in her smart sedan. ''Don't you want to go with me, Eric?" she would ask each afternoon as she started. "Autumn in the park! What could be finer? Come."

But he always excused himself: "I don't care for motoring— you know that." The fourth afternoon he followed her at a discreet distance in one of his least conspicuous cars. She drove to the park, stopped at a rather unfrequented place near the mall, veiled herself heavily (it was a chilly, drizzly day), and sped down

to Sheridan Square, leaving her sedan in Sixth avenue and hastened on foot to Ernie Clark's house, entering with a wholly casual air.

The following morning Eric Rohn called at Ernie's studio ostensibly to borrow a certain rare pigment he was unable to find in any of the shops. His real object was to learn his friend's contemplated whereabouts that night.

"The Village Post-Impressionists open their exhibition this evening down at Ishobar's," he said. "You're going?"

"Couldn't think of missing it," laughed Ernie. "They say there's some awfully rich stuff to be shown. You'll take it in?"

"Perhaps; I don't know."

There was some inconsequential talk (neither mentioned Ernie's forthcoming picture) and then Rohn took his leave, promising to have breakfast with his friend on the morrow at an Italian restaurant in the neighborhood.

iv

ERIC ROHN was a frank nighthawk, so Rosanne was not surprised when he informed her that evening at dinner that he was leaving early and might not be home till morning.

"Amuse yourself," he said. "Why not try the Villagers down at Ishobar's? I'm told there'll be some rare things on exhibition."

Her lip curled. "You know I despise those lunatics..."

At ten o'clock that night Rohn entered Ernie's studio by means of a pass-key. Ernie, with temperamental carelessness, always left the street door unlocked; so Rohn had had no trouble in gaining entrance to the building.

The studio was large, dark, packed with canvases big and little, painted and bare. The disrobing-room for models— really only a curtained partition— was near the dais, which stood under the sloping north windows. Eric Rohn flashlit his way to it, stretched himself comfortably on the lounge and slept more or less throughout the night.

Towards eight o'clock he left the disrobing-room and secreted himself behind some large mural pieces on the other side of the room. A few minutes later Ernie Clark entered the studio to begin the day's work, arranged his paints and brushes, uncovered the picture on the easel— the Lady on the Rug in a half-finished state showing up ravishingly Henneresque in the vivid morning light— then sat down and gazed, transported at what he no doubt hoped would prove to be his masterpiece.

At eight o'clock Rosanne came in. She kissed Ernie with great tenderness, went into the disrobing-room, then after a short while emerged nude, mounted the dais, fell into her pose on a crimson velvet rug, her face toward the artist smiling saucily, her feet and lower limbs up in the air, like a playful child's.

"My dear," murmured Ernie, "you're a dream. How stupid that for fear of your husband I dare not paint your adorable face along with your body..."

Eric Rohn stepped from behind the mural pieces, a revolver in his hand.

"Rosanne," he said, "you will pose for me this morning, not for your friend."

"Eric...!" she cried wildly, springing up to hurry into the disrobing-room.

"Don't move," he commanded. "If you do I'll kill your lover."

She stood trembling, white-faced, head hanging, her arms spread futilely to cover her nudity.

"Ah," exclaimed Rohn, "that's a good pose. I'll use it in my picture. He glanced at Ernie Clark, who sat dazed, motionless. "Ernie," he said, "I shall not leave here until my picture is completed— even if it takes three days ; and that, of course, would be a miraculously short time. Mrs. Rohn will pose with only half the usual rests. The same rule will apply to you— for you are to be in the picture. I shall call it some such name as The Devil's Model. The Devil has stolen your model and he sits and paints her for the shame of all souls, while you, the cheated artist, stand in the background, a victim of the most exquisite agony as you watch him transfer her beauty to canvas, the sinful beauty that drags men down to hell. That will be my motif. I shall call upon my imagination for the figure of Satan... I have already arranged for our meals to be left at the studio door by a restaurateur, and none of your friends or servants may enter. Every day my confidential manservant will call to see if the picture is finished. When it is he will take it away; and I—"

"Eric!" sobbed Rosanne. "Ah, God...!" "And I shall follow," Rohn resumed, "never to set eyes on either of you again.

Rosanne, I will divorce you and you can marry your lover and go away."

Ernie Clark, pale with anger, sprang to his feet—

Rohn leveled the pistol at him. "You know me, Ernie. You'd better do as I say—"

"Yes, yes, Ernie," begged Rosanne. "I love you! Let him hear me say it! I love you and want you to live..."

Ernie sank back upon his chair.

"Now," said Rohn, "we'll begin work. Ernie, will you pick me a canvas large enough for three life-sized figures? I think that one near that Salome will do admirably. Thank you... Now if you'll put it on the easel... I've brought my own stuff to work with. Rosanne, please keep that pose— only try to cover yourself with a little more desperation— and hang your head a trifle lower to express the uttermost of shame. Ernie, sit in that chair until I need you. Ah, friends, this picture will be my masterpiece..."

ERIC ROHN worked feverishly.

In two days the figures of Rosanne and Ernie were finished and on the second evening the manservant came and took the canvas away. Rohn, pale, haggard, followed, leaving the worn, half-dead Rosanne fainting in her lover's arms.

Rohn completed the picture in his own studio, composing a striking and malevolent Devil. Then, true to his promise, he gave Rosanne a divorce; and she and Ernie dropped out of world.

Quite naturally The Devil's Model proved to be the artistic sensation of the day.

19: The Jail Bird

Arthur Train

1875-1945

McClure's Magazine June 1905

Truth (Perth, WA) 30 June 1906

The author was a lawyer who began his career in the New York County District Attorney's Office, and later went into private practice. He pursuaed a parallel career as a writer of crime fiction, his most popular character being Mr Ephriam Tutt, a wily New York criminal lwyer.

NOW THAT it had come, he was not quite sure he wanted it. For a moment he longed to go back and join the men marching away to the shoe-shop. Inside those walls he had never had to think of what he should eat or drink, or wherewithal he should be clothed.

Over against the gray parapet echoed the buzzing of the electric cars, a strange sound to ears accustomed to the tramp of marching feet, the harsh voices of warders and the clang of iron doors. Below him the harbor waves danced and sparkled, ferry-boats rushed from, shore to shore, big ships moved slowly toward the distant islands and the still-more distant sea, while near at hand the busy street flowed like a river, which he was compelled to swim.

But in which he already felt the millstone of his past dragging him down. His heart sank as he asked himself what life could hold for him? How often sitting on his prison bed with his head in his hands, he had pictured joyously the present moment! Now, he felt like a child who has lost its parent's hand in the passing throng.

There had been a day when his old mother's letter had not come, and, in stead, only a line of stereotyped consolation from the country pastor to the village ne'er-do-well. No one had seen him choke over his bowl of soup and bread, or noticed the tears that trickled down upon the shoe-leather in his hand. She had been the only one who had ever written to him. There was-nothing now to take him back to the little cluster of white cottages among the hills where he was born.

As he stood there alone facing the world, he yearned to throw himself once more upon his cot and weep against its iron bars— for three years the only arms out-stretched to comfort him.

1

THE JUDGE concluded his charge with the usual: "I leave the case to you, gentlemen."

And the jury, collecting, their miscellaneous garments, slowly retired. The clerk pushed an indictment across the desk, whispering: "Try him: he's a short one!"

For it was getting late, and the afternoon sun was already gilding the dim cornices of the big court-room, now almost deserted save by a lounger or two asleep on the benches.

"People against Graham," called Dockbridge, the youthful assistant district attorney.

"Fill the box," shouted the clerk. "James Graham to the bar!"

And another dozen good men and true answered to their names and settled themselves comfortably in their places.

At the rear the door from the pen opened and the prisoner entered, escorted by an officer. He walked stolidly around the room, passed through the gate held open for him, and took his seat at the table reserved for the defendant and his counsel. There appeared, however, to be no lawyer to represent him. "

"Have you counsel?" casually inquired the clerk.

"No!" answered the prisoner.

"Mr Crookshanks, please look after the rights of this defendant," directed the judge.

The prisoner, a thick-set man of medium height, half rose from his seat and, turning towards the weazened little lawyer, shook his head rather impatiently. It was obvious they were not strangers. After a whispered conversation. Crookshanks stepped forward and addressed the court.

"Defendant declines counsel and stands on his constitutional rights to defend himself, your Honor! " he said apologetically. There was a slight lifting of heads among the jury, and a few sharp glances in the direction of the prisoner, which seemed in no wise to disconcert him.

"Very well, then! Proceed!" ordered the court.

The prosecutor rapidly outlined his case: one of simple larceny from the person. The People would show that the defendant had taken a wallet from the pocket of the complaining witness. He had been caught in *flagrante delicto*. There were several eye-witnesses. The case would occupy but a few moments, unless the prisoner had some witnesses. The young assistant, who seemed slightly nervous at the unusual prospect of conducting a trial against a lawyerless defendant (savoring as it did of a hand-to-hand combat in the days of trial by battle), started to comment on the novelty of the situation, gave it up, and to cover his retreat called his first witness.

Dockbridge was very young indeed. He was undergoing the process of being whipped into shape by the judge, a kind but unrelenting observer of all the technicalities of the criminal branch, and this was one of his first cases. He could work up a pretty fair argument in his office, but he now felt his inexperience,

and began to wish it was time to adjourn, or that his senior, "Colonel Bob," the stout Nestor of Part I., whose long practice made him ready for any emergency, would return. But "Colonel Bob" could have proved an excellent alibi at that moment, and the battle had to be fought out alone.

The prisoner, meanwhile, was sitting calm but vigilant, pen in hand. His face, square and strong, with firmly marked mouth and chin, showed no sign of emotion, but under their heavy brows his black eyes played uneasily between the court and jury. He was not more than 30 years of age, and his attitude and expression showed intelligence and capacity.

"Go on, Mr. District Attorney!" again admonished the judge.

And Dockbridge pulling himself together, commenced to examine the complainant. The prisoner was now straining eye and ear to catch every look and word from the witness-stand. Hardly had the complainant opened his mouth before the defendant objected to the answer, the objection had been sustained and the reply stricken out. He continued to object from, time to time, and his exceptions were so well taken that he dominated not only the examination but the witness as well, and the jury presently found themselves listening to a cross-examination as skilfully conducted as if by a trained practitioner. But although the defendant showed himself a better lawyer than his adversary, it was apparent that his battle was a losing one. Point after point he contested stubbornly, yet the case loomed clear against him.

The People having "rested," the defendant announced that he had no witnesses and would go to the jury on the evidence, or, rather, "failure of evidence," as he put it, of the prosecution.

It was done with great adroitness, and none of the jury perceived that by refusing to accept counsel he had made it impossible to take the stand in his own behalf, and had thus escaped the necessity of subjecting himself to examination as to his past career.

If the spectators had expected a piteous appeal for mercy or a burst of prison rhetoric they were disappointed. The prisoner summed up his case carefully, arguing that there was a reasonable doubt on the evidence, to which he was entitled: begged the jury not to condemn him merely because he appeared before them as one charged with a crime: appealed to them for justice: and at the close, for the first time forgetting the proprieties of the situation, exclaimed:

"I did not do it, gentlemen ! I did not do it! There is an absolute failure of proof! You cannot find that I took the purse from the old gentleman on such evidence! It is all a lie!"

It was his one false touch. To raise the issue of veracity is usually a mistake on the part of a defendant, and the defiant look in Graham's eyes might well have suggested conscious guilt. As he paused for a moment after this concluding

sentence, an Italian band came marching down Centre-street, playing "The Dead March." Some patriot was being borne to his last sleep in an alien land. Outside the court-house it paused for a moment with one melancholy crash of funeral chords. It seemed a vibrant echo of his own fruitless life. At the same moment a ray from the red sun setting over the Tombs fell on the prisoner's face.

Dockbridge summed the case up in the stock fashion, and then, for half an hour, the judge addressed the jury in a calm and dispassionate analysis of the evidence, not hesitating to compare the abilities of the prosecutor and prisoner to the advantage of the former, saying in this respect:

"Neither must you be influenced by any feeling of admiration at the capacity shown by defendant to conduct his own case. If he has appeared more than a match for the prosecution, it must not affect the weight which you give to the evidence against him."

"More than a match for the prosecution?"

That had been rather rough, to be sure, and the fifth juror had looked at Dockbridge and grinned.

The jury filed out, the prisoner was led back to the pen, the judge vanished into his chambers, and the prosecutor (his feet on the counsel table) lit a cigar and indulged in retrospection. The benches were deserted. There was no one but himself left in the courtroom. Usually, when a jury retired, there was some mother or wife or daughter with her handkerchief to her eyes, waiting for them to come back, but this fellow had none such. He had fought alone! Well, dam him! he deserved to! But who the deuce was he? It had been clever on his part not to take the stand. Strange to be trying a man you had never seen before—of whom you knew nothing, who had merely side-stepped into your life and would soon back out of it.

"Poor Devil!" thought the deputy as he lit another perfecto.

Now, the jury, as juries some times do, wanted to talk, and had a consuming desire to smoke, so they both smoked and talked, and when O'Reilly came to turn on the lights in the court-room they were still out, and Dockbridge had fallen fast asleep.

2

AT HALF-PAST TEN o'clock the big court-room still remained almost empty. Inside the rail the clerk and the stenographer, having returned from a short visit to Tom Foley's saloon across the way, were languidly discussing the condition of the stock market. A nebulous illumination in the vastness above only served to increase the shadowy dimness of the room. The taller of the pair made a scarcely audible whisper in the great silence. Outside, an electric car could be

heard at intervals: within, only the slam of iron doors, subdued by distance, echoed through the corridors.

Dockbridge had awakened, and, lounging before the table, was trying to get up a case for the morrow. The judge had gone home for dinner. One by one the court attendants had strayed away, coming back to push open the heavy door and, after a furtive glance at the empty bench, as silently to depart.

Below in the stifling pen, alone behind the bars, James Graham sat, staring vacantly at the stained cement floor. A savage rage surged through him. Curse them! That infernal judge had not given him half a chance. Once more he recalled that day when he had stepped out into the sunlight a free man. Again he saw his iron bed, his cobbling bench, his coarse food, his hated stripes! He choked at the thought of them. Only two months before he had been at liberty. Think of it! Good clothes, good food, pleasure! God! What a fool!

A dull pain worked through his body; he remembered he had not eaten since seven that morning. Outside in the corridor the keeper was smoking a cigar. The fumes of it drifted in and mingled with the stench of the pen. It almost nauseated him. He leaned his head against the wall and closed his eyes. The act brought rushing back the memories of his childhood, and of how, every night, he would lay his head upon his mother's knee and say: "Have I been a good boy to-day?"

A sob shook him, and he pressed closer against the wall. A sound of moving feet roused him suddenly, A door swung open, shut again, and voices came with a draft of air from the corridor. The keeper waiting outside stirred and stood up, looking regretfully at his cigar.

"Get up there, you!"

The prisoner obeyed perfunctorily, and followed the officer heavily up the stairs and down the dirty passage to the court-room. Outside, he shrank from entering. Those eyes! Those eyes! That hard, pitiless judge! But he was pushed roughly forward. Then his old pugnacity returned: he set his teeth, and entered. He trudged around the room and stopped at the bar before the clerk. On his right sat the twelve silent men. On the bench the white-haired judge was gazing at him with sad but penetrating eyes. It was different from the mellow glow of the afternoon. They were all so still— like ghosts— and all around all about him! He wanted to shout out at them: "Speak! For God's good sake! Speak!" But something stifled him. The overwhelming power of the law held him speechless.

The clerk rose without looking at the Prisoner.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed on a verdict?"

"We have!" answered the foreman, with his eyes on the floor.

"The jury will rise: the defendant will rise. Say you, do you find the defendant guilty or not guilty—"

Guilty of grand larceny in the first degree."

The prisoner involuntarily pressed his hand to his heart. He had weathered that blast before and could do so again. Dockbridge gave him a look full of pity. Graham hated him for it. That child! That snivelling little fool! He wanted none of his sympathy! His breath came faster. Must they all look at him? Was that part of his trial to be stared down? He glared back at them. The room swam, and he saw only the stern face on the bench above.

"Name ?" broke in the harsh voice of the clerk.

"James Graham."

"Age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Married or unmarried, sir? Temperate?" came the pitiless questions, all answered in a monotone.

"Ever convicted before?"

"No!" said the prisoner in a low voice, but the word sounded to him like a roaring torrent. Then came once more that awful silence. The dread eye of the judge searched his sold.

"Graham, is that the truth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you quite sure?"

That merciless question! What had that to do with it? Why should he have to tell them? That was not his crime! He was ready to suffer for what he had done, but not for the past: that was not fair, he had paid for that! He must defend himself.

"Yes, sir."

"Swear him," said the judge.

The officer took up the soiled Bible and started to place it in Graham's hand. But the hand dropped from it.

"No, no! I can't," he faltered. "I can't— I— I— it is no use," he added huskily.

"When were you convicted ?"

"I served six months for petty larceny in the penitentiary over six years ago."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Quite sure? Think again !"

"Yes, sir!" almost inaudibly. "Swear him !"

Again the book was forced toward the unwilling hand, and again it was refused.

"Have you no pity? No mercy?" his dark eves seemed to say. Then they gave way to a look of utter hopelessness.

"I served three years in Charleston for larceny, and was discharged two months ago."

"Is that all ?"

"Oh, God ! Isn't that enough?" suddenly groaned the prisoner. "No, no. It isn't all! It's always the same old story! Concord, Joliet, Springfield, Sing Sing, yes, six times. Twelve years! I'm a jailbird!" He laughed harshly and rested wearily against the wooden bar.

"Have you anything to say why judgment should not be pronounced against you ?"

"Your Honor, will you hear me?" Graham choked back a dry sob.

The judge slightly inclined his head.

"Yes, I'm a jailbird," uttered the prisoner rapidly. "I'm only out two months."

There was no defiance in his voice now, and his eyes searched the face of the judge, seeking for mercy.

"I had a good home— no matter where— and a good father and mother. My father died and didn't leave anything, and I had to work while my mother kept house. I worked on the farm winter and summer, early and late. I got sick of it. I quit the farm and went to the city. I worked hard and did well. I learned shorthand, and finally got a job as a court stenographer. That's how I know about the rules of evidence. Then I got started wrong, and by-and-bye I took a fifty dollar note, and another fellow was sent up for it. After that I didn't care. I had a good time— of its kind. It was better than a dog's life on the farm, any way. By-and-bye, I got caught, and then it was no use. Each time I got out I swore I'd lead an honest life. But I couldn't. A convict might as well try to eat stones as to find a job. But when I got free this time, I made up my mind to starve rather than get back again. I meant it, too. I tried hard. It was no use in Boston: they're too respectable. All a convict can do there is to get a two weeks' job, sawing wood. At the end of that time he's supposed to be able to take care of himself. I had to give it up and come to New York.

"It was August, and I went the rounds of the offices for three weeks, looking for work. No one wanted a stenographer,' and there was nothing else to do that I could find. Once I thought I had something on the water front, but the man changed his mind. A woman told me to go Dr. Westminster, so I went. He was kind enough, said he was very busy, but would do all he could for me: that there was a special society for just such cases, and he would give me a card. I thanked him and took the card and went to the society. The young woman there gave me two soup tickets, and said she would do all she could for me. Next day she reported that there was nothing doing just then, but if I could come back in about a month they could probably do better. Then she gave me another soup ticket, I drank the soup, and then I went back to Dr Westminster. He was rather annoyed at seeing me again, and said fee had done all he could, but would bear

me in mind. Meantime, unless I heard from him, it would be no use to call again. I'd lived on soup for two days.

"I got a meal by begging on the avenue. Then another woman told me to go to Dr. Emberdays, and I went to him. By this time I must have been looking pretty tough. He said he would do what he could, and that there was a society to which he would give me a line. They asked me a devil of a lot of questions, and gave me a flannel under-shirt. It made me sick! An under-shirt in August, when I wanted bread and human sympathy!

"It was no use. I gave up parsons and tried the river-front again. I didn't get over one meal a day, and my head ached all the time. I heard of a job, carrying lumber. I got a nickel for holding a horse, and went up. It was a gang of niggers. They got a dollar a day. The boss was a nigger, too, and they didn't want cheap white trash. I almost went down on my knees to him, and finally he said I might come the next day. I slept in a field, under a tree, without anything to eat that night, and I started-in at seven the next morning. The thermometer went up to 96 deg., and we worked without stopping. I had to lug one end of a big stick, with a nigger under the other end, one hundred yards— then go back and get another. I got so I didn't know what I was doing. At eleven o'clock I fainted, and then I was sick: dreadfully sick. At three the boss-nigger kicked me and said I had to stop faking or I wouldn't get paid, and so I got up and lugged until six. But I was so ill I knew it was no use. I couldn't do that kind of work.

"It was an awfully hot night. I walked through to the Avenue. When I got to the Waldorf I stopped and looked in the windows. There were men and women in there, and flowers and everything to eat: just what I could eat if I chose. And I had been working with niggers, judge, all say long, until I fainted, heaving timber. I just stood and waited, and when a chance came to snatch a roll of bills I took it. They couldn't catch me. I was good for ten of 'em, judge.

"After that it was easy. I met some of the fellows that had served time with me, and got back into the old life. Judge, it's no use! I don't blame you for what you are going to do, nor I don't blame the jury. Any one could see through the bluff I put up. I'm guilty. I'm a jail-bird, I say. I'm done. Only I've had no chance, judge. Give me another: let me go back to the farm. I'll go, I swear I will. It'll kill me to go to prison! I'm a human being! God meant me to live out of doors, and I've spent half of my life inside stone walls. Let me go back to the country. I'll go, judge. I'm a human being. Give me one more chance."

There was no sound when the prisoner stopped speaking. The judge did not reply for a full minute. His face wore its habitual look of unutterable sadness. Then he spoke in a very low tone, but one which was distinctly audible in the silence of the courtroom.

"Graham, you have read your own sentence. You have confessed you cannot lead an honest life. Your fault is that you will not work. There are plenty towns

in this state alone, and a thousand farms within a hundred miles where you could earn a livelihood for the asking. Your intelligence is of a high order. By ordinary application you could have risen far above your fellows. You are a dangerous criminal: all the more dangerous for your ability. You almost outwitted the jury, and conducted your own case more ably than nine out of ten lawyers would have done. You have ruined your own life, and cast away a pearl of price. You have my pity, but I cannot allow it to affect my duty. Graham, I sentence you to state prison for five years."

The prisoner shivered and covered his face with his hands. Then the officer clapped him on the shoulder and pushed him toward the door.

"Gentlemen, you are excused." The judge bowed to the jury.

"Hear ye! Hear ye!" bawled the attendant. "All persons having business with the General Sessions of the Peace, held in and for the County of New York, may now depart. This court now stands adjourned until to-morrow morning at half-past ten o'clock."

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20: Bunty Saves the Show

Cosmo Hamilton

Henry Charles Hamilton Gibbs, 1870-1942

Australian Women's Weekly, 25 April 1936

THAT dry, strident and nerve-racked voice came from the circle again. Its raucous note was exaggerated because the lips of Basil Winch, the famous producer of musical comedies, were placed against the mouthpiece of a small, and, to the company, terrifying megaphone.

"Miss Doyne. Listen and stand still. For the last time I remind you that this is the final dress rehearsal of the piece, which, by your colossal conceit and disloyalty, you have done your best to smash. You've just killed a very good scene and cut the throat of your song."

Miss Doyne, the beautiful Stella, the highest paid artist on the London stage, made her violet eyes into two long narrow slits.

