PAST MASTERS 228

Beatrice Grimshaw
H. P. Lovecraft
S. Baring-Gold
Guy Thorne
Edgar Jepson
"Sapper"
Ambrose Bierce
Frederick W. Bechdolt
Maxwell Struthers Burt

and more

PAST MASTERS 228

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

11 July 2025

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1: The Hunted Man

Vernon Ralston

fl 1909-1916

Gippsland Mercury (Sale, Vic) 11 June 1915

MR. WICKS looked across at his junior partner, Mr. Harris. The latter gentleman was reading the war news with intense interest.

"If I wasn't forty-five," remarked Mr. Harris, "I'd chuck this bally show and go and have a whack at William myself."

Mr. Wicks frowned disapprovingly. He detested the levity of his junior partner. The familiar reference to the business as a "bally show" and the Kaiser as William shocked his sense of propriety. Had not Mr. Harris been one of the best order-getters in England the partnership would have been dissolved long since.

"It is the duty of some of us," said Mr. Wicks loftily, "to stay at home and maintain that commercial warfare which is, after all, more important to the Empire.

"It's a deuced sight less interesting," said Mr. Harris.

"I don't like to distract your attention from that newspaper," proceeded the senior partner, "but there is an important point which must be settled— the management of our new West End branch."

"Jubb's the man," said Mr. Harris. "Bright young chap who'd make things hum."

"Unfortunately Jubb, as you are aware, has joined the new army. He might have consulted me first."

"Well, put someone in temporarily and let Jubb have it when he comes back."

"But this European struggle may prove to be a protracted one. The man who organises the new branch must be permanently in charge of it. I have promised to keep Jubb's place open for him, but I cannot allow our business interests to be jeopardised. I am thinking of appointing Rogers."

"He's a worm— an overtime-working worm."

"The fact that he devotes himself to our interests ought not to tell against him. He is a most industrious man. He spends all his time at evening classes. If we wish to fight the Germans commercially we must do it with their own weapons. Rogers must certainly have the appointment. It will carry with it an extra fifty pounds a years. Dear me! I must go to the bank. I think you might inform Rogers of our decision."

Mr. Harris crumpled up his newspaper and throw it into the wastepaper basket.

"By the way," he said, "I thought you made it a rule to have married men as branch managers."

"Certainly— that is a rule."

"Of course, Rogers is not married. I'd better give him a hint to get married at once."

"Oh, yes! Amongst the other advantages of marriage it is a great safeguard to employers. I believe 90 per cent. of embezzlers are unmarried men."

"Right. I'll see that Rogers gets married."

A few minutes later Mr. Harris rang his bell for Rogers.

Mr. Rogers was a young man with large round spectacles, a pallid complexion and an expression of intense industry. He came into the office at a rush to show his devotion to his employers.

"Don't hurry so, Mr. Rogers. It upsets my nerves."

"I beg pardon, sir. I was anxious that you should not have to wait."

"Sit down, Mr. Rogers. We have decided to make you manager of our new West End branch. You'll get an extra fifty pounds a year."

Mr. Rogers' pallid face grew mottled— his nearest approximation to a flush.

"I assure you, sir, that I am deeply grateful, and that I will use every effort to show that the firm's confidence in me is not misplaced."

Mr. Harris eyed the unsuspicious young man complacently. "Of course it is necessary that a branch manager should be married. Mr. Wicks makes a great point of that. Unless, of course, you have been secretly married—"

"I beg pardon, sir. I should never think of hiding anything from the firm."

"Well, perhaps you are engaged."

"I beg pardon, sir, I am not even engaged. I had not contemplated matrimony till this moment."

"Well, contemplate it at once. There's nothing easier. The country is chock full of nice girls. A ring, a visit to a hire-purchase furniture establishment and another to a church, and there you are. I assure you that it is a lot more trouble to get a divorce."

"But, sir—"

"I have given you all the information in my power, Mr. Rogers. Really, I can't spend all my time discussing your love-affairs in business hours. Mr. Wicks wishes you to get married. That is all I need say."

Mr. Harris chuckled when the spectacled youth had withdrawn and rang for Miss Tyrer, the senior typiste. He dictated a few letters to her, and then said, "By the way, Miss Tyrer, you are engaged to Mr. Jubb, aren't you? I think he said that you were going to be married when he came back from the war."

Miss Tyrer colored prettily. "I wanted to tell you that Mr. Wicks has decided about the managership of that new West End branch."

The girl's eyes sparkled.

"I'm sorry, but he thinks that Mr. Rogers has claims to the post."

"Mr. Rogers!" said the girl, scornfully.

"Yes; I have no say in the matter. In our partnership agreement there is a clause stating that all appointments are to be made by the senior partner. Otherwise there would have been a temporary appo'ntment through the war and Mr. Judd ehould have it on his return. But Mr. Wicks makes it a point that Mr. Rogers should get married."

"I don't know who would marry him," snapped the girl.

"He is not my ideal of what a husband should be. By the way, Miss Tyrer, some of the junior typistes are a little disposed to flirt, are they not? I am reflecting on your control of them, but, after all, human nature is human nature. I think a mild hint given to your staff that Mr. Rogers should be made love to might be desirable." There was a twinkle in Mr. Harris's eyes.

"This is, of course, a confidential conversation, Miss Tyrer. Tell those flappers of yours to make the running strong."

That night Mr. Rogers went home proudly. Having no one else to tell, he confided in his landlady.

"Well, I'm sure that if anyone deserves it it's you, Mr. Rogers," she said. "I never had a lodger who was more regular, or burnt less gas, or was more of a perfect gentleman about the house. Fifty pounds a year extra— well, it's a good thing I'm not an envious woman like that Mrs. Proctor next door. She nearly took to her bed when my aunt died and left me 'er best horse-hair suite."

"But there is one stipulation. I have to get married. Hitherto I have been so absorbed in my career that I have never contemplated matrimony as a possibility, Mrs. Tonks."

A calculating look came, into Mrs. Tonks' eye. "And a very good 'usband you'd make for anybody. Now my Dear 'usband would 'ave been better unmarried. He aggravated me more than you can say by 'is 'abit of drinking up the morning's milk when he come 'ome at night, which was generally by the first morning train. Now you'd be a prize."

"I hope I should make a good husband," said Mr. Rogers modestly.

Mrs. Tonks hurried downstairs and found her daughter gracefully reposing on the sofa reading *Millgirl and Marchioness*.

"Now, then, do up your 'air and put a clean blouse on. You've got to take up Mr. Rogers' tea. He's got another fifty quid a year, and his boss has told him to get married. There's a chance for you. Bless you! Anyone could get a mug like him."

"Well, ma, he's not much to look at."

"You'll not mind about that when you're married. There's no better 'usband to look at than the one 'oo brings 'ome plenty of money on Saturday regular. He's no 'abits. He'll be getting five pounds a week now. You don't find chances like that waiting on the doorstep every day. I can't do with you lazy young girls. You wouldn't 'ave 'ad to tell me twice about a chance like that at your age."

"Right-o!" said Miss Tonks, putting her hair un.

"Look 'ere, Mabel," proceeded Mrs. Tonks, "you'll 'ave to meet 'im a good deal more than 'alf-way." "Bless you, ma, do you think I've never talked to a feller before?"

A few minutes later Miss Tonks bore up the tea-tray. She was resplendent in a ruby-colored blouse.

"There, Mr. Rogers, I'm sorry if I've kept you waiting, but I do like to see that everything's quite hot. Business gentlemen need looking after when they've had all that strain all day."

"Ah! you can scarcely realise what the strain of business life is," said Mr. Rogers portentously.

"Oh, I can. I notice a lot more than you think. Before now when I have seen you come in all worn-out I've quite cried. I've said to ma many a time, 'He'll never live if he keeps on like that.' Oh, excuse me, there's a bit of fluff on the collar of your coat." She leant forward across Mr. Rogers. Her hair-net brushed his face and entangled itself on the points of his collar. "Oh! dear, do undo me now, Mr. Rogers."

"Ah, yes, certainly," said Mr. Rogers nervously.

The voice of Mrs. Tonks came from the landing in playful reproof.

"Now, now, you two."

"Oh! dear," said Miss Tonks, when released, "Ma will have such a lot to say when I go downstairs. She's sure to hint we've been kissing."

"I wasn't," protested Mr. Rogers.

"Of course, we know it was an accident, but ma is such a one to think."

"I am sure such an idea never entered my head," said Mr. Rogers.

"I can't stand those bold men who just rush to kiss a girl as if they owned her. Now, I don't know whether I ought to promise to take your tray away when you've finished. Mother will smile so."

"Oh, don't trouble. You can clear when I've gone out."

"Perhaps it would be safer," murmured Miss Tonks as she bent over the tea-plot, placing a plump waist in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Rogers' right arm. She went downstairs to her mother.

"He's that shy!" she said, contemptuously. "Didn't I say that you've got to meet him a lot more than half-way. He's going to that Poly-something-or-other to-night for lessons. You meet 'im outside and make him take you 'ome."

Mr. Rogers finished his tea and left the house quietly. He felt safer when he was in the advanced German class— he preferred advanced German to advancing young women. When he emerged at nine o'clock his mind was so full of the eccentricities of the German verbs in conjunction with prepositions that he had forgotten the existence of Miss Tonks. Suddenly a voice said,

"Why, it's Mr. Rogers. Who would have thought of meeting you here? I've just been to see an aunt of mine and was coming home. It is lucky I met you. I'm not quite sure of my way to the Tube Station, and I hate asking strange gentlemen. It seems so forward."

"Oh, dear me! There's my weak ankle given now. I hate these wretched slippery pavements. If you would not mind letting me take your arm."

Again the reluctant Rogers had to offer an arm. The maiden leant very heavily on it. Sometimes her head almost rested on his shoulder. Nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand would have encircled her waist with a protecting-arm— but Mr. Rogers was a spectacled Joseph. After the Tube journey was over they proceeded towards their abode. The ankle grew worse and worse, the weight of the maiden-more and more. Mr. Rogers, to avoid embarrassing subjects, discoursed on such of the heavenly host as chanced to be visible in the mist.

"I do love to hear you talk about the stars," said Miss Tonks. "You are so eloquent that I could listen for hours and hours."

When they came up to the house, Mrs. Tonks was waiting on the doorstep.

"Ah, this is a load off my mind," she said. "I was. so afraid something 'ad 'appened to Mabel. I was just thinking of going to the police-station. 'Aving a pretty daughter is a great responsibility, Mr. Rogers. Still, If she's been with you I know it's all right. But you're artful. I thought Mabel 'ad gone to see 'er aunt and you'd gone to your classes."

"I assure you, Mrs. Tonks, that I met your daughter quite by chance when I left the Polytechnic."

"That's your story, Mr. Rogers. Well, well, young people will be young people. I shouldn't like to swear on the book that all the things I told my mother was quite true when I was our Mabel's age. Still, a nice, steady young gentleman like you I can't find fault with."

"It was quite an accident, I assure you."

"Get along with you and your accidents. Well, I like you shy gentlemen better than the bold ones."

Mr. Rogers felt quite relieved when he got away to business the next morning. But even at business trouble awaited him. The junior typistes hovered around him like flies around a honeypot. They came to ask him how to spell something. Mr. Harris chanced to pass through the office, and noticed a girl bending over Mr. Rogers' desk.

"Mr. Rogers," he said sternly, "I wish to call your attention to the fact that this is a business house, and frivolous conversations must not be carried on here."

"I beg pardon, sir, but I—"

"I reqfl-re no explanations. I can use my eyes, Mr. Rogers."

Still in spite even of this stern reproof the girls were not kept away. Mr. Rogers received more attention from the typistes that day than he had received during the previous six months. Frivolous fellow-clerks whistled "When we are married how happy we'll be," as the typistes whispered to him. Every moment seemed to have its own agony.

At last, just as the office was about to close, the office-boy entered and said, "Mr. Rogers, there's a lady outside wants to see you."

"Who is she?"

"She said you'd know."

A wag whistled and passed a hat around, pretending that he was making a collection for a wedding prepe?mt.

Reluctantly Mr. Rogers went to the door. There was Miss Tonks waiting.

"Oh, Mr. Rogers, it's so trying to have to come here. The men do stare so. Two or three of them looked deliberately around the door."

"What do you want?" said the nervous Rogers.

"Mother's obliged to go out, and she asked me to bring you word to get your tea in town if you'll be good enough. She thinks the neighbors might talk if I was left alone tb get your tea."

"All right, all right. Excuse me, I'm busy."

Just then Mr. Harris emerged from the office. He gazed with a touch of amusement at the confused Rogers and the substantial Miss Tonks.

"Ah, I see you're going on in the right way, Mr. Rogers. I don't know when congratulations will be in order, but when it's time you may rely on mine."

With a polite bow to Miss Tonks he passed on.

"Is that your boss?" said Miss Tonks. "That was a nice speech he made, wasn't it? I'm so glad he likes me. Do you know any, good tea-shops around here. I really feel as if I need a cup of tea."

"I've got to stay late here," said Mr. Rogers. "I sha'n't be going out for hours yet. There is an excellent tea-shop across the way. Excuse me. Good afternoon."

The next morning— Miss Tonks being a late riser had not hunted her prey around the breakfast table— Mr. Rogers went to business in subdued spirits. Before the letters were opened a typiste patted him on the head and told him that she always loved brown hair that stood upright. It was the last straw. The poor young man was desperate. Directly Mr. Harris arrived he went in to see him.

"I can guess your errand," said the junior partner smilingly. "You want a little extra holiday. If Mr. Wicks is agreeable I think we can stretch a point when a honeymoon's in question."

"If you please, sir, it's nothing of the kind. In fact, sir, since I was promoted I've had no peace in the office or out of it. If you will excuse me mentioning it, sir, there are so many women wanting to marry me that I can't get on with my work."

"You must only marry one, Mr. Rogers. Mr. Wicks has very strong prejudices against bigamy. Make your choice and settle it."

"But really, sir, after this last day or two I don't want to marry anybody. The typistes here won't leave me alone, and I shall have to leave my lodgings because the landlady's daughter is always after me. And it would cost a lot more than the extra fifty pounds a year if I got married."

"You are quite correct, Rogers. Marriage is the most expensive thing under the sun. If we were all bachelors the Post Office Savings Bank would be crowded out with deposits."

"So if you'll excuse me, sir, I'd rather not take the management of the new branch if I've got to get married."

"Mr. Wicks does not like people to shirk responsibility. Let me see how it can be managed for you. Ah, Mr. Wicks is a most patriotic Englishman. If you went to him and told him that Mr. Jubb had the best right to the post and that you did not wish to stand in his way whilst he was fighting for his country I have no doubt that he would consent to you taking the post temporarily as a bachelor."

"I'm sure I thank you very much, sir."

"You're quite welcome, quite welcome, Rogers. Ah, I hear Wicks on the stairs. Just tell him now whilst I have a word with Miss Tyrer."

"If you will excuse me, sir," said Mr. Rogers, as the senior partner entered, "I wanted to speak to you about that West End appointment. I feel that Mr. Jubb ought to have had it, and I don't like him to suffer loss whilst he is working for the country. Would it be quite convenient for you if I occupied the post temporarily till his return?"

Mr. Wicks gazed scornfully at the clerk.

"Yes. Write to Mr. Jubb and tell him that the new post will be at his disposal when he returns. And, Mr. Rogers, we must all make sacrifices for the Empire. In such a case you will understand that I can give no advance in salary to an employe who is merely holding a post temporarily. That's all."

Mr. Wicks turned to his junior partner a few minutes later.

"Jubb shall have that appointment. That Rogers seems to me to lack pluck. He only undertakes to occupy the post temporarily. Of course, I've told him that in such a case we could pay no advance. If the war lasts a year that will save us

fifty pounds. I am disappointed in Rogers. Like many of the young men to-day, he shirks responsibility."

The junior partner smiled.

"Yes, but make it plural. I think he's shirking responsibilities."

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2: Trick Ending

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 29 Feb 1948

WE SAT at a table in a Hollywood restaurant.

My companion was a noted lawyer, a little man with a big mind.

"Mark," he said, "I read your story last Sunday. It wasn't too bad, but why must all your yarns have trick endings? Is it a law?"

I smiled.

"No, my dear Harry," I replied. "It's simply that I'm being paid for those trick finishes. Overpaid, in fact. Any objections?"

"None," he admitted. "I will agree that your sort of ending has some minor virtues. But I'd be willing to bet that, in a real life story, you wouldn't be able to furnish the punch ending."

"Try me," I suggested. "Just hand me a set of actual circumstances. And I'll bet you a 10-spot I'll give you the exact ending."

The lawyer grinned. "You're on," he said. "I'll tell you a story. A real story. It happened a few years ago. So, if you don't mind, I'll switch the names and leave the facts as they are."

"Oke," I returned happily. "Fire away."

"OUT near Pasadena," he began, "there is a man who is the head of an extremely reputable family. I'll call him Mr. Jones. He is sighty daffy on the subject of propriety, and he actualy supervises the lives of his family to make certain they never get their names in the papers.

"Six years ago, his only son was married to a girl named Clara. Her background had been thoroughly investigated by Jones, senior, and he approved. So Jimmy and Clara were married.

"Those kids were very much in love, and things went along beautifully until one evening, when the old man learned his wife had invited a lady named Maxine to be a house guest.

"Whereupon Mr. Jones went into a righteous rage. What did his wife mean by inviting this Maxine person? Didn't she know that Maxine was a divorced woman? And didn't his wife know that this Maxine might poison the minds of their children with scandal?"

I clapped my nands. "This is a cinch!" I yipped. "The old man was Maxine's sweetie!"

"Please, Mark." The lawyer shook his head. "Give me a chance to finish, will you? In spite of the old man's argument, Maxine came to the house— and it wasn't long before she was taking walks with young Johnny Jones. And they

were long walks, too. Young Johnny stopped paying attention to his wife, and Clara could do little about it.

"In the family, nothing was mentioned about it. But the old man, terribly afraid of any publicity, did a lot of private thinking— and one day he hit upon a rather smart idea. In town, he had a male secretary with a creamy, vacuous face. This chap's name was Brookstone.

"Well, without spilling the beans to Brookstone, he invited the young man out to his Pasadena estate for a week. On the way out, he told the mystified Brookstone that there was a brilliant woman named Maxine stopping at the house who needed company and gallant attention.

"They reached the house, and, when Johnny and Maxine returned from one of their 'walks,' the old man introduced Brookstone to Maxine. He lied beautifully, telling the woman that Brookstone was a wealthy real estate owner who was fairly dying for lack of romance.

"Now follow me carefully: Brookstone played his part well. He didn't quite understand, but he was accustomed to following orders. He and Maxine galloped all over the heather together— and young Johnny Jones suddenly discovered he was about as important to Maxine as an eleventh toe.

"And that, Mark, is as much of the story as I am going to tell. Now you give me the ending."

I TURNED on my most pitying smile, generally reserved for actors.

"My dear Harry," I said, "your story is one of the oldest on record. Here is the finish: The secretary, Brookstone, actually fell in love with Maxine and married her.

"The son, Johnny, suddenly awakened from his silly escapade, begged Clara's forgiveness, and went back to her loving arms to sin no more.

"The old man, Mr. Jones, was so happy about it all that he went on a second honeymoon with his wife. That's about all. Am I correct?"

The lawyer nodded. "Perfect," he replied.

I bowed prettily.

"Perfect," he repeated, "for fiction. But in real life it didn't turn out that way."

I stopped bowing. "No?" I queried.

"Well," continued the lawyer softly, "Mr. Jones, the old man, phoned me a week later. And in great agitation, he told me that his ungrateful secretary, Brookstone, had run off the night before— with Clara Jones!"

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3: Images of Friendship

Maxwell Bodenheim

1892-1954

The Little Review, New York, April, 1917

In Past Masters 209 *there was a short story by controversial bohemian poet and author Maxwell Bodenheim. I had no idea what his poetry was like, but I have since found this. He got $25 for it, which was pretty good money in 1917.*

Grey drooping-shouldered bushes scrape the edges
Of bending swirls of yellow-white flowers.
So do my thoughts meet the wind-scattered color of you.

The green shadowed trance of the water
Is splintered to little white-tasseled awakenings
By the beat of long black oars.
So do your words cut the massed smoothness of thoughts of you.

Split, brown-blue clouds press into each-other
Over hills dressed in mute, clinging haze.
So do my thoughts slowly form over the draped mystery of you.

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4: Lost Behind The Ranges

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Australian Women's Weekly 13 July 1935

"Something lost behind the ranges,
Something waiting for you— go!"
—Kipling.

HOMBRON BLUFF, big and rugged as its name, stood up to eastward; and to southward rose abruptly Mount Brown, where no one ever went... Who was Hombron, and after whom were Mount Brown and the Brown River called?

Nobby Gus, otherwise, and in other climes, Augustus Noble, did not know.

He only knew that, following one day his luck and the paces of his old dun horse, he had happened upon this forgotten, or never known, piece of country, under Hombron and Brown. Afar off, like Moses looking on the Promised Land, he had seen the greenness and the blue-blackness of it, and the silver of its streams; grassland and forests, watered, rich.

Miles and miles, and nobody there.

It happens at times, in New Guinea. There is so much of that great island continent, and— after forty years of settlement— so few white people in it, that large bits, here and there, may be left lying round like forgotten washing on a colossal line; nobody's business to take it in....

Gus felt his heart swell into his throat when, next day, after camping on an open tableland, and shooting a small wild pig for supper, he broke camp at dawn, and went down into that unknown bit of country, determined to take it for his own.

LONELY? A hundred times no. There was not a swoop, a springing bluff, of the Astrolabe Ranges, that did not call to him; not a swamp pheasant that didn't blow bubbles to him personally; not a giant Gaura pigeon, pacing like Queen Elizabeth, robed and crowned, along the dusk alleys of the forest, that did not welcome him as king.

Homeless all his life, a little Cockney who had drifted to New Guinea via Australia and got caged in the accounting department of a store, just as if he'd still been something in Cannon Street, Gus Noble felt, from that day forth, at home.

He did not tell the store; did not go back on Monday. He did not trouble the Lands Office. Only, he bought groceries from a native-owned booth, riding a day to do it, and spending his newly-paid month's salary on the purchases. He hired

a carrier or two from a village; took his stuff to the spot where he meant to live, paid the boys with tobacco, and said good-bye to everything.

You can do such things, in New Guinea.

It was good there. Very good. You got some sweet potato cuttings and some pineapple suckers from the native village a day's ride away, and planted them. You had your house, plaited bamboo, grass thatched, beside the river; all the materials for making it or mending it within reach of your hand. Bamboo made your bed, your furniture, your water buckets. There was wild fruit in the forest, wild yams on the edge of the bush. The game was wonderful, untouched; a cartridge a day more than provided you with meat. You knew how to make beer out of the pineapples, and you did. There was native tobacco.

It was the most peaceful and most pleasant place you'd ever seen, ever imagined, this side of heaven. Somebody else, not you, would have turned it into plantations— all this fertile, black-soil, river valley— would have put a lorry road in, made fences, generally bedevilled it and spoiled it.

BUT not you. Not you, who had never been free, done what you liked, before. Managers, companies, accounts (cursed accounts), hours to keep, reports to make. No!

Nobby Gus, amazedly, realised that even in the late 'twenties of the twentieth century a man could live for himself— reach out and take a piece of land and be forever free. And, in the valley behind the ranges, there were all the delights that (he had thought) only rich people could afford. Sleeping as long as you chose. Eating when you wanted. Shooting and fishing as much as ever you liked. Being bothered by nobody, ordered by nobody, doing all day long exactly what you pleased....

Nobby, who had never heard of a certain Henry David Thoreau, was carrying out his principles more faithfully than many who have made the pilgrimage to Walden Pond.

He had no books, and did not miss them; he had never been much of a reader. As for amusements, "life itself had become his amusement," and that was enough.

I could tell you a thousand things about this life behind-the-ranges of Augustus Noble's, but you know them all already. You used to love that life, on Sundays and Saturday afternoons, when you were ten, and there was a wood, and a stream running through it, mysterious, unexplored. But when you grew up you made yourself believe it was all nonsense....

Nobby, being simpler and wiser than you, knew that it was not.

It came about that one day, exploring (for he loved to explore; he loved to think, rightly or wrongly, that, near as Port Moresby might be, there wasn't a white man who had trodden this particular valley save himself), he came upon a

delightful, secret little stream running fast and clear over a gravelly bed, among whitish-colored rocks.

Nobby didn't know how to read the letters that the stream spelled out, any more than he understood the meaning of the different rocks that surrounded it and made its bed. But, just for fun he went home and got his dinner plate and a piece of tin, and amused himself washing gravel.

In the course of the afternoon he found four small, dull, yellow nuggets. Even Nobby knew what they were. Talk of gold has always run, like a glittering thread, through the chatter of the New Guinea world. You may not find an Edie Creek— indeed, it is practically certain that you will not— but talk of Edie Creeks, prophecies of new Yoddas will fill you with the pleasant hope that some day it may be your turn. That on a morning, or an evening you may dive into an unknown river bed, and rise up glittering with pure gold-as did an astonished discoverer, years ago. Or that the hoofs of your horse may bring down a stone, and picking it up you may see the threads of your destiny running through it, yellow and bright as sun upon a stream.

Nobby's horse was not in the picture; he was winding the threads of destiny in another direction that day. Nobby himself, having lighted on the thing for which all New Guinea continually thirsts, sat down and considered seriously.

THE upshot of his consideration was that he concealed all trace of his work, took the nuggets home, and hid them in a very clever place— under his home-stuffed kapok mattress— and decided that he would go to the stream once in a way as he felt inclined, and gather here and there a nugget, till he had a little store. Then he'd go down to the nearest Queensland port and buy some things he needed. A better gun than the trade shot-gun. Two guns, maybe. Fishing gear. A few clothes.

He couldn't think of anything else he wanted very much, and he was possessed by a teeth-clenching determination to tell nobody, keep his secret. "They" would come if they knew; "they" would tear up the place and make camps, and bring hundreds of unwilling, half-rebellious black carriers. And put up an hotel, and have a plane buzzing about— there was nothing he hated like planes. Behind-the-ranges wouldn't be his any more. It would be Theirs.