"Say anything more like that," she cried, sweeping down to the footlights, "and I'll walk straight out of this theatre and leave you flat! Do you hear? I've had enough of you..."

"Miss Doyne!"

Once more the voice of the god in the circle rang through that echoing theatre causing shudders to run down the spines of that army of people whose future was wrapped up in the play. It was three o'clock in the morning and they were mostly sitting in the stalls and boxes in death-like attitudes.

"Miss Doyne. The opening performance of this production takes place to-morrow— or rather to-night, at eight. Your acting is worse and your singing more dreadful than when we tried it out. You speak your lines without meaning and never once have you been anything but two points off the key. Because you're engaged to a rich man and come down late to rehearsals in a car as big as a train, bringing your damned little dog with you, which wants to be treated, as you do, like a spoilt girl, you think you can play the devil with me and jeopardise a concern which has cost a fortune to build." The voice became shrill with indignation and rage. "I tell you, finally, Miss Stella Doyne, that if you continue to jib at my direction I shall thank heaven on my knees to see the last of you... Make your entrance again. Let me hear what you say, and do what you can for the first time, to sing your number in tune. No further words from you."

Oliver Frant, the young and nervous author whose first attempt this was, and who had already spent his advance royalties in laying out his garden and in the purchase of rose trees, turned as white as a sheet. Kew, who had composed the song in question— it was an obvious hit— leaned forward in an agony of apprehension and spoke to Wellow, Tumby, and Sneath. Whose names were on the programme with his as the concoctors of other tunes. They were, as he was,

breathless and fearful, although they were in complete agreement with all that Winch had said. Christmas lurked behind the thick fog of those December days, and the presents they were so eager to give to their wives and eager children depended entirely upon the successful flotation of that unwieldy ship. It had been tossed about the provinces, repatched again and again during the course of a stormy try-out, and was all ready to be launched upon a London audience. The hearts of these men stood still.

"Now what?" asked Kew. "Will she take it or will she go? If she goes, we're licked."

Bertram Rossett, the manager, whose books showed a debit balance of twenty-five thousand pounds, put a shaking hand to his hot and exhausted head. "If Stella goes, I sink. If she stays, fractious and disagreeable as she is, I float, because the public will accept her, never mind what she does."

Every member of the company, those willing and hungry workers, hung upon Stella now. They might have been turned to stone. Even to the most casual onlooker it must have appeared that, at that moment of quivering suspense, some mischievous and all too whimsical fairy had waved a wand in the gallery of that distracted theatre and stopped the breathing capacity of everyone concerned.

Once more that awful voice.

"Do you hear what I say? Make your entrance again." A foot was stamped and two hands beat an imperious tattoo on the back of a wooden seat.

Hardly able to speak through her anger, Miss Doyne moved nearer to the footlights, raised her eyes to the dress circle and spoke.

"That's enough," she said. "You, the show, London, and every single creature on the face of this blessed earth can go to Timbuktu. I'm out."

SHE turned, marched through the static group of her fellow actors, and, with the echo of her high heels ringing in their brains, threw open the door of the Hotel Splendide in which the scene was laid and walked through the mimic sunshine of two enormous lamps. A murmur like a sudden wind in trees spread all over the house. It ran from the principal actors who were gathered on the stage to the members of the large and exhausted chorus, some of whom at that moment were lying on the floor of the boxes and sitting back to back in the wings. It was caught up by not only the author, the lyric writers and composers, but also by the dressmakers, the shoemakers, the designers and builders of the scenery, the peer's daughter who earned a precarious livelihood by interior decoration, the two smart girls who sat in the box office and hoped to sit there again for very many months, and Charlie, the alert call-boy, who intended to follow in the footsteps of Noel Coward, and would.

And when the moment arrived for Bunty's voice to be heard in the refrain, it encircled the theatre like perfume— the perfume of roses after a shower of rain.

Rossett didn't merely murmur. He uttered a shout in which there was horror and, not caring whether he barked his shins against the turned-down seats in the stalls, made a dash for the stairs which led to the dress circle, where, standing erect behind a little box with a lamp in it, and his copy of the play, was Winch, the tall, thin, round-shouldered, autocratic, capable Winch.

"What on earth have you done, man? If she does walk out and leave us I may as well cut my throat. Her understudy's ill— don't you know that?— and, in any case, she isn't the slightest use and it simply means that without Stella the opening can't take place. The theatre will be dark for at least two weeks with dead rent and salaries added to the already frightful sum..."

Winch stroked his tyrannical but expert megaphone with an affectionate hand. "Bluff," he said, with the confidence of one who had dealt with similar crises and other ladies of artistic temperament during his career. "You can make up your mind to the fact that after breaking something in her dressing-room and being nasty to her dog she will reappear in a better mood and kiss again with tears." He raised the megaphone and the boom of his voice brought silence everywhere.

"Charlie— Charlie! Nip round at once to Miss Doyne. Tell her that she can take ten minutes for deep and silent prayer, after which she will come back and carry on. Do you get me? Give my love to her dog. Stand easy, you on the stage."

"Righto, Chief," said Charlie, his optimism reviving and with a gasper behind his ear.

"I hope you're right," said Rossett, "but I have a hunch that you're not." He was a fat man and a soft one, and he wore a moustache with points. His hair had become conspicuously thinner during those trying and expensive weeks. He wouldn't have been a bit surprised if he were to look in a glass presently and discover that he was bald. As bald as a billiard ball. A man who put on musical shows asked for trouble and invariably got it. Not for the first time he told himself he would rather be breaking stones. "The house was sold out"— he was unable to restrain his tears— "and all the critics were coming and one of the Royal Dukes. A postponement will give us a frightful black eye, and there'll be paragraphs in the papers which we shall never live down. I know you're a very great man, Winch, and I'm proud to work with you, but you've gone too far this time. Stella won't come back."

"Don't you believe it," said Winch, with one of his queer half-smiles. "Hasn't she signed a contract for the run of the piece? You can bring an action against her for everything you've spent."

"What's the good of that? It'll cost as much to win it and what about the Christmas puddings for the crowd?"

CHARLIE returned to the stage— a Charlie ten years older than the one who had obeyed the orders of the man with the megaphone. His face was mottled and there was a tremble in his knees.

He stumbled as he made for the footlights and, in his agitation, crumpled his gasper to bits. In a high, shrill voice he called out, "Chief, Miss Doyne's gorn. She's left the theatre in her make-up and taken her little dawg."

"What?"

"It's true, sir, s'welp me bob... I saw the tail-light of her car as it went off down the street."

The murmur rose again, higher and higher, not like wind in trees, but like a gale which tosses high waves on a beach. Heads appeared from the strangest places. People rose to their feet. A conglomeration of bodies appeared suddenly on the stage. Carpenters, stage hands, chorus, comedians, and the leading juvenile, down whose careful make-up perspiration rolled. Tubby Rood, the dancing master, a brilliant little person whose mother must have been Terpsichore herself, fell on to the drum in the orchestra pit and bounced. This raised one short hysterical laugh which came from an oldish person in gold-rimmed spectacles who played the piccolo.

"There you are," said Rossett with a sort of perverted triumph. "I told you how it would be." He struggled to his bandy legs, mopped his forehead with a handkerchief whose clashing colors would have caused the most ardent chameleon to wish that he were dead, and turned his face towards the staircase which led to his private room. "I'm going to look for a razor," he said. "If I never see you again, Winch, I wish you better luck."

It must be said that Winch, even Winch, was winded, but with the last remains of a tired voice he tried to crack a joke. "Look here, old man, it's all right. We'll ring up the curtain to-night if I play the part myself."

Yes, Rossett had to laugh. It probably saved his life. But as he headed for his office something fell at his feet.

It was Frant, young Frant the author, who in his wild excitement and terror had missed his footing at the top of the stairs and had fallen all the way down. He might have broken his neck. But there are angels who look after authors, especially when they are young.

"Great Caesar's ghost!" yelled Rossett, whose nerves, as you may imagine, were exposed.

"You may go and buy a new hat— a couple, and let one of 'em be silk. If you'll do what I tell you we shall ring up to-night." The boy— who loved his roses and a girl by name of Bunty in the back row of the chorus who was to him,

though to no one else, the most beautiful rose in the world— clutched the lapels of Rossett's coat and hauled himself to his feet. There was a bump as big as a plover's egg on one side of his head. A nice small head with fair hair in which there was a kink.

"Mad," said Rossett. "Nutty. And I'm not a bit surprised. Frant, old thing, we're sunk."

"What do you mean. Mr. What's-your-name?" asked Winch. "If you've got a brainwave— shoot. We can do with it."

"I've got a colossal brainwave— the greatest inspiration this world has ever known. Give the part to Miss Miller. She's learnt the lines, I know. And her voice, by gum, comes straight from Heaven itself."

"You're right," said Winch. "He's mad. The poor young chap's gone barmy... Miller! That Bunty Miller thing? An inspiration? But she's the girl who's given Tubby more trouble than every other girl in the chorus rolled into a heap. Why, good lord, man. only this morning he came and told me that notwithstanding Christmas he'd have to turn her out. Sing? Her voice is no better than an escape of gas through a little hole in a pipe."

Frant waved his arms about. It was extraordinary. All through those rehearsals he had kept his hands in his pockets, had played the part of a mere author, that accidental person who had happened to write the book. The creature who, where a musical comedy is concerned, is of no account at all. "Let me tell you." he said, in the voice of Mussolini, "that I never was so sane. I'm not forcing her on you because she's a friend of mine. I haven't said one word to her and she may not know me by sight. But at the back of the stage at Southsea I heard her sing that number when she thought she was alone, and I assure you— really, I assure you— she can put Stella Doyne to bed. It was a revelation. It thrilled me and I made a mental note that if anything happened to Stella we were safe. Rossett, why don't you try her? Why not give her a chance? She can only fail, but if she wins..."

"It's silly," Rossett said, "it's hopeless, it's perfectly asinine. But anything's better than nothing. We'll try your inspiration and see how much it's worth. Winch, put that deadly thing to your mouth and give that girl a call."

There was a scoff from Winch. "Insanity seems to be catching," he said. "However, I don't care. My brain's gone and I'm so confoundedly doggo that I don't know where I am." He put his hand on the megaphone, rocking to and fro.

"NO. Wait a second," said Frant. "If you call that girl without warning and encouragement she'll shrivel up and die. I ask you to leave it to me. Will you, please— this time? I'll never ask you again."

"Yes," said Winch. "I will. But it's utterly absurd."

For the first time in his theatrical life he crumpled into a seat with a groan. Rossett sat beside him and, because he needed sympathy, held the producer's hand. What a pity it was that Rodin had missed those two. They would have provided him with something more despairing than even he had seen.

Frant went off like a rabbit that was chased by a sharp-toothed dog. Up those stairs, along passages, down further stairs and through the iron door. This he hit with his forehead and acquired another bump. What did he care? Why, nothing. He was only the blooming author, but, by the grace of God and good angels, he might save the show even now. Yes, and give a happy Christmas to all those willing people who had worked so well, and lift a poor little struggling chorus girl to the top of the tree! Bumps? He would make a vast collection in order to achieve such things.

EVERYONE in the building had watched his excited interview with the two important men. Although they had not been able to catch a word that had been said they sensed the fact, highly keyed as they were, that the youthful author, that quiet and amenable young man who had never counted until now, was suggesting, urging, and even pleading as to some way out of what appeared to be this tragic end of things. Every eye followed his rapid progress from the circle to the stage, and as he made an unconsciously dramatic entrance through the great door of the Splendide they instinctively stood up and met him with vibrations of the most wistful encouragement and eager helpfulness.

"It's all very well," said the heavy and pompous lady who played the inevitable aunt, "but as Stella's gone and chucked us and her understudy's ill, what's the solution, I should like to know? I don't see any way out."

"Well, authors do sometimes have ideas," replied the little comedian. "Wait and see."

Frant nosed about like a terrier looking for a stick, and as he darted from group to group and cried out the words, "Miss Miller, Miss Miller!" In a voice which shook with excitement, they were taken up with the most complete astonishment and incredulity by everyone everywhere.

"Miss Miller, Miss Miller!— who the deuce was she? Miller? Miller? Never heard the name."

With heavy sarcasm someone said, "Here she is— the miller's daughter who lives beside the mill, very deep runs the water, but she runs deeper still."

Yes, there was Bunty Miller, little Bunty Miller, looking like a nymph. She had heard her name called by Frant and taken up by the company, and she sat on the edge of what was supposed to be a bed of geraniums with her mouth open and her eyes wide, and her heart astonishingly still. "But, good heavens!" she managed to say to herself. "What's he want with me? Is this some awful joke?"

Frant pounced and said, "Miss Miller, Miss Miller, will you do something for me— not only for me, but for the company: Winch, Mr. Rossett, and the whole of the English stage?"

"I... I don't know what you mean. I'd do anything for you because I heard you put in a good word for me when I blundered with my feet."

"Very well, then. Take your courage in both hands— I don't know how one does— pick up the scene where Miss Doyne dropped it and have a shot at the song."

THERE was an extraordinary little cry. There was eagerness in it, stultification, and fear. "I couldn't. Oh, I couldn't! With everybody watching I should simply peter out!"

That voice once more, that awe-inspiring voice: "Get on with it, Frant, can't you? Show us what you mean."

In utter desperation Frant put his hand under Bunty's elbow and led her beneath a pergola covered with what appeared to him, even at that moment, to be the most appropriate flower. Wistaria it was— a mixture of wistfulness and hysteria with which his heart was full.

"Miss Miller," he said, "dear Miss Miller, if you'll allow me to speak personally, let me tell you that this is my first book. My whole future as a dramatist depends upon to-night. I've spent every farthing of my money in advance on rose trees for my garden, small but very nice. They tell me that your memory is wonderful, and that you know not only Miss Doyne's lines but almost every line in the play.

Miss Miller, is that true?"

"Yes," said Bunty, only faintly aware at that amazing moment that the boy was hurting her arm. His grip was convulsive and he possessed a tennis hand. "I don't know why, but I can remember everything I hear. Sometimes I wish I couldn't, but I do." Obviously she was referring to a nasty remark of Tubby's with regard to her having once or twice broken the tempo of an elaborate dance of his.

"On top of that," said Frant, "I heard you sing the love song one afternoon at Southsea in that dirty and draughty passage in which I caught a cold. And on top of that I love you— I'm sorry to be abrupt, but I repeat again that I love you and want you to seize this chance. Before that frightful megaphone is used again, come out and take up the scene. I'll will you to succeed. If I've never prayed before in my life I'll say a prayer for you and me, the company, Mr. Rossett, and Winch, which simply shall be heard. Oh, come!"

Before she could twist her arm away, make a dash for the stage-door and disappear round the corner of the building into Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt

herself drawn Into the glare of the footlights and placed dead centre among the principals. Vaguely, as though the boy's voice were coming from another planet, she heard him speak to the leading people with the most infinite appeal.

Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Miller, Miss Bunty Miller is going to save the show. I beg of you to help her so that we may raise the curtain to-night."

There were various ejaculations, fired rapidly. "Hot stuff!" "Good little sportsman!" "Give her ten!" "Hooray!"

The cheer was taken up by everyone on the stage, as well as by Kew, Wellow, Tumby, Sneath, and all those people in the auditorium who had been working for the piece.

The stage manager gave an order: "Clear, please, everybody not concerned with this scene. Now, Mr. Fortescue, commence on the line, 'Ever since I saw you first I've not been able to eat.'"

In an attitude of musical comedy ecstasy Mr. Fortescue jumped in and perpetrated that excessively popular line. To which Bunty replied as though in a dream, "Then you're saving money at last."

Came the voice through the megaphone: "Louder, louder, please! Smile and show your teeth. You've got some teeth, I suppose? Carry on from there."

The glistening Mr. Fortescue, whose hair was as black as a seal's back and who had a waist like a wasp, duly carried on, and Bunty, quite unaware of the fact that her feet were on the earth, replied duly to the infantile dialogue over which Oliver Frant had sweated in that little room in his cottage into which, whatever happened, the scent from all his rose trees must inevitably come.

These lines led up to the love song, the great hit number to be repeated ad nauseam after its several encores during the remainder of the play. It was the foundation as well as the topmost peak of what had been called, with astounding originality, "The Girl on the Motor Bike." The song itself, after much deep thought, was to be published as "On My Pillion Seat With You."

"GRACIOUS goodness! Deary me! Oh my!" gasped Rossett up in the circle, utterly unable to remember any of the stronger and more descriptive expletives to which he habitually gave way. "That girl's all right. She can do it. That is, well enough for a time. Winch, by gum, we're saved!"

"Wait a bit," said Winch, although he had to confess to himself that he was surprised and pleased. Apart from her natural nervousness, "that Bunty thing" spoke those lines with far more meaning and naive earnestness than ever Stella had. "What about the song? That requires a voice. I'm betting she'll let us down!"

"Oh don't," said Rossett, "don't!" And he wiped his head again— that large, round head on which he felt that at least one or two hairs had begun to sprout once more.

The orchestra leader raised his baton and waited for his cue. Every man in the orchestra pit grasped his instrument. By Jove!— that helpless kid. Never mind where she came from, never mind who she was. Every man and woman and even Charlie, who was neither, waited for Bunty's first note in a very agony. From every part of the building a sort of prayer went up. Was it possible that under those circumstances there was any angel in heaven who wouldn't help her now?

OUT swept the prelude in which there was a harp. Fortescue began the number in a nice, round baritone. His voice was filled with tremolo because the girl whom he had taken in his arms was shaking in every limb. He sang the first six lines to her and, while he did so, soothed and encouraged her shoulders with the most sympathetic hand. He was very fond of this song. He was perfectly certain that with a good partner he could make it run through the country like a tidal wave. Like Frant, who had backed into the wings and there was standing with his hands clasped and with a smile of the most blissful confidence on his charmingly-sensitive mouth, Fortescue willed this girl to sing as no one had ever sung.

Willing was going on from every part of the theatre, and even Charlie, who took life lightly as though it were a spree— it is the privilege of youth— had made himself into one small lump of concentration for the first time in his life.

ONE could almost feel the crackling of his sympathy, so electrical it was. The conductor gazed at Bunty with an almost fatherly smile and Tubby Rood buried his slight antagonism under a pile of autumn leaves. There was no moment in the whole of that piece, or, for the matter of that, in any other in which that company had been concerned, half as dramatic as this one, or which would approach within a thousand miles the suspense and human interest, or, if that little girl failed, the utter tragedy.

"Sing, sing, sing! Go on! Let it go! Do it justice! Put yourself into electrics! Save the show!"

But when it came to the moment when this Joan of Arc from the second row in the chorus, this little dark horse who had been brought out of obscurity, was to open her mouth and sing the rather lovely refrain with which Kew had been inspired... nothing came, not a sound.

WITH a moment's hesitation and fully aware of the huge ordeal into which Bunty had been placed, the conductor tapped his music-stand sharply, brought his orchestra to a full stop, and cried out, with his left hand suspended in midair: "Begin the song again."

Drawing in a deep breath, Fortescue took his cue:

Out on the road, as the sun shines.
My little pillion girl...
Sing! Sing! Oh, Baby let it go!"

But when, once more, the moment came for Bunty to join in... nothing, not a note.

One deep groan rose up to the indifferent ceiling of that famous theatre in which, who knows, how many mimic, as well as actual, dramas had happened since it was built.

And there, under the white glare of a spotlight, wearing the skimpy frock and the white apron of a musical comedy maid, stood poor little Bunty Miller, the girl who had missed her chance. Oh, what had become of the kind angels upon whom everyone, yes, everyone, had called? Was it conceivable that with cruel deliberation they had turned away their heads?... With dry tears and a thumping heart Bunty asked herself these questions. She could sing this song. She could. She had sung it over and over again— in draughty passages, in a deserted dressing-room and standing in front of the cracked looking-glass of her room in Hammersmith. She loved the song, and in her numerous dreams had placed herself on the pillion seat of the motor-bike with her arms round Oliver Frant, the only boy in that company who had been kind to her. Fear gripped her throat and closed it, so that, in spite of her whole-hearted effort to succeed, nothing came, not a note... Angels, oh sweet angels, where have you hidden yourselves?

The conductor threw up his hands and one by one the members of that large, competent, and sympathetic orchestra put their instruments down.

The stout lady with the white wig uttered a little sob. The small comedian with the ingenious feet became a tragedian. Every member of the chorus, jealous though they were, fluttered about like birds.

"There you are," said Winch hoarsely. "Dismiss the company. Tell the story to the papers. Try and find a leading lady and let's stagger home to bed. I'm absolutely done."

Rossett couldn't speak. Every word of his large and proficient vocabulary trickled out of his brain like a huge shower of small coal from the back of a cart. In the middle of his numbed mind he saw the ghastly figures which represented, roundly, twenty-five thousand pounds. He saw a cold white slip pasted over the vivid announcement of "The Girl on the Motor Bike." "Postponed." What a confession of weakness. Hunched into his seat like a sack, he put his hands to his face, and even in the diamond in the ring on his little finger there wasn't one atom of glint.

There was a movement on the stage. "Wait a second, darling, I'll see what I can do."

It was the lady with the white hair: the large and motherly lady who had children of her own— real children, living children, and a little house at Putney at the bottom of the hill. She made a dash for her dressing-room, came back with a bottle of throat tonic and a small and curious brush.

"Infalliable," she said, quoting from the Scotch wizard and his admirable P.C.

WINCH, from his place in the circle, stood with an overcoat half-on and a green dump hat in his hand. He had watched this rapid action and uttered another scoff. "What's the good of a throat tonic? What she needs is a throat. Pull yourself together, Rossett. Make up your mind that we're beaten; come to my rooms in a taxi and let's gargle a bottle of Scotch."

Although this was a temptation Rossett made no move. He was looking through his fingers at the stage. He couldn't say, "Wait a second, give the girl a chance." All his words had gone. By this time, without any doubt, they were piled into a corner of a dark cellar among beetles and other things.

"All right, then. Stay where you are. At any rate I shall go home and fall flat on my bed. There must be a competent actress somewhere on this earth."

Winch got into the remainder of his overcoat and went slowly up the stairs. There was an awful pain in his back and a vacuum in the neighborhood of his solar plexus and a sort of crick in his neck. It must be remembered that he and his megaphone had been standing in the circle from eleven o'clock that morning on exactly three cheese sandwiches and two cold cups of tea. Mentally and physically even Winch, that Mussolini of musical plays, had become a wreck.

But if his back had not been turned to the stage he would have seen something which caused an emotional sensation among everyone else in the place.

Leaving horror behind him as though it were yesterday's shirt, Frant made a dart and waved the mother aside. He was alight, yes, blazing with another brain-wave, another and far more beautiful inspiration which comes once into the heart of every decent man.

Putting his hands on Bunty's shoulders and his lips quite close to her ear, he said, "Bunty, oh, Bunty, I love you. You didn't know it, but I bought those rose-trees for you. Win or fail— it doesn't matter. They're yours. I'm yours, and the pillion seat on my motor bike, even if I have to pawn it, as I probably shall, belongs to you. Bunty, oh, Bunty, I love you." And, before everybody in that theatre, he kissed her on the lips.

The utter silence was broken by a sob, a laugh, a broken cheer, a sort of giggle from Charlie and a growing murmur which spread from the stage to the stalls.

Winch turned and stood on the stairs with his hat rammed over his ears. He was in time to see the most moving thing that he had ever seen in his life— even he, the producer of musical comedies, whose life was spent among people who were so easily moved. Why not? Behind the laughing mask which is worn by actors there are mostly serious faces from the very stern grind of life.

He saw to his amazement that Bunty seemed to bloom, that the small tight leaves of her bud-like body opened like those of a rose. He saw her, with an amazing smile, touch Frant's dead white face. He saw her straighten her shoulders, stand firmly on her feet, wave her hand at the orchestra leader with a sudden flash of her teeth. He heard her say in a sweet, firm voice, "Take it again, if you please."

Oh, my hat, that cheer!

Rossett leapt to his feet. Doing the most extraordinary things, his heart wound up in his mouth.

Once more came the prelude. Once more Fortescue sang. And when the moment arrived for Bunty's voice to be heard in the refrain, which was inevitably destined to sweep all over the earth, It encircled that theatre like perfume— the perfume of roses after a shower of rain.

Once more that voice through the megaphone at the finish of the song. It cut through the roar, the spontaneous and grateful outburst of applause. "Very good indeed. Rossett, we open to-night. Put the name of Bunty Miller on the programme and the bills. When you need a best man, Frant—"

"Thanks most awfully," said Oliver, holding Bunty's hand. "To-morrow morning, then."

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21: A Christmas Mystery

R. A. J. Walling

Robert Alfred John Walling, 1869-1949

Sunday Times (Perth) 24 Dec 1933

Walling was a journalist and prolific author. Noel Pinshon featured in two or three novels and several short stories.

ONE of the queerest experiences that ever befell Noel Pinson was the game of golf he did not play on Christmas Eve. He had meant to be at Sunningdale that day, and to spend Christmas Day at home in London; so that when his friend. Grainger, the inquiry agent at Westport, called on him to present a problem for his solution he was not top well pleased. Nothing, he said, would induce him to take on an investigation that meant missing Sunningdale

"Well, listen, anyhow, Mr. Pinson," said Grainger. "Have you seen anything in the papers about the Booth case?"

"Not a syllable."

"I'm not surprised. Fortunately, the London papers haven't seemed to get wise to it; but it's a corker."

"Explain, expound. Grainger! Who is Ruth, and what is she?"

"Rooth," Mr. Grainger corrected. "The English surname, not the name of a Biblical female. I'll tell you."

Whereupon Grainger let loose a very queer story.

IN THE AUTUMN a Mr. Sebastian Rooth, said to have made a modest fortune in the East at an exceptionally early age, arrived in Westport with his young wife, and bought a bungalow on the cliffs above Trenhayle Creek, a wooded paradise some six miles out of the town. His neighbors in the scattered houses round about thought him a pleasant, if rather retiring, fellow. His wife was a tiny bit of a thing, a pretty, dark creature, but fragile and timid. Their relations seemed normal, but the neighbors saw little of Mr. Booth, and obtained most of their impressions from the daily girl, who helped her about the house. The only thing that struck them as very peculiar was that a man apparently so warm as Rooth did not keep a larger establishment and give his wife more servants.

Then, all of a sudden, Mrs. Rooth disappeared, and the affairs of the Rooth family came right into the limelight. It happened this way:

Rooth had surprised Superintendent Lawton at Longbridge on the fourteenth by walking into his office with a complaint that his wife had been molested by a man the afternoon before while walking on the cliff path near Trenhayle Point. She ran away, and be followed her. but gave up the chase

when she came in sight of her house. That morning, however, she had received a letter containing threats.

"Lawton said I might bring you all the exhibits in the case to see," said Grainger, taking one from a packet of papers. Pinson read from a typewritten sheet:

"Same place, same time, to-morrow afternoon. You know what I want. If I do not get it, beware. Allthough I am a patient man, I do not propose to wait much longer. If you give warning, or bring any person, or have any person in concealment, you will not see me. Then I shall proceed to business."

"It hath a familiar ring, Grainger," said Pinson. "The blackmailer is a sad plagiarist, and a bad speller, isn't he? Of course, she knew him?"

"That's just what Rooth says she didn't wait a bit."

The superintendent put all the usual questions to Rooth (Grainger went on), but be could offer no explanation himself; he wanted the police to find one. So Lawton arranged a trap for the afternoon. Mrs. Rooth went to the spot indicated in the letter; but nothing happened. Next morning she received a second typed sheet complaining that she had employed the police. The writer said she should have one more chance the nest afternoon. The puzzled superintendent thereupon decided on another trial. This time ne concealed his men on the opposite side of the creek with field glasses. Again nothing happened.

He concluded that he had to deal with some half-witted practical joker; but that evening be was rung up by Booth from the house of his nearest neighbor, one Barbury, and asked to go at once to Trenhayle. This was what had occurred:

Mrs. Rooth had gone into the garden at half-past eight, just as a fine rain began to fall, to fetch a jumper which she had hung on a bush to dry. Rooth, in the dining-room reading, first awoke to the fact that she was staying a long time, then thought she might be in the kitchen busying herself with a little work, which she did after the maid was gone. Coming across something amusing in his reading, he called out: "Nadie! Do listed to this." No reply. The house was sliest He walked into the kitchen; no Mrs. Rooth there. Into the garden, calling "Nadie!" No answer.

Rooth, with other threatening letters in his mind, became alarmed. He ran this way and that, into the woods, calling her name. After five futile minutes he rushed to Barbury's house to telephone. By this time he was frantic.

While they waited for the police Barbury got ah electric torch and they made a close search of the garden. They found Mrs. Booth's jumper still hanging on a lavender bush. Then they noticed that a bed of endive between the lavender hedge and the fence bad beer trampled, followed the trail of ruined plants, and came to the fence itself an affair of pliable oak palings joined with wires.

Whatever marauder had destroyed the garden bed had also broken down the fence; it was bent back almost touching the ground ii one place.

Rooth and Barbury, getting through into the wood, breathlessly traced the marks of a recent passage through the undergrowth, and came out on the edge of the cliff above the creek, when a little strip of turf with a foot-track worn in it separated the trees from the steep descent, to the water fifty feet below. Mr. Barbury, flashing hiį torchlight, saw something lying on the grass and picked up an old felt bat.

It was, said Rooth, a discarded hat that his wife wore in the garden.

Both in a state of horrible fear, the: continued the search. A few feet further on the ground was trampled and torn as if by a scuffle, and a foot or two of turf had broken off at the cliff edge as if something or somebody had gone over. When Barbury drew Rooth's attention to a fresh smear of blood on the wet grass he collapsed.

This was the state of affairs when the police arrived. They found one thing more. On a point of shale close to the top of the cliff was a fragment of cloth which Mr. Rooth recognised as being exactly like the material of the tweed skirt his wife had been wearing. Below, the tide was rippling out into the channel at six knots an hour.

At this point Grainger paused in his narrative

"It's a strange story," said Pinson "but I suppose there's some more to it?"

"No more story," Grainger replied "but two bits of what might or might not be evidence."

First, a boy playing about at low tide just under the spot where Mrs Rooth was supposed to have gone over found a silver coin. Grainger fished it out of his pocket and handed it to Pinson.

"Belgian franc," said Pinson, returning it. "Well?"

Next, the police, scouting about the wood, had found, two days afterwards a piece of paper (which Grainger now drew from his pocket), roughly triangular in shape, with two of the three sides charred. It seemed to be the top of the middle fold of a letter. The burning of the rest had left only a few words visible. Half of then were on the first sheet of the document and half on the second, thus:

er Heyst
sbeke
n Haen.

This was discovered in the wood no far from the garden fence. Rooth had by this time gone off to London on some legal business, leaving his address with Barbury. Lawton wrote to ask whether this find suggested any thing to him. He replied from Bloomsbury hotel that it didn't.

"Got his letter?" Bald Pinson.

Grainger passed over the last of bi exhibits, a brief note on hotel paper:

Dear Mr. Lawton.

I don't think this has any connection. Can't think of any. I hope to return next week if I can finish business with lawyer in time. Till then letters or telegrams will allways find me at this address.

Yours truly,

Sebastian Rooth

"Well," said Pinson, "have you arrested him?"

"Good lord, no! Why?"

''Surely it was elementary. Have you seen him?"

"No, he's left the hotel. But you can't be serious. Mr. Pinson. Booth's been candor itself— begged the help of the police brought the letters..."

"Clever, Grainger, but not quite clever enough. If Mr. Booth wrote this letter from the hotel, then he also typed the other two himself."

Grainger scratched his head.

"Plain as St. Paul's," said Pinson. "The author of the typewritten slips and of the hotel letter had reached precisely the same stage in the science of orthography. One says 'although' with a double 'I,' and the other 'always' with a double 'l'. I never deny the possibility of coincidences. Grainger, but this one has too long an arm."

Grainger never liked to doubt Pinson's theories, but thought he had a stumer this time.

''Like me to test it?"

"I should," said Grainger.

"Very well. I'll give up my golf at Sunningdale, but only to change my course. I'll just have a game, and tell you by Monday whether I'm right or wrong."

ON WEDNESDAY Pinson, with a suitcase and a bag of golf sticks, caught the ten o'clock train from Victoria to Dover landed in the afternoon at Ostend, and took a taxi to Le Coq, whose golf course among the dunes, he bad been told, was one of the best In Europe.

The big hotels were closed, but he found a smiling welcome at a little one in the brand new yellow, red and white square of Le Coq, and one or two people who, like himself, were bent on doing thirty-six holes on Christmas Eve.

While the light yet remained Pinson sallied out to the tramway station, bought a paper, and was informed by Mademoiselle where he could find Monsieur le Maire of Le Coq. He arrived at that dignitary's villa just as he was about to dine, and apologised profusely for his inopportune visit. Much to the Mayor's regret. Pinson did not want to buy a villa and become a citizen of Le

Coq; he merely wished to inquire whether the Mayor knew of a family of Van der Heysts in the Commune. He did. They were farmers, and they lived away back beyond the dunes in the level country at the farm of Sluisbeke. If Monsieur would follow the road leading south from the Square for two kilometres, anybody he met would be able to direct him to Sluisbeke.

Pinson overflowed with thanks, and returned to his hotel. He talked golf and took a hand at bridge until bed-time. The next morning he went out before the golfers were astir, wound his way through the dips between the sand hills where Le Coq was feverishly getting itself built, and so to the flat and seemingly endless plain of West Flanders and along the straight road to the south.

No need to ask for Sluisbeke, The lock across a broad dyke and the foot bridge alongside sufficiently indicated the farm. No need, either, to wait the Van der Heysts, as it happened; for, as he approached the neat group of farm buildings, looking as if they had sprung right out of a picture, two people crossed the footbridge an walked along the road towards him— a tallish man In plus fours and a little woman wrapped in a big fur coat. They passed without noticing him, going towards the dunes.

When their figures had decreased to the size of dolls Pinson followed, note the point at which they turned from the road into the dunes, and half a hour later came upon them looking over the greenish sea and sheltered from the wind behind the breastwork of one of the old German gun emplacements.

Pinson sheltered there from the win as well, raising his hat, saying "Good morning," and adding something about the weather.

The man answered him pleasantly. The woman's dark eyes looked at him solemnly out of a little oval face, but she said nothing.

Presently they turned away.

"Don't go for a moment; Mr. Booth," said Mr. Pinson.

The man shot round to face him and the woman shrunk under his arm.

"I surprised you." said Mr. Pinson. "Sorry! There's no need for alarm. Here's my card. Will you introduce me to the late Mrs. Booth?"

Mr. Booth took the card and stared at Mr. Pinson for a full minute.

"I don't know how you're going do it," he said at last, "but I should like to know how you justify this intrusion."

"I admit it seems eccentric," said Mr Pinson. "It's entirely due to the anxiety of a Mr. Lawton about the circumstances of the late Mrs. Rooth's death. Now that I've satisfied myself that Mr. Lawton can never discover how Mrs. Booth departed this life, well, Mr. Lawton will have to be satisfied, too."'

"Then it's a friendly intrusion?" said Mr. Booth.

"It has been since I arrived at this spot" said Mr. Pinson, with a bow the little woman. "If, however, I had found you alone, Mr. Booth, it might have been less so."

Mr. Booth plucked a reed from the coping and twisted it round his finger, frowning at the North Sea.

"However friendly," said he, "it's extremely embarrassing for me."

"Why?" Mr. Pinson inquired. "You diddled the police very completely, but so far as I can see, you've committed no crime. It only needs for me to back to England and forget all about you, with the hope that, whatever the danger was which Mrs. Rooth feared, has been perfectly staved off by her untimely death."

The little woman shrank still closer to Mr. Rooth, looking fearfully at Mr. Pinson the while.

"It beggars me entirely," said Rooth, "to imagine how you've worn your way into this affair. But when you get back to England, if you make inquiries at Trenhayle, and can put two and two together as successfully, I think you'll see that the danger was not fanciful."

''That's easy to see. Nobody would have gone to the expense and trouble you've taken for the fun of mystifying Mr. Lawton. What was it?"

"Shall I tell him, Nadie?" Mr. Booth put an arm round his wife as he looked down at her.

"If you please." said she.

"Then, briefly, when we married in India, not only did I cut my own painter away from European society, but she offended powerful people of her own race. We've been fugitive for nearly two years. I thought we'd successfully concealed ourselves in that little corner of the West, but a few months after we got there we learned that the hiding-place was known."

"Was it so bad as that— a question of life and death?" Mr. Pinson asked.

"Absolutely. It was a personal as well as a racial feud. You understand?"

"Some jealousy, perhaps?"

Mr. Rooth nodded. "Anyhow, she wasn't safe once her whereabouts were known. We thought first of putting them off the scent with a faked suicide, but decided that it wouldn't be convincing enough. Then came the idea of a death that could be officially established. We worked up what we thought would be a perfect deception. I came over here, because I knew the country and the Van der Heysts, and fixed up the sort of refuge where we'd be least looked for. The night my wife was supposed to have been killed she was on her way to London, and the next day young Van der Heyst met her at Ostend."

"Very neat," said Pinson. "You'd thought of most things— even of supplying her with Belgian money before she left."

"Yes; but, good lord! How did you know that?"

"Because when you leant over the edge of the cliff to plant the bit of stuff from your wife's frock you dropped a franc. You must have had some of the change in your pocket— ticket pocket, I presume."

"Ah! That gives you Belgium. But what makes you suspect me at ail?"

"Oh, the usual error," Pinson replied, "committing things to paper. More people hang themselves or get into gaol by learning to write than in any other way."

Mr. Rooth looked puzzled.

"You see," said Pinson, "when a typewritten letter to Mrs. Rooth and a pen-written note to Mr. Lawton show the same peculiarities of spelling, it's a fair inference that the same artist accomplished both."

"By Jove," cried Mr. Booth. "I wouldn't like to steal a turnip if you were within a hundred miles. But, though you suspect me and you guess Belgium, and although Belgium to not a very big country, I still don't see how you got here."

"You should have invested in an electric torch like Mr. Barbury," said Pinson.

Mr. Booth shook his head.

"Or, at any rate, you should look at the paper you use for a torch before you throw it away. I suppose the flicker of a match wasn't enough to show you whether you had broken down the railings with sufficient artistic skill, so you took a piece of paper from your pocket and lit it for a flare. It happened to be the letter Van der Heyst had sent you, I assume in answer to your announcement that your wife would be here on a certain day. There wasn't much left except a part of the name Den Haem, which is, curiously enough, the Flemish equivalent or The Cock, and a part of the name of Van der Heyst. But there you are— and here I am in consequence."

"It's extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Rooth.

"Not at all," said Pinson. "Experience shows me that it's practically impossible for any man to cover up his tracks so completely that they can't be seen."

"Will you walk back with us, and perhaps take a country lunch?"

"With great pleasure," said Pinson. "I was going to play a round of golf, but there won't be time for that if I'm to eat my Christmas dinner at home."

IT WAS A FORTNIGHT later when Mr. Grainger called again on Pinson in London.

"You weren't so successful as you expected that week-end," said Kr. Grainger.

"No; but I had an excellent round of golf," Pinson replied.

"Meanwhile, a visitor's been to Trenhayle— just come and gone— that Lawton would like to have got hold of."

"Gosh!" said Pinson with a start. "The visitor was, I suspect, a gentleman of color?"

"He was; but how did you guess?"

"It wasn't a guess. Tell me about him."

"One of those yellow-skinned chaps," Grainger said, "with tablecloths tied round their beads, selling carpets. Prowled around the bungalows, asked about the empty one. Was told the tale of Mrs. Rooth's death by one of the servant girls, still prowled about, and was discovered by Barbury trying to break into Booth's place.

"Barbury got suspicious, remembering the threatening letters, and made a grab at him. Plucky, when you think of it, eh? But the fellow was off like a rocket into the wood, and hasn't been seen since. Lawton thinks he may be the man that did for Mrs Rooth, come back looking for whatever it was he demanded from her. It's a theory," said Grainger.

"Eye of the Indian idol, or the green jade god, or the temple ruby? What d'you think, Grainger?" Pinson laughed

"I don't think. What do you?"

"Tell you what, Grainger; whoever killed Mrs. Rooth, I'm certain it wasn't the carpet seller."

"I'm not so sure," said Mr. Grainger. "Anyhow, your own theory didn't work this time, Mr. Pinson."

"No, Grainger; but, as an eminent ornament of the Church once said, none but at fool is always right."

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22: Web

Ward Muir

1878-1927

The Red Magazine Jan 1909

Mirror (Perth, WA) 23 April 1909

KEITH WAS WALKING along the Strand when he ran into the arms of his uncle, old James Horniman— an outlandish figure, with an enormous hat, a green umbrella, and spectacles rimmed with tortoise shell.

"Hullo, Uncle! Where have you turned up from?" Keith had not seen his eccentric relative for years.

"I've just landed from Java, my boy." Horniman beamed through his archaic spectacles. "And," he added, as though landing from Java had fatigued him, "I want a cup of tea."

"Here's a tea shop," said Keith, and steered his companion into an A.B.C. "I'm on my way to the office— I'm on night duty now, at the *Morning News*— but I guess I can spare ten minutes to hear about Java. What have you been doing there, anyhow?"

Horniman leant across the table confidentially.

"I've done the biggest thing of my life," he said. "The— biggest—thing—of— my— life!"

"Let's hear about it." Keith was amused.

Old Horniman drew forth a box with a glass lid. "Look in this," he whispered. Keith looked, and at first saw nothing particularly notable. A rather thick sheet of some filmy stuff. It resembled a spider's web, but was thicker and firmer looking. It's color, though whitish, occasionally changed, iridescently, like pale shot silk. Indeed, it seemed to waver from time to time, as though the web moved. And then, for a second, the web really did move. A creature of some sort came from beneath it, a creature about the size of a filbert nut; and, in fact, fantastically nut-like in its general aspect, had it not been for its long clawed legs.

Keith with I drew his gaze hastily. "A spider?" he asked.

Old James Horniman nodded. "I went straight from the docks to show these spiders— there are five of them— to Professor Jackson; but he was out. Never mind, he will see them in good time. They'll stagger him. They'll stagger everybody."

Keith acquiesced politely. "I'm sure they will. They look weird beasts."

"Weird isn't the word," said his uncle. "No naturalist has ever caught one before— and I have caught five. Of course, we knew of their existence. Their webs are found in millions in Java. But the little beggars themselves could never

be netted. Cooped up in this box they can't show their paces, but in the open they move like lightning. They've gone before they've got there."

"What's the spider called?" asked Keith.

"It isn't called anything in English yet, but it will be called the Horniman Spider— after its discoverer." Uncle James waved his hand proudly. "The Horniman Spider," he repeated. "The joke is, it really is horny. You'd have to take a heavy axe to break one of the tiny chaps— and anyhow, if you opened the lid they'd be a mile away before the axe hit the spot."

"What does the eat?"

Horniman Spider "Flies, bees— anything it can catch which has blood to suck. The web is so tough that it can snare a bird in it— and the bird is a shriveled skin with nothing but bones inside two minutes afterwards. I shouldn't care to meet a few score Hornimans, all hungry. I dare say they'd attack a man if they couldn't get anything else."

"Nasty beasts," said Keith.

"Nasty? Not at all!" His uncle smiled indulgently. "They'd be nasty, though, if they were allowed to breed without check. You've heard about the fecundity of insects, I dare say? The Horniman is a regular record beater. A single Horniman lays thirty thousand female eggs a month, and the eggs hatch in twenty-four hours. Think of each of those thirty thousand laying another thirty thousand, and tell me what would happen in six months if even one spider started to populate this or any other country, eh? But nature has provided for the possible deletion of Java by a plague of Hornimans. There's a bird there called the Hammerbill, that lives on Hornimans. Centuries of evolution have trained it in a special knack of catching Hornimans, and digesting them when caught; and its wings are so strong that it can break through yards of web. Hammerbilis are as common in Java as sparrows in England— otherwise Java would be in a bad way. I brought a Hammerbill home part of the way, but it died on the voyage."

Keith was not much interested.

"Didn't you have to feed your Hammerbill on these precious Hornimans?" he suggested vaguely.

"No; I gave it meat. Hammerbilis will take bits of dried meat if they can't get their usual spider diet— but they won't touch meat if there's a spider to be had. I wish my Hammerbill hadn't died. I could have fed it on the multitudes of Hornimans which the ones I've got in this box are certain to produce. As it is, I shall have to kill them, for the sake of self-preservation. The house would be full of Hornimans— packed tight— in a month or two if I didn't destroy the eggs as quickly as they are laid."

Keith glanced at his watch. He rose, shook hands with his uncle, and began walking east again.

"Poor old boy," he reflected. "I don't know why one should be amused at a man gaining fame through a spider— but it's funny all the same."

Work at the *Morning News* office had been irksome, and Keith often cast a longing glance at the clock, whose fingers crawled so slowly to ward midnight. He therefore groaned audibly when a message came up from the editor's room to say that he was wanted below. To be "wanted," generally meant an overtime job.

"You know old Horniman, the naturalist?" asked the editor, as Keith entered his room.

"He's my uncle."

"Indeed ? I've bad news for you, then. He was run over and killed in Knightsbridge this afternoon about five o'clock. They didn't identify him at first, so the 'story' of his death has only just reached us."

"Good heavens! The poor old chap had tea with me half an hour before that. He came back from Java to-day, with some new spiders he'd found—" Keith paused. "Look here," he went on; "I think I'd better go and see after the body, eh? I can write an obituary notice, if that's what you want—"

"All right," said the editor. "We've got the obituary: but I thought you might add an intimate touch or two some personal anecdotes, maybe, up to date."

"Thanks," said Keith, and ten minutes later he was in the morgue where his uncle's body lay. The official allowed him to enter. A relative? All right, sir. No, we didn't find any property of value on him. A box with a glass lid? Yes, there was one; but the glass was broken. Here it is."

Keith snatched up the box. The lid had been shattered in the accident. Within was the web— and nothing more. He tore at the web, and it came away, in a tough and sticky sheet. There was nothing underneath it. The spiders had vanished.

"You're sure there were no— no insects inside this box?"

The official was quite sure.

"The accident happened in Knightsbridge?"

"Just beyond sir." Hyde Park Corner.

"Ah!" Keith slipped a coin into his hand, and departed to make arrangements for the removal of the body. An idea— an insistent idea— kept him awake that night. When he reached the *Morning News* office he had already had a busy day. Having polished off the first pressure of the night's work, he reached for the telephone and spoke to his friend Wakefield, a brief less barrister in the Temple. When Wakefield appeared in due course, Keith greeted him by asking him how much capital he could raise at a day's notice. Wakefield's face fell.

"My dear chap, you know I haven't a cent except what I live on. Two hundred and fifty a year is my little all."