No!

It might have been the thought of all that; it might have been the excitement and fatigue of a busier day than he had known for long; it might have been the heart-searching sound of the great Gaura pigeons' golden coo-ing from the forest, where now they were making court to one another, bowing, minuetting, stately as lords and ladies— but it is certain that, that evening, Nobby Gus felt sad.

As Adam knew himself to be naked, and shuddered at the thought, Augustus Noble, for the first time, felt himself alone.

Even the old horse, Bob, was gone; had been away for days. Gus missed him a good deal; but he hoped the kindly brute would come back. It was nice to see Bob's dun-colored, bony hips sticking up out of the kuru-kuru meadows, to hear him, in the night-time, chumping as he mumbled grass. Some call from the horses' centaur-God— some dream of wonderful, fleet mares with satin skins— had taken him away. He'd return, by and by.

It was now the south-east season, the kindly winter of New Guinea, when a silver wind blew all day long, and at night the skies, banded with pink and purple and cold blue, curiously mimicked the frosty evenings of other lands. Mornings, the water in the tumbling creek was chill; night time, one drew a blanket up and coiled down deliciously into the kapok bed, under which the growing store of nuggets bulked small and sharp against a man's hips as he lay....

Gus, in the last of the geranium-colored sunset, was standing on the hill behind his house, looking, as he always did at nightfall, half-despairingly, for Bob's return. "He was my mate," the little man said to himself. "I didn't think he'd've done me down."

And immediately, against the edge of dark, he saw that something moved.

"Bob!" he said joyfully. He ran to cut the last of his pineapples— the dun horse loved them. Then, with the fruit in his hand, he stood thinking. Was it Bob? The beast had looked huge, towering against the sky. Could there be things in this queer New Guinea that a man didn't know about? He'd heard of devil pigs on Mount Victoria, things as big as horses. Could there be things like horses, tall as elephants? Maybe giraffes? Gus' knowledge of zoology was small.

He could hear it now, and it sounded— it did sound— very like Bob. Clumpet, clumpet. Coming slowly, as if the horse was tired. Gus lit his hurricane lamp, went to the door of the hut, and stood waiting.

Clumpet, clump, clumpet. Up to the little house came Bob, in transparent dusk, and stopped dead, his neck out-stretched, his head hanging, as if he had travelled far.

BUT Augustus Noble had no eyes for Bob. The pineapple slid from his hand. His mouth opened. On the threshold of the hut he stood frozen. A woman had dropped down from Bob's back, and stood swaying with weariness, looking at him; at his small, slope-shouldered figure; at his kindly, rabbit face with the unshorn chin; at his boots, his shirt, the lantern he held in his hand.

"She upped and downed me," Gus said to himself afterwards, "like as if I was the chap they found alongside of the corpse in the liberry, and she was the C.I.D."

In the same moment, by the same flickering orange light, he looked at her, and this was what he saw. A woman, not young, maybe of middle age. Opulent figure (what Gus would have called "crummy") clad in a stained, fine frock. Eyes of an extraordinary greenish blue, that went through you so that you could "fair feel the 'oles of them in the back of your 'ed." Features hard, battered, once handsome. A curious mass of yellow-red hair piled so high on the top of her hatless head that she seemed to be wearing a beehive.

Gus, looking at her, and bemused with astonishment, found himself saying the first thing that came into his mind;

"It'd've bin a pity to shingle that."

She said, with curious intensity: "I'd cut his liver out of him if he tried." The sentence seemed to lack something; what, Gus for the moment could not consider, because he had seen the woman's feet, and they called forth from him an instant cry of dismay. Her shoes were worn to bits, and the toes that stuck out of them were bleeding.

"Yes," she said, nodding as he looked at the feet in horror. "If I hadn't come upon that horse of yours this morning, and got on to him, and chucked at him to go home, the crows would have been picking my eyes to-night. I didn't think," she said, "we were ever going to get anywhere."

She looked at him defiantly, and dropped on the ground.

When he had found the pineapple spirit, cursing his clumsiness and waste, and poured a jorum of it down her throat, she seemed better; was able to sit up. He took the wallaby stew off the fire and gave her his plate and spoon. She ate furiously, and while she ate he brought water from the stream and bathed her broken feet. Afterwards he bandaged them with strips of his second shirt.

"Like something in the Bible, cursed if it ain't," he thought. And he was pleased.

Bob had munched his pineapple and departed. The moon was up. The night was very still. Somewhere close at hand the creek went whispering, and the land wind, rising, began to stir in the grasses.

The woman, with a sigh, leaned back against the wall, and Gus said to her:

"Are you lost?"

He hadn't meant anything; only to ask if she had become bushed among the innumerable hills and valleys, all alike, that for many miles surround the settled districts of Port Moresby. Plenty of people had been bushed like that. Once, an Austrian Archduke.

But she pushed herself forward on her hands, and her eyes again went through him, only a foot from his face.

"WHAT do you mean?"

she said, drawing quick breaths. With-out waiting for an answer, she sank back.

"Don' mean anything," he was protesting. "Wanted to know if you were—"

But she was not listening She did not see him. God alone knew what she did see, with those great eyes of hers, glaring at the wall, looking through it, through the seas, the countries, and the years.

BY and by she struck one hand across her eyes, and when she took it away the fingers were wet.

"You're an innocent, I take it," she said, making nothing of her emotion.

Gus wondered if he were an innocent; what an innocent exactly was. He thought, on the whole, he was as fly as most. But this woman, with the queer, deep voice, and the eyes and the hands— white hands they were, that hadn't done much work; torn and stained by rough journeying, but real lady's hands- this woman seemed to think him something of a child.

She took his bed, took his house, and very soon, indeed, his heart. He asked her no questions. He was bemused, mad. She seemed to know so many things of which he had never heard; you couldn't understand half of her talk-and she had ways with her ways

"They would've drew an Emperor off his throne," Gus Noble said to himself Carelessly, with one finger, as it were, she drew him. And on the morning after one mad night, Nobby Gus, with his Cockney decency, his Ealing conscientiousness, came to her as she stood binding up her marvellous ropes of hair, under a cottonwood tree, and asked her, not without a lump in his throat— maybe for it meant the ending of his secret— would she, please, name the day.

Verena (that was the name she had given him— no more) paused a moment in her twisting and pinning. Her deep-set eyes, that seemed to hold all possible human experience in their green-blue depths, scanned him up and down.

"Are you making fun of me?" she asked.

He had already learned that she could fly into fits of unexplained swift rage. Hastily, he told her that he didn't mean to kid her, so help him Bob; he'd've put his 'ed under her 'eels any day if she said the word.

"I believe you would," she said, in that strangely-cultured accent of hers, that now and than broke into raucous coarseness. "Well, what do you want? Haven't you—?"

He said hastily that he only wanted to do the proper thing. Would she come with him to Port Moresby, and have the parson turn them off?

"I wouldn't do you down," he said earnestly, his five feet five drawn up to look as much like six feet as possible. "I'm not that kind, Verena, And I'd make you a good 'usband. My oath," he added, using an Australianism that had taken his fancy.

Now she looked strangely, and he thought she was going to laugh-or cry, maybe. Was she so pleased as all that? Maybe he was a better-looking man than he had fancied— than the girls had led him to suppose. He'd always known there was something in him that they didn't see. He'd always thought there would be a woman, some day— a wonderfully beautiful woman— and she'd love him like the princesses loved the young American who was better than any Prince, in the stories. Did Verena fancy him like that? Somehow, he wasn't quite sure.

You were never sure of Verena, in any way you could mention.

SHE said now: "Thanks, Gus. Will you put on the billycan; I'd rather like a cup of tea."

Was that accepting a man, or was it not?

He made the tea; he cooked her breakfast, and brought it to her, where she sat under the shady dome of the cottonwood.

"Would you like," he said earnestly, "for me to put up another little 'ouse, till we could be going to Port?"

At that she did have hysterics; she laughed and laughed till she spilled the tea all over him. But she said never a word, and Nobby Gus was left with his axe in his hand, uncertain whether to begin the building or not.

At all events, he thought, there'd be no harm in cutting a few eucalyptus trees— that straight, thin sort that grew down from the creek. And some bamboo for walls. He'd take a clearing knife.

Alone in the secret valley of which none knew but himself, his thoughts began to stray from woodman's work. He had not been down into the creek since Verena came; that was ten days ago. Hardly, even, had he thought of it. Lust of gold, the pioneer's chief vice, had little hold on Nobby.

But now he remembered his mornings spent washing dish after dish; the little dull-bright nuggets that rewarded him. The things they stood for— if he could keep them to himself.

IF he went to Port and made an honest woman of Verena, brought her back here, and set up house, maybe they'd want more and more of the nuggets. People would find out about the discovery, somehow, even if she did not tell. He thought she would not, but how could you be sure? A few months in New Guinea had taught him that gold, like love, cannot be hidden long.

"She don't know nothing about it," he thought, as he tramped homeward, carrying a load of cut bamboo. "What would she do if she did?"

But he could not fix his attention on the gold. It did not seem to matter compared with the wonder that had fallen upon him from the skies; the marvel of Verena's kindness.

Mounting the spur that led towards the hut, he stopped, mouth open, eyes 6taring and ears strained. What had he heard— the whinny of another horse, answering Bob's friendly whicker? Yes. It was no fancy. There went Bob, cantering like a two-year-old, and there was the other horse, a bright bay, grazing below the house. A saddle was on the bay horse's back, girths loosened, and a bridle, bit undone, was in his mouth.

Never in this world will the clever people believe in, understand, the occasional cleverness of the stupid. Nobody in Port would have credited Nobby with the spark of inspiration that told him, immediately and without doubt, who the rider of the bay horse must be.

"It'd be the feller 'oom she said she'd have the guts out of if he cut it," was Nobby Gus's reaction. Until that moment he had not thought about, had scarce remembered. Verena's puzzling words.

The next idea that came into his mind was that the fellow must be a swine, whoever he was. To threaten Verena!

Quietly he laid his load of bamboo down, and turned, by a secret way, toward the cottage. There was trailing clematis there among the grasses; he plucked a spray of it and put it to his lips. It smelled, he thought, like tresses of warm hair, scented and honeysweet...

At the back of the hut there were gaps in the bamboo work. Lying down, you could look through; could hear almost as well as if you were inside.

The man who had come upon the horse was sitting on a box, and talking earnestly to Verena. He was a big chap, with thick black hair, red lips, and shoulders like the top of a field gate. Just the sort of man that Nobby couldn't bear. They bellowed, those men, they trampled over everyone; they got their own way.

He could not see Verena's face, but he could see her hands, those white, torn hands of hers. She was sitting with her back to him, on the kapok mattress, and her palms were set, thumb outward, at her sides, supporting her. The fingers were restless; they moved and crisped upon the rough cover of the mattress. But her voice, as she spoke, was unusually quiet.

What she said was strange, impossible to link on to anything that Nobby knew of her. It was something about a Darlinghurst flat, and someone who had lived there, who was now, it seemed, dead. A woman. Verena was saying, "I knew all along you liked her more, the hussy!"

"I don't allow that," he answered, staring at her in a hungry kind of way. "But even if I had, there was no call to do what you did."

"Now what was that?" she said, cheeky-like. Nobby couldn't understand what was up, but he saw that her breath was coming fast, for all her cheekiness.

The man (Gordon, she called him), leaned forward, and caught a handful of her hair.

"Leave go!" she cried.

"You'd better have had it off," he said in a threatening sort of way. "You might as well have run away with black paint on your face. That's what I told you when I saw you that night in the lift." He had let go her hair, sat staring, staring. "Somehow," he said, "I like you the better for what you did."

"I don't care what you like or don't," she said.

He went on, not heeding her. "A good plucked one, you always were; but to think of you pretending to be drowned overboard from the *Morinda* and swimming ashore, and going bush like this— well, all I can say is you deserve to be taken to the place from whence you came, and—"

"Sh!" she said, and suddenly grew white: Nobby knew it, though he couldn't see her face.

Gordon said: "Have you anything to drink?"

"Not a drop."

"OH, come, now, what about the man you're living with? I know about him. Why, I traced you through his horse. The natives saw you. They see everything. Lucky for you they don't mostly tell. Where's the chap, and where's his whisky?"

"He doesn't drink," she answered. "And you'd best not mention him with your black tongue, you snake."

He didn't answer. Nobby could see that he was one of those people— those people who ought to be killed— who never, never noticed what you said.

The man yawned furiously. "You're coming back with me," he said. "I'll have a camp till the sun goes down a bit. We can ride it in four hours, if one knows the right track. Now shut your mouth. You are. Why, girl, we've got an alibi, for all the gang will swear black and blue you were at the pictures. You were in too great a hurry, running off."

She was silent for a minute, and then said, "It was the look of it."

GORDON did not immediately answer. Outside the hut the clear wind rippled in the trees; a Gaura pigeon rang its golden bell. "The world is good," it seemed to say. "The world is innocent and all of us are happy."

"I'll get that fellow with a stick," Gordon said. "They're good eating The look of it, you said? Well, when you've seen as many as I've seen— ah, and done—"

"Shut your mouth," she said to him again, in a hurried sort of way. "I— I don't want to see you, or the like of you, again. I'm— I'm going to be married."

Gordon roared like a bull. "The devil you are," he said, holding his sides. "Who to?"

"To an honest man," she answered.

"To Jack Ketch first," he said. "Why, don't you see, girl, you daren't cross me. Not another word out of you, or I'll crack you one the same as I used to. Get off

that bed and let me have a lie down, and we'll go in an hour. It's as hot as the hobs of hell in this cursed country."

She kept her place.

"Get up," he said, dragging her arm.

Suddenly she got up and ran outside. "Look, look!" she cried. "Somebody coming! Anyone after you, Gordon?"

He followed her, with a slightly scared look on his handsome, drink-swollen face.

"No," he parried. "Not that I know— why, there's nothing. What does the woman—?"

Swift as a cat she flung herself on the mattress she had just left, on which she had now, for weeks, been sleeping. Gus saw her fingers working furiously, and then she was still. "She's in one of her paddies," he thought. "And no wonder!"

The man came back and flung her off, with a coarse jest. He spread his huge limbs on the bed. Almost immediately Gus heard him begin to snore.

On that Gus got up carefully, and foot by foot slithered away from the house. When he was a little way off, he saw Verena come running through the kuru-kuru grass and the trailing clematis. He waited till she came up.

"Don't come back," she told him, holding one hand to her breast. "There's a— there's a bad man there. Wait till he's gone. He'll go in an hour or so."

"He came after you?" Nobby knew, but he wanted to hear her say it.

She nodded. "But I'm not going with him," she flared out suddenly. "I used to be fond of him—" She checked on that; went on: "You're good to a woman. Gus."

"You'll stay with me? Get married and stop here, where there's nobody can't never say, 'Do this,' nor 'Don't do that,' nor 'Why did you done it,' to you or me?"

He was transformed; he had almost risen to eloquence, seeing her there, with her hands held out to him, and her little feet, those feet that he had tended "like something in the Bible," drawing nearer to him. In another moment he would have her in his arms, and he would never—

Suddenly, she sprang back. "He's coming," she said.

GORDON came lumbering down the hill, like a great bull to look at, with his sloped head and smouldering eyes. "So that's your fancy man," he said, and took no more notice of Gus. In his hand he held a crowned Gaura, slain with a stick. "You cook that for my dinner," he said to Verena. "I've heard they're fine eating. And illegal eating, too, which makes them better."

"Are you going to be here for dinner?" she demanded.

"I am. And maybe longer. There's something about the look of this bit of country that- Never mind." He pulled out a black cigar, bit it, lighted it and stuck it in one corner of his' mouth. He looked round him as if he had just bought the valley, and was estimating its worth.

The heart of Gus stood still. He knew that appraising, possessive look.

Gordon said, smoking with slow enjoyment, and talking, as it were, to himself: "There were women twice as fancy as you on the Rand— and the Klondyke— though I was a nipper then." He stared about him, hummed a little tune. "It would be down that creek I'd begin," he said. He was still speaking as if to himself; Gus and Verena might not have been there.

Gus swallowed two or three times quickly; his throat felt dry. So it had happened, the thing that he had feared, "They" had come; "they," very soon, would find out. He'd lose the little bit of gold, but, far worse, was the thought of losing the secret place "behind the ranges," of seeing it crowded with white men and black, carriers, storekeepers, prospectors, surveyors. Government men. Of the dull boom of dynamite, tearing up rocks where yellow candle-flowers aspired, and grasses that were thick with wild clematis. Of the end of everything, the murder of his peace.

Gus had not lived in New Guinea for nothing; he knew about reward claims But he had small faith in such. "They" would contrive to get the best of him. And what did he need more, in any case, than that which he had if only he were allowed to keep it?

Verena seemed quite pleased and that was the last straw. She took the bird from Gordon said she'd cook it by and by; told him he was a wonder to find out things and laughed quite naturally as she spoke.

"We'll go and look at the creek by and by," she said, "and first we'll get some more of these birds: there's a gun in the house."

She didn't ask Gus for the gun; she went away with scarcely a glance at him.

"Are Gauras so good?" Gus heard the man saying. And Verena answered, smacking her lips, "Prime! you'll eat one all to yourself."

They took the shot-gun and a sack for game bag; Gordon told Verena to carry the gun and bag and strolled on in front, hands swinging loose, staring as he went at the rock formations, and now and then kicking up a pebble, taking it in his fingers and closely examining it.

As for Augustus Noble, he went back to the deserted hut, and sat there on a box, his head between his hands. He wondered, as men wonder who have met with a grave accident, how it came that he was not suffering more. There was no pain at all. he was simply numb.

Above his head, as he sat by the open door, a hornbill passed, making a noise like a plane; from the forest came the flash of orange wings, and the shriek of a bird-of-paradise. He sat on. The shyer things of the bush, iguanas, clown-

faced and bandy-legged wallabys, with dangling paws and noses like terriers, went scrambling, hopping, past him where he sat. He did not move.

AFTER a long while there came the sound of a shot— one only. Then the noon silence, like a warm cloak, fell again, and wrapped the earth. Nobby Gus, his fingers picking against one another, began to think consciously. He wondered if it hurt to shoot yourself. If the trick of tying a string to the trigger and pulling it with your toe was difficult. One wouldn't want to bungle it....

The friar-birds began complaining in the tops of the trees; locusts chattered; the heat of the day declined. From the summits of the Astrolabe a small, cool breeze crept down. Nobby lifted his eyes to those speed-well painted peaks, thinking vaguely of an old song he had heard when he was a boy. Something about the blue Alsatian mountains, and how things passed away, but they watched and waited always.

Somebody said beside him, very quietly. "Gus!" And he jumped to his feet and flung out his arms.

When he let her go, he saw that she had remained very pale all through his hugging and kissing, and that there was a curious brightness in her eyes. As if she saw something that he didn't see, a long way off.

"Where's he gone?" Gus asked, although he did not care to know. It was enough that the sight of him was removed.

"Gone for good," she said. "We all go when we must," and then she laughed. He didn't know what she meant; he did not care. She was here, and the great brute was not.

Tending the supper fire by and by, he asked some trivial question. She did not hear him; she was talking foreign languages to herself; a habit she had, and one which filled him with wonder.

"What was you saying?" he asked fondly, as he put the fried meat upon a dish, and motioned to her to sit down at the bamboo table.

She said, very rapidly, something that sounded like. "Snay ke le premmy pass ke coot."

"By gum, you are a one," he told her. "And what does it mean?"

"It means," she said deliberately, helping herself, "it means that when you've done a thing once, there's not much difficulty about doing it again."

"Like ridin' a bike. Or shootin'," he illustrated.

"Like shooting," she said.

Next morning she told him. "Gus, I must go away. I have to take that horse back again."

"Didn't he ride it?"

"No. He went a shorter way."

"Where'll you take it to?"

"Same way. Look for old Bob about sundown."

He gave in to her over that, as he gave in about everything. He said he would have everything ready for her when she came back that night. She said only, "Look out for Bob," and kissed him, and sprang without his help astride upon the dun. Leading the bright bay horse, she rode away.

Later there was a shot, but Nobby did not hear it. In the bush, five miles from Behind-the-Ranges, the bright bay sank his head upon the ground and died.

At sundown Bob came back, tired and half-lame and riderless. About his neck was tied a little parcel wrapped in torn silk. Nobby, stabbed through with fear, plucked it off and opened it. There was no letter, no word. Only a little handful of dull, gold nuggets, wrapped round with a tress of hair as gold as they.

He stood there in the falling twilight, bemused. "But—" he said to himself, and again, "But—" she knew all along! She was hiding them from him!

His mind, not so dull now, flashed along the wires of a hundred hidden, half-remembered incidents. Almost he understood.

"I don't care," stoutly he said. "She was like a angel to me. She was a angel. And what she done, she done for me. And I'll wait till I see them little feet of hers come up the hill again, if it's ten years."

TEN years have now passed. Ten years are a long time. Verena Graham, alias Vera George, alias Marguerite de Ray, a "woman of prepossessing appearance," finds them pass wearily in the prison appropriately named Long Bay. Seven years, she expects it to be, in all. The "gang" stood by her in the matter of wilful murder of one Violet Clifford; the alibi proved to be watertight. But there were other charges, robbery with violence among them, and they "got" Verena unexpectedly on one of these.

It may be, when the years have passed, she will return to the hut behind the ranges, and find it empty, desolate. It may be she will not return at all.

Augustus Noble, sitting on the log outside his door on moonlight nights, looks up at the shining crescent that slips down the sky, above the bubbling Goldie River, and says to himself: "It was all as if the moon had dropped into me hands."

He has never heard of Endymion.

5: The Wrong Man's Daughter

Edgar Jepson

1863-1938

The London Magazine July 1922

Australian Women's Weekly, 12 August 1933

IT was no fault of mine that Susie married Bellamy Tong. I was away doing business in the South Seas— pearls. I came back to find her desperately in love with him— and he with her, for that matter. Love is a ticklish thing; and it is best to leave it alone. It would have been quite different if Susie had been a robust young woman. I should have stepped in briskly. A heart-break or two does not seem to do that type much harm. But she was not a robust young woman; she was delicate, almost fragile, and very tender-hearted and affectionate. A heart-break might almost be the death of her. I thought it wiser to sit tight and do nothing and say nothing.

I did not like Bellamy and I trusted him even less. He was altogether too beautiful to be true. Of course I knew that a man who is really fond of his daughter is apt to be prejudiced against anyone who wants to take her away from him. But Bellamy was most certainly not the type of man I should have chosen for a son-in-law. He was tall and slim and dark and pale with large brown eyes and black hair, brushed straight back without a parting, and when he laughed he showed a row of long white teeth. And he had had a fond mother

That was why he had not gone to a public school or to the war. He had spent the last three years of it in Ireland, the home of the safe.

And it was why he was always full of noble talk. It seemed to run out of him, and anything would turn on the tap. And when he talked he used to run his long white fingers through his hair, and his beautifully polished nails used to shine out against the black. He talked and talked and talked— mush. But how should a girl know it was mush? Susie thought it the most beautiful talk in the world. I dare say, as talk goes, it was. She couldn't know that you can tell next to nothing about a man from what he says. It's what he does. As far as I could make out Bellamy did nothing except talk nobly.

I hate sentimentalists. At bottom they are generally as hard as nails. I had very little doubt that the base of Bellamy Tong's beautiful nature was good hard diamond. If things didn't go exactly his way, his eyes would go nearly as hard as any I ever came across. And doing business— my kind of business— about the Seven Seas and in the bad lands. I have seen some hard ones.

But, as I say, I came back from the South Seas too late to do anything. Bellamy had been talking to Susie for six weeks, pushing his fingers through his hair, languishing at her with his large brown eyes. He could have talked the hind-

leg off a horse for a small bet, and he talked the heart out of her. The harm was done.

So I let her marry him.

But I gave him his warning. He came to me to ask my consent. He really seemed to like the job, and he did it in many of the noblest words I have ever heard. I did not hurry him. Why should I? I heard him out and gave my consent.

Then I said quite quietly: "From my point of view you're in the world just to make Susie happy. If you don't I'll give you hell."

He looked at me hard and with astonishment. He had lived too much in drawing-rooms ever to get much straight talk in his young life; and I feared that he did not know it now he had got it. Then he looked nobly hurt and said that it was the one desire of his heart.

"That's all right," I said. "It's the right desire; keep on desiring it."

He said that he would, and meant it, for at the time Susie's happiness and his own coincided. But all the same I had a feeling that he did not really understand me. My guess was that he was marrying the wrong man's daughter.

Susie came back from her honeymoon very fit, stronger than she had ever been, and as happy as the day is long— a bit too happy for my liking. It is dangerous to be too happy. You have to pay for it.

However, it seemed to be lasting quite well, so two months later I went off on a business jaunt to Mexico— gun-running— with a fairly easy mind. I came back three months later, pleased with myself and with a good deal of money. When I set eyes on Susie my heart sank plumb and fetched up with a jolt. She wasn't happy any longer.

She was fragile again, and pale, and in very poor spirits; and I did not like her eyes. They were large in her face, and frightened. I have seen something very like that kind of fright in the eyes of a man devilishly hard hit and hearing the wings of Azrael coming up. Susie was very hard hit. I was scared— absolutely scared.

I got busy and made inquiries. Of course women were Bellamy Tong's weakness, or, rather, not his weakness— Bellamy was that— but his diversion. There were two of them, a rackety girl and a cultured woman— married, and thirty, of course. He hadn't been careless about his philanderings; he simply hadn't tried to hide them from Susie. He had told her that he was expanding his emotional nature. Susie, who was much too proud to admit that she minded it, had told my sister that that was what he was doing.

I did not need telling that it was a perfectly infernal mess. It is always a very ticklish business to interfere between husband and wife; and this particular husband made it harder. It was my guess that if I made it hot for him the young hound would take it out of Susie. I decided to say nothing. After all, action is my long suit.

BUT that matter was so important to me that I did not feel quite sure of myself, and I took advice— at least I asked it. I went to my brother William, who is the parson of one of the most fashionable parishes in London, and used to being consulted about just such things, and I went to my brother, Tom, who for ten years had been colonel of a crack cavalry regiment and used to handling young men, and asked their advice.

They were both of them frightfully sick about the business, for they were fond of Susie, but they were as hopeless as they were sick. Both of them said the same thing in different words— that when a man had once fallen out of love with a woman all the kindness in the world is no use and drastic methods no better.

Drastic methods gave it me. I had had something of the sort in my mind. In fact, I had been stopping myself from thinking that Susie would be much happier as a widow. It seemed to me that though the base of Bellamy's noble nature might be good hard diamond, there must be softer strata between that and the top. Besides, if his emotional nature could be expanded one way it could be expanded another. Drastic it was!

For most men it is practically impossible to be drastic with other people. But, naturally, I have not knocked about the bad lands and the Seven Seas for all these years without making some useful acquaintances. Some of the toughest live east of Aldgate, and they will do quite uncommon things for surprisingly little money. I thought at once of Billy Pride. What that weazened old crimp doesn't know about shanghaiing isn't worth knowing. I had him meet me at the Carter's Rest at Shadwell, told him what I wanted, and where to find Bellamy. He did not make any notes in a book. He just nodded. He arranged to hand Bellamy over to me at the corner of Chipperfield Common at 2.45 a.m. on the following Tuesday. I did not bother my head about what measures he would take. But I was pretty sure that from the time Bellamy left home next morning till 2.45 a.m. on Tuesday morning he would not walk twenty yards without Billy's hearing all about it.

As it chanced, two evenings later I saw Bellamy walking down the Cromwell Road. One of his diversions lived in Cromwell Gardens I slowed down the car and looked round for Billy Pride's friend. The friend was a lady, a strapping wench who looked like a gipsy— it would be quite like Billy to farm out the job to gipsies— very shabby, but with a brisk stride that could carry her over the ground two feet to Bellamy's one, even if he were walking for a wager. I was amused— the last person in the world any one would guess to be shadowing them. Also I was pleased; I should have my Bellamy all right on Tuesday morning. I followed them. Sure enough, at the bottom of the Cromwell Road Bellamy took a taxi; the lady took the next taxi that came along, and followed.

FOR the next few nights I took Susie out to dinner and the theatre, and on to sup and dance at the Midnight Follies. She did not want to go; she wanted to mope at home. But I put it that I had been having a hard time on the Mexican border and needed refreshments. So she came, and Geoffrey Franks came with us. I thought that he was good for her. He had been in love with her for donkey's years, and he was still in love with her, and showed it. I could have done with him as a son-in-law very well. He's a first-class soldier and a good deal more than a soldier. There's a lot of wounded vanity to these broken hearts; and I was sure Susie would find it soothing to have it dinned into her that she was still uncommonly attractive. Geoffrey would din it in all right. He did do her good— a little.

I was shaving on the Monday morning when she came round to the house and burst into my room in a devil of a state. Bellamy had not come home the night before.

That was just like Billy. You could always rely on him to be on time.

"Well, what about it" I said. "He's probably got caught in a poker or chemmy game, and at it still."

She wouldn't hear of it— Bellamy was not like that.

"Well, do you know how much money he had on him?" I said, considering.

"Money?" said Susie. "About three pounds. He asked me for some; and he made rather a fuss because it was all I had."

He would.

"Then there's nothing in the world to bother about," I said, with absolute certainty. "He's bound to turn up in the course of the day. A man can't stray any distance on three pounds— not a man like Bellamy."

She said in a rather heated way that Bellamy wouldn't want to stray. So I agreed with her; and she said I never had appreciated Bellamy. I agreed with her again and said that those noble natures always were above me. I was used to coarser types. She looked at me suspiciously. I stood it all right. I was in a good temper. Things were moving.

She stayed to breakfast— for comfort. Then I fairly dragged her off for a motor drive in the country, and we lunched at Canterbury. It was eight o'clock when we reached their flat.

She fairly dashed into it, asking for Bellamy. He had not come home. She was in a terrible state.

I helped her. I said: "I expect that the silly young ass has been dipping into the underworld— it's the fashionable thing to do, you know— with only three pounds in his pocket, and is in pawn somewhere."

She was furious, like a furious sucking-dove, and gave me a fine dressing down. That was what I wanted— anger could not do her any harm. I said I would

go and find him at once. I went. I drove to my club, rang up Mrs. Clavering-Clayton, the cultured one, and asked whether Bellamy was there. She was rather tart with me, and said he wasn't there, and hadn't been. He had been coming to dinner the night before and never turned up. She rang off. I wondered whether Billy's friends had culled Bellamy from her doorstep, or his own. I rang up Enid Cooper-Calhoun, the rackety one. Mrs. Cooper-Calhoun came to the telephone, and she, also, seemed peeved by my inquiry. She said that she didn't know where Mr. Tong was, in such a tone that I gathered that she didn't care.

"I understand that he was having tea with Miss Cooper-Calhoun," I said at a venture.

"He never came!" she snapped, and rang off.

Another poor parent who had bitten off more daughter than she could chew!

I rang up Susie and told her that Bellamy was not at the Claytons or the Calhouns, and had not been there. That, of course, was what she really wanted to know. It did not sound like it, though, for she asked me quite fiercely why I had gone to those horrible women.

"Horrible?" I said. "I thought they were very cultivated and he saw a good deal of them."

"Cultivated!" she said, and rang off. That was all right. Anger was much better for her than sorrow. Besides, such a blundering effort would get her still further away from suspecting that I had a hand in Bellamy's vanishing. I dined at the club, and made an excellent dinner. If I hadn't yet earned it, I was going to—between then and breakfast. After dinner I went up to the card room and played poker. The others were rather shirty because I went away as early as half-past one with quite a little lump of their money. But I had made up my mind to give myself plenty of time to get to Chipperfield Common. It would never do for Billy Pride to be on time with the goods and me not there to receive them.

IT was easy driving.

The streets were clear; the road was clearer; and no haze dimmed the November moon. I was at the corner of the Common at 2.35. At once I heard faintly in the stillness the slow beat of hoofs and the creaking of a cart on the Sarratt Road. At 2.44 there came round the corner a gipsy van drawn by a fat horse, and driven by a lady. A shawl hid quite as much of her face as my muffler and goggles hid of mine. But I recognised her by her build. It was the strapping wench of the Cromwell Road.

She pulled up the horse and said: "Is it Mr. Brown, of Islington?"

"Yes," said I.

"I've brought the pretty gentleman," she said, and got down.

I got out of the car to help her. She needed no help. She opened the door of the caravan, took the pretty gentleman by the ankles, lugged him out, snoring, hoisted him on to her shoulders, stepped across to the car, and tumbled him into the tonneau, for all the world as if he had been a sack of potatoes.

"Thank you, my dear. Here's some thing for your trouble," I said, and gave her a tenner.

She looked at it by the light of the lamps, gulped, and blessed me.

I said good-night, and drove off.

I had a long run across country before me. I have a country house, Bostocks, on a hill near Pullborough. I found Mrs. Whitcomb and her son Harry, who run the house and garden for me, asleep in the kitchen, sitting up for me. They are trustworthy people. Once on a time I had pulled Harry out of a devil of a mess. If he showed his face in the West Riding the police would have him in twenty-four hours. He only shows his face, and that not too freely, on that hill near Pullborough. They did not show any surprise at Bellamy's sleepy condition. He was still snoring, doped with some effective drug I did not recognise, though he smelt of it. Mrs. Whitcomb got to work, making coffee and frying bacon and eggs, while Harry helped me with Bellamy.

Bostock's has a big, high roof. Under it is an attic, the length and width of the house, with sloping walls, lighted by one small dormer window. We carried Bellamy upstairs, hauled him up the ladder, through the trap-door, into the attic, took off his overcoat, and laid him on a small mattress on the floor in a corner.

Then I handcuffed him, and with a safety razor shaved all that fine black hair off his head. Even by the poor light of the candle he did look an extraordinary person. It seemed a pity that he should lose such an amusing sight; and I sent Harry down for a mirror. He hung it on a nail by the window. Then I covered Bellamy with the blanket and his overcoat, and went down to my coffee and eggs and bacon. I enjoyed them very much.

I TOLD the Whitcombs not to go near Bellamy unless he shouted so loudly that it seemed likely to attract someone's attention. In that case Harry might go up and gag him. Then I drove home. It was nearly six when I arrived, and I had not been in the house five minutes when the telephone bell rang. It was my guess that it had rung often during the night.

Of course it was Susie.

I did not wait for her to get in a question. I said in a bitter voice: "I've been up all night looking into the matter of that silly young ass of yours."

She accepted the description and said meekly, but eagerly: "Have you found him?"

"I've found him," I said. "He's got himself into a devil of a mess and you won't see him for at least a fortnight. I'm not going to tell you what the mess is, or where he is. But he's quite safe; and not a woman in the world can get at him. Don't come round. You won't see me. I'm going to bed and I'm not going to be disturbed till two o'clock."

With that I put the receiver back. Relieved of anxiety, she should sleep herself till two o'clock.

At a quarter past two she found me at breakfast. I told her that the less she said about the silly young ass's scrape the better. She was not pressing. I think that she had tumbled to it that the one place in the world in which a woman can't get at a man is prison.

"It's really only a fortnight?" she said.

"Thirteen days now," I said.

"It's terrible," she said. But she did not say it as if she meant it very much. I fancied that that complete absence of women had sunk in.

"Not a bit of it. It will do the silly young ass good," I said.

She did not say that it would not.

I told her that I would call for her at half-past seven to take her out for the evening, and on to the Midnight Follies, and she was to ring up Geoffrey Franks to come along with us to dance with her.

She began: "Oh, I couldn't! With poor Bellamy in—"

"Stop! You don't know where Bellamy is!" I said sharply. "Bellamy has gone into the country for a fortnight."

She saw at once that I was right, and went away fairly cheerful. I was pleased not to have deceived her at all. What Bellamy was exactly getting was fourteen days without the option of a fine.

I finished my breakfast and drove down to Bostock's.

Mrs. Whitcomb told me that the gentleman had made a great fuss for an hour or so that morning, but was quite quiet now. I took a jug of water, a slice of bread, and a cane I had brought with me, up to the attic. When I came up through the trapdoor I found Bellamy standing over it, waiting for me.

When he saw who it was he said huskily: "You? You've found me, thank God!"

"Found you? I put you here," I said. He stepped back sharply. Then he saw the jug of water, howled, "Water!" and came for it.

The jug of water bucked him up a bit, for he looked feeble murder at me, got into something of an attitude, and croaked: "What does this mean?"

"Well, if you ask me, I should say it meant that you'd married the wrong man's daughter. But I gave you your warning." I said quietly.

"Warning?" he said. He had actually forgotten it.

"I told you if you didn't make Susie happy I'd give you hell," I said.

"Oh— that," he said.

"Just that," said I.

"But it's all nonsense," he croaked indignantly. "Why can't she be happy? It's these middle-class prejudices that rob life of its beauty."

"They've certainly robbed you of some of yours," I said, and laughed.

He was the funniest-looking object. At once he went, croaking, up into the air. He was going to do lots of unpleasant things to me— with the help of the law. I laughed again and took him by the arm. He is taller than I am but not half as thick; even if he had not been handcuffed he could have put up no kind of fight. Then I caned him just as I used to be caned at school. I gave him rather more than the average caning because he was older. I was not afraid of his showing the bruises to any one, not even to the law. They were not romantically placed. When I had finished he was blubbering— what a son-in-law for a man to have!

I told him a dozen things about himself he had never before realised. Then I apologised for leaving him so soon.

"But I'm taking Susie and Geoffrey Franks out to dinner and the theatre and the Midnight Follies," I said. "But you can rely on me to come down and cane you to-morrow."

WITH that I left him blubbering.

Susie and Geoffrey and I had a very pleasant time. I fancied that she felt that she was getting a holiday. She had nothing to be really anxious about— no rackety Enid, no high-brow vamp.

The next day I went down to Bostock's and had another painful inter-view with Bellamy. When the more painful part of it was over, I repeated a good deal of what I had told him about himself the day before. I wanted to get it into his head.

THEN I said: "We had a ripping time last night. I don't think I ever ate better caviare— the small-grained kind, you know."

He gave me a murderous look; and I went on: "I didn't bring you down here entirely for the good of your soul. I also wanted you out of the way. I want Susie to see a lot of Geoffrey Franks. He's very much in love with her, you know; and she was very fond of him till you came along. Absence makes the heart grow stronger, and I'm hoping that hers will grow strong enough to appreciate him again. He'll run away with her like a shot— any man in his senses would— if she'll let him. There'd be a devil of a scandal, of course; but it would be worth it to get rid of you. You're pretty well off your pedestal, you know. I've seen to that."

"You blasted fiend," he said quite fiercely.

I laughed and said: "I'm taking them round the town again to-night."

With that I left him. I had given him something to think about and I wanted him to start to think. My guess was that he could be as jealous as the next man. It would be an occupation.

Susie and Geoffrey and I kept holiday again that night. She was looking better and eating more; her eyes had lost that look of fright, and she was not so pale. It is wonderful what a complete change and freedom from anxiety will do. Of course she must be sorrowing over Bellamy in his cell; but the cell was woman-proof.

NEXT day, after the usual bamboo formula and telling Bellamy some more things about himself I had thought of, I chatted to him about some chicken Mary and I had eaten the night before, and how much better and happier Susie was looking, and of my hopes of her and Franks. I said I thought that in a day or two she would be ready enough to go about with him alone, for all these late hours were not particularly good for me. He took no part in the chat. He was looking most morose.

I kept up that treatment for three more days. On the fourth day I dropped the caning. But I took the cane up with me, and a couple of thick beef sandwiches. After he had eaten them, and he did enjoy them, I took off his handcuffs and set him to run round and round the room. I wanted to return him to Susie in good condition. When he flagged I encouraged him with the cane. After his exercise I chatted with him about an *entrecote* of almost prewar excellence I had found at the Cafe Royal, and of Geoffrey's progress with Susie.

I had learnt at school that sorrow's crown of sorrow was remembering happier things, and I did not think that it would take any of the crown off his sorrow to know that somebody else was enjoying them. It did not seem to. Also I took it that, when he did come out, he would want more than anything else in the world to be cosseted— for about six months, and hard— and Susie could cosset. I handcuffed him again before I went.

I kept that treatment up for five days. I had no need to use the cane after the first three days of it; he was becoming quite a sprinter. Also his face was no longer all eyes, but what eyes there were in it were very much clearer and brighter than I had ever seen them, and his lips were thinner and redder and more set. Also, I had no longer any need to tell him those things about himself. I had got them into his head. He admitted as much. He did not seem to bear me any particular malice. But, then, I had made a point of feeding him myself. A dog is about as sentimental a creature as there is in the world, and it likes to lick the hand that beats and feeds it.

There were three days to go. After his exercise I gave him a cup of tea, strong, and with plenty of sugar in it. It was almost touching to see him drink it. He made nearly as much noise over it as one of the lower classes.

After he had drunk it I began to talk very hopefully about Susie and Geoffrey Franks.

Suddenly his nostrils twitched queerly, and he said: "Stop it! Stop it, or I shall try to strangle you!"

"I'm surprised at you," I said in a grieved voice. "You know you couldn't."

"I know I couldn't! But I shall try!" he said, still twitching.

"I can't for the life of me see what's troubling you," I said. "You'll be able to spend all your time with Enid Cooper-Calhoun and Mrs. Clavering-Clayton now."

"Damn Enid Cooper-Calhoun! Blast Mrs. Clavering-Clayton!" he said.

It sounded harsh, but it was certainly fervent.

"And that's a man's love," I said in a grieved voice.

I left him feeling rather pleased with myself.

On the morning of the fourteenth day she came round to see me in a state of intense excitement. Her spirits were rather dashed when I told her that Bellamy would not be back till tea-time. It would take some time to make him presentable. He was not the extraordinary looking creature he had been; but he still looked odd. The hair on his head was not more than a sixteenth of an inch longer than the hair on his chin; and that was not any length to speak of. She went away to shop to keep herself quiet. I drove round to their flat and got a suit of his clothes and under-linen and his motor coat. Then I chose a black wig at Clarkson's and ordered it to be sent round to his flat.

I got to Bostock's fairly early. Bellamy had no notion that his sentence expired that day. He had an idea that it ran for another three months. I sent Mrs. Whitcomb to make coffee and fry eggs and bacon. Then I went up to Bellamy. I was in great spirits. I told him that I was practically sure that Susie had fixed it up with Franks, and of course there was no need to keep him at Bostock's any longer.

We started for home. It was a November day, and a bad one. But he seemed pleased enough to be out in it, though silent— nothing about the scenery. He looked as he had never looked In his life— as hard as nails. Sleeping cold and sprinting hard had hardened him.

As he came nearer London he grew very fidgety. But when I suggested a shave and a Turkish bath he agreed, saying rather drearily that after all there wasn't any hurry. He had them; and I drove him home.

Just as we came near the house I said: "Now, don't go and make a silly fuss if Franks is there."

He looked at me and shivered, and his lips and nostrils twitched.

"I'll try not to," he said, as if he wasn't sure that he would succeed.

I was quite sure that Franks would not be there.

"And if by any chance you and Susie do make it up, don't tell her about Bostock's. If you do, she'll never forgive me, and I shall have nothing to live for but vengeance," I said.

"I shan't," he said.

He had his key; and when we came to the door of his flat I said: "Let's go in quietly. They're probably having tea together."

He seemed to swallow something— quite a lot, in fact— and we went in quietly. There was a smell of muffins on the air. He opened the drawing room door. Susie was sitting in front of the fire, looking at it. She was wearing the prettiest frock I ever saw her in. She looked round, screamed, jumped up, and howled: "Whatever have they done to your poor hair?"

Then she rushed at him; and he made one jump for her.

I went out and shut the door.

WE have never spoken of Bellamy's unfortunate scrape till the other day. His hair explained everything so clearly. And, after all, it is not of any real importance to a really nice woman that her husband has done a paltry fourteen days without the option.

But the other day Susie said to me: "I really think that— that little episode has improved Bellamy."

Why not? He eats out of her hand; he talks less; and the fact that she has the most jealous husband in London does not seem to cause her any dissatisfaction. Perhaps, after all, he did not marry the wrong man's daughter.

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6: The Finger of God

W. C. Morrow

William Chambers Morrow, 1853-1923

Hale's Magazine, Dec 1899

THE BOOM of the shining brass cannon that stood in front of the prison office at San Quentin warned the inside and outside guards, and all the people for a league thereabout, that a convict had escaped. Children loitering homeward from school stopped, looked apprehensively at the summit of the ridge intervening between them and the prison walls, huddled closer, and then quickly sought the safety of their homes. Many a horse jogging along the neighboring highways heard a hurrying chirrup and felt the smart touch of a whip as his driver sent the impulse of the cannonshot into his laggard legs. For not only might a hunted and desperate man at large invade all personal rights in the pursuit of his safety, but soon would come eager men on horse and afoot, and likely the singing of rifle balls in the air.

Janet, the nurse of little Elaine, the prison warden's daughter, was one whose face paled and lips parted as the heavy boom of the gun struck her heart. She, better than the people of the countryside, realized the dangers of the moment; for over and over, day after day, the warden had cautioned her; again and again had she heard terrible accounts of these savage men, who when it came to a fight for their freedom, gave the value of human life no place in their reckoning; and more than once she had heard the boom of the cannon, seen eager men hunting their game to quarry, and listened with a still heart to the singing of rifle-balls in the air.

These two, Janet and little Elaine, had been spending a happy afternoon in the hills overlooking the great prison— all the happier that it had been so peaceful and quiet. Gentle as little Elaine always was, it seemed to Janet that never had the frail child been so lacking in manifestations of infantile animal life, so spiritual, so dainty, so exquisitely touched by what poor ignorant Janet whispered to herself was the Finger of God. For all that, it was clear that little Elaine was happy. The content that filled her young heart shone like a radiance in her wan face and her wide patient blue eyes, and at times came forth tangible in a rare smile, which, instead of dimpling her cheeks, lent them strange, bright wrinkles. So genuine was her happiness that she had even neglected the customary primness of her hair, which, having lost its encompassing ribbon, had gone wild about her head in childish abandon, its amber sheen glowing like the light which ushers the rising sun. Not once during the whole shining afternoon had the watchful eyes of Janet seen in the patient face of her charge that familiar dumb picture of pain which the deformed back of the child had so often painted there.

Little Elaine had heard the boom of the cannon, and understood its meaning. Even before Janet had recovered from the fear that stilled her heart the child was struggling unaided to her feet. "We must go quickly, dear," said Janet, catching up the child's hat from the ground, while Elaine's thin fingers were bringing the wild. amber sunbeams under ribboned subjection.

Elaine said not a word, and gave no sign of fear. She could walk very well, though slowly— too slowly for the terrified nurse, who unceremoniously seized the child in her arms for hasty flight down the hill-slope and through the stunted oaks to the warden's home outside tlie prison wall.

"Put me. down, Janet!" she peremptorily demanded with the imperiousness of childhood. "I want to walk." In an instant Elaine had wriggled from her nurse's embrace and was standing defiantly before her. Her keen sense of the indignity that had been thrust upon her lent such an unwonted color to her cheeks, and such an uncanny rebuke to her eyes, staring now so widely at Janet, that the girl was dismayed. The impulse, born of the agonizing fear which beset her, to seize the child and bear her to safety, wavered before the stern and unearthly expression of the child's face; and then, before she could shape her conduct, Elaine started down the hill with deliberate steps, remarking to the world at large:

"If you wish to go home with me, you may do so. I am not afraid. He will not hurt us."

The delay had been fatal; for he, panting with the exertion of his flight and with the lust of freedom, bounded up the slope and came to a halt before them. Knowing the instinct of the feminine throat in an extremity, and observing that its functions in Janet's case would give themselves instant exercise, the outlaw made a dash for her, closed his powerful fingers about her neck, and flung her unconscious to the ground. Then his gigantic form and menacing eyes faced Elaine.

They recognized each other at once. Still, and silent, and white, with a terrific awe enfolding her spirit, she gazed upward into the face of the most turbulent and dangerous of all the social flotsam that had drifted into her father's keeping. She knew him for his masterful size, his wild, hungry fanged glance, and his voice like a bull's. She knew him for his prison record, with its alternate outbursts of rage and sufferings of punishment; its blasphemies and violence; its assaults; its hatred of the authorities; its dreary weeks in the dungeon. She knew him for the man who had chiseled an oath into the stone face of the prison that he would kill her father. She knew him for the one human being who had had an unkind word for her, and that was when he cursed her one day and called her the warden's brat, and told her that she was a hunchback.

It was only for a moment that the giant and the cripple faced each other, but all those memories, and more rioted in the child's recollection, while her sharp ears caught the faint sounds of hurried preparations for the chase, far down thiough the stunted oaks. The swift galloping of horses, the shouted ommands of officers, the faint rattle of metal— nothing was lost.

The momentary spell was broken by her small musical voice.

"Tom," she said, "you can't get away; they will catch you." Ah, had she only not spoken!

"Bah!" growled the convict, shaking off the paralysis that had momentar ily overtaken him.

"The warden's brat— the hunchback!" His hoarse voice was choked with infinite hatred. Whatever murderous intention might have warmed his blood for hn instant it were idle to imagine; for at once there flashed through his moiling brain a splendid plan of safety. "You will be my shield, my bodyguard, yop twisted spawn!" With that he caught her up in his arms. "The bullet that finds me will first let daylight through you!" He dashed over the hill bearing her securely.

It was a wild flight: Down the further side of the hill the convict fled, across a dangerously open ravine, and up the contiguous slope, avoiding the roads, keeping always a wholly unfrequented route, and heading for the mountains, some miles away. Nothing cared he for the strong tree branches that tore the child's clothing, snatched off her hat, and started the blood in scratches from her skin. Once or twice her flowing hair, freed from its restraining ribbon caught in the trees, but with an oath he wrenched off the limb and plunged onward, laboring, panting, never ceasing his firm hold upon her, never staying his flight except for a moment now and then as he would gain an eminence and sweep the country in search of his pursuers. The load that he bore was small and light and it meant nothing to his superb strength. Across a shoulder and held in one arm he bore her, the other arm free to open a way through the brush and trees, now steadily growing more and more a stubborn hinderance to his progress, and more and more a torture to the living shield that he bore.

Hours had passed, and no pursuers had been seen. All through this wild fight little Elaine, though scratched by the branches till she bled, and though suffering agonies from the straining of her back, said not a word and made not a moan.

After many miles of this arduous exertion the convict began to slacken his pace. They were now well on toward temporary security in the mountains, and night was close at hand. From struggling over every foot of the ground the convict fell into- a walk. The morsel on his shoulder could feel the giant chest heave painfully, and she knew by the unsteady swaying of his body that the strength of his legs had come nearly to an end. As the tension of the flight

relaxed, his exertions slackened, and then she knew by his eager searching around that he was consumed with thirst.

Staggering on, the man at last found a gulch, which, though dry, gave promise of water in its higher reaches. Twilight had now come, and it imperceptibly merged into moonlight as he labored heavily up the canyon. A welcome trail made by cattle relieved the severer hardships of his progress, andthis and the growing night gave him greater ease of mind. It seemed to occur to him suddenly that the burden on his shoulder was a living thing and that it had been strangely limp and quiet* With some haste he drew her down and peered into her wide-open eyes. To his gratification he found her not only alive, but conscious.

"Hullo," he gruffly cried. "Been asleep? This has been a great lark, eh? Never had anybody to carry you so far? Well, well! that isn't bad and you've stood it like a brick !''

The tone and manner of the man were so different from their first expression that they sent a small thrill of comfort into the numb heart and aching body of the child.

"Oh," she exclaimed, with an approach to cheerfulness, "I didn't mind it much!"

"You didn't!" echoed the astonished man. He was so bewildered that all he could say was, "Well, well, well!" Then with something of tenderness he adjusted her more comfortably in both his arms, and thus slowly proceeded up the canyon.