"In other words, you have about five thousand pounds. I have about the same— and it's also my little all. Yet I'm going to risk it— and in the most romantic gamble you ever struck. You're going to plunge, too, my lad, when you've heard what I have to say."

Keith spoke rapidly, and Wakefield listened in silence. Once he whistled, as the stupendousness of Keith's proposition dawned on him ; but not until Keith halted his recital did he speak.

"So you want me to go to Java?"

"Yes— at once. Pack to-night, if there's a steamer to-morrow. Of course, the whole business may fall flat; but I'm inclined to back the opinion of my Uncle James. He was mad— but not mad about natural history. I shall watch things here, and I'll cable after you, saying how things are developing. If nothing happens, you'll have to come back— and we'll simply be out of pocket to the extent of your passage money. But if I cable to you to go ahead, then you must organise an expedition, and spend our capital like water to get what we want and get it quickly; and charter a special steamer home, if need be. I tell you, it seems to me there may be a big pile in this thing for both of us."

"It's lovely, I admit," said Wakefield. "But is it quite fair to the lie?"

"I have done everything I could. I've been to Scotland Yard— and they think me a lunatic. And I've been to every authority I know of, and they all look at me as though I ought to be in Bedlam."

"Couldn't you publish an article in your paper warning—"

"The editor wouldn't hear of it. Moreover, I've anticipated that. Here is the manuscript of an article I've written— a prophecy of the coming summer. I am going to seal it up in the presence of two witnesses— you can be one of them, and the editor can be the other— and then when things begin to hum, the envelope can be opened, and the public will see that I'm talking sense. By that time you'll be on your way home— and— well, our scoop comes off."

IT WAS EARLY in March when Keith descried the first small sign that events were moving. An evening paper had a paragraph headed "Curious discovery in Hyde Park."

It stated that one of the park keepers had come across a remarkable spider's web in a clump of bushes near the Serpentine. The web was so much stronger than the ordinary that a small bird had stuck in it. The keeper had been attracted by the bird's cries. No sign of the spider had been seen. Keith made no comment. A fortnight later the papers were full of what they called ' "The Plague of Spiders' Webs in the Park."

Keith went to the cable office, and along the wires flashed to Wakefield, who was now half way across the globe.

"Go ahead," it ran, "and be quick about it!"

April and May passed, and by now all England— all the world— was ringing with the extraordinary phenomena to be seen in Hyde Park. Hardly a yard of the area of the Park could be said to be untainted by web. It spread every night, and in the morning special gangs of men, armed with all sorts of brooms and squilges, had to clear the paths. In a single night the whole width of Rotten Row was paved with web, and an early horseman, who tried to brave this strange pavement, was compelled to withdraw because his steed would not face it.

Yet never a spider was found. Their agility in evading detection was amazing. The speed of their movements must have been literally faster than any eye could follow. Obviously, spiders were there— in millions— yet no human eye bad seen them. On every side the Park glittered arid shone with gossamer tissue. And over all there brooded a vast, ah ominous silence. "The birds had quitted their accustomed haunts.

June came, and there was an outbreak of web at Barnes Common, and in nearly every garden in Kensington and Bayswater. The Park was now practically impenetrable. Steam rollers were supposed to keep its roadways free of web; but a steam roller had scarcely gone a dozen yards before its wake began to fill with web again. A day came when the web was so thick that one of the steam rollers jammed in it. The driver got frightened, and jumped from his post— into a sea of web a yard deep. He struggled to the edge of it, shrieking; spectators saw the abandoned steam roller swiftly wound in semi-transparent filaments. In two hours it had vanished from view under a pyramid of white.

Parliament appointed a Royal Commission to examine into the plague of spiders— and one of the Royal Commissioners, who lived in a house overlooking St. James' Park, could not get out of the door one morning because it was glued up with web. He escaped from an upper window. Geometrical progression— that was the secret of the speed at which this horror grew. Five days after Hyde Park was finally closed and abandoned, both Piccadilly and the Bayswater Road were impassable with web; and two days later a child was killed by the spiders in Fulham. The details of its death were unspeakable. Onlookers saw it quite distinctly— and for the first, time saw the spiders, too—nutlike, hairy beasts, which, when they had done their hideous work, seemed to evaporate.

The river was now the one safe thoroughfare in central London; and Parliament still sat. Members arrived at Westminster by boat. Every householder who was able had moved into the suburbs or the country.

"How long will it be before England is inundated with web?" was the question on everybody's lips; and quite serious politicians were talking of a universal emigration scheme. Keith, working at the newspaper office, which had been transferred to Southend, watched and waited. Wakefield's steamer was about due now. If Uncle James was right, all would be well. If not— Keith shuddered.

Already Parliament had offered a reward of fifty thousand pounds to anyone who could devise a scheme of getting rid of the spiders. The millionaire proprietor of the *Morning News* had doubled the offer. Now it was trebled by another paper. Now Parliament voted a hundred thousand. Bayswater— Kensington— Mayfair— they existed no longer. Balloonists, looking down on them from above, saw them as deserts and hills and valleys of hideous opalescent whiteness. Web — web—web everywhere.

Then suddenly one day the *Morning News* came out with sensational placards: 'The Spider Problem Solved."

Wakefield had arrived— arrived with a special steamer whose decks and alleyways were lined with huge crate-like cages containing thousands of Hammerbills. The steamer was anchored down the river, and Keith and Wakefield travelled up to London in a dinghy to make terms.

As Keith had expected, his proposal was met with scepticism. Whereupon he went to the editor and asked him to open the sealed envelope. Within it was an exact prophecy— dated six months previously— of what would happen. Old Horniman's spiders had escaped in the metropolis, near Hyde Park. They would make for the shelter of the Park. They would breed at the rate of thirty thousand a month. And nothing could kill them except their natural enemy, the Hammerbill of Java.

There it was, all down in black and white— and penned long before a single web had been found! The evidence, read in Keith's presence before the Royal Commission, was effective. When Keith further offered not to claim the awards until London was clear of spiders, his plea was unanswerable.

Carefully the crates were brought ashore; and in the presence of practically the whole of Parliament one of them was opened within a short distance of the central sea of web, and a hundred Hammerbills were set free.

Sceptics shrugged their shoulders. But another case was brought and opened, and another hundred birds flew free.

Then another, and then another. When the last was reached, Wakefield was pale.

"Keith, old man," he said, "there goes the last penny of our ten thousand pounds. This expedition cost the deuce of a lot, and I didn't spare expense. I'm a pauper if those Hammerbills don't come up to scratch."

Keith and Wakefield experienced unspeakable anxiety, as time passed and definite results still hung fire. Professor Jackson, writing in a rival journal, deluged them with ridicule. But— what was significant— the professor had no alternative proposal to propound. At last some idiot at Putney had shot a Hammerbill— and behold, in its stomach was found a mass of half decomposed Horniman Spiders!

England rang with the news— and Londoners nearly lynched the sportsman. Parliament held a special sitting and passed a law making the shooting of Hammerbills a penal offence. After that things moved quickly. The Hammerbills themselves were rarely seen— but the effect of their work soon became apparent. The ocean of web narrowed, as it fell to bits and died into rottenness.

Whitehall was now free, and the whole of the City: then Piccadilly was cleared, and the masses of putrescent web taken out to sea in lighters and got rid of; a path was made across St. James' Park, and there was talk of the King returning to Buckingham Palace from Sandringham; Hyde Park, black and ugly, came to light again; gardeners started work in it; day by day the news throbbed forth of a fresh release.

One by one the Hammerbills were found, lying dead— dead of starvation. Not a spider remained, and therefore no food. Finally, one was caught and preserved on a special meat diet at the Zoo. To this day its cage is a place of pilgrimage for those who remember the havoc of the web and the awful period when London was enwrapped in its pall of silver.

And as for Keith and Wakefield?

Their scoop had come off.

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23: The Handkerchief

Dolph Wyllarde

Dorothy Margarette Selby Lowndes, 1871-1950

The Pall Mall Magazine January 1902

Queenslander 15 Feb 1902

WHEN MISS AMORY first noticed him he was buying Maltese lace handkerchiefs in a shop in Port Said, and he struck her as a young man who did not know his own mind. He was at the moment bargaining with the plausible, brown-skinned salesman for a reduction in price if he took four handkerchiefs instead of one, and something in his voice was familiar to Miss Amory.

Then it gradually dawned upon her that he sat at the same table as herself on board the *Mameluke*, outward bound for India, and that, like herself, he had taken advantage of the boat's coaling to come ashore and spend money in Port Said. A good many of the passengers had come ashore she fancied; but their faces had passed her in the unfamiliar streets as something dimly visioned in a dream. She did not recollect Tom Heath until in his bargaining about the handkerchiefs she heard his voice, for her memory was much more tenacious of voices than of faces.

Miss Amory was a little elderly lady, who had never had a chance to be young, and in consequence took a vast interest in youth. She was somewhat reserved, and a good deal solitary, and had hardly spoken to any one on the *Mameluke*, which she had joined at Marseilles, except a few married people, who were even older than herself. Yet her attraction was always towards the younger portion of the community, and she watched their little flirtations and advances towards intimacy with a shy interest and excitement of which no one suspected her. Life on board a liner is an epitome of the experience of the world. Tragedies and comedies— sometimes only incipient, and never developed, it is true— are evolved within the limits of the floating prison which forces human nature into intimacies that, in the nature of things, must advance at a startling rate.

Miss Amory was already deeply engrossed in one or two couples, but it chanced that her attention had been only waveringly caught by the young man immediately in her range of vision at the present moment. She thought, when she came to consider it, that he was rather popular on board, and she knew that he had been nick-named "the Deacon" for some reason that she could only conjecture. He was slightly built, but wiry, and his being clean-shaven may have suggested a clerical tone about him; but the clean-lipped, humorous face struck Miss Amory as much more like an actor or a lawyer.

She moved instinctively nearer to the counter where he stood fingering the lace with an exaggerated sense of its daintiness and value, after the manner of

his sex. Miss Amory's over-active imagination was weaving a romance already out of those lace handkerchiefs, while she stood quietly examining the raw turquoise and trays of unmounted moonstones which the salesman was pressing upon her.

"Can't you give me one more expensive than the others?" said Mr. Heath.

Miss Amory's nerves quivered in sympathy. There was suggestion in the mere idea. She took up a moonstone and asked its price absently, listening to the conversation beside her instead of to her own business.

"Well. I'll take those three anyhow. Two of them are alike, aren't they?"

But yes, said the dusky, writhing salesman; two were alike, but the purchaser had chosen one much less expensive than the others!

"Oh, yes, that will do for—" Tom Heath broke off abruptly, and began fingering the richer laces which the sales-man proceeded to lay out on the counter. "I don't quite like this pattern— it hasn't the cross," he said. Then his eyes fell on Miss Amory, wildly purchasing moonstones in her agitated attention to his own bargains, though this he did not guess.

He raised his hat slightly, and smiled in a rather quizzical fashion, recognising her as a fellow-passenger.

"I wish you would come to the rescue, and give me your advice!" he said pleasantly. "Ladies know more about these things than men. Look here— is this so much better than the others?"

Miss Amory abandoned the moonstones, and gave her whole attention to the handkerchief question in a tremor of delight. She was a very woman, this quiet little spinster, in her keen scent for a romance.

"Oh, yes, I think this one much handsomer!" she said in a quick, soft fashion. "You— you wanted one to be better than the others?"

"Yes, I did!" He laughed in a rather embarrassed fashion, and then something in the sympathetic eyes looking at him seemed to restore his confidence. "I want one much nicer— obviously so!— than the others, and one rather—rather less nice, you know. They are all for one family."

"Oh!" said Miss Amory, a whole world of meaning in the one word.

"And I want one of the girls to understand that I'm sending her a better handkerchief than the others. Do you think she'll see it?"

"Oh, I hope so!" said the little lady earnestly. "But how will you manage? Will you— write a letter with them?"

She felt herself dreadfully intrusive for asking such a question. Indeed, those dim sympathetic eyes drew his confidence from him.

"N—no, I don't think I shall write. It would be rather too much, you know. I don't exactly want to make it too pointed. And yet I want her to understand."

"Oh!" said Miss Amory again. She looked down with a little chill of disappointment, and her original impression recurred to her, that he was a young man who did not know his own mind.

"But you have chosen one so much less handsome than the others!" she remarked after a pause.

"Yes, that's intentional too. You see there are three sisters, and the mother, and I can't quite leave any of them out. I like the mother and one sister very much; and— and the one, you know— well, of course I like her! But the eldest sister is very jealous."

"But," said Miss Amory, "why should she be?"

"Oh! I don't know." But the embarrassment came back to his face, and Miss Amory sighed. "Well, on my honour I didn't! I was only just pleasant."

She looked at the half-amused, half-ashamed smile round his mouth and eyes— at the crisp, dark hair which was too short to curl— and recognising a certain characteristic charm in his face, she wondered what his "just pleasant" might not be. Nevertheless, being a woman, she was inclined to exonerate him and blame the jealous sister.

"I'll take those four," he said at last to the salesman, sweeping them on to one side. "I think it will be all right," he added to Miss Amory.

"I am afraid it will cause a great deal of trouble," said Miss Amory, with a sigh, as she gathered up her own purchases and followed him out of the shop.

HE WAS an object of absorbing interest to her from that day, the more so in that he surprised her so very much, and she could not entirely approve of him even in the excess of her charity. The Deacon increased in popularity daily, and by the time the *Mameluke* was through the Canal Miss Amory recognised that she must expect to find him in dark corners with certain ladies on board.

"It does not seem to me to be quite fair to the Handkerchief Girl," she said to herself, wrinkling up her forehead. She had old-fashioned notions, in that she considered that people whose affections were already appropriated should not venture into dark corners with anybody who happened to be at hand.

"He does not call himself exactly engaged to her, and yet there is certainly some sort of understanding between them. I should like to ask him all about it, but I don't like."

The Deacon did not wait to be asked, however; in a moment of expansion he came and sat down by Miss Amory, and told her more of his affair. Perhaps he felt how much she liked him, and that whatever failings he might have to confess he would not be hardly judged. He had met the Handkerchief Girl down in Herefordshire, where he had been staying with a married brother, and in the course of ten weeks they appeared to have come very near to falling in love with each other. To do the Deacon justice, his reason for not coming to a complete

understanding was the uncertainty of his own prospects. He was going out to India on business for his firm, and on its satisfactory conclusion and his return would probably be made a junior partner. Until that time he thought it better not to speak, which Miss Amory conceded as very noble of him; unfortunately, however, he appeared somewhat susceptible to feminine charms, of which she could not so entirely approve. And he was really a little too assured in his confidence in the Handkerchief Girl. He seemed to think that he had only to ask and to have.

"I don't think you should be quite so certain," she protested mildly. "A man in love is always a little diffident, and apt to depreciate himself."

"Unfortunately I am only too sure," he said, and then he laughed and coloured. "I mean— I know I am sure."

There was a distressed pause— distressed on Miss Amory's part at any rate. She almost wished, in her championship of her sex, that far away in England the Handkerchief Girl was flirting far more desperately than Mr. Tom Heath had done last night with little Miss Paget.

"Dances are fatal things," he said at last. "I will never go to another. You sit out in dark places, and then—"

Her imagination rioted wildly through fervent scenes. She was an inflammable little lady, for all her spinsterhood.

"I suppose— the conservatory?" she suggested. "Or— the garden?"

"No, neither. It was an alcove," he admitted.

"There is to be a fancy-dress dance to-morrow night," said Miss Amory, in mild warning. "I know; I'm going as a monk. But I won't sit out in dark corners," he said laughing, and went off to play bull-board.

Miss Amory's opinion of his last resolution was not great, warned by her knowledge of him. She was further dismayed on the night of the dance when little Miss Paget, got up as the sweetest of Geishas, walked up to the monk and made him a demur curtsey.

"Give me your blessing father," she said, glancing up out of her bewitching eyes at Tom, who, to Miss Amory's astonishment chased her round one of the hatches with apparently amorous intentions.

"Do you know the blessing I should like to give you?" Miss Amory heard him say, before little Miss Paget escaped from his grasp and fled, laughing.

"Decidedly," said Miss Amory to herself. "he is a young man who does not know his own mind!"

It troubled her so much, poor soul, that she ventured timidly to remind him of his obligations next day, when she met him on deck, apparently as clear-conscience and happy in his mind as if he had never thought of kissing any little girl in a Geisha dress, or had no attachment in England.

"I hope you have not forgotten to send the handkerchiefs home,'" said Miss Amory suggestively, as they leaned on the ship's rail side by side.

"No, but I really have not done so yet," he returned, smiling. "I couldn't send them from such a hole as Port Said, could I?"

"Well, I don't quite see why," said Miss Amory in feeble remonstrance.

"Oh, they would think nothing of them," he returned. "I dare say I shall send them from Aden, though."

Miss Amory sighed. She looked at Tom Heath, and thought of the Handkerchief Girl. Poor little Handkerchief Girl! probably torturing her soul out because she was ashamed to think that she had bestowed her love where it had not been formally demanded. Miss Amory thought of the alcove, and blushed with her. The woman who has "given herself away," and feels herself unjustified, is an object for pity. But in the fire of her quick sympathies Miss Amory could follow in fancy slippery stages by which it came to pass. She had not watched Tom Heath for nothing— he had green eyes with which he could say anything he pleased, and so he rarely troubled his clean-lipped mouth to speak and incriminate him, though he had a way of smiling without parting those lips that accented the wordless conversation. He was not a very safe young man to leave about on board— particularly as he did not know his own mind.

There was among the passengers a certain Miss Poppy Janaway. She was travelling with her mother, and she was the typical girl on board ship who causes all the trouble. Miss Amory liked her, because all young fair things had an attraction for her; but the other women disapproved of Poppy. She flirted, and what was more, she did not confine her attentions to one man. If she had a choice, perhaps it was the deacon; but as his fancy was as errant as her own, she filled her spare time with others, and came back to him as occasion served.

Besides her mother she owned an album, in which she invited other passengers to write. When it came to Miss Amory's turn, the old lady was pensively turning over the leaves of the blue-and-gold volume, when she was conscious of a slight shock. Many were the cameras on board, and some one had snapshotted Miss Poppy and the deacon, and had had the assurance to give her a copy, which she had placed in the album among other trophies. It was rather a happy snapshot, and represented Mr. Heath and Miss Janaway; engaged in earnest conversation— indeed, they appeared to be gazing into each other's eyes.

Miss Amory gasped. She closed the album abruptly, for she saw the deacon approaching her and clasped her hands over it.

"Well?" he said, sitting down in the empty hammock-chair beside her, "and what are you doing?"

"Miss Janaway asked me to write in her album. I am thinking what I shall write."

"Oh, yes; she asked me. I haven't thought of anything pretty as yet."

"What is the Handkerchief Girl like?" said Miss Amory abruptly.

"Five feet six ; rather a big girl, with fair hair— very pretty hair, all curly. It is rather short when down, only hangs to her shoulders—"

"My dear Deacon, how can you know things!"

"I stayed in the same house, and met her going to the bathroom. Don't interrupt me! She has eyes like a cat's; they look gray by daylight, but at night the pupils expand, just like a cat's eyes. She is fond of music, but doesn't sing or play; and she cycles, and plays tennis, and all that sort of thing!"

"Oh!" said Miss Amory, rather non-plussed by the glib catalogue. "Have you a photo of her?"

"Yes; but only an amateur— a snapshot. I'll show you some day."

Miss Amory thought of the snapshot even now reposing under her clasped hands, and she shook her head. It seemed to her that the Handkerchief Girl needed a champion.

She never learned whether the handkerchiefs were posted; but she parted from Tom Heath at Calcutta, Fate detaining him at that place and sending her on to Lucknow. As it happened, she did not say good-bye to him; she was waiting her turn in the background, but he had so many last words to say, and young hands to press, that the little old spinster, with a wise smile, slipped away without embarrassing him further, and went ashore. She shook her head again at the memory sometimes; but she never forgot the Handkerchief Girl.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, the handkerchiefs were posted at Calcutta, and could Miss Amory's second sight have followed them to their destination she would have been quite distressed.

They arrived at a pretty country home in Herefordshire one sunny spring morning, when there was only one solitary occupant in the breakfast-room. This was Miss Lyndon, the "jealous elder sister." She was usually down first, and she was one of those people who looked through the letters that had arrived by the morning post, and mused on them, whether they were for her or any one else. She saw a packet with the Indian postmark lying on her mother's plate, addressed in handwriting she knew, and she bit her lip. The packet had come far, and the Deacon had done it up in a hurry— perhaps he had an appointment with Miss Janaway that day, for Poppy and her mother had stayed in Calcutta for a time. Anyhow, the string was partly untied— it only needed a touch to finish it, and it was really a marvel it had not given way before.

The devil came into that sunny breakfast-room, and said something in Miss Lyndon's ear. She glanced at the clock, saw that she was early, and —undid the

packet. There were four Maltese-lace handkerchiefs inside, labelled with separate names— no further word; but her feminine eyes saw the significance of the richer lace on Winnie's and the poorer on her own far quicker than masculine ones could do. Remember that the labels were only pinned to each handkerchief. Again the devil whispered, and Miss Lyndon unpinned and altered two of the labels. Then she replaced the paper, and tied the string— oh, so carefully! just as it had been before, only safely this time— and when her mother and sisters came down to breakfast she was reading her own letters, with a bright spot in either cheek, and looked up calmly to receive her share of the packet—the handsomest lace hand-kerchief of all the four.

"Really!" said her mother, laughing, "I think this should have come to me! But I suppose Tom thinks he has an excuse as you are the eldest, Miriam, and he would rather send his pretty present to a young woman than an old one."

"I think it is rather unnecessarily pointed, and in bad taste!" said Miriam righteously. "But of course it may be as you say, because I am the eldest. Will you change with me mother?"

"Oh no, dear! He meant it for you. He even wrote your name on it. I should have thought—" she caught herself up for she had involuntarily glanced at Winnie, and changed the subject.

Winnie said nothing. She accepted the slight of the narrow lace, and thought she understood it. Girls who gave themselves away deserved no more.

She went and played tennis as hard as she could that afternoon, and tried to tire the sore feeling out of her heart by slogging down the balls; but when it came to writing to thank the sender of the handkerchiefs, she begged off.

"We cannot all write. Four separate notes would be ridiculous!" she said. "If you or mother are writing, you can thank Mr. Heath for me, Miriam."

So Miriam scored yet another point in the game, because she quietly persuaded her second sister to write, too, after all, and Winnie was the only one whose present remained pointedly unacknowledged, save for a very brief message which Miriam took care to word herself. It did look like a snub, and the Handkerchief Girl was more fully avenged than even Miss Amory's championship could have wished.

Miss Amory picked up the connection with the story until her return to England a year later. Then a chance invitation took her to Herefordshire. It was summer when she went to stay with her friends. They gave tennis parties, and invited the neighbourhood, and Miss Amory sat under the trees and watched the men in flannels and the girls in white frocks sending the balls gaily over the nets, and wove romances for herself, it chanced one afternoon that she was caught by the eyes of one particular girl; she seemed such a bright, healthy

thing, so full of strong young life and wholesome strength, that Miss Amory's sympathetic eyes rested on her wistfully.

"Who is the girl in white who plays so well?" she asked a lady seated next to her.

"My youngest daughter!" was the reply, with a pleasant laugh. "She is a great tennis player. You would like to know her? The game is just ending. I will call her over. Winnie!"