The change seemed to give her great relief, for she nestled her head against his shoulder and sighed in satisfaction. This bewildered the fugitive the more; and although a vicious thirst was gnawing him and sharp cramps stung the overstrained muscles of his legs, he felt a strange pleasure in pressing the soft, frail little form closer to his chest, and feeling its warmth there, and the sweet childish breath thatswepthis neck. He muttered unintelligibly to himself about it all, and then, after saying, "Well, well!" a great many times, he reached the climax in one hearty exclamation— "I'll be hanged!"

He found the water at last, and so eager was he for it that he half dropped the child in putting her down, and was in the act of throwing himself upon the ground to drink, when lie suddenly checked himself, glanced at the little heap lying so still, and said:

"Well! hang me if I hadn't almost forgotten the little one. Don't you want a drink?"

"Yes," came the gentle answer from a very dry throat, but there was a smile in it.

"Of course the little one wants a drink. Come! can you lie down flat and drink?"

She tried, but when she moved she caught her breath in pain, for the ailing back had been sorely tried in the rough flight,

" It hurts, Little One?"— and yet she had tried hard not to let him see that it did. "Well, well! now, you lie still, and I'll make you a cup."

With that he dexterously shaped a cup from a leaf, rinsed it carefully, filled it, and placed it to her lips. She drank with a dainty eagerness, and her wide eyes asked for more; which the outlaw gave to her, and then another, and another, as her eyes asked for more, until the fugitive began to exhibit alarm.

"Little One!" he cried, "where in thunder are you putting all that water? Why, you must have been dying for it, and you never said a word and I never thought of it!"

She smiled amusedly at him, and the wrinkling of her face as she did so, brought a strange look into his. He gazed at her so steadily that she became uneasy and reminded him that he had not drunk.

"Oh, bless my soul, I had forgotten all about it!"

Thereupon he flung himself down and drank so long, and eagerly, and deeply that a thin childish voice cried in mock alarm:

"Tom! where in thunder are you putting all that water?"

He straightened up instantly, and as soon as he could get his breath his mighty chest and wide throat gave issue to a hearty laugh that rang up and down through the canyon as never laughter had done in that wilderness b e fore.

But there were graver things to consider— among them the danger of the vast laugh that had gone ringing up and down through the canyon; for the man knew with his every thinking faculty that the pursuit of him, since he had stolen the child, would be relentless and desperate, and that his hunters would count their lives as nothing so long as he retained possession of her. Confused plans raced through his turbulent brain. Now that the immediate danger of attack was past, he no longer had need of her, and it had been his plan to abandon her when night should come so that he might continue his flight unhampered and under cover of darkness. But now he seemed to have forgotten that— at least, he thought it might be just as well to find shelter for her, as the night was growing cold and the child was dressed for a summer day. It was out of the question to make a fire to warm her. He took her hands. They felt so cold, and thin, and soft in his great hot palms that the softness, and smallness, and coldness of them seemed to hurt him in some way that he could not understand. He roused himself out of that.

"I'm terribly hungry, Little One," he said.

"Are you? And you have nothing to eat. I am very sorry. "

He looked down atlier quickly as she still lay on the ground.

"You must be hungry too, Little One," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind that!" she protested.

That dazed him. He gazed at her a full minute in silent astonishment, and then, speaking low to himself, half reverently, he said :

"Well, well— I'll be hanged!"

A certain indefinable wretchedness, a certain aching that he could in no way understand, weighed upon his breast. All his strained mental alertness, all the capabilities of his tremendous muscles, fell into awkwardness and he floundered miserably.

"Do you feel the cold, Little One?'' he asked foolishly.

"Oh, not much!"

"Get up and run about; that will warm you."

Her small face wrinkled into a smile at this gruff but thoughtful command, and she tried to obey, but sank again.

"Let me help you," he said, lifting her gingerly to her feet, as though he feared that she would break under his rough touch. But her thin face betrayed the pain that she suffered, and her legs seemed incapable; so she sank to the ground. Then a strange, wild look of alarm entered her face.

"Tom!" she called in unspeakable fear, looking up as he bent over her. "Tom!"

"I won't hurt you, Little One."

"I know, I know, but where are my legs, Tom?"

"Why, here they are, Little One— don't you see?"

She put out her hand with a strange hesitation, felt them, pinched them, and then, with added terror, she said sobbing:

"Those are not mine, Tom! I don't feel them. It dosen't hurt to pinch them. I can't feel anything there, and just now, when I tried to stand they were gone, Tom!"

Thus was the brave little spirit broken at last, and the hulking giant, who understood it all, lurched back upon his feet, and gazed speechless down upon the wreck that he had made, lying before him sobbing, her eyes all terrorfilled, and her thin arms held out beseechingly toward him. And then the weight that he had felt in his chest, and the strange pain that had gnawed him there, became the one a mountain and the other a tiger, smothering and devouring the wildness in him, the desperation, the splendid ferocity. With infinite awkwardness, which his tenderness concealed, he seated himself beside her, took off his convict's coat, wrapped her snugly in it, smoothed back her wild hair and placed his convict's cap upon her head and drew it down over her ears, took

her gently in his arms, and held her snugly and comfortably there. No word had he spoken, for his power of speech was choked back within him. The thin little face lay upon his shoulder close to his cheek.

The giant holding her thus, and saying nothing, swayed his body to and fro, as a mother might, and gradually the Little One's sobbing ceased, and he thought she had gone to sleep; but presently she shrank a little and quietly said:

"Tom, you will get wet out here."

"How, Little One?"— but his voice was thick.

"From the rain. I felt some drops on my cheek. They were hot."

The convict made no reply, but he drew her closer and held his head further back.

After a time he knew that she had gone to sleep. Then the mysteries of the night, the wonderful silence of the moon, the dangers that hunted him, the gently heaving morsel that he held in his arms, all these worked unceasingly upon him, bewildering him, deadening him, filling him with strange and unaccountable agonies. Hardly did he realize that he should have been many miles away, that every moment was bringing nearer to him those terrible hounds of the law that no doubt must be finding his trail as often as they lost it, and, aided by the telegraph, were drawing in upon him from many directions. Numbly he pictured them in his imagination as they picked their way in the darkness, silently, eagerly, with unfailing alertness, and with rifles always cocked and ready for instant use. And back of all that he saw the huddled form of a woman lying where his good strong hands had tossed her, and a strange, small, white vision of calm and unterrified dignity standing before him as though it were the warning Finger of God.

Toward morning the Little One stirred. He soothed her into slumber again, but presently he looked down into her face, and in the gray light of morning he beheld her wide blue eyes looking calmly up into the sky.

"Are you ready to go now, Little One?'' he asked.

She sighed wearily and answered, "Yes." One awful question he had not the courage to ask, one awful test he had not the courage to make— he would not let her feet touch the ground. He gave her some water, and still holding her gently in both arms, and keeping her wrapped in his convict's coat, strode rapidly down the canyon, though escape lay the other way.

"You shall have something to eat very soon, Little One," he said, "and a good place to rest."

He swung along at a free gait, quite different from the crouching, stealthy, hunted flight of the day before. With his head thrown back he faced the daylight and the open world, and instead of the wild and desperate ferocity which the child had seen before in his face, was the calmness of serene and satisfied manhood.

Presently he turned out of the canyon into a trail for which he had been evidently searching, ascended the slope, found a road, and followed it openly and unafraid. Before long he arrived at a rude cabin and there found a few rough men preparing their breakfast. He entered without ceremony.

The men were speechless, but the convict paid no attention to their surprise.

"Are you woodchoppers?"

One of them stammered an affirmative answer.

"Well," said the fugitive, "that means that you are honest men. You see what I am. There is no sense in standing there like fools— I won't eat you. Give me something for the Little One to eat. Do you hear? That bread, that milk— hurry, you fools!" But not waiting for their dazed obedience, he seated himself at their table, propped the child up against his left arm, and brought the food to her lips. She began to eat favenously, but the convict interrupted:

"Slow, Little One, slow— there is time. Here— try a little of this coffee; it is good and warm, and woodchoppers have honest victuals."

"But, Tom," she protested, " you are hungrier than I am. You eat first."

He looked around the men in a bewildered, foolish way, glancing at each in turn as they stood awkwardly looking on, and there was a certain air of pride and triumph in his manner, as though it meant to say, "Did you ever see anything like that?" But they were so astonished at the spectacle of a man in convict dress— evidently an escape— huge, savage, bare-headed, having in charge so small and dainty and elegant a little morsel of childhood, and tending and feeding her as if that were the one thing in life remaining for him to do, instead of thinking first that they were his possible captors, eager for the price that would surely be set upon his head, that they could only stand and wonder in stupid silence.

The hunger of the fugitive and his charge was satisfied at iast, and when the Little One thanked the choppers the convict declared in astonishment that he would be hanged.

"Why, Little One," he declared, "these men are proud to do that for you!" And they promptly said that they were.

The convict then put the Little One to bed in one of the bunks of the cabin, sat down beside her, and without giving any further heed to the men, said reassuringly :

"You will soon be home again."

She started, and a quick bright, flush came into her pallid cheeks; then she smiled as she looked gratefully at him, extended a small hand to be grasped by his, settled herself comfortably, closed her eyes, and soon was asleep.

The convict gently released the child's hand, rose, and wearily stretched his prodigious frame. Up to this time he had paid no attention to the men. He had

not observed that one by one they had quietly slipped outside, but he seemed to feel no apprehension when he discovered on tiptoeing to the door and looking out that they had all disappeared.

A quick glance backward into the cabin revealed the evil glint of a rifle that leaned against the wall. It fascinated the man. Though he had been made of iron, his pose could not have been more rigid as he stood while the shimmer of the rifle found its way into the ultimate depths of his nature and kindled life and stimulation there.

He walked back as one in a trance, looking neither to right nor left; picked up the weapon, examined it critically, found that it was in perfect order and of large caliber, and that its magazine was full, laid it across his arm, and with a trance-like stride stepped out of the cabin into the open. A shot, which brought a biting sting in his neck, put him instantly in command of all his faculties.

The cabin stood upon a bald mountain and many yards below was the breast of the forest. It was a laboring distance for a rifle to carry true, and likbly the bullet that found the convict's heck had had the help of chance. Only from that direction could the attack be made, as back of the cabin the mountain was naked to the crown.

The convict, watchfully scanning the forest front for a mark, held his rifle poised. The gray convict color had returned to his face, and with it all the hardness and sullen determination of a man making a final stand for his freedom or his life. But was it so? Wherefore stood he out in the open, when the cabin walls might have given him so secure protection? What had become of his purpose to use the Little One as a shield against which a rifle could not even be aimed? No matter. It was a thing of his own doing, the action of a man under a joyous inspiration of the knowledge that he was free— free to live or die in the manner that bis soul should choose. Behind the dark forest rampart there might be a dozen, a score, a hundred men with shining eyes at that moment ranging rifle-sights upon his breast; at any instant, from the wide arc that stretched before him, might come an overwhelming charge of men mounted and afoot to riddle him at closer quarters. But there he stood alone, massive, calm, defiant, his eyes blazing with the madness of hate, his gray face drawn with the passion to kill. And not the slightest heed did he give to the stinging in his neck or the blood that trickled down and saturated the convict's shirt on his breast.

A puff of smoke issued from the edge of the forest. The bullet went astray, but instantly the convict had sent an answering one. Then the arc gave forth a long scattered line of men. They ran rapidly up the slope, and when the convict's rifle came again to bear— this time upon the leader, who was the warden himself— every man fell flat, and the convict reserved his fire. Thus he stood with his rifle poised, ready to shoot the first man who rose; but they were too wily for that. Then he beheld an extraordinary scene. The pursuers, instead of

coming to their feet and charging, began to crawl upon their bellies up the mountain-side. Thus in deathly silence approached the wriggling line, made of small black dots upon the ground.

The convict was bewildered. The slowness of the advance, the deadly and implacable purpose of it, and its awful silence weighed cold and heavy upon his spirit. If they would only come on like men, with shouts and the cracking of rifles, how gloriously he could fight, how bravely he could die! But the line crept on with the slow fatality of the rising tide. Its every inch of progress shortened the range, and the very position of the men on the ground would lend a deadly effectiveness to their aim.

But they were wasting no shots now.

The convict fired at one of the black spots, and saw the dust that his bullet raised near it; but worse than that, he saw the line spring to its feet, dash forward, and sink the moment he had thrown the lever and was ready for another shot.

The line crept steadily on. Then an ominous stillness fell upon it, and a volley rang out from end to end. The convict fell, and the line dashed onward. He arose to a sitting posture, then to his knees, and the line dropped again.

At this juncture there appeared in the doorway of the cabin, within sight of all the men, and in range behind the convict, a tiny morsel of humanity, known in certain quarters as the Little One. The door-facing and the cabin walls to her right and left showed the rips and tears of rifle-balls. Though the hunters could not see at that distance the terror in her wide eyes and the deepened pallor of her cheeks, they did behold, and some of them recognized, the thick crown of fair hair to which the early sun had lent a richer amber glow.

"Tom!" she called.

That struck him harder and cut deeper than the stinging bite in his neek and the vicious leg-snip that had cut him down. He flung the rifle aside, rose to his feet, and, a great light driving the black iron from his face, he cried exultantly:

"Why, Little One, you've found your legs!" And then she ran to him, and he caught her up in his arms.

There are said to be those living today who declare that in their opinion the convict threw away his rifle and snatched up the child as the better protection of his life. But— well upon one point there is no variance of opinion, for it was what every man saw and heard: The Little One led the unarmed giant by the hand to meet his pursuers, and promised him again and again, in response to his pleadings, while she nestled in her father's arms, that she would visit him in the prison every day.

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7: Crash and Carry

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1900-1954

The Passing Show, 19 May 1934

Australian Women's Weekly, 6 Oct 1934

AT the age of seven, George Wilkins took the kitchen clock apart and put it together again— almost: there were a few wheels left over. His mother said that he would be a mechanical genius, but his father said he'd be merely a mechanic, remembering what had happened to his car while in the repair shop the week before.

At fifteen George learned the saxophone— pretty well. His mother said he'd be a great band-leader; his father said he'd be murdered.

At twenty, George was working as an assistant in the East Street branch of the Corner Supply Stores, but the seeds of greatness were still in him and the light of genius still burned, however many bushels it might have been under.

George stood on the threshold of greatness. So he thought. Actually, he was standing on the threshold of J. K. McPeake's office. J.K. was the general manager of the Corner Stores. George knew him slightly. J.K. had brows like black moustaches. He wriggled them at George and said: "Well, come in, young fellow. What's on your mind? You work in the East Street branch, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. George Wilkins. Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. McPeake, how many dozens of good fresh eggs are smashed during a year in your stores?"

J.K. grunted and laid his hand on the typewritten sheet on his desk.

"Got the figures on it here." He scowled at the sheet. "And I notice that you've broken more than anybody else in the city."

"That day," said George calmly, though his heart thudded a little and his Adam's apple bobbed slightly, "is now over."

With these words, George unwrapped the oblong parcel he had in his hand and laid it on J.K.'s desk with the air of the magi bearing gifts.

"What's this?" J.K. reached out and picked up the black rubber box and opened it.

"It's the Wilkins Egg-Preserver, sir. It's made of rubber. It's inflated. The eggs fit snugly in the compartments and if, perchance, a careless hand should let it drop, no harm is done. I have here"— George produced a bag— "a dozen eggs. I put them in— so."

J.K. pulled out a cigar and bit the end of it while George set the eggs in their little nests and shut down the top.

GEORGE picked up the box, held it above his head and let it drop on J.K.'s desk. Something clutched at his heart in that moment and warned him, but it

was too late. The box came down with a crash, fell open and strewed sticky whites and yellow yolks all over J.K.'s pad. Some-thing was rotten. George's mouth hung open.

"Oh, Mr. McPeake, I'm sorry. It never went that way before, I assure you. It must have been—"

"You had better go," said J.K. in a low and level tone. "Quickly."

"But there's one thing more, Mr. McPeake— have you ever thought of giving a half-dozen tins of soup and a tin opener to all the new brides in your districts. It would be grand ad-vertising and—"

"Go!"

Mr. McPeake had arisen. There was some egg on his coat. There was a queer gleam in his eye. George left his egg-preserver and started for the door.

"One thing more, Wilkins," said Mr. McPeake in that same level tone. "If I have any further bad reports of you, out you go. Keep your mind on your work, that's what you're paid for."

George, silent and chagrined, went out into the street and walked list-lessly towards the restaurant where he ate lunch.

He sat down at his favorite table and covered his face with his hands. He had looked forward to this day; had pictured a triumph. He had visioned J. K. McPeake patting him on the back, handing him a good cigar and saying: "My boy, I congratulate you; your fortune is made."

Ah well! George took his hands away and looked up. He sat up. Across from him, at another table, was a girl with soft brown eyes. They were looking into his with a wistful and concerned expression.

From time to time, during the tasteless meal. George glanced at her and she at him. Nice looking girl, he decided. It seemed as if he had seen her before. Probably had and failed to notice her sufficiently to recall her now. His mind was filled with thoughts in which women had no place.

The egg-preserver had fallen down on him, but there was still the Wilkins tractor-shovel, that masterpiece of mechanical genius which would revolutionise the fine art of excavation and make the name of George Wilkins known and honored wherever a sod was turned.

The tractor-shovel was his big bet. The plans and the model were finished now, safely locked up in the attic of his boarding house, that Mrs. Kelly had kindly lent him for a workshop. He had written to various engineering firms, describing his invention. It would only be a matter of days until something came of it.

The tractor-shovel cheered him up immensely and when the brown-eyed girl smiled at him as she was leaving the restaurant, he smiled back. Perhaps, he mused dreamily, when the royalties were pouring in, when he had a gleaming motor and servants and a swell apartment, he would look her up and tell her

how, when he was in despair, when his faith in his great future had begun to be undermined, her smile had cheered him and given him new hope.

He would take her hand and smile gently, "Ah, those," he would say, "were dark days, before the Wilkins tractor-shovel—"

He looked at the clock and leapt for his hat. After all, a job was a job, while waiting for the shovel to make good. If he got back late it might get to J. K. McPeake's ears and all would not be well. Coupled with his record as champion egg-breaker of the Corner Supply Stores, a few more tardy-marks would do the trick.

He got there on time. He concentrated all afternoon on the ignoble task of selling bread, biscuits, fruit, potatoes and sugar. He was careful with the eggs. He didn't drop one. He would show J. K. McPeake that he was as great a man in the small things of life, in menial tasks like this, as in wondrous and mammoth inventions.

He could see the words, the printed page in his biography: "Even in the lowly capacity of grocer's assistant, George Wilkins showed genius. While his mind was busy with the intricate workings of his colossal machines, his hands were deftly employed in dis-pensing groceries. True greatness, this, for genius, as the great French philosopher says, is only an infinite capacity—"

"Fetch that basket of eggs, Wilkins." The voice of Mr. Gottlieb, the manager, broke in like a discord.

George moved mechanically, picked up the wire basket, turned and saw the brown eyes again. She had just come into the store; she was smiling at him. As a gentleman, he looked at her and smiled.

A CRATE of oranges in his path meant nothing at the moment. Politeness was the thing. He saw the smile in her eyes turn to a look of frozen horror when he tripped. In that dizzy moment, he did not again look at her and he thought, as he surveyed the yellow chaos, that he would never care to face an egg again.

Well, what was two weeks' notice? Probably, by that time, some big firm would have taken hold of the tractorshovel and his name would be made. Doubtless there would be some letters for him at his boarding-house. This was all for the best. Sooner or later, he would have had to leave his lowly calling.

There were letters from all the people he had written to. He gathered them up from the hall table and started upstairs. On the landing he met her, and he knew at once where he had seen those eyes before. Right here in Mrs. Kelly's. She had come, he decided, recently. He must have passed her on the stairs as he was doing now.

"Hello," she said in a low, full-toned voice. "I hope you didn't get into any trouble over the eggs. I felt guilty in a way, for distracting you. Or did I?"

"Why, no, I—" George laughed heartily. "I have a habit of breaking eggs—regular thing with me. I held the egg-breaking championship for the Corner Stores."

"You held it! Meaning you don't hold it any more?"

"I don't. I've got the sack. But still"— he glanced at the letters in his hand—"there are other things."

"Your inventions?"

"How did you know about—?"

"Mrs. Kelly told me you were awfully clever and would be a great man some day. It's thrilling. What are you working on now, Mr. Wil-kins?" George lapped up the awe and admiration in her eyes.

"Oh, just a little toy," he said airily. "Tell you about it some time. Miss—"

"My name is Kitty Lee. I just came here last week. Oh, will you really tell me about your inventions."

"Of course I will," beamed George. "And soon. Good-bye, Miss Lee."

That, he mused, as he turned to watch her go into the living-room, is a face that has smashed a thousand eggs— and why not?

The letters— he sat on his bed while he read them, and let them fall to the floor, one by one— seemed all to be written by the same fellow, for they all said, unmistakably, the same thing— no.

George felt weak, felt a hollowness in his chest. He stood up after a moment, his jaw set grimly. It was a hard and bitter struggle, this attempt to climb the heights of greatness. It was a man's fight. You had to do it alone. You had to face defeat, dis-couragement, despair. You had to have the courage of a lion, the strength of steel.

HOW many other great men, he thought, had stood, like himself, in moments like this, filled with darkness, with no single ray of hope, and vowed to the gods that they would not give in, that they would fight while in them remained an ounce of strength wherewith to struggle, a drop of blood to shed.

But he could not go near the tractorshovel to-night. He felt, towards it, something of that same emotion that had turned him against the eggpreserver. He shouldn't, he knew. The tractor-shovel was in a class by itself. It was superb. Long and patient were the hours he had spent on it, and it was a joy, a triumph.

Why, just to watch it work— the neat model he had made— to see it scoop up stones and sand and nails and bolts from the table was a delight, an ecstasy that in itself was the reward of labor and the laurel of his genius.

Just wait. These arrogant engineers would be made to swallow their stupid words about freak inventions and the like. They would feel the flush of shame when, in all its mammoth mag-nificence, the Wilkins tractor-shoved rumbled upon the world.

George could see it—the first one— fresh from the factory, towering above the pigmy men who, in awed silence, surrounded it. Beautiful in red and green paint, with his name in great, gold letters, across the world it would roll, scooping and lifting and dump-ing; through Europe, through Asia, into darkest Africa—

BUT night had come into his little room and it was wet and drizzly outside and a dank wind blowing, sending low coils of smoke down into the dingy street out-side Mrs. Kelly's. Lights gleamed on the shining pavements, the trees were bare of their leaves. It was a mournful, dreary, autumn night— a night to discourage dreams such as his.

Suppose the tractor-shovel never got a chance to show its marvellous properties; suppose these jealous engineers kept him out, deliberately combined against him to keep the tractor-shovel off the market? He would need money, lots of capital, to manufacture it himself.

Where could he get that money now, jobless and friendless as he was?

The music of a piano, of a soft, full-toned contralto, came up to him. Her voice— Kitty Lee's. Its sweetness calmed him and the words of the song:

"I'll be loving you— always.
When the things you've planned
Need a helping hand.
I will understand— always."

"I'll bet she could, too," said George. "I'd like to make good for a girl like that. I'd like to buy her diamonds and a car and a fur coat and—"

Dreaming again. He bit his lip. All his life had been spent in dreaming. Perhaps, as some people had insinuated, he was just an ass and his in-ventions were no good. Perhaps he would have done better to stick at his job and not go around breaking eggs and getting fired.

HE shook his head.

He didn't want to give in. You had to be bold, to put a brave face on things. He opened the door and went downstairs. He stopped in the hall to listen to Kitty's music. He wondered if she was alone in there, and when she stopped and said, "How do you like it, Xerxes?" he knew she was, for Xerxes was Mrs. Kelly's cat and girls don't, as a rule, consult cats when there are humans present.

So he strolled into the sitting-room, after straightening his bow-tie and his glasses. She looked over her shoulder at him and smiled a welcome.

"I love your music," he said. How he needed companionship, friendship, to-night. And how slender and feminine and lovely she was, with her full, curving

lips and tilted nose and the velvety-brown eyes and gleaming hair. "Mind if I listen?"

"I'd like you to. What shall I play? There is a new, modern number, an impressionistic piece that brings in the things of modern life— the rush of traffic, the sound of riveters, the clank of great steam-shovels—"

"Play that." said George. "Please." He listened, enraptured, to the crashing, jangling, tumbled chords, the melody of the modern world, the sym-phony of steel. It was vast and thrilling. It spurred him on. He would be a part of it— he and his invention.

He looked fondly at Kitty; at the thick masses of her hair and the beauty of her profile. He would be a great man and she would share his greatness, and when they were together they would look back on this quiet hour together as the beginning of their love.

THEY would laugh about it, about the old piano, so bat-tered and out of tune, the awful wall-paper, the tinted photos of the Kelly family, Michael in his policeman's uni-form, Mrs. Kelly in her bridal veil, and the kids all ready to start for a picnic. Pleasant memories—

"I suppose you're thinking of your work?"

"Eh!" George started. The music had ceased moments ago and the brown eyes were studying him with a look of understanding.

"You weren't listening to me."

"I heard all your music. Truly I did. It— it made me dream."

"Of what?"

"Of— oh, of many things."

"Of your invention, I bet. I'd love to see it."

"Why, it's just a silly toy, I told you. I'll show it to you some time."

"Sold it yet?"

"Not yet. I— well, I haven't— no."

Something in his tone, some lack of its wonted buoyancy, made her look at him with sudden concern.

"I'm sure you'll make a lot of money on it. I'll bet it's good."

"I—well, thank you for saying so. Would you—it's a kind of lonely night — would you like to go to a show and have a bite to eat?"

"I'd love it."

GEORGE liked sitting next to her in the friendly darkness of the theatre. He liked the touch of her shoulder, the way she enjoyed the picture and when, at the most romantic part, warm little fingers slipped unconsciously into his, he felt the wonder of the world and the return of complete belief in himself and the tractorshovel.

But when he was again alone in his room that fullness of belief had passed from him and hopelessness returned. All very well to dream and hope. But that didn't help matters, that didn't bring fulfilment to these new dreams in which Catherine Lee now played a leading part. She believed in him. She thought him a great man.