Winnie came, rose-flushed with exercise, her fair hair tossed about her forehead, and swinging her racket. She dropped into the chair beside Miss Amory, and looked at her with frank, gray eyes.

"Isn't it hot?" she said, fanning her-self carelessly with a bunch of leaves she had pulled from the tree overhead. "But I suppose you don't feel it so, sittings here in the shade?"

"I have lately been in India. England feels to me rather chilly!" said Miss Amory apologetically.

"India!" said Winnie quickly. "Oh!— what part?"

"The North-west Province."

"You don't know Burmah, do you?" said Mrs. Lyndon from the other side. "We had a friend who went to Burmah— he was in Calcutta first for some time."

And then her hostess chanced to come and take her away to have some refreshment.

"Who was your friend in Burmah? Perhaps I heard of him," said Miss Amory, turning to Winnie.

"Oh, only a man named Heath," said Winnie indifferently. "I don't suppose you heard of him—Tom Heath."

Miss Amory uttered a little soft exclamation, and stared at her.

"You knew Tom Heath!" she said.

"We knew him— once— yes!" said Winnie, in a hard voice. "He dropped out of our lives a year ago. He was staying down here in Herefordshire for about ten weeks before he went to India "

Her eyes, in the deep shade of the tree, had suddenly altered.

Miss Amory, trembling on the brink of a revelation, almost stammered: "O!" she said, "you must be the Handkerchief Girl!" It was rather unfortunate, because the word "handkerchief" was to Winnie like a red rag to a bull. She drew up her round throat and stared at Miss Amory blankly. "I don't understand you!" she said distantly.

"I beg your pardon, my dear; but I am so interested in you!" was Miss Amory's plea; and her obvious distress was enough to soften the hardest heart. "I— the fact is, I first made Mr. Heath's acquaintance through some Maltese lace handkerchiefs he was buying, and perhaps he confided in me— I was so very interested!— but I quite think one of them must have been for you!"

"Mr. Heath sent us four Maltese lace handkerchiefs from Calcutta!" said Winnie slowly. She shut her lips.

"And you had the handsomest!" said Miss Amory softly.

"Pardon me! I had the most insignificant of the four!"

The quick answer made Miss Amory turn her head in sheer surprise. The same dim eyes that had drawn Tom Heath's confidence from him by their sympathy influenced Winnie's sore heart and loosened her tongue. She spoke on impulse.

"I was rather hurt at the time. We had been such great friends. It seemed to me he needn't have taken the trouble to make any difference between mother and Edith and me."

Edith was the second sister.

"But," said Miss Amory, bewildered, "he chose one handkerchief more expensive than the others on purpose for you! Then who had that one?"

"Oh, I suppose he changed his mind— for he sent it to Miriam."

"Your jea— eldest sister?"

"Yes. There was no mistake— they were all labelled with our names."

If the days of inspiration are over, then Miss Amory must have been endowed with a special and holy fire. For she saw, as in a lightning flash, how the mistake might have arisen, and she felt she knew that it *had* happened so. Her own tired experience had held a jealous woman, far back in her life, and she knew that such an one was not to be judged by ordinary standards. Right and wrong get distorted under the influence of jealousy, and honour is as nought.

She looked into the gray eyes that were dilating again, and she spoke.

"I am sure there was a mistake— but we won't ask how. The best of those handkerchiefs was intended for you; you may be quite sure of it! Did you write and thank him?"

"No! I let Miriam do that for me."

"What a mistake!" said Miss Amory, in dismay. "And you have lost sight of him ever since?"

"No, I haven't," said Winnie truthfully. "I wish I had; but his brother lives down here, and we hear of him from time to time."

"And where is he now?" said Miss Amory breathlessly.

"I believe he has just come home— I suppose he is in England somewhere. But I don't know where, and I don't care!" said Winnie defiantly.

"You oughtn't to talk like that," remarked Miss Amory quietly, as she rose to leave the shady retreat. "For one thing, because it isn't true, and for another because there is so little happiness in this world that it is wicked to throw away a chance of it. Good-bye, my dear. You will always be the Handkerchief Girl to me, and you mustn't be offended with me, because I am quite an old lady, and I love young things!"

Miss Amory was not self-assertive, but she did a thing the very next day that would have staggered her host and hostess could they have divined it. She borrowed their pony carriage; ostensibly for a lonely drive, and she deliberately went over to Tom Heath's brother, whose place was some five miles distant, and obtained Tom's address. She explained that she had met him on the way to India, and liked him so much that she regretted losing sight of him, and wanted to write and renew the acquaintance, as she had heard of his return. She said nothing at all about Winnie Lyndon. In some respects Miss Amory was a hypocrite.

Mr. William Heath gave her the address, naturally enough. Who would suspect a quiet elderly lady with tired eyes of being a matchmaker and playing Providence to two turbulent young people? And Miss Amory went home and wrote a letter to Tom Heath, which she had to draft three times before it satisfied her. She remembered him as a little too confident, and even though she suspected that the misunderstanding about the handkerchiefs had had the salutary effect of lowering his estimate of himself, she defended the Handkerchief Girl delicately from all suspicion of offering anything unasked.

Her letter did not obtain a direct answer. Its immediate result was that Mr. William Heath received an unexpected epistle from his brother, inviting himself down to Herefordshire, and mentioning incidentally that he heard a former friend of his was staying in the neighbourhood. He also said nothing about the Handkerchief Girl. But Mr. William Heath was secretly disturbed by the coincidence, for he knew his brother, and he began to wonder whether every woman Tom met in his wanderings round the world had attractions for him, however faded and elderly, and his mind reverted to that portion of the rubric which declares that "A man may not marry his grandmother!"

MISS AMORY did not see the final scene of the romance in which she had so seriously interested herself, though she heard afterwards of the result. But her imagination filled in the blank spaces quite as vividly as if she had been present. What really happened was this.

On a certain sunny afternoon, about a week after Winnie had met Miss Amory, she was coming through their own grounds on her way to the house and tea, when she encountered a visitor entering the front gate. The drive was a winding one, and the encounter could not be seen from the house. There were neither explanations nor recriminations, because Tom Heath's mind suddenly knew itself without aid from its owner; and he laid his hands on the Handkerchief Girl's shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Tom!" she stammered. "Tom— I'm sorry! It was all a mistake!" And then... she was safely in his arms.

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24: The Story of Hans

Albert Dorrington

1874-1953

The Bulletin (Sydney), 8 Mar 1906

Never mind The Flying Dutchman; what about the Flying Pawnbroker?

SVEN owned der schooner, Shling Olsen vas mate, und Borka, de Finn, rushed de cedar aboard out ob de bush. We vas all partners in de leedle sawmill on the flat. We tink ob nodin' but cedar, de corned beef cask, und rum.

Borka talk a lot about England, und vat a great island it vas, until we all got sick ob de cedar trade und de grog shop down de river.

"Let us go to dis England," says Shling. Und eferybody says, "Yes, let us go! Let us go nord vere de geese vas trailin' up der fiords und der ice vas boomin' in der Belt."

Und so we lay in stores und a new rig-out, und avay we goes. We make good weather to der Leeuwin und Kerguelen. Den we meet de Cape birds und der green seas, und der vind get hold ob us like a big Englishman mit wet hands. Den one day Sven hit de compass a blow mit his fist. "Vere vas we now, do you tinks?" he says.

"Someveres bv Finisterre," I says, for we haf left der tropics under our feet und fetch der grey skies und Channel rain.

One day we see a big black ship come from de sky-line. De smoke about her vas like a town.

"We are in her way," I says.

"Veil, stop der ondil she speaks." Und Sven stood for'rd mit a rusty chronometer in his hand. De big ship begin to blow und hoot like a howlin' lion. "Out ob de way! Out ob de way!" she screams. I read "Campania" on her hull, und I knew we vas someveres between Liverpool and New York.

"Cap'n," says Sven, "oblige us mit de time ob day, und vich vay vas id to England?"

"East, east, you blackguards ! You vas goin' to America," he says. "Rybuck," says Sven, und we go about quick und lively.

We did meet anoder Yankee ship, und de cap'n, mit a big cigar in his face, poked de borak at us.

"Ver vas England ?" says Sven.

"Id vasn't dere ven I coom past," says de Yank. "I noticed id vas a bit muddier in de Nord Sea. Did id haf a gatepost at de corner und a garden in front?" he ask.

"Dot man vas jokin'," says Sven. "England vas dere alride." We keep de schooner east by east for anoder week ondil we sight de rocks of England. Sven

went ashore, in de dingy, und-a man mit a sheepskin coat walk along de beach und ask him what he want.

"We want England," says Sven, "Vere is id?"

"Dis vas Skye," says de sheepskin man. Den Sven sit on a rock mit Borka, und drink rum.

"Go avay, Sheepy," says Sven. "Go away."

Sheepy would nod go avay. He sit by und look at de rum. "Come on, den, Sheepy," says Sven. Und Sheepy sit by, und when Borka drink Sheepy drink, und ven Sven drink Sheepy make a noise. Sven look hard at him. "Go avay," he says. "Sheepy, go avay. "

A leedle while und Sheepy come back mit a big red-haired woman. She look at de Finn and ask him to fight her. "I cannot fight a woman," says Borka. " I will fight your husband."

" Fight me," says de woman.

"Yes, fight her," says Sheepy. "She vill gif you plenty."

Borka und Sven rowed back to de schooner.

We go nor'-nor'-west until we meet grey skies und squally winds. "Dis vas England," said Sven. "Shoost listen!" He stooped low und blew on his fingers. "I can hear de bells ob London ring."

Der vas a smell ob fried fish in de fog, und Sven told us dot it coom up from der Mansion House. Borka und Shling vas by de wheel, und dey looked hard at de sky und de grey water, und sneezed. "Id vas like de Baffin Sea," dey said. "Der vas seals not far avay."

Sven looked away Nord ver a grey mountain vas movin' from the sky-line upon us. He sprang to de wheel mit a roar, und set de schooner's heels to de movin' mass.

"By Shimmy!" said Shling. " Der Nord Pole haf broke loose!" We look troo der mist und see de iceberg plunging upon us. Id vas covered mit snow, und it vas de size of a cathedral.

"We vas a corpse alride," said Sven to me. "Der schooner vill not answer de wheel."

De ice-hill came upon us. De sudden cold pinched de spine und stiffened our hands. I heard de leedle schooner shake und cry as de ice-wall slammed upon her sides.

I vas after de Finn like a shot. A narrow ledge run like a counter around de waist of der berg. Id struck us amidships, und I jumped mit der Finn und held to der big holes dot der sea made veil it shoot up troo de bottom. Shling und Sven came after us.

By crikey, id vas cold. Der vas a black tunnel troo de berg worn away by de wind und sea. De horrible cold slammed in our face, und bit our hands und feet like acid.

De Finn, mit his teeth clackin', says: "My fader told me always to keep under de lee of a berg. Dis vind vas from de Baffin Sea. By cripes, Australia vas nod too warm after all."

We crawled around de ice-hill after de Finn und we had to hold by de frozen drip overhead. Den we get anoder smell ob fried fish und gravy. Borka stopped on de ledge of ice holdin' up his finger.

Round de sharp corner vas a big room worn in de ice. De ceiling vas adrip und an' oil smoke came out dot nearly blind us. De floor vas covered mit ships' battens. Und we see a leedle old man Jew sittin' in de middle eatin' de fish. His back vas round, und his beard ran to his hips. Der vas no one else in de room und we hear de old man breathe efery time he swallowed de fried fish.

"Good efenin', fafter Abraham!" said Sven.

"Vas dis place der British Isles? Vas der a railway about here, do you know?"

De Jew jumped mit a scream, upsettin' de pan of fish.

"Id vas alride, Abraham," said Sven quietly. "Dis British Isles of yours haf knock a hole in my schooner. We to drouble you."

De old Jew grabbed his pan, und he looked sideways at us. "You vas poor sailors to bump de front ob mein house," he say. " Eferyting on dis iceberg vas mine. De pots und kettles; de stores und de bed clothes."

"Vere in hell vas you makin' for?" asks Sven. "Vas you runnin' de Arctic Loan Office?"

De Jew grew hot in de face. "You moost nod swear on de berg," he* said. "Der vas tree German sailors here last month who nearly melt de house mit der language. Dey vas dead now."

De Finn und Sven sit round de fryin' pan, but old Abraham fly into a rage.

"I cannot keep you for nodings," he said. "Vere vas your money?"

De Finn shook his head und stared at de Jew mit red eyes.

"No fish out of dis pan 'till I see de money, said Abraham. "Dis iceberg vas mein investment. I bought id from a Greenland whaler. Der deeds vas in my box."

Sven, after hagglin' mit de Finn, gave de Jew ten shillin'.

De Jew said id vas alride und we all go for de hot fish in der pan.

" Shentlemen," said old Abraham after dinner, "dis vas my iceberg. Id vill pe a long whiles pefore a steamer bicks you up. Vill you pay me

efery veek in advance ? "

"Efery veek," says Sven.

" Der vas a goot room to shleep in, said de Jew. "Und I find beds und food." Den he rubbed his nose und looked hard at Shling und

"Id vud come cheaper," he says, "if you could buy a bit of der iceberg for yourselves. I vill sell you a nice corner block cheap, shentlemen. De piece dot

faces America vas a nice suitable position. You buy de block und der vas no more rent to pay."

Sven thought de block dot face America vud melt next week. He said dot ice vos not real. Abraham swore und lifted his hands. He said de ice at de Poles vas burstin' mit mortgages. He would gif us a guarantee dot de berg would keep hard all de summer. Den he offered billing a corner block for ten bob.

So we travel mit fader Abraham on de berg for tree long weeks, und de weather get warmer und warmer. De ice begin to drip und fall avay in lumps. One nide a big crack boomed across de middle, und Abraham rushed mit his clothes und furniture to de larger half of de berg. All day he vas carrying stores over de crevasse, und ven he finished he asked us to buy de piece we stood on for a song; id vas a good chance, he said, to get an iceberg of our own.

At mid-day de sun broke troo de fog, und de berg begin to talk und groan. De noise of a thousand hammers came from beneath. " Look out! cried Sven; "she will go like an avalanche!"

A cannon-shot seemed to burst up from de sea-floor. Pinnancles of ice break about us like shrapnel. Hell doors sliding apart was noding to de berg ven de left wing gaped and rolled upon its back. Id vas a great sight. Id lay like a broken moon on de sea.

We four were on de smaller half. Abraham had left usd a liddle food and oil.

A Yankee whaler picked us up. He told us dot fader Abraham vas de Flyin' Pawnbroker un sailors would not pick him up.

Sven said dot Abraham vas a harmless fool. But we nefar found England. Borka und Shling still belief id vas somevere in de Nord Sea.

Sven does not tink so. He says de British Isles vas a joke invented by de Yankees. Sven vas a great navigator.

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25: Eph and Effie

Ward Edson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

Traralgon Record (Vic.) 17 Dec 1901

EPHRAIM LISTER went to Lee's Creek— called by the natives for oral convenience 'Leecreek'— to recover from the somewhat disturbed condition of his nerves resulting upon the completion of his last novel.

Ephraim was rather a success, as success goes amongst Australian authors, and had published a few books at a profit. His stories sold freely, and as an all-round journalist, with an adaptable conscience and interchangeable opinions, he succeeded in dodging the 'lot austere that waits on men of letters here,' and made an income somewhere between that of an energetic bottle-ho and. that of a fairly popular suburban doctor. Consequently Mr Ephraim Lister was able to indulge himself in change of scene, country air and complete rest when brain fag supervened upon the last page of *Raven, the Bushranger*.

Ephraim was much admired by the women, and had all a conceited man's success with them, but at thirty he had not married.

'Fact is,' said Ephraim in his best manner, 'I am too close a student of woman-nature to be caught by those gossamer surface attractions which the sex spreads like spiderwebs for unwary flies. I admire, I may even adore, but I escape through the openings in the web which are so obvious to the fly who is really fly.'

There were people who looked upon Eph's low-necked shirt, his obtrusively intellectual brow, and his crown of fluffy hair, and declared in cold blood that he was a superlative fool— not merely a fool, but a fool with Australasiatic adjectives.

These people were mostly fools, but without superlatives, because they made the common and, perhaps, not unnatural mistake of confounding egotism with fatuousness. Lister was a really clever fellow; he wrote better than he observed, but he had plenty of brains, and it was a pity that in believing himself so much cleverer than he was he had not the success which many of us have achieved in disguising the belief.

Lister went to Lee's Creek incognito.

'I want complete rest, complete seclusion,' he told his friend Fred Blackwhite, the artist, and if I give my real name I suppose the admirers of *The Stockman's Bride*' and *Stirrup Songs* up there will simply rob me of what little brain I seem to have left with their kindly but doubtless fatiguing attentions.'

'Right, old boy,' said Blackwhite, 'go as Lister Ephraim, and nobody will a recognise you.'

So Ephraim Lister, the author of *The Stockman's Bride*, went to Lee's a Creek as Lister Ephraim, and nobody recognised him.

It would be incorrect to say Eph was wholly delighted with I the success of his disguise. He would have been rather pleased had one or two people penetrated the veil of anonymity.

The young author found Lee's Creek quite as picturesque and restful as Blackwhite had painted it. It was green, cool and shady when the rest of the world seemed hot, parched and arid. A score or more of springs trickled from the range that threw its comfortable shadow over Lee's Creek in the early afternoon, helping the creek to keep the soil soft and moist and the grass green. Each of these springs oozed out of a it miniature fairyland, and the creek had a hundred delightful nooks among the a willow-like peppermint gums drowsing along its banks, in which it was a keen, new joy to lie and revel in one's favourite authors.

Lister Ephraim's favourite author was Ephraim Lister, but in these sylvan shades he read his second favourites, or dreamed of new plots and heroines of the most romantic, attractive and profitable kind. In this way Eph passed nearly a week at Lee's Creek without making any more than a few casual acquaintances amongst the young men who played billiards nightly at the Bridge Inn.

But Eph was not unsociable; he was too much an egotist for that. It is not good for an egotist to live alone, his heart craves company, which means admirers; and when Sunday came Mr Lister Ephraim had made up his mind that Lee's Creek would be an adorable place had it an intelligent and good-looking society that fully appreciated the merits of the author of *Stockman's Bride* and *Stirrup Songs*.

Yet it was quite by accident that Eph made his first friend on Lee's Creek. He had crossed the rough bush bridge of unhewn logs, picturesque by reason of the bush, green and purple-leaved saplings springing around the piles and between the timbers, and was rambling along the creek— carrying so much clear, deep, still water here that the wonder was it had escaped the more imposing title of river— when he came quite suddenly upon a lady who seemed in dire need of a hero.

The lady in question was young, neatly dressed, slim, small of hand and foot, delightful because unexpected qualities in a country girl. She stood with her back to a gum tree, and evidently imagined that her life was menaced by a sedate and matronly red cow, which stood a few feet off, regarding her with drowsy interest, while a long legged, ungainly calf jumped about in an ecstasy of clumsy merriment.

The girl was frantically menacing the cow with a fragile pink sunshade, and calling for help. 'Shoo! shoo!' cried the female in distress, exactly if it were an intruding hen she had to deal with. 'Go away, you nasty beast! Help! Help!'

Then seeing Eph at hand, she cried appealingly: 'Oh, please-please!'

The young author realised that he never had in all his life an easy chance of distinguishing himself, and with a rush and a yell he completely routed the foe, and sent her lumbering up the bank, alarmed and indignant at treatment which she evidently regarded as wholly uncalled for.

Then Ephraim turned to the young lady. She was leaning against the tree, with a heaving bosom and one hand pressed to her side.

'I hope you are not hurt,' he said.

'Oh, no, thank you very much,' the young lady faltered. 'Only very frightened.'

'But, really, I think her intentions were quite honorable—'

'I don't trust them, the nasty things, and I'm very, very grateful to you.'

'Not at all. She would not have harmed you.'

'I am quite positive she had made up her mind to eat my hat at the very least.'

Ephraim laughed, and thought he might safely take advantage of the opening for a compliment.

'Which shows she has excellent taste.'

The girl blushed quite to Eph's satisfaction. It was indeed a pretty hat she was wearing, and she was well aware of the fact.

Lister picked her book from the ground, and she thanked him quite in the manner of the simple rural heroine.

'But the cow would have shown better taste had she wanted to eat the heroine,' he continued, rubbing it in.

'You mustn't think me foolish,' said the girl. 'These cows do dreadful things.'

'But I thought it was only the city misses who were terrified in the presence of cows.'

'Indeed, no; I'm very much afraid of them.'

Then she sat on the root. of the big tree, and Eph lounged on the grass at a little distance. She learned that he was Mr L. Ephraim, staying at the Bridge Inn for his health, and he learned that she was Effie, the daughter of Mrs Reid, who owned the Lee Creek flour mill. Mamma would be very anxious to thank him for his bravery, and he must call.

It often happened after this that Effie sat on the root of that particular gum tree and Eph lolled gracefully on the grass at her feet, while they talked of poetry and sentiment— and Eph. Eph was a comparatively inexhaustible topic of conversation. Lister said to himself that at last he had met the oft-imagined, pretty, ingenuous little country maiden, innocent and sincere, modest and yet intellectual enough to appreciate the author of *The Stockman's Bride* as he deserved. He had often dreamed of such a divine creature and often thought that should he meet a fair, sweet girl with none of the pert smartness of the city

miss, and yet bright enough to sincerely and truly worship him for himself alone, he might be tempted into matrimony.

In calling Effie Reid pretty, Ephraim already proved himself to be under some influence not coldly intellectual. She was not pretty, but she was a fine, clean-skinned, bright-eyed, picturesque sort of girl, and had Eph been as cute an observer and as well versed in human nature as he imagined himself, her small, humorous mouth and the keen light in her alert grey eye might have warned him that there was less rural simplicity in Lee's Creek than he fondly imagined.

At their third meeting Effie carried a book which Eph was swift to recognise as *The Stockman's Bride*.

'How do you like the book?' he asked with apparent unconcern when an hour had flown.

'This?' said Effie. 'Oh, very much. I just love the breezy, healthy character of the hero, but I think the title rather ridiculous, don't you?'

'Well, yes, perhaps it is,' Eph admitted.

'Oh, by the way, Mr Ephraim, what is your Christian name?' she asked suddenly.

'Lister.'

'Lister!' she cried. 'There, I knew your name was familiar. Lister Ephraim, Ephraim Lister. That is curious.'

'Yes, it is rather a coincidence.'

The conversation then drifted to other things, and Eph preserved his incognito.

They met again and again to talk and to walk, and Eph took tea at Mrs Reid's when the weather would not permit of excursions abroad; but at length the time approached when Eph must return to journalism, although he was reluctant to admit that he was well enough. He was quite satisfied by this that Effie Reid was the most unsophisticated of her kind, and yet possessed of intelligence enough to know his worth. She knew his books, too, and admired them with excellent judgment, he thought, although he was slow to dispute the judgment of anyone who admired his books. But Eph had not thought of marriage with Effie as a possibility.

It was at this stage that Effie persuaded Eph to take her for a row on the fine lagoon about half-a-mile down the creek. The afternoon was beautiful. The deep lagoon reflected heaven's purest blue. Eph had ceased rowing, and Effie lay listlessly in the stern, doing nothing but looking exceedingly attractive. A contemplative silence was broken by Eph.

'Great heaven, the boat is filling!' It was true that the water was rushing in in a flood; the plug had been removed from the bottom of the punt. Instead of taking to his oars, Eph made a plunge, seeking for the plug, and before he could

do anything sensible the punt had sunk under them, and the two were left struggling in the water.