As the days of his two weeks flitted by, he began to realise how strong was her belief in him. They went out together often. She treated him always as if he were already wearing the crown of greatness. She talked, as if like himself she could vision it, of the day when he would come to immortality.

"I know you will." she insisted, when he sought to discourage her. "I'm sure of it, and I hope when you are a great man you'll remember how happy were these times we had together."

"I could never forget," said George. That was the first time he really squeezed her hand. And that night he kissed her.

But he would not tell her about the tractor-shovel. He wanted, when he did show it to her, to be able to tell her that it was sold, that he had money for it, that he wanted her to marry him right there and then.

Only once in those weeks did he go to the attic. He gazed with question, with a faint fear, at his model. He had enamelled it in green and red with his name in golden letters. He had put a little man in the control-cab, but it was the turning of a simple hand-crank that actually made it work. He turned the crank, the wheels whirled, the crane lifted and dipped, the shovel caught up its load of sand and nails— all as smooth as clock-work.

"It's good," he muttered. "It will astonish the world."

The next night he took Kitty Lee out to dinner. His days at the Corner Stores were almost over, and he had no idea where to find a new job. But he forgot his troubles in her company. He smiled into the brown eyes across the table and saw that she was worried and not at ease.

"What's the matter, Kitty?" he laid his hand on hers and was thrilled and proud when the small fingers caught his firmly.

"Do you like me, George?"

"I— you know I love you, Catherine. I do love you. I adore you and we're going to get married as soon as I sell my invention."

"And you wouldn't be angry with me if—?"

"Not for anything."

"Well—" She took a deep breath. "I— I was watching your invention through the keyhole last night."

George laughed. Silly child. Making such a fuss over that. He should have told her about it, showed it to her, long ago.

"WHY, that's nothing, dear," he said "I don't mind. I should have shown it to you long ago. What do you think of it? Some toy, eh?"

"It's— it's gorgeous. I— there's more to tell, George. I told my boss, Mr. Romberger, about it. He was keen to see it. I— you'll think I'm a terrible sneak, but we're only a small firm and I was afraid you wouldn't deal with us. Well, I begged Mrs. Kelly to let Mr. Romberger and myself into the attic, and we saw it, and he was wild about it. He's prepared to give you a big price for it."

"He— Kitty, are you serious? He will buy my invention!"

"Give you a big advance, and a royalty. That's the way we do. But he says your tractor-shovel will go all over the world. Will you deal with him?"

"Will I? Where is he? Can we find him now?"

"I told him I would bring you to the office to-night."

"Let's go. Never mind the food. I can't believe—"

It was only a few streets away. They raced breathlessly. The office was dark except for one square of frosted glass that said S. Romberger, Managing Director.

S. Romberger was waiting and ready with a cheque that made George gasp and cling tight to Kitty's arm; ready with the papers that gave him the right to manufacture and sell the Wilkins Tractor-Shovel in all the countries of the globe.

"You will see it," said S. Romberger, "all over the world before Christmas."

"Great!" said George. He visioned the Wilkins Tractor-Shovels, hundreds, thousands of them, rolling across tundras and through mountain-passes, scooping the world away.

"Yes," said S. Romberger. "Chinese, French, Dutch, Spanish— it don't matter what nationality a kid is, he'll just love to dig into a pile of sand with a tractor-shovel like that. It's the toy of the century!"

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8: The Shunned House

H. P. Lovecraft

1890-1937

Weird Tales, Oct 1937

FROM EVEN THE GREATEST of horrors irony is seldom absent. Sometimes it enters directly into the composition of the events, while sometimes it relates only to their fortuitous position among persons and places. The latter sort is splendidly exemplified by a case in the ancient city of Providence, where in the late forties Edgar Allan Poe used to sojourn often during his unsuccessful wooing of the gifted poetess, Mrs. Whitman. Poe generally stopped at the Mansion House in Benefit Street— the renamed Golden Ball Inn whose roof has sheltered Washington, Jefferson, and Lafayette— and his favorite walk led northward along the same street to Mrs. Whitman's home and the neighboring hillside churchyard of St. John's, whose hidden expanse of Eighteenth Century gravestones had for him a peculiar fascination.

Now the irony is this. In this walk, so many times repeated, the world's greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre was obliged to pass a particular house on the eastern side of the street; a dingy, antiquated structure perched on the abruptly rising side hill, with a great unkempt yard dating from a time when the region was partly open country. It does not appear that he ever wrote or spoke of it, nor is there any evidence that he even noticed it. And yet that house, to the two persons in possession of certain information, equals or outranks in horror the wildest fantasy of the genius who so often passed it unknowingly, and stands starkly leering as a symbol of all that is unutterably hideous.

The house was— and for that matter still is— of a kind to attract the attention of the curious. Originally a farm or semi-farm building, it followed the average New England colonial lines of the middle Eighteenth Century— the prosperous peaked-roof sort, with two stories and dormerless attic, and with the Georgian doorway and interior panelling dictated by the progress of taste at that time. It faced south, with one gable end buried to the lower windows in the eastward rising hill, and the other exposed to the foundations toward the street. Its construction, over a century and a half ago, had followed the grading and straightening of the road in that especial vicinity; for Benefit Street— at first called Back Street— was laid out as a lane winding amongst the graveyards of the first settlers, and straightened only when the removal of the bodies to the North Burial Ground made it decently possible to cut through the old family plots.

At the start, the western wall had lain some twenty feet up a precipitous lawn from the roadway; but a widening of the street at about the time of the

Revolution sheared off most of the intervening space, exposing the foundations so that a brick basement wall had to be made, giving the deep cellar a street frontage with door and one window above ground, close to the new line of public travel. When the sidewalk was laid out a century ago the last of the intervening space was removed; and Poe in his walks must have seen only a sheer ascent of dull gray brick flush with the sidewalk and surmounted at a height of ten feet by the antique shingled bulk of the house proper.

The farm-like ground extended back very deeply up the hill, almost to Wheaton Street. The space south of the house, abutting on Benefit Street, was of course greatly above the existing sidewalk level, forming a terrace bounded by a high bank wall of damp, mossy stone pierced by a steep flight of narrow steps which led inward between canyon-like surfaces to the upper region of mangy lawn, rheumy brick walks, and neglected gardens whose dismantled cement urns, rusted kettles fallen from tripods of knotty sticks, and similar paraphernalia set off the weather-beaten front door with its broken fanlight, rotting Ionic pilasters, and wormy triangular pediment.

WHAT I HEARD in my youth about the shunned house was merely that people died there in alarmingly great numbers. That, I was told, was why the original owners had moved out some twenty years after building the place. It was plainly unhealthy, perhaps because of the dampness and fungous growths in the cellar, the general sickish smell, the drafts of the hallways, or the quality of the well and pump water. These things were bad enough, and these were all that gained belief among the persons whom I knew. Only the notebooks of my antiquarian uncle, Doctor Elihu Whipple, revealed to me at length the darker, vaguer surmises which formed an undercurrent of folklore among old-time servants and humble folk; surmises which never travelled far, and which were largely forgotten when Providence grew to be a metropolis with a shifting modern population.

The general fact is, that the house was never regarded by the solid part of the community as in any real sense "haunted." There were no widespread tales of rattling chains, cold currents of air, extinguished lights, or faces at the window. Extremists sometimes said the house was "unlucky," but that is as far as even they went. What was really beyond dispute is that a frightful proportion of persons died there; or more accurately, *had* died there, since after some peculiar happenings over sixty years ago the building had become deserted through the sheer impossibility of renting it. These persons were not all cut off suddenly by any one cause; rather did it seem that their vitality was insidiously sapped, so that each one died the sooner from whatever tendency to weakness he may have naturally had. And those who did not die displayed in varying degree a type of anemia or consumption, and sometimes a decline of the

mental faculties, which spoke ill for the salubriousness of the building. Neighboring houses, it must be added, seemed entirely free from the noxious quality.

This much I knew before my insistent questioning led my uncle to show me the notes which finally embarked us both on our hideous investigation. In my childhood the shunned house was vacant, with barren, gnarled and terrible old trees, long, queerly pale grass and nightmarishly misshapen weeds in the high terraced yard where birds never lingered. We boys used to overrun the place, and I can still recall my youthful terror not only at the morbid strangeness of this sinister vegetation, but at the eldritch atmosphere and odor of the dilapidated house, whose unlocked front door was often entered in quest of shudders. The small-paned windows were largely broken, and a nameless air of desolation hung round the precarious panelling, shaky interior shutters, peeling wall-paper, falling plaster, rickety staircases, and such fragments of battered furniture as still remained. The dust and cobwebs added their touch of the fearful; and brave indeed was the boy who would voluntarily ascend the ladder to the attic, a vast raftered length lighted only by small blinking windows in the gable ends, and filled with a massed wreckage of chests, chairs, and spinning-wheels which infinite years of deposit had shrouded and festooned into monstrous and hellish shapes.

But after all, the attic was not the most terrible part of the house. It was the dank, humid cellar which somehow exerted the strongest repulsion on us, even though it was wholly above ground on the street side, with only a thin door and window-pierced brick wall to separate it from the busy sidewalk. We scarcely knew whether to haunt it in spectral fascination, or to shun it for the sake of our souls and our sanity. For one thing, the bad odor of the house was strongest there; and for another thing, we did not like the white fungous growths which occasionally sprang up in rainy summer weather from the hard earth floor. Those fungi, grotesquely like the vegetation in the yard outside, were truly horrible in their outlines; detestable parodies of toadstools and Indian-pipes, whose like we had never seen in any other situation. They rotted quickly, and at one stage became slightly phosphorescent; so that nocturnal passers-by sometimes spoke of witch-fires glowing behind the broken panes of the fetor-spreading windows.

We never— even in our wildest Halloween moods— visited this cellar by night, but in some of our daytime visits could detect the phosphorescence, especially when the day was dark and wet. There was also a subtler thing we often thought we detected— a very strange thing which was, however, merely suggestive at most. I refer to a sort of cloudy whitish pattern on the dirt floor— a vague, shifting deposit of mold or niter which we sometimes thought we could trace amidst the sparse fungous growths near the huge fireplace of the

basement kitchen. Once in a while it struck us that this patch bore an uncanny resemblance to a doubled-up human figure, though generally no such kinship existed, and often there was no whitish deposit whatever.

On a certain rainy afternoon when this illusion seemed phenomenally strong, and when, in addition, I had fancied I glimpsed a kind of thin, yellowish, shimmering exhalation rising from the nitrous pattern toward the yawning fireplace, I spoke to my uncle about the matter. He smiled at this odd conceit, but it seemed that his smile was tinged with reminiscence. Later I heard that a similar notion entered into some of the wild ancient tales of the common folk— a notion likewise alluding to ghoulish, wolfish shapes taken by smoke from the great chimney, and queer contours assumed by certain of the sinuous tree-roots that thrust their way into the cellar through the loose foundation-stones.

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NOT TILL MY ADULT YEARS did my uncle set before me the notes and data which he had collected concerning the shunned house. Doctor Whipple was a sane, conservative physician of the old school, and for all his interest in the place was not eager to encourage young thoughts toward the abnormal. His own view, postulating simply a building and location of markedly unsanitary qualities, had nothing to do with abnormality; but he realized that the very picturesqueness which aroused his own interest would in a boy's fanciful mind take on all manner of gruesome imaginative associations.

The doctor was a bachelor; a white-haired, clean-shaven, old-fashioned gentleman, and a local historian of note, who had often broken a lance with such controversial guardians of tradition as Sidney S. Rider and Thomas W. Bicknell. He lived with one man-servant in a Georgian homestead with knocker and iron-railed steps, balanced eerily on the steep ascent of North Court Street beside the ancient brick court and colony house where his grandfather— a cousin of that celebrated privateersman, Captain Whipple, who burnt His Majesty's armed schooner *Gaspee* in 1772— had voted in the legislature on May 4, 1776, for the independence of the Rhode Island Colony. Around him in the damp, low-ceiled library with the musty white panelling, heavy carved overmantel and small-paned, vine-shaded windows, were the relics and records of his ancient family, among which were many dubious allusions to the shunned house in Benefit Street. That pest spot lies not far distant— for Benefit runs ledgewise just above the court house along the precipitous hill up which the first settlement climbed.

When, in the end, my insistent pestering and maturing years evoked from my uncle the hoarded lore I sought, there lay before me a strange enough chronicle. Long-winded, statistical, and drearily genealogical as some of the

matter was, there ran through it a continuous thread of brooding, tenacious horror and preternatural malevolence which impressed me even more than it had impressed the good doctor. Separate events fitted together uncannily, and seemingly irrelevant details held mines of hideous possibilities. A new and burning curiosity grew in me, compared to which my boyish curiosity was feeble and inchoate.

The first revelation led to an exhaustive research, and finally to that shuddering quest which proved so disastrous to myself and mine. For at the last my uncle insisted on joining the search I had commenced, and after a certain night in that house he did not come away with me. I am lonely without that gentle soul whose long years were filled only with honor, virtue, good taste, benevolence, and learning. I have reared a marble urn to his memory in St. John's churchyard— the place that Poe loved— the hidden grove of giant willows on the hill, where tombs and headstones huddle quietly between the hoary bulk of the church and the houses and bank walls of Benefit Street.

The history of the house, opening amidst a maze of dates, revealed no trace of the sinister either about its construction or about the prosperous and honorable family who built it. Yet from the first a taint of calamity, soon increased to boding significance, was apparent. My uncle's carefully compiled record began with the building of the structure in 1763, and followed the theme with an unusual amount of detail. The shunned house, it seems, was first inhabited by William Harris and his wife Rhoby Dexter, with their children, Elkanah, born in 1755, Abigail, born in 1757, William, Jr., born in 1759, and Ruth, born in 1761. Harris was a substantial merchant and seaman in the West India trade, connected with the firm of Obadiah Brown and his nephews. After Brown's death in 1761, the new firm of Nicholas Brown & Company made him master of the brig *Prudence*, Providence-built, of 120 tons, thus enabling him to erect the new homestead he had desired ever since his marriage.

The site he had chosen— a recently straightened part of the new and fashionable Back Street, which ran along the side of the hill above crowded Cheapside— was all that could be wished, and the building did justice to the location. It was the best that moderate means could afford, and Harris hastened to move in before the birth of a fifth child which the family expected. That child, a boy, came in December; but was still-born. Nor was any child to be born alive in that house for a century and a half.

The next April, sickness occurred among the children, and Abigail and Ruth died before the month was over. Doctor Job Ives diagnosed the trouble as some infantile fever, though others declared it was more of a mere wasting-away or decline. It seemed, in any event, to be contagious; for Hannah Bowen, one of the two servants, died of it in the following June. Eli Lideason, the other servant, constantly complained of weakness; and would have returned to his father's

farm in Rehoboth but for a sudden attachment for Mehitabel Pierce, who was hired to succeed Hannah. He died the next year— a sad year indeed, since it marked the death of William Harris himself, enfeebled as he was by the climate of Martinique, where his occupation had kept him for considerable periods during the preceding decade.

The widowed Rhoby Harris never recovered from the shock of her husband's death, and the passing of her first-born Elkanah two years later was the final blow to her reason. In 1768 she fell victim to a mild form of insanity, and was thereafter confined to the upper part of the house; her elder maiden sister, Mercy Dexter, having moved in to take charge of the family. Mercy was a plain, raw-boned woman of great strength; but her health visibly declined from the time of her advent. She was greatly devoted to her unfortunate sister, and had an especial affection for her only surviving nephew William, who from a sturdy infant had become a sickly, spindling lad. In this year the servant Mehitabel died, and the other servant, Preserved Smith, left without coherent explanation— or at least, with only some wild tales and a complaint that he disliked the smell of the place. For a time Mercy could secure no more help, since the seven deaths and case of madness, all occurring within five years' space, had begun to set in motion the body of fireside rumor which later became so bizarre. Ultimately, however, she obtained new servants from out of town; Ann White, a morose woman from that part of North Kingstown now set off as the township of Exeter, and a capable Boston man named Zenas Low.

It was Ann White who first gave definite shape to the sinister idle talk. Mercy should have known better than to hire anyone from the Nooseneck Hill country, for that remote bit of backwoods was then, as now, a seat of the most uncomfortable superstitions. As lately as 1892 an Exeter community exhumed a dead body and ceremoniously burnt its heart in order to prevent certain alleged visitations injurious to the public health and peace, and one may imagine the point of view of the same section in 1768. Ann's tongue was perniciously active, and within a few months Mercy discharged her, filling her place with a faithful and amiable Amazon from Newport, Maria Robbins.

Meanwhile poor Rhoby Harris, in her madness, gave voice to dreams and imaginings of the most hideous sort. At times her screams became insupportable, and for long periods she would utter shrieking horrors which necessitated her son's temporary residence with his cousin, Peleg Harris, in Presbyterian Lane near the new college building. The boy would seem to improve after these visits, and had Mercy been as wise as she was well-meaning, she would have let him live permanently with Peleg. Just what Mrs. Harris cried out in her fits of violence, tradition hesitates to say; or rather, presents such extravagant accounts that they nullify themselves through sheer

absurdity. Certainly it sounds absurd to hear that a woman educated only in the rudiments of French often shouted for hours in a coarse and idiomatic form of that language, or that the same person, alone and guarded, complained wildly of a staring thing which bit and chewed at her. In 1772 the servant Zenas died, and when Mrs. Harris heard of it she laughed with a shocking delight utterly foreign to her. The next year she herself died, and was laid to rest in the North Burial Ground beside her husband.

Upon the outbreak of trouble with Great Britain in 1775, William Harris, despite his scant sixteen years and feeble constitution, managed to enlist in the Army of Observation under General Greene; and from that time on enjoyed a steady rise in health and prestige. In 1780, as a captain in the Rhode Island forces in New Jersey under Colonel Angell, he met and married Phebe Hetfield of Elizabethtown, whom he brought to Providence upon his honorable discharge in the following year.

The young soldier's return was not a thing of unmitigated happiness. The house, it is true, was still in good condition; and the street had been widened and changed in name from Back Street to Benefit Street. But Mercy Dexter's once robust frame had undergone a sad and curious decay, so that she was now a stooped and pathetic figure with hollow voice and disconcerting pallor—qualities shared to a singular degree by the one remaining servant Maria. In the autumn of 1782 Phebe Harris gave birth to a still-born daughter, and on the fifteenth of the next May Mercy Dexter took leave of a useful, austere, and virtuous life.

William Harris, at last thoroughly convinced of the radically unhealthful nature of his abode, now took steps toward quitting it and closing it for ever. Securing temporary quarters for himself and his wife at the newly opened Golden Ball Inn, he arranged for the building of a new and finer house in Westminster Street, in the growing part of the town across the Great Bridge. There, in 1785, his son Dutee was born; and there the family dwelt till the encroachments of commerce drove them back across the river and over the hill to Angell Street, in the newer East Side residence district, where the late Archer Harris built his sumptuous but hideous French-roofed mansion in 1876. William and Phebe both succumbed to the yellow fever epidemic of 1797, but Dutee was brought up by his cousin Rathbone Harris, Peleg's son.

Rathbone was a practical man, and rented the Benefit Street house despite William's wish to keep it vacant. He considered it an obligation to his ward to make the most of all the boy's property, nor did he concern himself with the deaths and illnesses which caused so many changes of tenants, or the steadily growing aversion with which the house was generally regarded. It is likely that he felt only vexation when, in 1804, the town council ordered him to fumigate the place with sulfur, tar, and gum camphor on account of the much-discussed

deaths of four persons, presumably caused by the then diminishing fever epidemic. They said the place had a febrile smell.

Dutee himself thought little of the house, for he grew up to be a privateersman, and served with distinction on the *Vigilant* under Captain Cahoone in the War of 1812. He returned unharmed, married in 1814, and became a father on that memorable night of September 23, 1815, when a great gale drove the waters of the bay over half the town, and floated a tall sloop well up Westminster Street so that its masts almost tapped the Harris windows in symbolic affirmation that the new boy, Welcome, was a seaman's son.

Welcome did not survive his father, but lived to perish gloriously at Fredericksburg in 1862. Neither he nor his son Archer knew of the shunned house as other than a nuisance almost impossible to rent— perhaps on account of the mustiness and sickly odor of unkempt old age. Indeed, it never was rented after a series of deaths culminating in 1861, which the excitement of the war tended to throw into obscurity. Carrington Harris, last of the male line, knew it only as a deserted and somewhat picturesque center of legend until I told him my experience. He had meant to tear it down and build an apartment house on the site, but after my account decided to let it stand, install plumbing, and rent it. Nor has he yet had any difficulty in obtaining tenants. The horror has gone.

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IT MAY WELL BE imagined how powerfully I was affected by the annals of the Harrises. In this continuous record there seemed to me to brood a persistent evil beyond anything in nature as I had known it; an evil clearly connected with the house and not with the family. This impression was confirmed by my uncle's less systematic array of miscellaneous data— legends transcribed from servant gossip, cuttings from the papers, copies of death certificates by fellow-physicians, and the like. All of this material I cannot hope to give, for my uncle was a tireless antiquarian and very deeply interested in the shunned house; but I may refer to several dominant points which earn notice by their recurrence through many reports from diverse sources. For example, the servant gossip was practically unanimous in attributing to the fungous and malodorous *cellar* of the house a vast supremacy in evil influence. There had been servants— Ann White especially— who would not use the cellar kitchen, and at least three well-defined legends bore upon the queer quasi-human or diabolic outlines assumed by tree-roots and patches of mold in that region. These latter narratives interested me profoundly, on account of what I had seen in my boyhood, but I felt that most of the significance had in each case been largely obscured by additions from the common stock of local ghost lore.

Ann White, with her Exeter superstition, had promulgated the most extravagant and at the same time most consistent tale; alleging that there must lie buried beneath the house one of those vampires— the dead who retain their bodily form and live on the blood or breath of the living— whose hideous legions send their preying shapes or spirits abroad by night. To destroy a vampire one must, the grandmothers say, exhume it and burn its heart, or at least drive a stake through that organ; and Ann's dogged insistence on a search under the cellar had been prominent in bringing about her discharge.

Her tales, however, commanded a wide audience, and were the more readily accepted because the house indeed stood on land once used for burial purposes. To me their interest depended less on this circumstance than on the peculiarly appropriate way in which they dovetailed with certain other things— the complaint of the departing servant Preserved Smith, who had preceded Ann and never heard of her, that something "sucked his breath" at night; the death-certificates of the fever victims of 1804, issued by Doctor Chad Hopkins, and showing the four deceased persons all unaccountably lacking in blood; and the obscure passages of poor Rhoby Harris's ravings, where she complained of the sharp teeth of a glassy-eyed, half-visible presence.

Free from unwarranted superstition though I am, these things produced in me an odd sensation, which was intensified by a pair of widely separated newspaper cuttings relating to deaths in the shunned house— one from the *Providence Gazette and Country-Journal* of April 12, 1815, and the other from the *Daily Transcript and Chronicle* of October 27, 1845— each of which detailed an appallingly grisly circumstance whose duplication was remarkable. It seems that in both instances the dying person, in 1815 a gentle old lady named Stafford and in 1845 a schoolteacher of middle age named Eleazar Durfee, became transfigured in a horrible way, glaring glassily and attempting to bite the throat of the attending physician. Even more puzzling, though, was the final case which put an end to the renting of the house— a series of anemia deaths preceded by progressive madnesses wherein the patient would craftily attempt the lives of his relatives by incisions in the neck or wrist.

This was in 1860 and 1861, when my uncle had just begun his medical practise; and before leaving for the front he heard much of it from his elder professional colleagues. The really inexplicable thing was the way in which the victims— ignorant people, for the ill-smelling and widely shunned house could now be rented to no others— would babble maledictions in French, a language they could not possibly have studied to any extent. It made one think of poor Rhoby Harris nearly a century before, and so moved my uncle that he commenced collecting historical data on the house after listening, some time subsequent to his return from the war, to the first-hand account of Doctors Chase and Whitmarsh. Indeed, I could see that my uncle had thought deeply on

the subject, and that he was glad of my own interest— an open-minded and sympathetic interest which enabled him to discuss with me matters at which others would merely have laughed. His fancy had not gone so far as mine, but he felt that the place was rare in its imaginative potentialities, and worthy of note as an inspiration in the field of the grotesque and macabre.

For my part, I was disposed to take the whole subject with profound seriousness, and began at once not only to review the evidence, but to accumulate as much more as I could. I talked with the elderly Archer Harris, then owner of the house, many times before his death in 1916; and obtained from him and his still surviving maiden sister Alice an authentic corroboration of all the family data my uncle had collected. When, however, I asked them what connection with France or its language the house could have, they confessed themselves as frankly baffled and ignorant as I. Archer knew nothing, and all that Miss Harris could say was that an old allusion her grandfather, Dutee Harris, had heard of might have shed a little light. The old seaman, who had survived his son Welcome's death in battle by two years, had not himself known the legend, but recalled that his earliest nurse, the ancient Maria Robbins, seemed darkly aware of something that might have lent a weird significance to the French raving of Rhoby Harris, which she had so often heard during the last days of that hapless woman. Maria had been at the shunned house from 1769 till the removal of the family in 1783, and had seen Mercy Dexter die. Once she hinted to the child Dutee of a somewhat peculiar circumstance in Mercy's last moments, but he had soon forgotten all about it save that it was something peculiar. The granddaughter, moreover, recalled even this much with difficulty. She and her brother were not so much interested in the house as was Archer's son Carrington, the present owner, with whom I talked after my experience.

HAVINg exhausted the Harris family of all the information it could furnish, I turned my attention to early town records and deeds with a zeal more penetrating than that which my uncle had occasionally shown in the same work. What I wished was a comprehensive history of the site from its very settlement in 1636— or even before, if any Narragansett Indian legend could be unearthed to supply the data. I found, at the start, that the land had been part of the long strip of home lot granted originally to John Throckmorton; one of many similar strips beginning at the Town Street beside the river and extending up over the hill to a line roughly corresponding with the modern Hope Street. The Throckmorton lot had later, of course, been much subdivided; and I became very assiduous in tracing that section through which Back or Benefit Street was later run. It had, as rumor indeed said, been the Throckmorton graveyard; but as I examined the records more carefully, I found that the graves had all been

transferred at an early date to the North Burial Ground on the Pawtucket West Road.

Then suddenly I came— by a rare piece of chance, since it was not in the main body of records and might easily have been missed— upon something which aroused my keenest eagerness, fitting in as it did with several of the queerest phases of the affair. It was the record of a lease, in 1697, of a small tract of ground to an Etienne Roulet and wife. At last the French element had appeared— that, and another deeper element of horror which the name conjured up from the darkest recesses of my weird and heterogeneous reading— and I feverishly studied the platting of the locality as it had been before the cutting through and partial straightening of Back Street between 1747 and 1758. I found what I had half expected, that where the shunned house now stood the Roulets had laid out their graveyard behind a one-story and attic cottage, and that no record of any transfer of graves existed. The document, indeed, ended in much confusion; and I was forced to ransack both the Rhode Island Historical Society and Shepley Library before I could find a local door which the name of Etienne Roulet would unlock. In the end I did find something; something of such vague but monstrous import that I set about at once to examine the cellar of the shunned house itself with a new and excited minuteness.

The Roulets, it seemed, had come in 1696 from East Greenwich, down the west shore of Narragansett Bay. They were Huguenots from Caude, and had encountered much opposition before the Providence selectmen allowed them to settle in the town. Unpopularity had dogged them in East Greenwich, whither they had come in 1686, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and rumor said that the cause of dislike extended beyond mere racial and national prejudice, or the land disputes which involved other French settlers with the English in rivalries which not even Governor Andros could quell. But their ardent Protestantism— too ardent, some whispered— and their evident distress when virtually driven from the village down the bay, had moved the sympathy of the town fathers. Here the strangers had been granted a haven; and the swarthy Etienne Roulet, less apt at agriculture than at reading queer books and drawing queer diagrams, was given a clerical post in the warehouse at Pardon Tillinghast's wharf, far south in Town Street. There had, however, been a riot of some sort later on— perhaps forty years later, after old Roulet's death— and no one seemed to hear of the family after that.

For a century and more, it appeared, the Roulets had been well remembered and frequently discussed as vivid incidents in the quiet life of a New England seaport. Etienne's son Paul, a surly fellow whose erratic conduct had probably provoked the riot which wiped out the family, was particularly a source of speculation; and though Providence never shared the witchcraft panics of her

Puritan neighbors, it was freely intimated by old wives that his prayers were neither uttered at the proper time nor directed toward the proper object. All this had undoubtedly formed the basis of the legend known by old Maria Robbins. What relation it had to the French ravings of Rhoby Harris and other inhabitants of the shunned house, imagination or future discovery alone could determine. I wondered how many of those who had known the legends realized that additional link with the terrible which my wider reading had given me; that ominous item in the annals of morbid horror which tells of the creature *Jacques Roulet, of Caude*, who in 1598 was condemned to death as a demoniac but afterward saved from the stake by the Paris parliament and shut in a madhouse. He had been found covered with blood and shreds of flesh in a wood, shortly after the killing and rending of a boy by a pair of wolves. One wolf was seen to lope away unhurt. Surely a pretty hearthside tale, with a queer significance as to name and place; but I decided that the Providence gossips could not have generally known of it. Had they known, the coincidence of names would have brought some drastic and frightened action— indeed, might not its limited whispering have precipitated the final riot which erased the Roulets from the town?

I NOW VISITED the accursed place with increased frequency; studying the unwholesome vegetation of the garden, examining all the walls of the building, and poring over every inch of the earthen cellar floor. Finally, with Carrington Harris's permission, I fitted a key to the disused door opening from the cellar directly upon Benefit Street, preferring to have a more immediate access to the outside world than the dark stairs, ground-floor hall, and front door could give. There, where morbidity lurked most thickly, I searched and poked during long afternoons when the sunlight filtered in through the cobwebbed above-ground windows, and a sense of security glowed from the unlocked door which placed me only a few feet from the placid sidewalk outside. Nothing new rewarded my efforts— only the same depressing mustiness and faint suggestions of noxious odors and nitrous outlines on the floor— and I fancy that many pedestrians must have watched me curiously through the broken panes.

At length, upon a suggestion of my uncle's, I decided to try the spot nocturnally; and one stormy midnight ran the beams of an electric torch over the moldy floor with its uncanny shapes and distorted, half-phosphorescent fungi. The place had dispirited me curiously that evening, and I was almost prepared when I saw— or thought I saw— amidst the whitish deposits a particularly sharp definition of the "huddled form" I had suspected from boyhood. Its clearness was astonishing and unprecedented— and as I watched I seemed to see again the thin, yellowish, shimmering exhalation which had startled me on that rainy afternoon so many years before.

Above the anthropomorphic patch of mold by the fireplace it rose; a subtle, sickish, almost luminous vapor which as it hung trembling in the dampness seemed to develop vague and shocking suggestions of form, gradually trailing off into nebulous decay and passing up into the blackness of the great chimney with a fetor in its wake. It was truly horrible, and the more so to me because of what I knew of the spot. Refusing to flee, I watched it fade— and as I watched I felt that it was in turn watching me greedily with eyes more imaginable than visible. When I told my uncle about it he was greatly aroused; and after a tense hour of reflection, arrived at a definite and drastic decision. Weighing in his mind the importance of the matter, and the significance of our relation to it, he insisted that we both test— and if possible destroy— the horror of the house by a joint night or nights of aggressive vigil in that musty and fungus-cursed cellar.

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ON WEDNESDAY, June 25, 1919, after a proper notification of Carrington Harris which did not include surmises as to what we expected to find, my uncle and I conveyed to the shunned house two camp chairs and a folding camp cot, together with some scientific mechanism of greater weight and intricacy. These we placed in the cellar during the day, screening the windows with paper and planning to return in the evening for our first vigil. We had locked the door from the cellar to the ground floor; and having a key to the outside cellar door, were prepared to leave our expensive and delicate apparatus— which we had obtained secretly and at great cost— as many days as our vigils might be protracted. It was our design to sit up together till very late, and then watch singly till dawn in two-hour stretches, myself first and then my companion; the inactive member resting on the cot.

The natural leadership with which my uncle procured the instruments from the laboratories of Brown University and the Cranston Street Armory, and instinctively assumed direction of our venture, was a marvelous commentary on the potential vitality and resilience of a man of eighty-one. Elihu Whipple had lived according to the hygienic laws he had preached as a physician, and but for what happened later would be here in full vigor today. Only two persons suspected what did happen— Carrington Harris and myself. I had to tell Harris because he owned the house and deserved to know what had gone out of it. Then too, we had spoken to him in advance of our quest; and I felt after my uncle's going that he would understand and assist me in some vitally necessary public explanations. He turned very pale, but agreed to help me, and decided that it would now be safe to rent the house.

To declare that we were not nervous on that rainy night of watching would be an exaggeration both gross and ridiculous. We were not, as I have said, in any

sense childishly superstitious, but scientific study and reflection had taught us that the known universe of three dimensions embraces the merest fraction of the whole cosmos of substance and energy. In this case an overwhelming preponderance of evidence from numerous authentic sources pointed to the tenacious existence of certain forces of great power and, so far as the human point of view is concerned, exceptional malignancy. To say that we actually believed in vampires or werewolves would be a carelessly inclusive statement. Rather must it be said that we were not prepared to deny the possibility of certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter; existing very infrequently in three-dimensional space because of its more intimate connection with other spatial units, yet close enough to the boundary of our own to furnish us occasional manifestations which we, for lack of a proper vantage-point, may never hope to understand.

In short, it seemed to my uncle and me that an incontrovertible array of facts pointed to some lingering influence in the shunned house; traceable to one or another of the ill-favored French settlers of two centuries before, and still operative through rare and unknown laws of atomic and electronic motion. That the family of Roulet had possessed an abnormal affinity for outer circles of entity— dark spheres which for normal folk hold only repulsion and terror— their recorded history seemed to prove. Had not, then, the riots of those bygone seventeen-thirties set moving certain kinetic patterns in the morbid brain of one or more of them— notably the sinister Paul Roulet— which obscurely survived the bodies murdered and buried by the mob, and continued to function in some multiple-dimensioned space along the original lines of force determined by a frantic hatred of the encroaching community?

Such a thing was surely not a physical or biochemical impossibility in the light of a newer science which includes the theories of relativity and intra-atomic action. One might easily imagine an alien nucleus of substance or energy, formless or otherwise, kept alive by imperceptible or immaterial subtractions from the life-force or bodily tissue and fluids of other and more palpably living things into which it penetrates and with whose fabric it sometimes completely merges itself. It might be actively hostile, or it might be dictated merely by blind motives of self-preservation. In any case such a monster must of necessity be in our scheme of things an anomaly and an intruder, whose extirpation forms a primary duty with every man not an enemy to the world's life, health, and sanity.

What baffled us was our utter ignorance of the aspect in which we might encounter the thing. No sane person had ever seen it, and few had ever felt it definitely. It might be pure energy— a form ethereal and outside the realm of substance— or it might be partly material; some unknown and equivocal mass of plasticity, capable of changing at will to nebulous approximations of the solid,

liquid, gaseous, or tenuously unparticled states. The anthropomorphic patch of mold on the floor, the form of the yellowish vapor, and the curvature of the tree-roots in some of the old tales, all argued at least a remote and reminiscent connection with the human shape; but how representative or permanent that similarity might be, none could say with any kind of certainty.

WE HAD DEVISED two weapons to fight it; a large and specially fitted Crookes tube operated by powerful storage batteries and provided with peculiar screens and reflectors, in case it proved intangible and opposable only by vigorously destructive ether radiations, and a pair of military flame-throwers of the sort used in the World War, in case it proved partly material and susceptible of mechanical destruction— for like the superstitious Exeter rustics, we were prepared to burn the thing's heart out if heart existed to burn. All this aggressive mechanism we set in the cellar in positions carefully arranged with reference to the cot and chairs, and to the spot before the fireplace where the mold had taken strange shapes. That suggestive patch, by the way, was only faintly visible when we placed our furniture and instruments, and when we returned that evening for the actual vigil. For a moment I half doubted that I had ever seen it in the more definitely limned form— but then I thought of the legends.

Our cellar vigil began at ten p. m., daylight saving time, and as it continued we found no promise of pertinent developments. A weak, filtered glow from the rain-harassed street-lamps outside, and a feeble phosphorescence from the detestable fungi within, showed the dripping stone of the walls, from which all traces of whitewash had vanished; the dank, fetid and mildew-tainted hard earth floor with its obscene fungi; the rotting remains of what had been stools, chairs, and tables, and other more shapeless furniture; the heavy planks and massive beams of the ground floor overhead; the decrepit plank door leading to bins and chambers beneath other parts of the house; the crumbling stone staircase with ruined wooden hand-rail; and the crude and cavernous fireplace of blackened brick where rusted iron fragments revealed the past presence of hooks, andirons, spit, crane, and a door to the Dutch oven— these things, and our austere cot and camp chairs, and the heavy and intricate destructive machinery we had brought.

We had, as in my own former explorations, left the door to the street unlocked; so that a direct and practical path of escape might lie open in case of manifestations beyond our power to deal with. It was our idea that our continued nocturnal presence would call forth whatever malign entity lurked there; and that being prepared, we could dispose of the thing with one or the other of our provided means as soon as we had recognized and observed it sufficiently. How long it might require to evoke and extinguish the thing, we had no notion. It occurred to us, too, that our venture was far from safe; for in what

strength the thing might appear no one could tell. But we deemed the game worth the hazard, and embarked on it alone and unhesitatingly; conscious that the seeking of outside aid would only expose us to ridicule and perhaps defeat our entire purpose. Such was our frame of mind as we talked— far into the night, till my uncle's growing drowsiness made me remind him to lie down for his two-hour sleep.

Something like fear chilled me as I sat there in the small hours alone— I say alone, for one who sits by a sleeper is indeed alone; perhaps more alone than he can realize. My uncle breathed heavily, his deep inhalations and exhalations accompanied by the rain outside, and punctuated by another nerve-racking sound of distant dripping water within— for the house was repulsively damp even in dry weather, and in this storm positively swamp-like. I studied the loose, antique masonry of the walls in the fungus-light and the feeble rays which stole in from the street through the screened window; and once, when the noisome atmosphere of the place seemed about to sicken me, I opened the door and looked up and down the street, feasting my eyes on familiar sights and my nostrils on wholesome air. Still nothing occurred to reward my watching; and I yawned repeatedly, fatigue getting the better of apprehension.

Then the stirring of my uncle in his sleep attracted my notice. He had turned restlessly on the cot several times during the latter half of the first hour, but now he was breathing with unusual irregularity, occasionally heaving a sigh which held more than a few of the qualities of a choking moan.

I turned my electric flashlight on him and found his face averted; so rising and crossing to the other side of the cot, I again flashed the light to see if he seemed in any pain. What I saw unnerved me most surprisingly, considering its relative triviality. It must have been merely the association of any odd circumstance with the sinister nature of our location and mission, for surely the circumstance was not in itself frightful or unnatural. It was merely that my uncle's facial expression, disturbed no doubt by the strange dreams which our situation prompted, betrayed considerable agitation, and seemed not at all characteristic of him. His habitual expression was one of kindly and well-bred calm, whereas now a variety of emotions seemed struggling within him. I think, on the whole, that it was this *variety* which chiefly disturbed me. My uncle, as he gasped and tossed in increasing perturbation and with eyes that had now started open, seemed not one but many men, and suggested a curious quality of alienage from himself.

ALL AT ONCE he commenced to mutter, and I did not like the look of his mouth and teeth as he spoke. The words were at first indistinguishable, and then— with a tremendous start— I recognized something about them which filled me with icy fear till I recalled the breadth of my uncle's education and the

interminable translations he had made from anthropological and antiquarian articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. For the venerable Elihu Whipple was muttering *in French*, and the few phrases I could distinguish seemed connected with the darkest myths he had ever adapted from the famous Paris magazine.

Suddenly a perspiration broke out on the sleeper's forehead, and he leaped abruptly up, half awake. The jumble of French changed to a cry in English, and the hoarse voice shouted excitedly, "My breath, my breath!" Then the awakening became complete, and with a subsidence of facial expression to the normal state my uncle seized my hand and began to relate a dream whose nucleus of significance I could only surmise with a kind of awe.

He had, he said, floated off from a very ordinary series of dream-pictures into a scene whose strangeness was related to nothing he had ever read. It was of this world, and yet not of it— a shadowy geometrical confusion in which could be seen elements of familiar things in most unfamiliar and perturbing combinations. There was a suggestion of queerly disordered pictures superimposed one upon another; an arrangement in which the essentials of time as well as of space seemed dissolved and mixed in the most illogical fashion. In this kaleidoscopic vortex of phantasmal images were occasional snap-shots, if one might use the term, of singular clearness but unaccountable heterogeneity.

Once my uncle thought he lay in a carelessly dug open pit, with a crowd of angry faces framed by straggling locks and three-cornered hats frowning down on him. Again he seemed to be in the interior of a house— an old house, apparently— but the details and inhabitants were constantly changing, and he could never be certain of the faces or the furniture, or even of the room itself, since doors and windows seemed in just as great a state of flux as the presumably more mobile objects. It was queer— damnably queer— and my uncle spoke almost sheepishly, as if half expecting not to be believed, when he declared that of the strange faces many had unmistakably borne the features of the Harris family. And all the while there was a personal sensation of choking, as if some pervasive presence had spread itself through his body and sought to possess itself of his vital processes.

I shuddered at the thought of those vital processes, worn as they were by eighty-one years of continuous functioning, in conflict with unknown forces of which the youngest and strongest system might well be afraid; but in another moment reflected that dreams are only dreams, and that these uncomfortable visions could be, at most, no more than my uncle's reaction to the investigations and expectations which had lately filled our minds to the exclusion of all else.

Conversation, also, soon tended to dispel my sense of strangeness; and in time I yielded to my yawns and took my turn at slumber. My uncle seemed now

very wakeful, and welcomed his period of watching even though the nightmare had aroused him far ahead of his allotted two hours.

Sleep seized me quickly, and I was at once haunted with dreams of the most disturbing kind. I felt, in my visions, a cosmic and abysmal loneness; with hostility surging from all sides upon some prison where I lay confined. I seemed bound and gagged, and taunted by the echoing yells of distant multitudes who thirsted for my blood. My uncle's face came to me with less pleasant association than in waking hours, and I recall many futile struggles and attempts to scream. It was not a pleasant sleep, and for a second I was not sorry for the echoing shriek which clove through the barriers of dream and flung me to a sharp and startled awakeness in which every actual object before my eyes stood out with more than natural clearness and reality.

v

I HAD BEEN lying with my face away from my uncle's chair, so that in this sudden flash of awakening I saw only the door to the street, the window, and the wall and floor and ceiling toward the north of the room, all photographed with morbid vividness on my brain in a light brighter than the glow of the fungi or the rays from the street outside. It was not a strong or even a fairly strong light; certainly not nearly strong enough to read an average book by. But it cast a shadow of myself and the cot on the floor, and had a yellowish, penetrating force that hinted at things more potent than luminosity. This I perceived with unhealthy sharpness despite the fact that two of my other senses were violently assailed. For on my ears rang the reverberations of that shocking scream, while my nostrils revolted at the stench which filled the place. My mind, as alert as my senses, recognized the gravely unusual; and almost automatically I leaped up and turned about to grasp the destructive instruments which we had left trained on the moldy spot before the fireplace. As I turned, I dreaded what I was to see; for the scream had been in my uncle's voice, and I knew not against what menace I should have to defend him and myself.

Yet after all, the sight was worse than I had dreaded. There are horrors beyond horrors, and this was one of those nuclei of all dreamable hideousness which the cosmos saves to blast an accursed and unhappy few. Out of the fungus-ridden earth steamed up a vaporous corpse-light, yellow and diseased, which bubbled and lapped to a gigantic height in vague outlines half human and half monstrous, through which I could see the chimney and fireplace beyond. It was all eyes— wolfish and mocking— and the rugose insect-like head dissolved at the top to a thin stream of mist which curled putridly about and finally vanished up the chimney. I say that I saw this thing, but it is only in conscious retrospection that I ever definitely traced its damnable approach to form. At the

time, it was to me only a seething, dimly phosphorescent cloud of fungous loathsomeness, enveloping and dissolving to an abhorrent plasticity the one object on which all my attention was focussed. That object was my uncle— the venerable Elihu Whipple— who with blackening and decaying features leered and gibbered at me, and reached out dripping claws to rend me in the fury which this horror had brought.

It was a sense of routine which kept me from going mad. I had drilled myself in preparation for the crucial moment, and blind training saved me. Recognizing the bubbling evil as no substance reachable by matter or material chemistry, and therefore ignoring the flame-thrower which loomed on my left, I threw on the current of the Crookes tube apparatus, and focussed toward that scene of immortal blasphemousness the strongest ether radiations which man's art can arouse from the spaces and fluids of nature. There was a bluish haze and a frenzied sputtering, and the yellowish phosphorescence grew dimmer to my eyes. But I saw the dimness was only that of contrast, and that the waves from the machine had no effect whatever.

Then, in the midst of that demoniac spectacle, I saw a fresh horror which brought cries to my lips and sent me fumbling and staggering toward that unlocked door to the quiet street, careless of what abnormal terrors I loosed upon the world, or what thoughts or judgments of men I brought down upon my head. In that dim blend of blue and yellow the form of my uncle had commenced a nauseous liquefaction whose essence eludes all description, and in which there played across his vanishing face such changes of identity as only madness can conceive. He was at once a devil and a multitude, a charnel-house and a pageant. Lit by the mixed and uncertain beams, that gelatinous face assumed a dozen— a score— a hundred— aspects; grinning, as it sank to the ground on a body that melted like tallow, in the caricatured likeness of legions strange and yet not strange.

I saw the features of the Harris line, masculine and feminine, adult and infantile, and other features old and young, coarse and refined, familiar and unfamiliar. For a second there flashed a degraded counterfeit of a miniature of poor mad Rhoby Harris that I had seen in the School of Design museum, and another time I thought I caught the raw-boned image of Mercy Dexter as I recalled her from a painting in Carrington Harris's house. It was frightful beyond conception; toward the last, when a curious blend of servant and baby visages flickered close to the fungous floor where a pool of greenish grease was spreading, it seemed as though the shifting features fought against themselves and strove to form contours like those of my uncle's kindly face. I like to think that he existed at that moment, and that he tried to bid me farewell. It seems to me I hiccupped a farewell from my own parched throat as I lurched out into the

street; a thin stream of grease following me through the door to the rain-drenched sidewalk.

THE REST is shadowy and monstrous. There was no one in the soaking street, and in all the world there was no one I dared tell. I walked aimlessly south past College Hill and the Athenæum, down Hopkins Street, and over the bridge to the business section where tall buildings seemed to guard me as modern material things guard the world from ancient and unwholesome wonder. Then gray dawn unfolded wetly from the east, silhouetting the archaic hill and its venerable steeples, and beckoning me to the place where my terrible work was still unfinished. And in the end I went, wet, hatless, and dazed in the morning light, and entered that awful door in Benefit Street which I had left ajar, and which still swung cryptically in full sight of the early householders to whom I dared not speak.

The grease was gone, for the moldy floor was porous. And in front of the fireplace was no vestige of the giant doubled-up form traced in niter. I looked at the cot, the chairs, the instruments, my neglected hat, and the yellowed straw hat of my uncle. Dazedness was uppermost, and I could scarcely recall what was dream and what was reality. Then thought trickled back, and I knew that I had witnessed things more horrible than I had dreamed.

Sitting down, I tried to conjecture as nearly as sanity would let me just what had happened, and how I might end the horror, if indeed it had been real. Matter it seemed not to be, nor ether, nor anything else conceivable by mortal mind. What, then, but some exotic *emanation*; some vampirish vapor such as Exeter rustics tell of as lurking over certain churchyards? This I felt was the clue, and again I looked at the floor before the fireplace where the mold and niter had taken strange forms.

In ten minutes my mind was made up, and taking my hat I set out for home, where I bathed, ate, and gave by telephone an order for a pickax, a spade, a military gas-mask, and six carboys of sulfuric acid, all to be delivered the next morning at the cellar door of the shunned house in Benefit Street. After that I tried to sleep; and failing, passed the hours in reading and in the composition of inane verses to counteract my mood.

At eleven a. m. the next day I commenced digging. It was sunny weather, and I was glad of that. I was still alone, for as much as I feared the unknown horror I sought, there was more fear in the thought of telling anybody. Later I told Harris only through sheer necessity, and because he had heard odd tales from old people which disposed him ever so little toward belief. As I turned up the stinking black earth in front of the fireplace, my spade causing a viscous yellow ichor to ooze from the white fungi which it severed, I trembled at the

dubious thoughts of what I might uncover. Some secrets of inner earth are not good for mankind, and this seemed to me one of them.

My hand shook perceptibly, but still I delved; after a while standing in the large hole I had made. With the deepening of the hole, which was about six feet square, the evil smell increased; and I lost all doubt of my imminent contact with the hellish thing whose emanations had cursed the house for over a century and a half. I wondered what it would look like— what its form and substance would be, and how big it might have waxed through long ages of life-sucking. At length I climbed out of the hole and dispersed the heaped-up dirt, then arranging the great carboys of acid around and near two sides, so that when necessary I might empty them all down the aperture in quick succession. After that I dumped earth only along the other two sides; working more slowly and donning my gas-mask as the smell grew. I was nearly unnerved at my proximity to a nameless thing at the bottom of a pit.

Suddenly my spade struck something softer than earth. I shuddered, and made a motion as if to climb out of the hole, which was now as deep as my neck. Then courage returned, and I scraped away more dirt in the light of the electric torch I had provided. The surface I uncovered was fishy and glassy— a kind of semi-putrid congealed jelly with suggestions of translucency. I scraped further, and saw that it had form. There was a rift where a part of the substance was folded over. The exposed area was huge and roughly cylindrical; like a mammoth soft blue-white stovepipe doubled in two, its largest part some two feet in diameter. Still more I scraped, and then abruptly I leaped out of the hole and away from the filthy thing; frantically unstopping and tilting the heavy carboys, and precipitating their corrosive contents one after another down that charnel gulf and upon the unthinkable abnormality whose titan *elbow* I had seen.

THE BLINDING maelstrom of greenish-yellow vapor which surged tempestuously up from that hole as the floods of acid descended, will never leave my memory. All along the hill people tell of the yellow day, when virulent and horrible fumes arose from the factory waste dumped in the Providence River, but I know how mistaken they are as to the source. They tell, too, of the hideous roar which at the same time came from some disordered water-pipe or gas main underground— but again I could correct them if I dared. It was unspeakably shocking, and I do not see how I lived through it. I did faint after emptying the fourth carboy, which I had to handle after the fumes had begun to penetrate my mask; but when I recovered I saw that the hole was emitting no fresh vapors.

The two remaining carboys I emptied down without particular result, and after a time I felt it safe to shovel the earth back into the pit. It was twilight

before I was done, but fear had gone out of the place. The dampness was less fetid, and all the strange fungi had withered to a kind of harmless grayish powder which blew ash-like along the floor. One of earth's nethermost terrors had perished for ever; and if there be a hell, it had received at last the demon soul of an unhallowed thing. And as I patted down the last spadeful of mold, I shed the first of the many tears with which I have paid unaffected tribute to my beloved uncle's memory.

The next spring no more pale grass and strange weeds came up in the shunned house's terraced garden, and shortly afterward Carrington Harris rented the place. It is still spectral, but its strangeness fascinates me, and I shall find mixed with my relief a queer regret when it is torn down to make way for a tawdry shop or vulgar apartment building. The barren old trees in the yard have begun to bear small, sweet apples, and last year the birds nested in their gnarled boughs.