'Oh, save me! save me!' Effie gurgled, and Eph felt her arms about him.

Eph was a poor swimmer, and he preserved a very dim recollection of what followed.

What really happened was that Effie, who swam like a fish, making a clever display of struggling wildly all the time, and pleading with him piteously to save her, actually not only saved herself, but brought Eph ashore too.

When the author of *The Stockman's Bride* was capable of realising what was going on around him, he found himself standing upon the grass with Effie, a limp mass of hair and muslin, crouched at his feet, embracing his legs, and calling him her preserver.

'You have saved my life,' she sobbed. 'How can I repay you, my hero, my preserver?'

Eph was amazed, wondering however he could have done it, but enormously elated. He took Effie home to her mother, and received the tears, the homage, admiration and gratitude of the widow with becoming modesty.

When he had changed his clothes at the hotel he found himself the hero of Lee's Creek, and sniffed incense with great gusto. He called to inquire after Effie that evening, and found her pale, but, he thought, more beautiful than ever. More incense!

He was her hero, he had saved her life; what could she, a poor, helpless little country girl do to show her gratitude, her devotion? Eph was deeply touched. First he revealed himself as Ephraim Lister, 'the distinguished young Australian litterateur,' and then before Effie could recover from the consternation into which this great revelation had plunged her, he cried: 'Ah, Effie, my darling, look up, I love you!'

'Oh, Ephraim!' said Effie, and sank into his arms.

'Be my wife!' said Eph.

'Oh, Ephraim!' said Effie.

And it was all settled. Late that night before going to bed Effie took a letter from her little desk and read one paragraph of it:

Ephraim Lister is going to visit Lee's Creek for rest and recuperation on my advice. Make his acquaintance. He is egotistical, but I don't think it's chronic. Anyhow he is not a bad fellow, rather romantic, and susceptible through his vanity. If you like him— well, he should be a soft snap for you.

The letter was signed 'Frank Blackwhite.'

Effie wrote a little note there and then, addressed to Mr Frank Blackwhite.

The soft snap has come off. He has taken my measure for an engagement ring. He's certainly egotistical but I like him— perhaps more than is good for him. But I had to souse him in the lagoon to bring him to the point.

When Blackwhite read that he said: 'Well, the beggar's got the best little woman in the world— just the better half he needed to quality his egotism and romanticism. Lister will be almost bearable in twelve months.'

Lister is quite bearable now, but he insists that his wife is a foolishly romantic little thing.

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26: The Princess and the Jewel Doctor

Robert Smythe Hichens

1864-1950

Collected in: *The Black Spaniel, and Other Stories*, 1905

IN St. Petersburg society there may be met at the present time a certain Russian Princess, who is noted for her beauty, for an ugly defect— she has lost the forefinger of her left hand— and for her extraordinary attachment to the city of Tunis, where she has spent at least three months of each year since 1890— the year in which she suffered the accident that deprived her of a finger. What that accident ,was, and why she is so passionately attached to Tunis, nobody in Russia seems to know, not even her doting husband, who bows to all her caprices. But two persons could explain the matter— a Tunisian guide named Abdul, and a rather mysterious individual who follows a humble calling in the Rue Ben-Ziad, close to the Tunis bazaars. This latter is the Princess's personal attendant during her yearly visit to Tunis. He accompanies her everywhere, may be seen in the hall of her hotel when she is at home, on the box of her carriage when she drives out, close behind her when she is walking. He is her shadow in Africa. Only when she goes back to Russia does he return to his profession in the Rue Ben-Ziad.

This is the exact history of the accident which befell the Princess in 1890. In the spring of that year she arrived one night at Tunis. She had not long been married to an honourable man whom she adored. She was rich, pretty, and popular. Yet her life was clouded by a great fear that sometimes made the darkness of night almost intolerable to her. She dreaded lest the darkness of blindness should come upon her. Both her mother, now dead, and her grandfather had laboured under this defect. They had been born with sight, and had become totally blind ere they reached the age of forty. Princess Danischeff— as we may call her for the purpose of this story— trembled when she thought of their fate, and that it might be hers. Certain books that she read, certain conversations on the subject of heredity that she heard in Petersburg society fed her terror. Occasionally, too, when she stood under a strong light she felt a slight pain in her eyes. She never spoke of her fear, but she fell into a condition of nervous exhaustion that alarmed her husband and her physician. The latter recommended foreign travel as a tonic. The former, who was detained in the capital by political affairs, reluctantly agreed to a separation from his wife. And thus it came about, that, late one night of spring, the Princess and her companion, the elderly Countess de Rosnikoff, arrived in Tunis at the close of a tour in Algeria, and put up at the Hotel Royal.

The bazaars of Tunis are among the best that exist in the world of bazaars, and, on the morning after her arrival, the Princess was anxious to explore them

with her companion. But Madame de Rosnikoff was fatigued by her journey from Constantine. She begged the Princess to go without her, desiring earnestly to be left in her bedroom with a cup of weak tea and a French novel. The Princess, therefore, ordered a guide and set forth to the bazaars.

The guide's name was Abdul. He was a talkative young Eastern, and as he turned with the Princess into the network of tiny alleys that spreads from the Bab-el-bahar to the bazaars, he poured forth a flood of information about the marvels of his native city. The Princess listened idly. That morning she was cruelly pre-occupied. As she stepped out of the hotel into the bright sunshine she had felt a sharp pain in her eyes, and now, though she held over her head a large green parasol, the pain continued. She looked at the light and thought of the darkness that might be coming upon her, and the chatter of Abdul sounded vague in her ears. Presently, however, she was forced to attend to him, for he asked her a direct question.

"To-day they sell jewels by auction near the Mosquée Djama-ez-Zitouna," he said. "Would the gracious Princess like to see the market of the jewels? "

The Princess put her hand to her eyes and assented in a low voice. Abdul turned out of the sunshine into a narrow alley covered with a wooden roof. It was full of shadows and of squatting men, who held out brown hands to the Princess as she passed. But she was staring at the shadows and did not see the merchants of Goblin Market. Leaving this alley Abdul led her abruptly into a dense crowd of Arabs, who were all talking, gesticulating, and moving hither and thither, apparently under the influence of extreme excitement. Many of them held rings, bracelets, or brooches between their fingers, and some extended palms upon which lay quantities of uncut jewels— turquoises, sapphires, and emeralds. At a little distance a grave man was noting down something in a book. But the Princess scarcely observed the progress of the jewel auction. Her attention had been attracted by an extraordinary figure that stood near her. This was an immensely tall Arab, dressed in a dingy brown robe, and wearing upon his shaven head, which narrowed almost to a point at the back, a red fez with a large black tassel. His claw-like hands were covered with rings and his bony wrists with bracelets. But the attention of the Princess was riveted by his eyes. They were small and bright, arid squinted horribly— so horribly, that it was impossible to tell at what he was looking. These eyes gave to his face an expression of diabolic and ruth-less vigilance and cunning. He seemed at the same time to be seeing everything and to be gazing definitely at nothing.

"That is Safti, the jewel doctor," murmured Abdul in the ear of the Princess.

"A jewel doctor! What is that?" asked the Princess.

"When you are sick he cures you with jewels."

"And what can he cure?" said the Princess, still looking at Safti, who was now bargaining vociferously with a fat Arab for a piece of milk-white jade.

"All things. I was sick of a fever that comes with the summer. He gave me a stone crushed to a powder, and I was well. He saved from death one of the Bey's sons, who was dying from hijada. And then, too, he has a stone in a ring which can preserve sight to him who is going blind."

The Princess started violently.

"Impossible!" she cried.

"It is true," said Abdul. " It is a green stone— like that."

He pointed to an emerald which an Arab was holding up to the light.

The Princess put her hand to her eyes. They still ached, and her temples were throbbing furiously.

"I cannot stay here," she said. "It is too hot. But tell the jewel doctor that I wish to visit him. Where does he live?"

"In a little street, Rue Ben-Ziad, in a little house. But he is rich." Abdul spread his arms abroad. "When will the gracious Princess—?"

"This afternoon. At— at four o'clock you will take me."

Abdul spoke to Safti, who turned, squinted horribly at the Princess, and salaamed to her with a curious and contradictory dignity, turning his fingers, covered with jewels, towards the earth.

That afternoon, at four, when the venerable Madame de Rosnikoff was still drinking her weak tea and reading her French novel, the Princess and Abdul stood before the low wooden door of the jewel doctor's house. Abdul struck upon it, and the terrible physician appeared in the dark aperture, looking all ways with his deformed eyes, which fascinated the Princess. Having ascertained that he could speak a little broken French, like many of the Tunisian Arabs, she bade Abdul wait outside, and entered the hovel of the jewel doctor, who shut close the door behind her.

The room in which she found herself was dark and scented. Faint light from the street filtered in through an aperture in the wall, across which was partially drawn a wooden shutter. Round the room ran a divan covered with straw matting, and Safti now conducted the Princess ceremoniously to this, and handed her a cup of thick coffee, which he took from a brass tray that was placed upon a stand. As she sipped the coffee and looked at the pointed head and twisted gaze of Safti, the Princess heard some distant Arab at a street corner singing monotonously a tuneless song, and the scent, the darkness, the reiterated song, and the tall, strange creature standing silently before her gave to her, in their combination, the atmosphere of a dream. She found it difficult to speak, to explain her errand.

At length she said: "You are a doctor? You can cure the sick?"

Safti salaamed.

"With jewels? Is that possible?"

"Jewels are the only medicine," Safti replied, speaking with sudden volubility. "With the ruby I cure madness, with the white jade the disease of the *hijada*, and with the bloodstone haemorrhage. I have made a man who was ill of fever wear a topaz, and he arose from bed and walked happily in the street."

"And with an emerald," interrupted the Princess; "have you not preserved sight with an emerald? They told me so."

Safti's expression suddenly became grim and suspicious.

"Who said that?" he asked sharply.

"Abdul. Is it true? Can it be true?"

Her cheeks were flushed. She spoke almost with violence, laying her hand upon his arm. Safti seemed to stare hard into the corners of the little room. Perhaps he was really looking at the Princess. At length he said: "It is true."

"I will give any price you ask for it," said the Princess.

"You!" said Safti. " But you—"

Suddenly he lifted his lean hands, took the face of the Princess between them quite gently, and turned it towards the small window. She had begun to tremble. Holding her soft cheeks with his brown fingers, Safti remained motionless for a long time, during which it seemed to the Princess that he was looking away from her at some distant object. She watched his frightful and surreptitious eyes, that never told the truth, she heard the distant Arab's everlasting song, and her dream became a nightmare. At last Safti dropped his hands and said:

"It may be that some day you will need my emerald."

The Princess felt as if at that moment a bullet entered her heart.

"Give it me— give it me! " she cried. "I am rich. I —

"I do not sell my medicines," Safti answered. "Those who use them must live near me, here in Tunis. When they are healed they give back to me the jewel that has saved them. But you— you live far off."

With the swiftness of a woman the Princess saw that persuasion would be useless. Safti's face looked hard as brown wood. She seemed to recover from her emotion, and said quietly:

"At least you will let me see the emerald?"

Safti went to a small bureau that stood at the back of the room, opened one of its drawers with a key which he drew from beneath his dingy robe, lifted a small silver box carefully out, returned to the Princess, and put the box into her hand.

"Open it," he said.

She obeyed, and took out a very small and antique gold ring, in which was set a rather dull emerald. Safti drew it gently from her, and put it upon the forefinger of her left hand. It was so tiny that it would not pass beyond the joint of the finger, and it looked ugly and odd upon the Princess, who wore many

beautiful rings. Now that she saw it she felt the superstition that had sprung from her terror dying within her. Safti, with his crooked eyes, must have read her thought in her face, for he said:

"The Princess is wrong. That medicine could cure her. The one who wears it for three months in each year can never be blind."

Taking the emerald from her finger, he touched her two eyes with it, and it seemed to the Princess that, as he did so, the pain she felt in them withdrew. Her desire for the jewel instantly returned.

"Let me wear it," she said, putting forth all her charm to soften the jewel doctor. "Let me take it with me to Russia. I will make you rich."

Safti shook his head.

"The Princess may wear it here, in Tunis," he replied. "Not elsewhere."

She began to temporise, hoping to conquer his resistance later.

"I may take it with me now?" she asked.

"At a fee."

"I will pay it."

The jewel doctor went to the door, and called in Abdul. Five minutes later the Princess passed the singing Arab at the corner of the street, Rue Ben-Ziad. She had signed a paper pledging herself to return the emerald to Safti at the end of forty-eight hours, and to pay 125 francs for her possession of it during that time. And she wore the emerald on the forefinger of her left hand.

On the following morning Madame de Rosnikoff said to the Princess:

"I hate Tunis. It has an evil climate. The tea here is too strong, and I feel sure the drains are bad. Last night I was feverish. I am always feverish when I am near bad drains."

The Princess, who had slept well, and had waked with no pain in her eyes, answered these complaints cheerily, made the Countess some tea that was really weak, and drove her out in the sunshine to see Carthage. The Countess did not see it, because there is no longer a Carthage. She went to bed that night in a bad humour, and again complained of drains the next morning. This time the Princess did not heed her, for she was thinking of the hour when she must return the emerald to Safti.

"What an ugly ring that is," said the old Countess. "Where did you get it? It is too small. Why do you wear it?"

"I— I bought it in the bazaars," answered the Princess.

"My dear, you wasted your money," said the companion; and she went to bed with another French novel.

That afternoon the Princess implored Safti to sell her the emerald, and as he persistently declined she renewed her lease of it for another forty-eight hours. As she left the jewel doctor's home she did not notice that he spoke some words in a low and eager voice to Abdul, pointing towards her as he did so. Nor did she

see the strange bustle of varied life in the street as she walked slowly under the great Moorish arch of the Porte de France. She was deeply thoughtful.

Since she had worn the ugly ring of Safti she had suffered no pain from her eyes, and a strange certainty had gradually come upon her that, while the emerald was in her possession, she would be safe from the terrible disease of which she had so long lived in terror. Yet Safti would not let her have the ring. And she could not live for ever in Tunis. Already she had prolonged her stay abroad, and was due in Russia, where her anxious husband awaited her. She knew not what to do. Suddenly an idea occurred to her. It made her flush red and tingle with shame. She glanced up, and saw the lustrous eyes of Abdul fixed intently upon her. As he left her at the door of the hotel he said,

"The Princess will stay long in Tunis?"

"Another week at least, Abdul," she answered carelessly. "You can go home now. I shall not want you any more to-day."

And she walked into the hotel without looking at him again. When she was in her room she sent for a list of the steamers sailing daily from Tunis for the different ports of Africa and Europe. Presently she came to the bedside of Madame de RosnikofF.

"Countess," she said, "you are no better?"

"How can I be? The drains are bad, and the tea here is too strong."

"There is a boat that leaves for Sicily at midnight— for Marsala. Shall we go in her?"

The old lady bounded on her pillow.

"Straight on by Italy to Russia?" she cried joyfully.

The Princess nodded. A fierce excitement shone in her pretty eyes, and her little hands were trembling as she looked down at the dull emerald of Safti.

At eleven o'clock that night the Princess and the Countess got into a carriage, drove to the edge of the huge salt lake by which Tunis lies, and went on board the *Stella d'Italia*.

The sky was starless. The winds were still, and it was very dark. As the ship glided out from the shore the old Countess hurried below. But the Princess remained on deck, leaning upon the bulwark, and gazing at the fading lights of the city where Safti dwelt. Two flames seemed burning in her heart, a fierce flame of joy, a fierce flame of contempt— of contempt for herself. For was she not a common thief? She looked at Safti's ring on her finger, and flushed scarlet in the darkness. Yet she was joyful, triumphant, as she heard the beating of the ship's heart, and saw the lights of Tunis growing fainter in the distance, and felt the onward movement of the Stella A'Italia through the night. She felt herself nearer to Russia with each throb of the machinery. And from Russia she would expiate her sin. From Russia she would compensate Safti for his loss. The lights of Tunis grew fainter. She thought of the open sea.

But suddenly she felt that the ship was slowing down. The engines beat more feebly, then ceased to beat. The ship glided on for a moment in silence, and stopped. A cold fear ran over the Princess. She called to a sailor.

"Why," she said, "why do we stop? Is anything wrong?"

He pointed to some lights on the port side.

"We are off Hammam-Lif, madame," he said. "We are going to lie to for half-an-hour to take in cargo."

To the Princess that half-hour seemed all eternity. She remained upon deck, and whenever she heard the splash of oars as a boat drew near, or the guttural sound of an Arab voice, she trembled, and, staring into the blackness, fancied that she saw the tall figure, the pointed head, and the deformed eyes of the jewel doctor. But the minutes passed. The cargo was all got on board. The boats drew off. And once again the ship shuddered as the heart of her began to beat, and the ebon water ran backward from her prow.

Then the Princess was glad. She laid the hand on which shone Safti's emerald upon the bulwark, and gazed towards the sea, turning her back upon the lights of Hammam-Lif, She thought of safety, of Russia. She did not hear a soft step drawing near upon the deck behind her. She did not see the flash of steel descending to the bulwark on which her hand was laid.

But suddenly the horrible cry of a woman in agony rang through the night. It was instantly succeeded by a splash in the water, as a tall figure dived over the vessel's side.

When the sun rose on the following day over the minarets of Tunis the *Stella d'Italia* with the Princess on board, was far out at sea.

The emerald of Safti was once more in the little house in the Rue Ben-Ziad.

It was still upon the Princess's finger.

27: Monsieur Caloche

"Tasma"

Jessie Catherine Couvreur, 1848-1897

The Australasian (Melbourne); 27 April & 4 May 1878

Collected in: *A Sydney Sovereign and other tales*, 1890

A MORE un-English, uncolonial appearance had never brightened the prosaic interior of Bogg & Company's big warehouse in Flinders Lane. Monsieur Caloche, waiting in the outer office, under fire of a row of curious eyes, was a wondrous study of "Frenchiness" to the clerks. His vivacious dark eyes, shining out of his sallow face, scarred and seamed by the marks of smallpox, met their inquisitive gaze with an expression that seemed to plead for leniency. The diabolical disease that had scratched the freshness from his face had apparently twisted some of the youthfulness out of it as well; otherwise it was only a young soul that could have been made so diffident by the consciousness that its habitation was disfigured. Some pains had been taken to obviate the effects of the disfigurement and to bring into prominence the smooth flesh that had been spared. It was not chance that had left exposed a round white throat, guiltless of the masculine Adam's apple, or that had brushed the fine soft hair, ruddily dark in hue like the eyes, away from a vein-streaked temple. A youth of unmanly susceptibilities, perhaps— but inviting sympathy rather than scorn— sitting patiently through the dreary silent three-quarters of an hour, with his back to the wall which separated him from the great head of the firm of Bogg & Co.

The softer-hearted of the clerks commiserated him. They would have liked to show their goodwill, after their own fashion, by inviting him to have a "drink," but— the possibility of shouting for a young Frenchman, waiting for an interview with their chief!... Any one knowing Bogg, of Bogg & Co., must have divined the outrageous absurdity of the notion. It was safer to suppose that the foreigner would have refused the politeness. He did not look as though whisky and water were as familiar to him as a tumbler of eau sucrée. The clerks had heard that it was customary in France to drink absinthe. Possibly the slender youth in his loose-fitting French paletôt reaching to his knees, and sitting easily upon shoulders that would have graced a shawl, had drunk deeply of this fatal spirit. It invested him with something mysterious in the estimation of the juniors, peering for traces of dissipation in his foreign face. But they could find nothing to betray it in the soft eyes, undimmed by the enemy's hand, or the smooth lips set closely over the even row of small French teeth. Monsieur Caloche lacked the happy French confidence which has so often turned a joke at the foot of the guillotine. His lips twitched every time the door of the private office creaked. It was a ground-glass door to the left of him, and as he sat, with his turned-up hat in his hand, patiently waiting, the clerks could see a sort of suppression

overspreading his disfigured cheeks whenever the noise was repeated. It appeared that he was diffident about the interview. His credentials were already in the hands of the head of the firm, but no summons had come. His letter of recommendation, sent in fully half an hour back, stated that he was capable of undertaking foreign correspondence; that he was favourably known to the house of business in Paris whose principal had given him his letter of presentation; that he had some slight knowledge of the English language; that he had already given promise of distinguishing himself as an homme de lettres. This final clause of the letter was responsible for the length of time Monsieur Caloche was kept waiting. Homme de lettres! It was a stigma that Bogg, of Bogg and Co., could not overlook. As a practical man, a self-made man, a man who had opened up new blocks of country and imported pure stock into Victoria— what could be expected of him in the way of holding out a helping hand to a scribbler— a pauper who had spent his days in making rhymes in his foreign jargon? Bogg would have put your needy professionals into irons. He forgave no authors, artists, or actors who were not successful. Homme de lettres! Coupled with his poverty it was more unpardonable a title than jail-bird. There was nothing to prove that the latter title would not have fitted Monsieur Caloche as well. He was probably a ruffianly Communist. The French Government could not get hold of all the rebels, and here was one in the outer office of Bogg & Co. coolly waiting for a situation.

Not so coolly, perhaps, as Bogg, in his aggrieved state of mind, was ready to conclude. For the day was a hot-wind day, and Bogg himself, in white waistcoat and dust-coat, sitting in the cool depths of his revolving— chair in front of the desk in his private office, was hardly aware of the driving dust and smarting grit emptied by shovelfuls upon the unhappy people without. He perspired, it is true, in deference to the state of his big thermometer, which even here stood above 85° in the corner, but having come straight from Brighton in his private brougham, he could wipe his moist bald head without besmearing his silk handkerchief with street grime. And it was something to be sitting here, in a lofty office, smelling of yellow soap and beeswax, when outside a north wind was tormenting the world with its puffs of hot air and twirling relays of baked rubbish and dirt. It was something to be surrounded by polished mahogany, cool to the touch, and cold iron safes, and maps that conveyed in their rippling lines of snowy undulations far-away suggestions of chill heights and mountain breezes. It was something to have iced water in the decanter at hand, and a little fountain opposite, gurgling a running reminder of babbling brooks dribbling through fern-tree valleys and wattle-studded flats. Contrasting the shaded coolness of the private office with the heat and turmoil without, there was no cause to complain.

Yet Bogg clearly had a grievance, written in the sour lines of his mouth, never too amiably expanded at the best of times, and his small, contracted eyes, full of shrewd suspicion-darting light. He read the letter sent in by Monsieur Caloche with the plentiful assistance of the tip of his broad forefinger, after a way peculiar to his early days, before he had acquired riches, or knighthood, or rotundity.

For Bogg, now Sir Matthew Bogg, of Bogg and Company, was a self— made man, in the sense that money makes the man, and that he had made the money before it could by any possibility make him. Made it by dropping it into his till in those good old times when all Victorian storekeepers were so many Midases, who saw their spirits and flour turn into gold under their handling; made it by pocketing something like three thousand per cent, upon every penny invested in divers blocks of scrubby soil hereafter to be covered by those grand and gloomy bluestone buildings which make of Melbourne a city of mourning; made it by reaching out after it, and holding fast to it, whenever it was within spirit-call or finger-clutch, from his early grog-shanty days, when he detected it in the dry lips of every grimy digger on the flat, to his latter station-holding days, when he sniffed it in the drought which brought his neighbours low. Add to which he was lucky— by virtue of a certain inherent faculty he possessed in common with the Vanderbilts, the Stewarts, the Rothschilds of mankind— and far-seeing. He could forestall the news in the Mark Lane Express. He was almost clairvoyant in the matter of rises in wool. His luck, his foresight, were only on a par with his industry, and the end of all his slaving and sagacity was to give him at sixty years of age a liver, a paunch, an income bordering on a hundred thousand pounds, and the title of Sir Matthew Bogg.

It was known that Sir Matthew had worked his way to the colonies, acting indiscriminately as pig-sticker and deck-swabber on board the *Sarah Jane*. In his liverless, paunchless, and title-less days he had tossed for coppers with the flat-footed sailors on the forecastle. Now he was bank director, railway director, and a number of other things that formed a graceful flourish after Sir Matthew, but that would have sounded less euphonious in the wake of plain "Bogg." Yet "plain Bogg" Nature had turned him out, and "plain Bogg" he would always remain while in the earthly possession of his round, overheated face and long, irregular teeth. His hair had abandoned its lawful territory on the top of his head, and planted itself in a vagrant fashion, in small tufts in his ears and nostrils. His eyebrows had run riot over his eyes, but his eyes asserted themselves through all. They were eyes that, without being stronger or larger or bolder than any average pair of eyes to be met with in walking down the street, had such a knack of "taking your measure" that no one could look at them without discomfiture. In the darkened atmosphere of the Flinders Lane office, Sir Matthew knew how to turn these colourless unwinking orbs to account. To the maliciously inclined

among the clerks in the outer office there was nothing more amusing than the crestfallen appearance of the applicants, as they came out by the ground-glass door, compared with the jauntiness of their entrance. Young men who wanted colonial experience, overseers who applied for managerships on his stations, youths fresh from school who had a turn for the bush, had all had specimens of Sir Matthew's mode of dealing with his underlings. But his favourite plan, his special hobby, was to "drop on to them unawares."

There is nothing in the world that gives such a zest to life as the possession of a hobby, and the power of indulging it. We may be pretty certain that the active old lady's white horse at Banbury Cross was nothing more than a hobby-horse, as soon as we find out in the sequel that she "had rings on her fingers and bells on her toes," and that "she shall have music wherever she goes." It is the only horse an old lady could be perpetually engaged in riding without coming to grief— the only horse that ever makes us travel through life to the sound of music wherever we go.

From the days when Bogg had the merest shred of humanity to bully, in the shape of a waif from the Chinese camp, the minutes slipped by with a symphony they had never possessed before. As fulness of time brought him increase of riches and power, he yearned to extend the terror of his sway. It was long before he tasted the full sweetness of making strong men tremble in their boots. Now, at nearly sixty years of age, he knew all the delights of seeing victims, sturdier and poorer than himself, drop their eyelids before his gaze. He was aware that the men in the yard cleared out of his path as he walked through it; that his managers up-country addressed him in tones of husky conciliation; that every eye met his with an air of deprecation, as much as to apologise for the fact of existing in his presence; and in his innermost heart he believed that in the way of mental sensation there could be nothing left to desire. But how convey the impression of rainbow-tints to eyes that have never opened upon aught save universal blackness? Sir Matthew had never seen an eye brighten, a small foot dance, at his approach. A glance of impotent defiance was the only equivalent he knew for a gleam of humid affection. He was accustomed to encounter a shifting gaze. The lowest form of self-interest was the tie which bound his people to him. He paid them as butts, in addition to paying them as servants. Where would have been his daily appetiser in the middle of the day if there had been no yard, full of regulations impossible to obey; no warehouse to echo his harsh words of fault-finding; no servile men, and slouching fast-expanding boys, to scuttle behind the big cases, or come forth as if they were being dragged by hooks, to stand with sheepish expression before him? And when he had talked himself hoarse in town, where would have been the zest of wandering over his stations, of surveying his fat bullocks and woolly merinos, if there had been no accommodating managers to listen reverentially to his

loudly— given orders, and take with dejected, apologetic air his continued rating? The savour of life would have departed,— not with the bodily comfort and the consequence that riches bring, but with the power they confer of asserting yourself before your fellow-men after any fashion you please. Bogg's fashion was to bully them, and he bullied them accordingly.

But, you see, Monsieur Caloche is still waiting; in the position, as the junior clerks are well aware, of the confiding calf awaiting butchery in a frolicsome mood outside the butcher's shop. Not that I would imply that Monsieur Caloche frolicked, even metaphorically speaking. He sat patiently on with a sort of sad abstracted air; unconsciously pleating and unpleating the brim of his soft Paris hat, with long lissome fingers that might have broidered the finest silk on other than male hands. The flush of colour, the slight trembling of lips, whenever there was a noise from within, were the only signs that betrayed how acutely he was listening for a summons. Despite the indentations that had marred for ever the smoothness of the face, and pitted the forehead and cheeks as if white gravel had been shot into them, the colour that came and went so suddenly was pink as rose-coloured lake. It stained even the smooth white neck and chin, upon which the faintest traces of down were not yet visible to the scrutinising eyes of the juniors.

Outside, the north wind ran riot along the pavement, upsetting all orderly arrangements for the day with dreadful noise and fussiness, battering trimly-dressed people into red-eyed wretches heaped up with dust; wrenching umbrellas from their handles, and blinding their possessors trying to run after them; filling open mouths with grit, making havoc with people's hats and tempers, and proving itself as great a blusterer in its character of a peppery emigrant as in its original rôle of the chilly Boreas of antiquity.

Monsieur Caloche had carefully wiped away from his white wristband the dust that it had driven into his sleeve, and now the dust on his boots— palpably large for the mere slips of feet they enclosed— seemed to give him uneasiness; but it would seem that he lacked the hardihood to stoop and flick it away. When, finally, he extended surreptitiously a timid hand, it might have been observed of his uncovered wrist that it was singularly frail and slender. This delicacy of formation was noticeable in every exterior point. His small white ear, setting close to his head, might have been wrapped up over and over again in one of the fleshy lobes that stretched away from Sir Matthew's skull. Decidedly, the two men were of a different order of species. One was a heavy mastiff of lupine tendencies— the other a delicate Italian greyhound, silky, timorous, quivering with sensibility.

And there had been time for the greyhound to shiver long with expectancy before the mastiff prepared to swallow him up.

It was a quarter to twelve by the gloomy-faced clock in the outer office, a quarter to twelve by all the clerks' watches, adjusted every morning to the patriarch clock with unquestioning faith, when Monsieur Caloche had diffidently seated himself on the chair in the vicinity of the ground-glass door. It was half-past twelve by the gloomy-faced clock, half-past twelve by all the little watches that toadied to it, when Sir Matthew's bell rang. It was a bell that must have inherited the spirit of a fire-bell or a doctor's night-bell. It had never been shaken by Sir Matthew's fingers without causing a fluttering in the outer office. No one knew what hair-suspended sword might be about to fall on his head before the messenger returned. Monsieur Caloche heard it ring, sharply and clamorously, and raised his head. The white-faced messenger, returning from his answer to the summons, and speaking with the suspension of breath that usually afflicted him after an interview with Sir Matthew, announced that "Mister Caloosh" was wanted, and diving into the gloomy recess in the outer office, relapsed into his normal occupation of breathing on his penknife and rubbing it on his sleeve.

Monsieur Caloche meanwhile stood erect, more like the startled greyhound than ever. To the watchful eyes of the clerks, staring their full at his retreating figure, he seemed to glide rather than step through the doorway. The ground-glass door, attached by a spring from the inside, shut swiftly upon him, as if it were catching him in a trap, and so hid him in full from their curious scrutiny. For the rest, they could only surmise. The lamb had given itself up to the butcher's knife. The diminutive greyhound was in the mastiff's grip.

Would the knife descend on the instant? Would the mastiff fall at once upon the trembling foreigner, advancing with sleek uncovered head, and hat held in front by two quivering hands? Sir Matthew's usual glare of reception was more ardent than of custom as Monsieur Caloche approached. If every "foreign adventurer" supposed he might come and loaf upon Bogg, of Bogg & Company, because he was backed up by a letter from a respectable firm, Sir Matthew would soon let him find out he was mistaken! His glare intensified as the adventurous stripling glided with softest footfall to the very table where he was sitting, and stood exactly opposite to him. None so adventurous, however, but that his lips were white and his bloodless face a pitiful set-off to the cruelly prominent marks that disfigured it. There was a terror in Monsieur Caloche's expression apart from the awe inspired by Sir Matthew's glare which might have disarmed a butcher or even a mastiff. His large, soft eyes seemed to ache with repressed tears. They pleaded for him in a language more convincing than words, "I am friendless— I am a stranger— I am— " but no matter! They cried out for sympathy and protection, mutely and unconsciously.

But to Sir Matthew's perceptions visible terror had only one interpretation. It remained for him to "find out" Monsieur Caloche. He would "drop on to him

unawares" one of these days. He patted his hobby on the back, seeing a gratification for it in prospective, and entering shortly upon his customary stock of searching questions, incited his victim to reply cheerfully and promptly by looking him up and down with a frown of suspicion.

"What brought you 'ere?"

"Please?" said Monsieur Caloche, anxiously.

He had studied a vocabulary opening with "Goodday, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you this morning?" The rejoinder to which did not seem to fit in with Sir Matthew's special form of inquiry.

"What brought you 'ere, I say?" reiterated Sir Matthew, in a roar, as if deafness were the only impediment on the part of foreigners in general to a clear comprehension of our language.

"De sheep, Monsieur! La Reine Dorée," replied Monsieur Caloche, in low-toned, guttural, musical French.

"That ain't it," said Sir Matthew, scornfully. "What did you come 'ere for? What are you fit for? What can you do?"

Monsieur Caloche raised his plaintive eyes. His sad desolation was welling out of their inmost depths. He had surmounted the first emotion that had driven the blood to his heart at the outset, and the returning colour, softening the seams and scars in his cheeks, gave him a boyish bloom. It deepened as he answered with humility, "I will do what Monsieur will! I will do my possible!"

"I'll soon see how you shape," said Sir Matthew, irritated with himself for the apparent difficulty of thoroughly bullying the defenceless stranger. "I don't want any of your parley-vooing in my office— do you hear! I'll find you work— jolly quick, I can tell you! Can you mind sheep? Can you drive bullocks, eh? Can you put up a post and rail? You ain't worth your salt if you can't use your 'ands!"

He cast such a glance of withering contempt on the tapering white fingers with olive-shaped nails in front of him that Monsieur Caloche instinctively sheltered them in his hat. "Go and get your traps together! I'll find you a billet, never fear!"

"Mais, Monsieur—"

"Go and get your traps together, I say! You can come 'ere again in an hour. I'll find you a job up-country!" His peremptory gesture made any protest on the part of Monsieur Caloche utterly unavailing. There was nothing for him to do but to bow and to back in a bewildered way from the room. If the more sharp-eared of the clerks had not been in opportune contiguity to the ground-glass door during Sir Matthew's closing sentences, Monsieur Caloche would have gone away with the predominant impression that "Sir Bang" was an enragé, who disapproved of salt with mutton and beef, and was clamorous in his demands for "traps," which Monsieur Caloche, with a gleam of enlightenment in the midst of his heart-sickness and perplexity, was proud to remember meant "an

instrument for ensnaring animals." It was with a doubt he was too polite to express that he accepted the explanation tendered him by the clerks, and learned that if he "would strike while the iron is hot" he must come back in an hour's time with his portmanteau packed up. He was a lucky fellow, the juniors told him, to jump into a billet without any bother; they wished to the Lord they were in his shoes, and could be drafted off to the Bush at a moment's notice.

Perhaps it seemed to Monsieur Caloche that these congratulations were based on the Satanic philosophy of "making evil his good." But they brought with them a flavour of the human sympathy for which he was hungering. He bowed to the clerks all round before leaving, after the manner of a court-page in an opera. The hardiest of the juniors ran to the door after he was gone. Monsieur Caloche was trying to make head against the wind. The warm blast was bespattering his injured face. It seemed to revel in the pastime of filling it with grit. One small hand was spread in front of the eyes— the other was resolutely holding together the front of his long, light paletôt, which the rude wind had sportively thrown open. The junior was cheated of his fun. Somehow the sight did not strike him as being quite so funny as it ought to have been.

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THE station hands, in their own language, "gave Frenchy best." No difference of nationality could account for some of his eccentricities. As an instance, with the setting in of the darkness he regularly disappeared. It was supposed that he camped up a tree with the birds. The wit of the wool— shed surmised that "Froggy" slept with his relatives, and it would be found that he had "croaked" with them one of these odd times. Again, there were shearers ready to swear that he had "blubbered" on finding some sportive ticks on his neck. He was given odd jobs of wool-sorting to do, and was found to have a mania for washing the grease off his hands whenever there was an instant's respite. Another peculiarity was his aversion to blood. By some strange coincidence, he could never be found whenever there was any slaughtering on hand. The most plausible reason was always advanced for necessitating his presence in some far-distant part of the run. Equally he could never be induced to learn how to box— a favourite Sunday morning and summer evening pastime among the men. It seemed almost to hurt him when damage was done to one of the assembled noses. He would have been put down as a "cur" if it had not been for his pluck in the saddle, and for his gentle winning ways. His pluck, indeed, seemed all concentrated in his horsemanship. Employed as a boundary-rider, there was nothing he would not mount, and the station hands remarked, as a thing "that beat them once for all," that the "surliest devils" on the place hardly ever played up with him. He employed no arts. His bridle-hand was by no means

strong. Yet it remained a matter of fact that the least amenable of horses generally carried him as if they liked to bear his weight. No one being sufficiently learned to advance the hypothesis of magnetism, it was concluded that he carried a charm.

This power of touch extended to human beings. It was almost worth while spraining a joint or chopping at a finger to be bandaged by Monsieur Caloche's deft fingers. His horror of blood never stood in his way when there was a wound to be doctored. His supple hands, browned and strengthened by his outdoor work, had a tenderness and a delicacy in their way of going to work that made the sufferer feel soothed and halfhealed by their contact. It was the same with his manipulation of things. There was a refinement in his disposition of the rough surroundings that made them look different after he had been among them.

And not understood, jeered at, petted, pitied alternately— with no confidant of more sympathetic comprehension than the horse he bestrode— was Monsieur Caloche absolutely miserable? Granting that it were so, there was no one to find it out. His brown eyes had such an habitually wistful expression, he might have been born with it. Very trifles brought a fleeting light into them— a reminiscence, perhaps that, while it crowned him with "sorrow's crown of sorrow," was yet a reflection of some past joy. He took refuge in his ignorance of the language directly he was questioned as to his bygone life. An embarrassed little shrug, half apologetic, but powerfully conclusive, was the only answer the most curious examiner could elicit.

It was perceived that he had a strong objection to looking in the glass, and invariably lowered his eyes on passing the cracked and uncompromising fragment of mirror supported on two nails against the planking that walled the rough, attached kitchen. So decided was this aversion that it was only when Bill, the blacksmith, asked him chaffingly for a lock of his hair that he perceived with confusion how wantonly his silken curls were rioting round his neck and temples. He cut them off on the spot, displaying the transparent skin beneath. Contrasted with the clear tan that had overspread his scarred cheeks and forehead, it was white as freshly-drawn milk.

He was set down on the whole as given to moping; but, taking him all round, the general sentiment was favourable to him. Possibly it was with some pitiful prompting of the sort that the working manager sent him out of the way one still morning, when Sir Matthew's buggy, creaking under the unwelcome preponderance of Sir Matthew himself, was discerned on its slow approach to the homestead. A most peaceful morning for the initiation of Sir Matthew's blustering presence! The sparse gum-leaves hung as motionless on their branches as if they were waiting to be photographed. Their shadows on the yellowing grass seemed painted into the soil. The sky was as tranquil as the plain

below. The smoke from the homestead reared itself aloft in a long, thinly-drawn column of grey. A morning of heat and repose, when even the sunlight does not frolic and all nature toasts itself, quietly content. The dogs lay blinking at full length, their tails beating the earth with lazy, measured thump. The sheep seemed rooted to the patches of shade, apathetic as though no one wore flannel vests or ate mutton-chops. Only the mingled voices of wild birds and multitudinous insects were upraised in a blended monotony of subdued sounds. Not a morning to be devoted to toil! Rather, perchance, to a glimmering perception of a golden age, when sensation meant bliss more than pain, and to be was to enjoy.

But to the head of the firm of Bogg & Company, taking note of scattered thistles and straggling wire fencing, warmth and sunshine signified only dry weather. Dry weather clearly implied a fault somewhere, for which somebody must be called to account. Sir Matthew had the memory of a strategist. Underlying all considerations of shorthorns and merinos was the recollection of a timid foreign lad to be suspected for his shy, bewildered air— to be suspected again for his slim white hands— to be doubly suspected and utterly condemned for his graceful bearing, his appealing eyes, that even now Sir Matthew could see with their soft lashes drooping over them as he fronted them in his darkened office in Flinders Lane. A scapegoat for dry weather, for obtrusive thistles, for straggling fencing! A waif of foreign scum to be found out! Bogg had promised himself that he would "drop on to him unawares." Physically, Bogg was carried over the ground by a fast trotter; spiritually, he was borne along on his hobby, ambling towards its promised gratification with airy speed.

The working manager, being probably of Bacon's way of thinking, that "dissimulation is but a faint kind of policy," did not, in his own words, entirely "knuckle down" to Sir Matthew. His name was Blunt— he was proud to say it— and he would show you he could make his name good if you "crossed' him. Yet Blunt could bear a good deal of "crossing" when it came to the point. Within certain limits, he concluded that the side on which his bread was buttered was worth keeping uppermost, at the cost of some hard words from his employer.

And he kept it carefully uppermost on this especial morning, when the quietude of the balmy atmosphere was broken by Sir Matthew's growls. The head of the firm, capturing his manager at the door of the homestead, had required him to mount into the double-seated buggy with him. Blunt reckoned that these tours of inspection in the companionship of Bogg were more conducive to taking off flesh than a week's hard training. He listened with docility, nevertheless, to plaints and ratings— was it not a fact that his yearly salaries had already made a nest-egg of large proportions?— and might have listened to the end, if an evil chance had not filled him with a sudden foreboding. For, pricking his way over the plain, after the manner of Spencer's

knight, Monsieur Caloche, on a fleet, newly broken-in two— year-old, was riding towards them. Blunt could feel that Sir Matthew's eyes were sending out sparks of wrath. For the first time in his life he hazarded an uncalled-for opinion.

"He's a good working chap, that, sir!"— indicating by a jerk of the head that the lad now galloping across the turf was the subject of his remark.

"Ah!" said Sir Matthew.

It was all he said, but it was more than enough.

Blunt fidgeted uneasily. What power possessed the boy to make him show off his riding at this juncture? If he could have stopped him, or turned him back, or waved him off!— but his will was impotent.

Monsieur Caloche, well back in the saddle, his brown eyes shining, his disfigured face flushed and glowing, with wide felt-hat drawn closely over his smooth small head, with slender knees close pressed to the horse's flanks, came riding on, jumping small logs, bending with flexible joints under straggling branches, never pausing in his reckless course, until on a sudden he found himself almost in front of the buggy, and, reining up, was confronted in full by the savage gleam of Sir Matthew's eyes. It was with the old scared expression that he pulled off his wideawake and bared his head, black and silky as a young retriever's. Sir Matthew knew how to respond to the boy's greeting. He stood up in the buggy and shook his fist at him; his voice, hoarse from the work he had given it that morning, coming out with rasping intensity.

"What the devil do you mean by riding my 'orses' tails off, eh?"

Monsieur Caloche, in his confusion, straining to catch the full meaning of the question, looked fearfully round at the hind-quarters of the two-year— old, as if some hitherto unknown phenomenon peculiar to Australian horses might in fact have suddenly left them tailless.

But the tail was doing such good service against the flies at the moment of his observations, that, reassured, he turned his wistful gaze upon Sir Matthew.

"Monsieur," he began apologetically, "permit that I explain it to you. I did ga-lopp."

"You can ga-lopp to hell!" said Sir Matthew with furious mimicry. "I'll teach you to ruin my 'orses' legs!"

Blunt saw him lift his whip and strike Monsieur Caloche on the chest. The boy turned so unnaturally white that the manager looked to see him reel in his saddle. But he only swayed forward and slipped to the ground on his feet. Sir Matthew, sitting down again in the buggy with an uncomfortable sensation of some undue excess it might have been as well to recall, saw this white face for the flash of an instant's space, saw its desperation, its shame, its trembling lips; then he was aware that the two— year-old stood riderless in front of him, and away in the distance the figure of a lad was speeding through the timber, one

hand held against his chest, his hat gone and he unheeding, palpably sobbing and crying in his loneliness and defencelessness as he stumbled blindly on.

Run-away boys, I fear, call forth very little solicitude in any heart but a mother's. A cat may be nine-lived, but a boy's life is centuple. He seems only to think it worth keeping after the best part of it is gone. Boys run away from schools, from offices, from stations, without exciting more than an ominous prognostication that they will go to the bad. According to Sir Matthew's inference, Monsieur Caloche had "gone to the bad" long ago— ergo, it was well to be rid of him. This being so, what utterly inconsistent crank had laid hold of the head of the great firm of Bogg & Company, and tortured him through a lengthy afternoon and everlasting night, with the vision of two despairing eyes and a scarred white face? Even his hobby cried out against him complainingly. It was not for this that it had borne him prancing along. Not to confront him night and day with eyes so distressful that he could see nothing else. Would it be always so? Would they shine mournfully out of the dim recesses of his gloomy office in Flinders Lane, as they shone here in the wild bush on all sides of him?— so relentlessly sad that it would have been a relief to see them change into the vindictive eyes of the Furies who gave chase to Orestes. There was clearly only one remedy against such a fate, and that was to change the nature of the expression which haunted him by calling up another in its place. But how and when!

Sir Matthew prowled around the homestead the second morning after Monsieur Caloche's flight, in a manner unaccountable to himself. That he should return "possessed" to his elaborate warehouse, where he would be alone all day— and his house of magnificent desolation, where he would be alone all night, was fast becoming a matter of impossibility. What sums out of all proportion would he not have forfeited to have seen the white-faced foreign lad, and to be able to pay him out for the discomfort he was causing him— instead of being bothered by the sight of his "cursed belongings" at every turn! He could not go into the stable without seeing some of his gimcracks; when he went blustering into the kitchen it was to stumble over a pair of miniature boots, and a short curl of hair, in silken rings, fell off the ledge at his very feet. There was only one thing to be done! Consulting with Blunt, clumsily enough, for nothing short of desperation would have induced Sir Matthew to approach the topic of Monsieur Caloche, he learned that nothing had been seen or heard of the lad since the moment of his running away.

"And 'twasn't in the direction of the township, neither," added Blunt, gravely. "I doubt the sun'll have made him stupid, and he'll have camped down some place on the run."

Blunt's insinuation anent the sun was sheer artifice, for Blunt, in his private heart, did not endorse his own suggestion in the least degree. It was his belief

that the lad had struck a shepherd's hut, and was keeping (with a show of common-sense he had not credited him with) out of the way of his savage employer. But it was worth while making use of the artifice to see Sir Matthew's ill-concealed uneasiness. Hardly the same Sir Matthew, in any sense, as the bullying growler who had driven by his side not two days ago. For this morning the double-seated buggy was the scene of neither plaints nor abuse. Quietly over the bush track— where last Monsieur Caloche, with hand to his breast, had run sobbing along— the two men drove, their wheels passing over a wideawake hat, lying neglected and dusty in the road. For more than an hour and a half they followed the track, the dusty soil that had been witness to the boy's flight still indicating at intervals traces of a small footprint. The oppressive calm of the atmosphere seemed to have left even the ridges of dust undisturbed. Blunt reflected that it must have been "rough on a fellow" to run all that way in the burning sun. It perplexed him, moreover, to remember that the shepherd's hut would be now far in their rear. Perhaps it was with a newly-born sense of uneasiness on his own account that he flicked his whip and made the trotter "go," for no comment could be expected from Sir Matthew, sitting in complete silence by his side.