9: A Tale of Negative Gravity

Frank R. Stockton

1834-1902

The Century Magazine, Nov 1884

MY WIFE AND I were staying at a small town in northern Italy; and on a certain pleasant afternoon in spring we had taken a walk of six or seven miles to see the sun set behind some low mountains to the west of the town. Most of our walk had been along a hard, smooth highway, and then we turned into a series of narrower roads, sometimes bordered by walls, and sometimes by light fences of reed or cane. Nearing the mountain, to a low spur of which we intended to ascend, we easily scaled a wall about four feet high, and found ourselves upon pasture-land, which led, sometimes by gradual ascents, and sometimes by bits of rough climbing, to the spot we wished to reach. We were afraid we were a little late, and therefore hurried on, running up the grassy hills, and bounding briskly over the rough and rocky places. I carried a knapsack strapped firmly to my shoulders, and under my wife's arm was a large, soft basket of a kind much used by tourists. Her arm was passed through the handles and around the bottom of the basket, which she pressed closely to her side. This was the way she always carried it. The basket contained two bottles of wine, one sweet for my wife, and another a little acid for myself. Sweet wines give me a headache.

When we reached the grassy bluff, well known thereabouts to lovers of sunset views, I stepped immediately to the edge to gaze upon the scene, but my wife sat down to take a sip of wine, for she was very thirsty; and then, leaving her basket, she came to my side. The scene was indeed one of great beauty. Beneath us stretched a wide valley of many shades of green, with a little river running through it, and red-tiled houses here and there. Beyond rose a range of mountains, pink, pale green, and purple where their tips caught the reflection of the setting sun, and of a rich gray-green in shadows. Beyond all was the blue Italian sky, illumined by an especially fine sunset.

My wife and I are Americans, and at the time of this story were middle-aged people and very fond of seeing in each other's company whatever there was of interest or beauty around us. We had a son about twenty-two years old, of whom we were also very fond; but he was not with us, being at that time a student in Germany. Although we had good health, we were not very robust people, and, under ordinary circumstances, not much given to long country tramps. I was of medium size, without much muscular development, while my wife was quite stout, and growing stouter.

The reader may, perhaps, be somewhat surprised that a middle-aged couple, not very strong, or very good walkers, the lady loaded with a basket containing two bottles of wine and a metal drinking-cup, and the gentleman carrying a

heavy knapsack, filled with all sorts of odds and ends, strapped to his shoulders, should set off on a seven-mile walk, jump over a wall, run up a hillside, and yet feel in very good trim to enjoy a sunset view. This peculiar state of things I will proceed to explain.

I had been a professional man, but some years before had retired upon a very comfortable income. I had always been very fond of scientific pursuits, and now made these the occupation and pleasure of much of my leisure time. Our home was in a small town; and in a corner of my grounds I built a laboratory, where I carried on my work and my experiments. I had long been anxious to discover the means not only of producing, but of retaining and controlling, a natural force, really the same as centrifugal force, but which I called negative gravity. This name I adopted because it indicated better than any other the action of the force in question, as I produced it. Positive gravity attracts everything toward the centre of the earth. Negative gravity, therefore, would be that power which repels everything from the centre of the earth, just as the negative pole of a magnet repels the needle, while the positive pole attracts it. My object was, in fact, to store centrifugal force and to render it constant, controllable, and available for use. The advantages of such a discovery could scarcely be described. In a word, it would lighten the burdens of the world.

I will not touch upon the labors and disappointments of several years. It is enough to say that at last I discovered a method of producing, storing, and controlling negative gravity.

The mechanism of my invention was rather complicated, but the method of operating it was very simple. A strong metallic case, about eight inches long, and half as wide, contained the machinery for producing the force; and this was put into action by means of the pressure of a screw worked from the outside. As soon as this pressure was produced, negative gravity began to be evolved and stored, and the greater the pressure the greater the force. As the screw was moved outward, and the pressure diminished, the force decreased, and when the screw was withdrawn to its fullest extent, the action of negative gravity entirely ceased. Thus this force could be produced or dissipated at will to such degrees as might be desired, and its action, so long as the requisite pressure was maintained, was constant.

When this little apparatus worked to my satisfaction I called my wife into my laboratory and explained to her my invention and its value. She had known that I had been at work with an important object, but I had never told her what it was. I had said that if I succeeded I would tell her all, but if I failed she need not be troubled with the matter at all. Being a very sensible woman, this satisfied her perfectly. Now I explained everything to her— the construction of the machine, and the wonderful uses to which this invention could be applied. I told her that it could diminish, or entirely dissipate, the weight of objects of any kind.

A heavily loaded wagon, with two of these instruments fastened to its sides, and each screwed to a proper force, would be so lifted and supported that it would press upon the ground as lightly as an empty cart, and a small horse could draw it with ease. A bale of cotton, with one of these machines attached, could be handled and carried by a boy. A car, with a number of these machines, could be made to rise in the air like a balloon. Everything, in fact, that was heavy could be made light; and as a great part of labor, all over the world, is caused by the attraction of gravitation, so this repellent force, wherever applied, would make weight less and work easier. I told her of many, many ways in which the invention might be used, and would have told her of many more if she had not suddenly burst into tears.

"The world has gained something wonderful," she exclaimed, between her sobs, "but I have lost a husband!"

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, in surprise.

"I haven't minded it so far," she said, "because it gave you something to do, and it pleased you, and it never interfered with our home pleasures and our home life. But now that is all over. You will never be your own master again. It will succeed, I am sure, and you may make a great deal of money, but we don't need money. What we need is the happiness which we have always had until now. Now there will be companies, and patents, and lawsuits, and experiments, and people calling you a humbug, and other people saying they discovered it long ago, and all sorts of persons coming to see you, and you'll be obliged to go to all sorts of places, and you will be an altered man, and we shall never be happy again. Millions of money will not repay us for the happiness we have lost."

These words of my wife struck me with much force. Before I had called her my mind had begun to be filled and perplexed with ideas of what I ought to do now that the great invention was perfected. Until now the matter had not troubled me at all. Sometimes I had gone backward and sometimes forward, but, on the whole, I had always felt encouraged. I had taken great pleasure in the work, but I had never allowed myself to be too much absorbed by it. But now everything was different. I began to feel that it was due to myself and to my fellow-beings that I should properly put this invention before the world. And how should I set about it? What steps should I take? I must make no mistakes. When the matter should become known hundreds of scientific people might set themselves to work; how could I tell but that they might discover other methods of producing the same effect? I must guard myself against a great many things. I must get patents in all parts of the world. Already, as I have said, my mind began to be troubled and perplexed with these things. A turmoil of this sort did not suit my age or disposition. I could not but agree with my wife that the joys of a quiet and contented life were now about to be broken into.

"My dear," said I, "I believe, with you, that the thing will do us more harm than good. If it were not for depriving the world of the invention I would throw the whole thing to the winds. And yet," I added, regretfully, "I had expected a great deal of personal gratification from the use of this invention."

"Now listen," said my wife, eagerly; "don't you think it would be best to do this: use the thing as much as you please for your own amusement and satisfaction, but let the world wait? It has waited a long time, and let it wait a little longer. When we are dead let Herbert have the invention. He will then be old enough to judge for himself whether it will be better to take advantage of it for his own profit, or simply to give it to the public for nothing. It would be cheating him if we were to do the latter, but it would also be doing him a great wrong if we were, at his age, to load him with such a heavy responsibility. Besides, if he took it up, you could not help going into it, too."

I took my wife's advice. I wrote a careful and complete account of the invention, and, sealing it up, I gave it to my lawyers to be handed to my son after my death. If he died first, I would make other arrangements. Then I determined to get all the good and fun out of the thing that was possible without telling any one anything about it. Even Herbert, who was away from home, was not to be told of the invention.

The first thing I did was to buy a strong leathern knapsack, and inside of this I fastened my little machine, with a screw so arranged that it could be worked from the outside. Strapping this firmly to my shoulders, my wife gently turned the screw at the back until the upward tendency of the knapsack began to lift and sustain me. When I felt myself so gently supported and upheld that I seemed to weigh about thirty or forty pounds, I would set out for a walk. The knapsack did not raise me from the ground, but it gave me a very buoyant step. It was no labor at all to walk; it was a delight, an ecstasy. With the strength of a man and the weight of a child, I gayly strode along. The first day I walked half a dozen miles at a very brisk pace, and came back without feeling in the least degree tired. These walks now became one of the greatest joys of my life. When nobody was looking, I would bound over a fence, sometimes just touching it with one hand, and sometimes not touching it at all. I delighted in rough places. I sprang over streams. I jumped and I ran. I felt like Mercury himself.

I now set about making another machine, so that my wife could accompany me in my walks; but when it was finished she positively refused to use it. "I can't wear a knapsack," she said, "and there is no other good way of fastening it to me. Besides, everybody about here knows I am no walker, and it would only set them talking."

I occasionally made use of this second machine, but I will give only one instance of its application. Some repairs were needed to the foundation-walls of my barn, and a two-horse wagon, loaded with building-stone, had been brought

into my yard and left there. In the evening, when the men had gone away, I took my two machines and fastened them, with strong chains, one on each side of the loaded wagon. Then, gradually turning the screws, the wagon was so lifted that its weight became very greatly diminished. We had an old donkey which used to belong to Herbert, and which was now occasionally used with a small cart to bring packages from the station. I went into the barn and put the harness on the little fellow, and, bringing him out to the wagon, I attached him to it. In this position he looked very funny with a long pole sticking out in front of him and the great wagon behind him. When all was ready I touched him up; and, to my great delight, he moved off with the two-horse load of stone as easily as if he were drawing his own cart. I led him out into the public road, along which he proceeded without difficulty. He was an opinionated little beast, and sometimes stopped, not liking the peculiar manner in which he was harnessed; but a touch of the switch made him move on, and I soon turned him and brought the wagon back into the yard. This determined the success of my invention in one of its most important uses, and with a satisfied heart I put the donkey into the stable and went into the house.

Our trip to Europe was made a few months after this, and was mainly on our son Herbert's account. He, poor fellow, was in great trouble, and so, therefore, were we. He had become engaged, with our full consent, to a young lady in our town, the daughter of a gentleman whom we esteemed very highly. Herbert was young to be engaged to be married, but as we felt that he would never find a girl to make him so good a wife, we were entirely satisfied, especially as it was agreed on all hands that the marriage was not to take place for some time. It seemed to us that, in marrying Janet Gilbert, Herbert would secure for himself, in the very beginning of his career, the most important element of a happy life. But suddenly, without any reason that seemed to us justifiable, Mr. Gilbert, the only surviving parent of Janet, broke off the match; and he and his daughter soon after left the town for a trip to the West.

This blow nearly broke poor Herbert's heart. He gave up his professional studies and came home to us, and for a time we thought he would be seriously ill. Then we took him to Europe, and after a Continental tour of a month or two we left him, at his own request, in Göttingen, where he thought it would do him good to go to work again. Then we went down to the little town in Italy where my story first finds us. My wife had suffered much in mind and body on her son's account, and for this reason I was anxious that she should take outdoor exercise, and enjoy as much as possible the bracing air of the country. I had brought with me both my little machines. One was still in my knapsack, and the other I had fastened to the inside of an enormous family trunk. As one is obliged to pay for nearly every pound of his baggage on the Continent, this saved me a great deal of money. Everything heavy was packed into this great trunk— books,

papers, the bronze, iron, and marble relics we had picked up, and all the articles that usually weigh down a tourist's baggage. I screwed up the negative-gravity apparatus until the trunk could be handled with great ease by an ordinary porter. I could have made it weigh nothing at all, but this, of course, I did not wish to do. The lightness of my baggage, however, had occasioned some comment, and I had overheard remarks which were not altogether complimentary about people travelling around with empty trunks; but this only amused me.

Desirous that my wife should have the advantage of negative gravity while taking our walks, I had removed the machine from the trunk and fastened it inside of the basket, which she could carry under her arm. This assisted her wonderfully. When one arm was tired she put the basket under the other, and thus, with one hand on my arm, she could easily keep up with the free and buoyant steps my knapsack enabled me to take. She did not object to long tramps here, because nobody knew that she was not a walker, and she always carried some wine or other refreshment in the basket, not only because it was pleasant to have it with us, but because it seemed ridiculous to go about carrying an empty basket.

There were English-speaking people stopping at the hotel where we were, but they seemed more fond of driving than walking, and none of them offered to accompany us on our rambles, for which we were very glad. There was one man there, however, who was a great walker. He was an Englishman, a member of an Alpine Club, and generally went about dressed in a knickerbocker suit, with gray woollen stockings covering an enormous pair of calves. One evening this gentleman was talking to me and some others about the ascent of the Matterhorn, and I took occasion to deliver in pretty strong language my opinion upon such exploits. I declared them to be useless, foolhardy, and, if the climber had any one who loved him, wicked.

"Even if the weather should permit a view," I said, "what is that compared to the terrible risk to life? Under certain circumstances," I added (thinking of a kind of waistcoat I had some idea of making, which, set about with little negative-gravity machines, all connected with a conveniently handled screw, would enable the wearer at times to dispense with his weight altogether), "such ascents might be divested of danger, and be quite admissible; but ordinarily they should be frowned upon by the intelligent public."

The Alpine Club man looked at me, especially regarding my somewhat slight figure and thinnish legs.

"It's all very well for you to talk that way," he said, "because it is easy to see that you are not up to that sort of thing."

"In conversations of this kind," I replied, "I never make personal allusions; but since you have chosen to do so, I feel inclined to invite you to walk with me to-morrow to the top of the mountain to the north of this town."

"I'll do it," he said, "at any time you choose to name." And as I left the room soon afterward I heard him laugh.

The next afternoon, about two o'clock, the Alpine Club man and myself set out for the mountain.

"What have you got in your knapsack?" he said.

"A hammer to use if I come across geological specimens, a field-glass, a flask of wine, and some other things."

"I wouldn't carry any weight, if I were you," he said.

"Oh, I don't mind it," I answered, and off we started.

The mountain to which we were bound was about two miles from the town. Its nearest side was steep, and in places almost precipitous, but it sloped away more gradually toward the north, and up that side a road led by devious windings to a village near the summit. It was not a very high mountain, but it would do for an afternoon's climb.

"I suppose you want to go up by the road," said my companion.

"Oh no," I answered, "we won't go so far around as that. There is a path up this side, along which I have seen men driving their goats. I prefer to take that."

"All right, if you say so," he answered, with a smile; "but you'll find it pretty tough."

After a time he remarked:

"I wouldn't walk so fast, if I were you."

"Oh, I like to step along briskly," I said. And briskly on we went.

My wife had screwed up the machine in the knapsack more than usual, and walking seemed scarcely any effort at all. I carried a long alpenstock, and when we reached the mountain and began the ascent, I found that with the help of this and my knapsack I could go uphill at a wonderful rate. My companion had taken the lead, so as to show me how to climb. Making a *détour* over some rocks, I quickly passed him and went ahead. After that it was impossible for him to keep up with me. I ran up steep places, I cut off the windings of the path by lightly clambering over rocks, and even when I followed the beaten track my step was as rapid as if I had been walking on level ground.

"Look here!" shouted the Alpine Club man from below, "you'll kill yourself if you go at that rate! That's no way to climb mountains."

"It's my way!" I cried. And on I skipped.

Twenty minutes after I arrived at the summit my companion joined me, puffing, and wiping his red face with his handkerchief.

"Confound it!" he cried, "I never came up a mountain so fast in my life."

"You need not have hurried," I said, coolly.

"I was afraid something would happen to you," he growled, "and I wanted to stop you. I never saw a person climb in such an utterly absurd way."

"I don't see why you should call it absurd," I said, smiling with an air of superiority. "I arrived here in a perfectly comfortable condition, neither heated nor wearied."

He made no answer, but walked off to a little distance, fanning himself with his hat and growling words which I did not catch. After a time I proposed to descend.

"You must be careful as you go down," he said. "It is much more dangerous to go down steep places than to climb up."

"I am always prudent," I answered, and started in advance. I found the descent of the mountain much more pleasant than the ascent. It was positively exhilarating. I jumped from rocks and bluffs eight and ten feet in height, and touched the ground as gently as if I had stepped down but two feet. I ran down steep paths, and, with the aid of my alpenstock, stopped myself in an instant. I was careful to avoid dangerous places, but the runs and jumps I made were such as no man had ever made before upon that mountain-side. Once only I heard my companion's voice.

"You'll break your —— neck!" he yelled.

"Never fear!" I called back, and soon left him far above.

When I reached the bottom I would have waited for him, but my activity had warmed me up, and as a cool evening breeze was beginning to blow I thought it better not to stop and take cold. Half an hour after my arrival at the hotel I came down to the court, cool, fresh, and dressed for dinner, and just in time to meet the Alpine man as he entered, hot, dusty, and growling.

"Excuse me for not waiting for you," I said; but without stopping to hear my reason, he muttered something about waiting in a place where no one would care to stay, and passed into the house.

There was no doubt that what I had done gratified my pique and tickled my vanity.

"I think now," I said, when I related the matter to my wife, "that he will scarcely say that I am not up to that sort of thing."

"I am not sure," she answered, "that it was exactly fair. He did not know how you were assisted."

"It was fair enough," I said. "He is enabled to climb well by the inherited vigor of his constitution and by his training. He did not tell me what methods of exercise he used to get those great muscles upon his legs. I am enabled to climb by the exercise of my intellect. My method is my business and his method is his business. It is all perfectly fair."

Still she persisted:

"He *thought* that you climbed with your legs, and not with your head."

And now, after this long digression, necessary to explain how a middle-aged couple of slight pedestrian ability, and loaded with a heavy knapsack and basket, should have started out on a rough walk and climb, fourteen miles in all, we will return to ourselves, standing on the little bluff and gazing out upon the sunset view. When the sky began to fade a little we turned from it and prepared to go back to the town.

"Where is the basket?" I said.

"I left it right here," answered my wife. "I unscrewed the machine and it lay perfectly flat."

"Did you afterward take out the bottles?" I asked, seeing them lying on the grass.

"Yes, I believe I did. I had to take out yours in order to get at mine."

"Then," said I, after looking all about the grassy patch on which we stood, "I am afraid you did not entirely unscrew the instrument, and that when the weight of the bottles was removed the basket gently rose into the air."

"It may be so," she said, lugubriously. "The basket was behind me as I drank my wine."

"I believe that is just what has happened," I said. "Look up there! I vow that is our basket!"

I pulled out my field-glass and directed it at a little speck high above our heads. It was the basket floating high in the air. I gave the glass to my wife to look, but she did not want to use it.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "I can't walk home without that basket. It's perfectly dreadful!" And she looked as if she was going to cry.

"Do not distress yourself," I said, although I was a good deal disturbed myself. "We shall get home very well. You shall put your hand on my shoulder, while I put my arm around you. Then you can screw up my machine a good deal higher, and it will support us both. In this way I am sure that we shall get on very well."

We carried out this plan, and managed to walk on with moderate comfort. To be sure, with the knapsack pulling me upward, and the weight of my wife pulling me down, the straps hurt me somewhat, which they had not done before. We did not spring lightly over the wall into the road, but, still clinging to each other, we clambered awkwardly over it. The road for the most part declined gently toward the town, and with moderate ease we made our way along it. But we walked much more slowly than we had done before, and it was quite dark when we reached our hotel. If it had not been for the light inside the court it would have been difficult for us to find it. A travelling-carriage was standing before the entrance, and against the light. It was necessary to pass around it, and my wife went first. I attempted to follow her, but, strange to say, there was nothing under my feet. I stepped vigorously, but only wagged my legs

in the air. To my horror I found that I was rising in the air! I soon saw, by the light below me, that I was some fifteen feet from the ground. The carriage drove away, and in the darkness I was not noticed. Of course I knew what had happened. The instrument in my knapsack had been screwed up to such an intensity, in order to support both myself and my wife, that when her weight was removed the force of the negative gravity was sufficient to raise me from the ground. But I was glad to find that when I had risen to the height I have mentioned I did not go up any higher, but hung in the air, about on a level with the second tier of windows of the hotel.

I now began to try to reach the screw in my knapsack in order to reduce the force of the negative gravity; but, do what I would, I could not get my hand to it. The machine in the knapsack had been placed so as to support me in a well-balanced and comfortable way; and in doing this it had been impossible to set the screw so that I could reach it. But in a temporary arrangement of the kind this had not been considered necessary, as my wife always turned the screw for me until sufficient lifting power had been attained. I had intended, as I have said before, to construct a negative-gravity waistcoat, in which the screw should be in front, and entirely under the wearer's control; but this was a thing of the future.

When I found that I could not turn the screw I began to be much alarmed. Here I was, dangling in the air, without any means of reaching the ground. I could not expect my wife to return to look for me, as she would naturally suppose I had stopped to speak to some one. I thought of loosening myself from the knapsack, but this would not do, for I should fall heavily, and either kill myself or break some of my bones. I did not dare to call for assistance, for if any of the simple-minded inhabitants of the town had discovered me floating in the air they would have taken me for a demon, and would probably have shot at me. A moderate breeze was blowing, and it wafted me gently down the street. If it had blown me against a tree I would have seized it, and have endeavored, so to speak, to climb down it; but there were no trees. There was a dim street-lamp here and there, but reflectors above them threw their light upon the pavement, and none up to me. On many accounts I was glad that the night was so dark, for, much as I desired to get down, I wanted no one to see me in my strange position, which, to any one but myself and wife, would be utterly unaccountable. If I could rise as high as the roofs I might get on one of them, and, tearing off an armful of tiles, so load myself that I would be heavy enough to descend. But I did not rise to the eaves of any of the houses. If there had been a telegraph-pole, or anything of the kind that I could have clung to, I would have taken off the knapsack, and would have endeavored to scramble down as well as I could. But there was nothing I could cling to. Even the water-spouts, if I could have reached the face of the houses, were embedded in the walls. At an

open window, near which I was slowly blown, I saw two little boys going to bed by the light of a dim candle. I was dreadfully afraid that they would see me and raise an alarm. I actually came so near to the window that I threw out one foot and pushed against the wall with such force that I went nearly across the street. I thought I caught sight of a frightened look on the face of one of the boys; but of this I am not sure, and I heard no cries. I still floated, dangling, down the street. What was to be done? Should I call out? In that case, if I were not shot or stoned, my strange predicament, and the secret of my invention, would be exposed to the world. If I did not do this, I must either let myself drop and be killed or mangled, or hang there and die. When, during the course of the night, the air became more rarefied, I might rise higher and higher, perhaps to an altitude of one or two hundred feet. It would then be impossible for the people to reach me and get me down, even if they were convinced that I was not a demon. I should then expire, and when the birds of the air had eaten all of me that they could devour, I should forever hang above the unlucky town, a dangling skeleton with a knapsack on its back.

Such thoughts were not reassuring, and I determined that if I could find no means of getting down without assistance, I would call out and run all risks; but so long as I could endure the tension of the straps I would hold out, and hope for a tree or a pole. Perhaps it might rain, and my wet clothes would then become so heavy that I would descend as low as the top of a lamp-post.

As this thought was passing through my mind I saw a spark of light upon the street approaching me. I rightly imagined that it came from a tobacco-pipe, and presently I heard a voice. It was that of the Alpine Club man. Of all people in the world I did not want him to discover me, and I hung as motionless as possible. The man was speaking to another person who was walking with him.

"He is crazy beyond a doubt," said the Alpine man. "Nobody but a maniac could have gone up and down that mountain as he did! He hasn't any muscles, and one need only look at him to know that he couldn't do any climbing in a natural way. It is only the excitement of insanity that gives him strength."

The two now stopped almost under me, and the speaker continued:

"Such things are very common with maniacs. At times they acquire an unnatural strength which is perfectly wonderful. I have seen a little fellow struggle and fight so that four strong men could not hold him."

Then the other person spoke.

"I am afraid what you say is too true," he remarked. "Indeed, I have known it for some time."

At these words my breath almost stopped. It was the voice of Mr. Gilbert, my townsman, and the father of Janet. It must have been he who had arrived in the travelling-carriage. He was acquainted with the Alpine Club man, and they were talking of me. Proper or improper, I listened with all my ears.

"It is a very sad case," Mr. Gilbert continued. "My daughter was engaged to marry his son, but I broke off the match. I could not have her marry the son of a lunatic, and there could be no doubt of his condition. He has been seen— a man of his age, and the head of a family— to load himself up with a heavy knapsack, which there was no earthly necessity for him to carry, and go skipping along the road for miles, vaulting over fences and jumping over rocks and ditches like a young calf or a colt. I myself saw a most heartrending instance of how a kindly man's nature can be changed by the derangement of his intellect. I was at some distance from his house, but I plainly saw him harness a little donkey which he owns to a large two-horse wagon loaded with stone, and beat and lash the poor little beast until it drew the heavy load some distance along the public road. I would have remonstrated with him on this horrible cruelty, but he had the wagon back in his yard before I could reach him."

"Oh, there can be no doubt of his insanity," said the Alpine Club man, "and he oughtn't to be allowed to travel about in this way. Some day he will pitch his wife over a precipice just for the fun of seeing her shoot through the air."

"I am sorry he is here," said Mr. Gilbert, "for it would be very painful to meet him. My daughter and I will retire very soon, and go away as early to-morrow morning as possible, so as to avoid seeing him."

And then they walked back to the hotel.

For a few moments I hung, utterly forgetful of my condition, and absorbed in the consideration of these revelations. One idea now filled my mind. Everything must be explained to Mr. Gilbert, even if it should be necessary to have him called to me, and for me to speak to him from the upper air.

Just then I saw something white approaching me along the road. My eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and I perceived that it was an upturned face. I recognized the hurried gait, the form; it was my wife. As she came near me, I called her name, and in the same breath entreated her not to scream. It must have been an effort for her to restrain herself, but she did it.

"You must help me to get down," I said, "without anybody seeing us."

"What shall I do?" she whispered.

"Try to catch hold of this string."

Taking a piece of twine from my pocket, I lowered one end to her. But it was too short; she could not reach it. I then tied my handkerchief to it, but still it was not long enough.

"I can get more string, or handkerchiefs," she whispered, hurriedly.

"No," I said; "you could not get them up to me. But, leaning against the hotel wall, on this side, in the corner, just inside of the garden gate, are some fishing-poles. I have seen them there every day. You can easily find them in the dark. Go, please, and bring me one of those."