To Blunt's discerning eyes the last of the footprints seemed to occur right in the middle of the track. On either side was the plain. Ostensibly, Sir Matthew had come that way to look at the sheep. There was, accordingly, every reason for turning to the right and driving towards a belt of timber some hundred yards away, and there were apparently more forcible reasons still for making for a particular tree— a straggling tree, with some pretensions to a meagre shade, the sight of which called forth an ejaculation, not entirely coherent, from Blunt.

Sir Matthew saw the cause of Blunt's ejaculation— a recumbent figure that had probably reached "the quiet haven of us all"— it lay so still. But whether quiet or no, it would seem that to disturb its peace was a matter of life or death to Sir Matthew Bogg. Yet surely here was satiety of the fullest for his hobby! Had he not "dropped on to the 'foreign adventurer' unawares?" So unawares, in fact, that Monsieur Caloche never heeded his presence, or the presence of his working manager, but lay with a glaze on his half-closed eyes in stiff unconcern at their feet.

The clerks and juniors in the outer office of the great firm of Bogg & Co. would have been at some loss to recognise their chief in the livid man who knelt by the dead lad's side. He wanted to feel his heart, it appeared, but his trembling fingers failed him. Blunt comprehended the gesture. Whatever of tenderness Monsieur Caloche had expended in his short lifetime was repaid by the gentleness with which the working manager passed his hand under the boy's rigid neck. It was with a shake of the head that seemed to Sir Matthew like the fiat of his doom that Blunt unbuttoned Monsieur Caloche's vest and discovered

the fair, white throat beneath. Unbuttoning still— with tremulous fingers, and a strange apprehension creeping chillily over him— the manager saw the open vest fall loosely asunder, and then—

Yes; then it was proven that Sir Matthew's hobby had gone its extremest length. Though it could hardly have been rapture at its great triumph that filled his eyes with such a strange expression of horror as he stood looking fearfully down on the corpse at his feet. For he had, in point of fact, "dropped on to it unawares;" but it was no longer Monsieur Caloche he had "dropped on to," but a girl with breast of marble, bared in its cold whiteness to the open daylight, and to his ardent gaze. Bared, without any protest from the half-closed eyes, unconcerned behind the filmy veil which glazed them. A virgin breast, spotless in hue, save for a narrow purple streak, marking it in a dark line from the collar-bone downwards. Sir Matthew knew, and the working manager knew, and the child they called Monsieur Caloche had known, by whose hand the mark had been imprinted. It seemed to Sir Matthew that a similar mark, red hot like a brand, must now burn on his own forehead for ever. For what if the hungry Australian sun, and emotion, and exhaustion had been the actual cause of the girl's death? he acknowledged, in the bitterness of his heart, that the "cause of the cause" was his own bloodstained hand.

It must have been poor satisfaction to his hobby, after this, to note that Blunt had found a tiny pocket-book on the person of the corpse, filled with minute foreign handwriting. Of which nothing could be made! For, with one exception, it was filled with French quotations, all of the same tenor— all pointing to the one conclusion— and clearly proving (if it has not been proved already) that a woman who loses her beauty loses her all. The English quotation will be known to some readers of Shakespeare, "So beauty blemished once for ever's lost!" Affixed to it was the faintly-traced signature of Henriette Caloche.

So here was a sort of insight into the mystery. The "foreign adventurer" might be exonerated after all. No baser designs need be laid at the door of dead "Monsieur Caloche" than the design of hiding the loss which had deprived her of all glory in her sex. If, indeed, the loss were a real one! For beauty is more than skin-deep, although Monsieur Caloche had not known it. It is of the bone, and the fibre, and the nerves that thrill through the brain. It is of the form and the texture too, as any one would have allowed who scrutinised the body prone in the dust. Even the cruel scars seemed merciful now, and relaxed their hold on the chiselled features, as though "eloquent, just, and mightie Death" would suffer no hand but his own to dally with his possession.

It is only in Christmas stories, I am afraid, where, in deference to so rollicking a season, everything is bound to come right in the end, that people's natures are revolutionised in a night, and from narrow-minded villains they become open-hearted seraphs of charity. Still, it is on record of the first Henry that from the

time of the sinking of the White Ship "he never smiled again." I cannot say that Sir Matthew was never known to smile, in his old sour way, or that he never growled or scolded, in his old bullying fashion, after the discovery of Monsieur Caloche's body. But he was none the less a changed man. The outside world might rightly conjecture that henceforth a slender, mournful-eyed shadow would walk by his side through life. But what can the outside world know of the refinement of mental anguish that may be endured by a mind awakened too late? In Sir Matthew's case— relatively as well as positively. For constant contemplation of a woman's pleading eyes and a dead statuesque form might give rise to imaginings that it would be maddening to dwell upon. What a wealth of caresses those stiff little hands had had it in their power to bestow! What a power of lighting up the solemnest office, and— be sure— the greatest, dreariest house, was latent in those dejected eyes!

Brooding is proverbially bad for the liver. Sir Matthew died of the liver complaint, and his will was cited as an instance of the eccentricity of a wealthy Australian, who, never having been in France, left the bulk of his money to the purpose of constructing and maintaining a magnificent wing to a smallpox hospital in the south of France. It was stipulated that it should be called the "Henriette" wing, and is, I believe, greatly admired by visitors from all parts of the world.

28: A Twilight Adventure

Melville Davisson Post

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The "Uncle Abner" detective stories are set in pre-Civil War Virginia

IT WAS A STRANGE scene that we approached. Before a crossroad leading into a grove of beech trees, a man sat on his horse with a rifle across his saddle. He did not speak until we were before him in the road, and then his words were sinister.

"Ride on!" he said.

But my Uncle Abner did not ride on. He pulled up his big chestnut and looked calmly at the man.

"You speak like one having authority," he said.

The man answered with an oath.

"Ride on, or you'll get into trouble!"

"I am accustomed to trouble," replied my uncle with great composure; "you must give me a better reason."

"I'll give you hell!" growled the man. "Ride on!"

Abner's eyes traveled over the speaker with a deliberate scrutiny.

"It is not yours to give," he said, "although possibly to receive. Are the roads of Virginia held by arms?"

"This one is," replied the man.

"I think not," replied my Uncle Abner, and, touching his horse with his heel, he turned into the crossroad.

The man seized his weapon, and I heard the hammer click under his thumb. Abner must have heard it, too, but he did not turn his broad back. He only called to me in his usual matter-of-fact voice:

"Go on, Martin; I will overtake you."

The man brought his gun up to his middle, but he did not shoot. He was like all those who undertake to command obedience without having first determined precisely what they will do if their orders are disregarded. He was prepared to threaten with desperate words, but not to support that threat with a desperate act, and he hung there uncertain, cursing under his breath.

I would have gone on as my uncle had told me to do, but now the man came to a decision.

"No, by God!" he said; "if he goes in, you go in, too!"

And he seized my bridle and turned my horse into the crossroad; then he followed.

There is a long twilight in these hills. The sun departs, but the day remains. A sort of weird, dim, elfin day, that dawns at sunset, and envelops and possesses the world. The land is full of light, but it is the light of no heavenly sun. It is a light equal everywhere, as though the earth strove to illumine itself, and succeeded with that labor.

The stars are not yet out. Now and then a pale moon rides in the sky, but it has no power, and the light is not from it. The wind is usually gone; the air is soft, and the fragrance of the fields fills it like a perfume. The noises of the day and of the creatures that go about by day cease, and the noises of the night and of the creatures that haunt the night begin. The bat swoops and circles in the maddest action, but without a sound. The eye sees him, but the ear hears nothing. The whippoorwill begins his plaintive cry, and one hears, but does not see.

It is a world that we do not understand, for we are creatures of the sun, and we are fearful lest we come upon things at work here, of which we have no experience, and that may be able to justify themselves against our reason. And so a man falls into silence when he travels in this twilight, and he looks and listens with his senses out on guard.

It was an old wagon-road that we entered, with the grass growing between the ruts. The horses traveled without a sound until we began to enter a grove of ancient beech trees; then the dead leaves cracked and rustled. Abner did not look behind him, and so he did not know that I came. He knew that someone followed, but he doubtless took it for the sentinel in the road. And I did not speak.

The man with the cocked gun rode grimly behind me. I did not know whither we went or to what end. We might be shot down from behind a tree or murdered in our saddles. It was not a land where men took desperate measures upon a triviality. And I knew that Abner rode into something that little men, lacking courage, would gladly have stayed out of.

Presently my ear caught a sound, or, rather, a confused mingling of sounds, as of men digging in the earth. It was faint, and some distance beyond us in the heart of the beech woods, but as we traveled the sound increased and I could distinguish the strokes of the mattock, and the thrust of the shovel and the clatter of the earth on the dry leaves.

These sounds seemed at first to be before us, and then, a little later, off on our right hand. And finally, through the gray boles of the beech trees in the lowland, I saw two men at work digging a pit. They had just begun their work, for there was little earth thrown out. But there was a great heap of leaves that they had cleared away, and heavy cakes of the baked crust that the mattocks had pried up. The length of the pit lay at right angles to the road, and the men were working with their backs toward us. They were in their shirts and trousers,

and the heavy mottled shadows thrown by the beech limbs hovered on their backs and shoulders like a flock of night birds. The earth was baked and hard; the mattock rang on it, and among the noises of their work they did not hear us.

I saw Abner look off at this strange labor, his head half turned, but he did not stop and we went on. The old wagon-road made a turn into the low ground. I heard the sound of horses, and a moment later we came upon a dozen men.

I shall not easily forget that scene. The beech trees had been deadened by some settler who had chopped a ring around them, and they stood gaunt with a few tattered leaves, letting the weird twilight in. Some of the men stood about, others sat on the fallen trees, and others in their saddles. But upon every man of that grim company there was the air and aspect of one who waits for something to be finished.

An old man with a heavy iron-gray beard smoked a pipe, puffing out great mouthfuls of smoke with a sort of deliberate energy; another whittled a stick, cutting a bull with horns, and shaping his work with the nicest care; and still another traced letters on the pommel of his saddle with his thumbnail.

A little to one side a great pronged beech thrust out a gray arm, and under it two men sat on their horses, their elbows strapped to their bodies and their mouths gagged with a saddlecloth. And behind them a man in his saddle was working with a colt halter, unraveling the twine that bound the headpiece and seeking thereby to get a greater length of rope.

This was the scene when I caught it first. But a moment later, when my uncle rode into it, the thing burst into furious life. Men sprang up, caught his horse by the bit and covered him with weapons. Some one called for the sentinel who rode behind me, and he galloped up. For a moment there was confusion. Then the big man who had smoked with such deliberation called out my uncle's name, others repeated it, and the panic was gone. But a ring of stern, determined faces were around him and before his horse, and with the passing of the flash of action there passed no whit of the grim purpose upon which these men were set.

My uncle looked about him.

"Lemuel Arnold," he said; "Nicholas Vance, Hiram Ward, you here!"

As my uncle named these men I knew them. They were cattle grazers. Ward was the big man with the pipe. The men with them were their renters and drovers.

Their lands lay nearest to the mountains. The geographical position made for feudal customs and a certain independence of action. They were on the border, they were accustomed to say, and had to take care of themselves. And it ought to be written that they did take care of themselves with courage and decision, and on occasion they also took care of Virginia.

Their fathers had pushed the frontier of the dominion northward and westward and had held the land. They had fought the savage single-handed and desperately, by his own methods and with his own weapons. Ruthless and merciless, eye for eye and tooth for tooth, they returned what they were given.

They did not send to Virginia for militia when the savage came; they fought him at their doors, and followed him through the forest, and took their toll of death. They were hardier than he was, and their hands were heavier and bloodier, until the old men in the tribes of the Ohio Valley forbade these raids because they cost too much, and turned the war parties south into Kentucky.

Certain historians have written severely of these men and their ruthless methods, and prattled of humane warfare; but they wrote nursing their soft spines in the security of a civilization which these men's hands had builded, and their words are hollow.

"Abner," said Ward, "let me speak plainly. We have got an account to settle with a couple of cattle thieves and we are not going to be interfered with. Cattle stealing and murder have got to stop in these hills. We've had enough of it."

"Well," replied my uncle, "I am the last man in Virginia to interfere with that. We have all had enough of it, and we are all determined that it must cease. But how do you propose to end it?"

"With a rope," said Ward.

"It is a good way," replied Abner, "when it is done the right way."

"What do you mean by the right way?" said Ward.

"I mean," answered my uncle, "that we have all agreed to a way and we ought to stick to our agreement. Now, I want to help you to put down cattle stealing and murder, but I want also to keep my word."

"And how have you given your word?"

"In the same way that you have given yours," said Abner, "and as every man here has given his. Our fathers found out that they could not manage the assassin and the thief when every man undertook to act for himself, so they got together and agreed upon a certain way to do these things. Now, we have indorsed what they agreed to, and promised to obey it, and I for one would like to keep my promise."

The big man's face was puzzled. Now it cleared.

"Hell!" he said. "You mean the law?"

"Call it what you like," replied Abner; "it is merely the agreement of everybody to do certain things in a certain way."

The man made a decisive gesture with a jerk of his head.

"Well," he said, "we're going to do this thing our own way."

My uncle's face became thoughtful.

"Then," he said, "you will injure some innocent people."

"You mean these two blacklegs?"

And Ward indicated the prisoners with a gesture of his thumb.

My uncle lifted his face and looked at the two men some distance away beneath the great beech, as though he had but now observed them.

"I was not thinking of them," he answered. "I was thinking that if men like you and Lemuel Arnold and Nicholas Vance violate the law, lesser men will follow your example, and as you justify your act for security, they will justify theirs for revenge and plunder. And so the law will go to pieces and a lot of weak and innocent people who depend upon it for security will be left unprotected."

These were words that I have remembered, because they put the danger of lynch law in a light I had not thought of. But I saw that they would not move these determined men. Their blood was up and they received them coldly.

"Abner," said Ward, "we are not going to argue this thing with you. There are times when men have to take the law into their own hands. We live here at the foot of the mountains. Our cattle are stolen and run across the border into Maryland. We are tired of it and we intend to stop it.

"Our lives and our property are menaced by a set of reckless desperate devils that we have determined to hunt down and hang to the first tree in sight. We did not send for you. You pushed your way in here; and now, if you are afraid of breaking the law, you can ride on, because we are going to break it-if to hang a pair of murderous devils is to break it."

I was astonished at my uncle's decision.

"Well," he said, "if the law must be broken, I will stay and help you break it!"

"Very well," replied Ward; "but don't get a wrong notion in your head, Abner. If you choose to stay, you put yourself on a footing with everybody else."

"And that is precisely what I want to do," replied Abner, "but as matters stand now, every man here has an advantage over me."

"What advantage, Abner?" said Ward.

"The advantage," answered my uncle, "that he has heard all the evidence against your prisoners and is convinced that they are guilty."

"If that is all the advantage, Abner," replied Ward, "you shall not be denied it. There has been so much cattle stealing here of late that our people living on the border finally got together and determined to stop every drove going up into the mountains that wasn't accompanied by somebody that we knew was all right. This afternoon one of my men reported a little bunch of about a hundred steers on the road, and I stopped it. These two men were driving the cattle. I inquired if the cattle belonged to them and they replied that they were not the owners, but that they had been hired to take the drove over into Maryland. I did not know the men, and as they met my inquiries with oaths and imprecations, I was suspicious of them. I demanded the name of the owner who had hired them to drive the cattle. They said it was none of my damned business and went

on. I raised the county. We overtook them, turned their cattle into a field, and brought them back until we could find out who the drove belonged to. On the road we met Bowers."

He turned and indicated the man who was working with the rope halter.

I knew the man. He was a cattle shipper, somewhat involved in debt, but who managed to buy and sell and somehow keep his head above water.

"He told us the truth. Yesterday evening he had gone over on the Stone-Coal to look at Daniel Coopman's cattle. He had heard that some grazer from your county, Abner, was on the way up to buy the cattle for stockers. He wanted to get in ahead of your man, so he left home that evening and got to Coopman's place about sundown. He took a short cut on foot over the hill, and when he came out he saw a man on the opposite ridge where the road runs, ride away. The man seemed to have been sitting on his horse looking down into the little valley where Coopman's house stands. Bowers went down to the house, but Coopman was not there. The door was open, and Bowers says the house looked as though Coopman had just gone out of it and might come back any moment. There was no one about, because Coopman's wife had gone on a visit to her daughter, over the mountains, and the old man was alone.

"Bowers thought Coopman was out showing the cattle to the man whom he had just seen ride off, so he went out to the pasture field to look for him. He could not find him and he could not find the cattle. He came back to the house to wait until Coopman should come in. He sat down on the porch. As he sat there he noticed that the porch had been scrubbed and was still wet. He looked at it and saw that it had been scrubbed only at one place before the door. This seemed to him a little peculiar, and he wondered why Coopman had scrubbed his porch only in one place. He got up and as he went toward the door he saw that the jamb of the door was splintered at a point about halfway up. He examined this splintered place and presently discovered that it was a bullet hole.

"This alarmed him, and he went out into the yard. There he saw a wagon track leading away from the house toward the road. In the weeds he found Coopman's watch. He picked it up and put it into his pocket. It was a big silver watch, with Coopman's name on it, and attached to it was a buckskin string. He followed the track to the gate, where it entered the road. He discovered then that the cattle had also passed through this gate. It was now night. Bowers went back, got Coopman's saddle horse out of the stable, rode him home, and followed the track of the cattle this morning, but he saw no trace of the drove until we met him."

"What did Shifflet and Twiggs say to this story?" inquired Abner.

"They did not hear it," answered Ward; "Bowers did not talk before them. He rode aside with us when we met him."

"Did Shifflet and Twiggs know Bowers?" said Abner.

"I don't know," replied Ward; "their talk was so foul when we stopped the drove that we had to tie their mouths up."

"Is that all?" said Abner.

Ward swore a great oath.

"No!" he said. "Do you think we would hang men on that? From what Bowers told us, we thought Shifflet and Twiggs had killed Daniel Coopman and driven off his cattle; but we wanted to be certain of it, so we set out to discover what they had done with Coopman's body after they had killed him and what they had done with the wagon. We followed the trail of the drove down to the Valley River. No wagon had crossed, but on the other side we found that a wagon and a drove of cattle had turned out of the road and gone along the basin of the river for about a mile through the woods. And there in a bend of the river we found where these devils had camped."

"There had been a great fire of logs very near to the river, but none of the ashes of this fire remained. From a circular space some twelve feet in diameter the ashes had all been shoveled off, the marks of the shovel being distinct. In the center of the place where this fire had burned the ground had been scraped clean, but near the edges there were some traces of cinders and the ground was blackened. In the river at this point, just opposite the remains of the fire, was a natural washout or hole. We made a raft of logs, cut a pole with a fork on the end and dragged the river. We found most of the wagon iron, all showing the effect of fire. Then we fastened a tin bucket to a pole and fished the washout. We brought lip cinders, buttons, buckles and pieces of bone."

Ward paused.

"That settled it, and we came back here to swing the devils up."

My uncle had listened very carefully, and now he spoke.

"What did the man pay Twiggs and Shifflet?" said my uncle. "Did they tell you that when you stopped the drove?"

"Now that," answered Ward, "was another piece of damning evidence. When we searched the men we found a pocket-book on Shifflet with a hundred and fifteen dollars and some odd cents. It was Daniel Coopman's pocketbook, because there was an old tax receipt in it that had slipped down between the leather and the lining.

"We asked Shifflet where he got it, and he said that the fifteen dollars and the change was his own money and that the hundred had been paid to him by the man who had hired them to drive the cattle. He explained his possession of the pocketbook by saying that this man had the money in it, and when he went to pay them he said that they might just as well take it, too."

"Who was this man?" said Abner.

"They will not tell who he was."

"Why not?"

"Now, Abner," cried Ward, "why not, indeed! Because there never was any such man. The story is a lie out of the whole cloth. Those two devils are guilty as hell. The proof is all dead against them."

"Well," replied my uncle, "what circumstantial evidence proves, depends a good deal on how you get started. It is a somewhat dangerous road to the truth, because all the signboards have a curious trick of pointing in the direction that you are going. Now, a man will never realize this unless he turns around and starts back, then he will see, to his amazement that the signboards have also turned. But as long as his face is set one certain way, it is of no use to talk to him, he won't listen to you; and if he sees you going the other way, he will call you a fool."

"There is only one way in this case," said Ward.

"There are always two ways in every case," replied Abner, "that the suspected person is either guilty or innocent. You have started upon the theory that Shifflet and Twiggs are guilty. Now, suppose you had started the other way, what then?"

"Well," said Ward, "what then?"

"This, then," continued Abner. "You stop Shifflet and Twiggs on the road with Daniel Coopman's cattle, and they tell you that a man has hired them to drive this drove into Maryland. You believe that and start out to find the man. You find Bowers!"

Bowers went deadly white.

"For God's sake, Abner!" he said.

But my uncle was merciless and he drove in the conclusion.

"What then?"

There was no answer, but the faces of the men about my uncle turned toward the man whose trembling hands fingered the rope that he was preparing for another.

"But the things we found, Abner?" said Ward.

"What do they prove," continued my uncle, "now that the signboards are turned? That somebody killed Daniel Coopman and drove off his cattle, and afterward destroyed the body and the wagon in which it was hauled away... But who did that?... The men who were driving Daniel Coopman's cattle, or the man who was riding Daniel Coopman's horse, and carrying Daniel Coopman's watch in his pocket?"

Ward's face was a study in expression. "Ah!" cried Abner. "Remember that the signboards have turned about. And what do they point to if we read them on the way we are going now? The man who killed Coopman was afraid to be found with the cattle, so he hired Twiggs and Shifflet to drive them into Maryland for him and follows on another road."

"But his story, Abner?" said Ward.

"And what of it?" replied my uncle. "He is taken and he must explain how he comes by the horse that he rides, and the watch that he carries, and he must find the criminal. Well, he tells you a tale to fit the facts that you will find when you go back to look, and he gives you Shifflet and Twiggs to hang."

I never saw a man in more mortal terror than Jacob Bowers. He sat in his saddle like a man bewildered.

"My God!" he said, and again he repeated it, and again.

And he had cause for that terror on him. My uncle was stern and ruthless. The pendulum had swung the other way, and the lawless monster that Bowers had allied was now turning on himself. He saw it and his joints were unhinged with fear.

A voice crashed out of the ring of desperate men, uttering the changed opinion.

"By God!" it cried, "we've got the right man now."

And one caught the rope out of Bowers' hand.

But my Uncle Abner rode in on them.

"Are you sure about that?" he said.

"Sure!" they echoed. "You have shown it yourself, Abner."

"No," replied my uncle, "I have not shown it. I have shown merely whither circumstantial evidence leads us when we go hotfoot after a theory. Bowers says that there was a man on the hill above Daniel Coopman's house, and this man will know that he did not kill Daniel Coopman and that his story is the truth."

They laughed in my uncle's face.

"Do you believe that there was any such person?"

My uncle seemed to increase in stature, and his voice became big and dominant.

"I do," he said, "because I am the man!"

They had got their lesson, and we rode out with Shifflet and Twiggs to a legal trial.

End