The hotel was not far away, and in a few minutes my wife returned with a fishing-pole. She stood on tiptoe, and reached it high in air; but all she could do was to strike my feet and legs with it. My most frantic exertions did not enable me to get my hands low enough to touch it.

"Wait a minute," she said; and the rod was withdrawn.

I knew what she was doing. There was a hook and line attached to the pole, and with womanly dexterity she was fastening the hook to the extreme end of the rod. Soon she reached up, and gently struck at my legs. After a few attempts the hook caught in my trousers, a little below my right knee. Then there was a slight pull, a long scratch down my leg, and the hook was stopped by the top of my boot. Then came a steady downward pull, and I felt myself descending. Gently and firmly the rod was drawn down; carefully the lower end was kept free from the ground; and in a few moments my ankle was seized with a vigorous grasp. Then some one seemed to climb up me, my feet touched the ground, an arm was thrown around my neck, the hand of another arm was busy at the back of my knapsack, and I soon stood firmly in the road, entirely divested of negative gravity.

"Oh that I should have forgotten," sobbed my wife, "and that I should have dropped your arms and let you go up into the air! At first I thought that you had stopped below, and it was only a little while ago that the truth flashed upon me. Then I rushed out and began looking up for you. I knew that you had wax matches in your pocket, and hoped that you would keep on striking them, so that you would be seen."

"But I did not wish to be seen," I said, as we hurried to the hotel; "and I can never be sufficiently thankful that it was you who found me and brought me down. Do you know that it is Mr. Gilbert and his daughter who have just arrived? I must see him instantly. I will explain it all to you when I come upstairs."

I took off my knapsack and gave it to my wife, who carried it to our room, while I went to look for Mr. Gilbert. Fortunately I found him just as he was about to go up to his chamber. He took my offered hand, but looked at me sadly and gravely.

"Mr. Gilbert," I said, "I must speak to you in private. Let us step into this room. There is no one here."

"My friend," said Mr. Gilbert, "it will be much better to avoid discussing this subject. It is very painful to both of us, and no good can come from talking of it."

"You cannot now comprehend what it is I want to say to you," I replied. "Come in here, and in a few minutes you will be very glad that you listened to me."

My manner was so earnest and impressive that Mr. Gilbert was constrained to follow me, and we went into a small room called the smoking-room, but in

which people seldom smoked, and closed the door. I immediately began my statement. I told my old friend that I had discovered, by means that I need not explain at present, that he had considered me crazy, and that now the most important object of my life was to set myself right in his eyes. I thereupon gave him the whole history of my invention, and explained the reason of the actions that had appeared to him those of a lunatic. I said nothing about the little incident of that evening. That was a mere accident, and I did not care now to speak of it.

Mr. Gilbert listened to me very attentively.

"Your wife is here?" he asked, when I had finished.

"Yes," I said; "and she will corroborate my story in every item, and no one could ever suspect her of being crazy. I will go and bring her to you."

In a few minutes my wife was in the room, had shaken hands with Mr. Gilbert, and had been told of my suspected madness. She turned pale, but smiled.

"He did act like a crazy man," she said, "but I never supposed that anybody would think him one." And tears came into her eyes.

"And now, my dear," said I, "perhaps you will tell Mr. Gilbert how I did all this."

And then she told him the story that I had told.

Mr. Gilbert looked from the one to the other of us with a troubled air.

"Of course I do not doubt either of you, or rather I do not doubt that you believe what you say. All would be right if I could bring myself to credit that such a force as that you speak of can possibly exist."

"That is a matter," said I, "which I can easily prove to you by actual demonstration. If you can wait a short time, until my wife and I have had something to eat— for I am nearly famished, and I am sure she must be— I will set your mind at rest upon that point."

"I will wait here," said Mr. Gilbert, "and smoke a cigar. Don't hurry yourselves. I shall be glad to have some time to think about what you have told me."

When we had finished the dinner, which had been set aside for us, I went upstairs and got my knapsack, and we both joined Mr. Gilbert in the smoking-room. I showed him the little machine, and explained, very briefly, the principle of its construction. I did not give any practical demonstration of its action, because there were people walking about the corridor who might at any moment come into the room; but, looking out of the window, I saw that the night was much clearer. The wind had dissipated the clouds, and the stars were shining brightly.

"If you will come up the street with me," said I to Mr. Gilbert, "I will show you how this thing works."

"That is just what I want to see," he answered.

"I will go with you," said my wife, throwing a shawl over her head. And we started up the street.

When we were outside the little town I found the starlight was quite sufficient for my purpose. The white roadway, the low walls, and objects about us, could easily be distinguished.

"Now," said I to Mr. Gilbert, "I want to put this knapsack on you, and let you see how it feels, and how it will help you to walk." To this he assented with some eagerness, and I strapped it firmly on him. "I will now turn this screw," said I, "until you shall become lighter and lighter."

"Be very careful not to turn it too much," said my wife, earnestly.

"Oh, you may depend on me for that," said I, turning the screw very gradually.

Mr. Gilbert was a stout man, and I was obliged to give the screw a good many turns.

"There seems to be considerable hoist in it," he said, directly. And then I put my arms around him, and found that I could raise him from the ground.

"Are you lifting me?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes; I did it with ease," I answered.

"Upon— my— word!" ejaculated Mr. Gilbert.

I then gave the screw a half-turn more, and told him to walk and run. He started off, at first slowly, then he made long strides, then he began to run, and then to skip and jump. It had been many years since Mr. Gilbert had skipped and jumped. No one was in sight, and he was free to gambol as much as he pleased. "Could you give it another turn?" said he, bounding up to me. "I want to try that wall." I put on a little more negative gravity, and he vaulted over a five-foot wall with great ease. In an instant he had leaped back into the road, and in two bounds was at my side. "I came down as light as a cat," he said. "There was never anything like it." And away he went up the road, taking steps at least eight feet long, leaving my wife and me laughing heartily at the preternatural agility of our stout friend. In a few minutes he was with us again. "Take it off," he said. "If I wear it any longer I shall want one myself, and then I shall be taken for a crazy man, and perhaps clapped into an asylum."

"Now," said I, as I turned back the screw before unstrapping the knapsack, "do you understand how I took long walks, and leaped and jumped; how I ran uphill and downhill, and how the little donkey drew the loaded wagon?"

"I understand it all," cried he. "I take back all I ever said or thought about you, my friend."

"And Herbert may marry Janet?" cried my wife.

"*May* marry her!" cried Mr. Gilbert. "Indeed, he *shall* marry her, if I have anything to say about it! My poor girl has been drooping ever since I told her it could not be."

My wife rushed at him, but whether she embraced him or only shook his hands I cannot say; for I had the knapsack in one hand and was rubbing my eyes with the other.

"But, my dear fellow," said Mr. Gilbert, directly, "if you still consider it to your interest to keep your invention a secret, I wish you had never made it. No one having a machine like that can help using it, and it is often quite as bad to be considered a maniac as to be one."

"My friend," I cried, with some excitement, "I have made up my mind on this subject. The little machine in this knapsack, which is the only one I now possess, has been a great pleasure to me. But I now know it has also been of the greatest injury indirectly to me and mine, not to mention some direct inconvenience and danger, which I will speak of another time. The secret lies with us three, and we will keep it. But the invention itself is too full of temptation and danger for any of us."

As I said this I held the knapsack with one hand while I quickly turned the screw with the other. In a few moments it was high above my head, while I with difficulty held it down by the straps. "Look!" I cried. And then I released my hold, and the knapsack shot into the air and disappeared into the upper gloom.

I was about to make a remark, but had no chance, for my wife threw herself upon my bosom, sobbing with joy.

"Oh, I am so glad— so glad!" she said. "And you will never make another?"

"Never another!" I answered.

"And now let us hurry in and see Janet," said my wife.

"You don't know how heavy and clumsy I feel," said Mr. Gilbert, striving to keep up with us as we walked back. "If I had worn that thing much longer, I should never have been willing to take it off!"

Janet had retired, but my wife went up to her room.

"I think she has felt it as much as our boy," she said, when she rejoined me. "But I tell you, my dear, I left a very happy girl in that little bedchamber over the garden."

And there were three very happy elderly people talking together until quite late that evening. "I shall write to Herbert to-night," I said, when we separated, "and tell him to meet us all in Geneva. It will do the young man no harm if we interrupt his studies just now."

"You must let me add a postscript to the letter," said Mr. Gilbert, "and I am sure it will require no knapsack with a screw in the back to bring him quickly to us."

And it did not.

There is a wonderful pleasure in tripping over the earth like a winged Mercury, and in feeling one's self relieved of much of that attraction of gravitation which drags us down to earth and gradually makes the movement of our bodies but weariness and labor. But this pleasure is not to be compared, I think, to that given by the buoyancy and lightness of two young and loving hearts, reunited after a separation which they had supposed would last forever.

What became of the basket and the knapsack, or whether they ever met in upper air, I do not know. If they but float away and stay away from ken of mortal man, I shall be satisfied.

And whether or not the world will ever know more of the power of negative gravity depends entirely upon the disposition of my son Herbert, when— after a good many years, I hope— he shall open the packet my lawyers have in keeping.

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[*Note*.— It would be quite useless for any one to interview my wife on this subject, for she has entirely forgotten how my machine was made. And as for Mr. Gilbert, he never knew.]

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10: Blackmail

"Sapper"

H C McNeile, 1888-1937

McClure's Magazine May 1925

THE LETTER came to me as a voice from the dead. At first the handwriting on the envelope seemed strange, and then after staring at it for a few seconds I remembered. I hadn't seen that writing for twenty years, and one is apt to forget.

The postmark was New York, and with the letter still unopened in my hand I sat staring out of the window. So Jim Featherstone was in America— the man who at one time had been my greatest friend. We had lost touch with one another after the tragedy had happened and Jim had paid the price. I'd tried— Heaven knows— hard enough to find the dear old chap, but every time I'd come up against a blank wall.

And now here in my hand I held the answer to my search: at last Jim had broken the silence.

Unconsciously my thoughts drifted backwards to that dreadful time twenty years ago. And now that I felt instinctively that the clue to everything which had puzzled us all at the time— for there were many who loved Jim— lay here between my fingers, deliberately I refrained from opening the envelope. It had waited long years: it could wait a few more minutes while I sorted out in my mind the events as they had happened.

It had been midnight when the telephone bell had rung in my sitting-room. I remember I had one leg of my pyjamas off and one on, and I swore at the interruption. I was sleepy and wanted to go to bed: I'd been working pretty hard on a case, and I had to be in court early the next morning. Who on earth could want me at midnight?

But the bell went on ringing insistently, and I went into the sitting-room.

"What is it?" I cried irritably into the receiver.

"Are you Mr. Pollock?" came a man's voice.

"I am. Who are you?"

"Vine Street speaking, sir. Can you come down here at once? Mr. Featherstone is here, and has asked for you as a legal adviser."

Into my mind there leapt at once the idea that Jim was tight, and wanted me to try and fix things. And my irritation did not decrease.

"What on earth does he want me for at this time?" I half muttered, forgetting the man at the other end could hear. "I suppose the old fool has got blotto."

And from the other end came the reply:

"I'm afraid it's not that, sir: it's something infinitely more serious." And the tone of the voice even more than the words pulled me together.

"I'll come at once," I said.

All the time I dressed I wondered what Jim could have been doing: all the way down in a hansom, which I was lucky enough to pick up, I was still wondering. Wild Jim was and always had been, but there was no atom of vice in him. He had money: at least quite enough, without being actually wealthy: he had hosts of friends. So what could he have been doing?

An Inspector met me and his face was very grave. He made no attempt at beating about the bush, but came straight to the point.

"It's murder, Mr. Pollock, I'm sorry to say."

I stared at him stupidly.

"You mean that Jim— that Mr. Featherstone— is accused of murdering someone?" I said.

He nodded.

"But it's incredible," I cried angrily. "Whom is he accused of murdering?"

"A Mr. John Parsons," said the Inspector. "Perhaps you would go and see him, Mr. Pollock. He can tell you the story himself, but I am bound to admit that things look extremely black. You see, your friend makes no attempt to deny the charge; in fact, he admits it."

"How did he do it?" I asked dully.

"He shot him with a revolver in Mr. Parsons's own study," said the Inspector. "Will you come this way?"

ii

MECHANICALLY I followed him, until he halted before the locked door of a cell. Jim was inside, sitting on the edge of the bed, and he got up with a cheery smile as he saw me.

"Sorry to drag you out, old man, at this ungodly hour—but as the Inspector has probably told you, I'm in a hole."

"Look here, Jim!" I cried, "there must be a mistake."

"Devil a bit, Bill," he answered. "There's no mistake. I've told the Inspector here everything that happened. I went up to Hampstead to interview Mr. John Parsons after dinner. I had a certain request to make to him, and had he seen his way to granting that request, I should not have killed him. But as he did not see his way to doing so, I did kill him. I warned him first, but he rather stupidly thought I was bluffing. I wasn't."

I stared at him aghast.

"But, Jim, old boy," I cried, "you don't seem to realise. It's murder."

"On the contrary, Bill, I realise it only too well. As you say, it's murder."

"But who is this John Parsons? I've never heard of him."

"No more had I until this morning," he answered. "But if it's of importance, and presumably it is, John Parsons is, or rather was, a foul blackmailing swine. He was a man dead to even the twinge of a decent instinct, a loathsome brute, a slimy cur. And though I realise quite fully that legally speaking I've committed murder, from every other point of view I have merely exterminated a thing that had no right to live."

"Granted, old man," I said hopelessly. "But that's got nothing to do with it. The only point of view we're concerned with is the legal one, and legally it doesn't matter if he was all you say or an angel of light. Tell me, what was this request you went up to make and which he wouldn't grant?"

Jim smiled at me gravely, and laid his hand on my arm.

"I knew you'd ask me that, old man. It's pretty obvious, isn't it? Sticks out a yard. But I can't tell you."

"You can't tell me?" I repeated. "But why not? Presumably you've sent for me because you want me to defend you."

"If you'll be so good, Bill."

"Good be blowed, Jim!" I cried. "Of course I'll defend you. But I must know all the facts of the case."

Once again he smiled gravely and shook his head.

"You shall know all except that, Bill. Believe me, old friend, I have a very good reason."

I argued, expostulated and finally lost my temper, but it was useless. He was adamant on that one point— the most vital point in the whole case. He had gone up to interview this man Parsons, having made an appointment by telephone. The object of the interview was to demand the handing over of a certain thing. And that demand had been refused. Parsons had merely laughed at his request. So Jim had taken the revolver out of his pocket, and had warned him of his unalterable intention of killing him if the request was not complied with. And once again Parsons had laughed and, rising from his chair, had crossed to the bell.

"It was then that I shot him through the heart, Bill," said Jim quietly. "After that I locked the door, took the keys of his safe from the body, opened the safe and found what I sought. The servants were hammering on the door, but it was a stout one. I burnt the thing I had come for, and then I opened the door. And that is absolutely all there is to it."

Moreover, that had been absolutely all there was to it when he was tried. Not by even so much as a hint had Jim given away what had been the object of his visit. I warned him of the consequences, but I might have saved my breath.

"I realise all you say, old friend," he said patiently. "But it's just impossible for me to tell you. I know what it means to me, but I can't help it, whatever the result may be."

iii

AND SO it came to the trial. The court was crammed, and the most self-possessed person there was Jim. I can see him now standing between the two warders, head thrown back a little, arms folded. And what a magnificent-looking specimen of manhood he was! He gave me a nod and a smile, but after that he looked neither to the right hand nor the left, though the court was crammed with his friends.

Quietly, inexorably, but with studied moderation counsel for the Crown outlined the case. He made no effort to gloss over the character of the murdered man: with scrupulous fairness he went so far as to emphasise it.

"As my learned friend will doubtless tell you, gentlemen," he said, "John Parsons was that most loathsome of all things— a blackmailer. From documents discovered in his safe, no doubts can be entertained on that score. But, gentlemen, the law of England protects people against blackmail. Further, it punishes the blackmailer with the utmost severity. It is the safeguard of a civilised community, it is the thing to which appeal must be made. And no man, under any conditions whatever, has the right to take the law into his own hands."

It was a short case. Though technically the plea was "Not guilty," there was no dispute over facts. And there was no drama to it either until I put Jim himself into the witness box. Whether he liked it or not, I was determined to run sentiment for all it was worth. And I asked him once again the question point blank:

"What was the request you made to John Parsons?"

He looked me straight in the face.

"I refuse to say."

"Did it concern a woman's honour?"

For a moment he hesitated; then he answered firmly:

"Yes— it did."

Of course, it was useless. Counsel for the Crown, as was his duty, pushed him hard on the point.

"Who was the woman?"

"I refuse to say."

"Will you write down the name and hand it to his Lordship?"

"I will not."

And then the Judge intervened. A little sternly he pointed out that Jim was jeopardising his chances by his attitude, and that his consistent refusal to give any information on this point not only tended to throw doubts on the veracity of his statement, but came perilously near contempt of court.

Jim bowed, and I can hear now his quiet, level voice.

"My Lord, I realise what you say only too well. May I, however, beg of you to believe that nothing is farther from my mind than any feeling of contempt of court. For what it is worth, you have my word: but I can bring you no proof, even if I wished to. For the proof was destroyed by me that night. And whatever your Lordship's judgment may be on me, I thank my God that I was able to do so."

A woman in court gave a little sob, and the Judge frowned.

I talked to him three years after at some banquet or other, and he told me his feelings at the moment. Notoriously one of the most impartial men on the bench, yet every sympathy he had was with Jim. And he felt that he was being stupidly quixotic.

"Are we to understand," he said, "that there is a woman living so devoid of every decent sense that she allows you to stand on trial for murder— a murder perpetrated, as you say, to save her honour— without coming forward and giving evidence?"

I saw the muscles on Jim's face tighten, and a strange look came into his eyes.

"The woman in question is dead, my Lord."

And for a space there was absolute silence in court.

IT WAS all over in one day. There could only be one end: the issue was never in doubt. There was no refuting the Crown's deadly arguments. If such a precedent were allowed, where would matters end? There was merely prisoner's unsubstantiated word that he had killed this man to save a dead woman's honour. Even if it were true, there was no justification whatever for such an act. And how could they possibly tell that it was true? The members of the jury must obliterate from their minds all questions of sentiment. They must not take into account the prisoner's personality, nor that of the dead man. All they must concentrate on was the fact that admittedly a man had been murdered, and that the only excuse for the act was an appeal to sentiment which might, he allowed, be true, but which, on the other hand, might be merely a lie put forward as a last despairing endeavour to mitigate a cold-blooded crime. Let them not forget that prisoner at the bar had gone to this man's house with a loaded revolver in his pocket....

And through it all Jim listened with the same grave, quiet attention. Never for one instant did any hint of agitation or fear show on his face, and when the jury left to consider their verdict and he was removed he gave me one of his

usual cheery smiles. They didn't take long— ten minutes to be exact— and the verdict was the only possible one— "Guilty."

They took a couple of sobbing women out, and they closed the doors. And hands clenched, and knees twitched, for it's a dreadful moment, when a man's life is declared forfeit. They asked him if he had anything to say, and because he was white clean through he did have something to say. And it was this:

"Only one thing, my Lord. That had I been in any other position in this court to-day, either in your Lordship's seat or in the jury box, or conducting the case for the Crown, I only hope that I should have acted with the same scrupulous fairness towards prisoner that has been accorded to me to-day."

AND THEN it was over. Jim was sentenced to death, and it seemed to me as I watched him that he was staring at something above him—something that he saw, and we couldn't. But then maybe my eyes were a bit dim.

Certain it is that even to the last he never faltered. He seemed to be sustained by some outside power; he seemed to be curiously aloof. And all through the days that followed he was just the same. When I told him that from every corner of the country huge petitions were arriving for his reprieve he shrugged his shoulders and smiled a little sadly.

"Dear old Bill," he answered, "you've been just wonderful over it all. But I don't think I very much mind what happens. I'm not a particularly religious bloke, but perhaps— who knows— one might run across people over the other side."

And again he seemed to be staring through the windows of his cell at something or somebody that I couldn't see.

It was successful— the petition— and the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. The utter vileness of the man Parsons had a good deal to do with it, I think. And when I told Jim the news, and the two warders stood there smiling all over their face, he wrung my hand and thanked me. But even at the time it struck me that his chief feeling was gratitude for the trouble I'd taken, rather than joy at the result.

THAT WAS the last time I ever saw him. The years rolled by, and by the law of nature his memory grew a little dim. I became increasingly busy, and Jim faded a bit from my mind. But always I had marked the date of his release: I wanted to meet him as he came out. He had earned the maximum remission of his sentence, and the Governor of the prison had promised to let me know the actual date. And then, as luck would have it, I went down with a severe attack of influenza two days before he was due to come out.

I wired to the Governor asking him to tell Jim where I was, and he told him. But Jim never came. I went to old addresses: I followed every clue I could think

of, but it was useless. Jim completely disappeared, leaving no trace, and, as I have said, I gave it up, a little hurt and offended.

And now, at long last, I held in my hands a letter from him. It was a very bulky one, and I gave a start as I saw the date. It had been written two years previously, though the postmark was recent.

"Old friend," it ran, "don't think too hardly of me. The Governor gave me your message, but fifteen years of prison changes a man. We should have been strangers, Bill, and I should have stepped back into a world I didn't know, and that didn't know me. I couldn't have borne to meet the old set again. Most of them probably are married, and to their wives, who never knew me at all, I should have been just an unknown man who'd served a life sentence for murder. It would have been an impossible situation: I couldn't have stood it. But it was good of you to think of me— awfully good, old pal. Only I'm thankful you had 'flu, otherwise I should have had to hurt you. For I had made up my mind irrevocably to cut adrift, and I should have had a terrible job trying to make you see my point of view.

"But now, during the three years since I came out, the conviction has been growing on me that it is only fair to you to let you, who defended me so ably, know the truth. You won't get this letter until I am dead"— for a moment I stopped reading and stared out of the window— "but you'll get it then. The old lungs got touched up a bit in prison, and they tell me that I ought to go to some sanatorium. But I'm thinking it's hardly worth while....

"All I ask you, Bill, is to burn this letter when you've read it, and promise me that never by word or deed will you divulge its contents to a living soul. Because it's the story of the only part of my life that counts, and the only part of the life of one other.

"I met her first at St. Moritz. She was nineteen and I was twenty-one. We were both pretty good skiers, and so she managed to get away from the two stout women who dogged her footsteps wherever she went. Because, you see, she wasn't an ordinary mortal like, you and me, old man; she was a Royalty. And yet she was just an ordinary mortal like you and me, in that she loved love, and life, and most marvellous of all, she loved one, Jim Featherstone. Useless to ask how these things happen; they lie on the lap of the gods for capricious distribution. And I— great Heavens! old friend, it would be beyond my power to tell you how I loved that girl. She was more to me than life itself. We were discreet; we had to be. She was there incognito, of course, but the two Gorgons watched her like lynxes. Had they had an inkling of our feelings for one another they would have whisked her away and buried her once more in the starchy ceremony of her father's Court. For he was a King, and it should not tax your ingenuity overmuch to find out the country he reigned over.

"But there are ways of eluding even lynx-eyed Gorgons, and for four weeks we managed to do it. And for four weeks we lived in a world of our own— my girl and I. We didn't bother much over what was going to happen—the present was good enough for us. Once or twice I alluded to it, but always she put her little hand over my mouth and stopped me. So I forced myself to forget the madness of it all, and lived just for each day as it came.

"But at last there came the time when it could be ignored no longer. We were up there in the snow, eating our lunch, when she told me in her sweet, broken English:

" 'To-morrow, Jim, I'm going. Going back to prison.'

"I'd known, of course, that it had to come, but that didn't make it any easier. And something snapped inside me. I caught her in my arms, and begged and implored her to sacrifice everything and marry me.

" 'You'll be happy as my wife, dear love,' I whispered. 'I've got a bit of money, and there's the whole great world in front of us.'

"Just for a little she lay in my arms with the wonder of it all in her dear eyes; and then she gave a little twisted smile.

" 'If only I could, my Jim!' she said gravely. 'If only I could! But there's something I haven't told you. Maybe I've been wicked these last few weeks, letting you kiss me and make love to me. But I couldn't help it, for I love you so, my dear. And I think I hate him.'

" 'Who?' I demanded.

" 'The man I've got to marry. It's been arranged for many years.'

"And she told me who he was. A diplomatic marriage— the usual thing: and for a while I cursed bitterly and foolishly, till the words died away in my throat and I grew silent, just staring into her dear eyes. It was to take place when she was twenty-one, so there were two years before the sacrifice.

"This isn't a love story, Bill, and, anyway, there are things of which a man does not write. And that last afternoon is one of them. Sufficient to say that we said good-bye to one another up in the white purity of the snow. And white though it was it was no whiter than my beloved girl.

"The months went on, and I came back to London. I tried to forget in the way that men have always tried to forget, and I couldn't. Time made things no better: if anything it made them worse. The official announcement appeared in the papers full of the usual lies. How wonderful it was that the close cementing together of the two nations should be accomplished by such a romantic love-match— you know the sort of stuff. And I cursed the fools who wrote it, and went on all the harder trying to forget.

"It was three months before the ceremony was due to take place that a letter came to me at my club, and I stood there staring at it like a man bereft of

his senses. I'd only seen her handwriting once, but I knew it in a flash. And the postmark was London.

"She'd sent it over by someone, of course— I'd given her my club as an address if ever she wanted me. That was my first thought, until I turned the envelope over. And on the back was the name of a London hotel.

"Bill, I was shaking like a man with the palsy when I opened that letter. I had to put it on a table before I could get it steady enough to read. She was in London for three days, and though she felt it was madness, she must see me again. Would I meet her that afternoon? She gave me a rendezvous, where she would be in her car, and then we would go for a drive.

"And now I'm coming to the end, old man. Madness it may have been— the time we spent those next three days. But it was a madness which has lived through the long, grey years, and will live with me till the end. She was strictly incognito: only one girl friend was with her— a girl who loved her even as I did. She knew, of course; she it was who came later and told me what had happened. It was the driver who was the traitor— God! if I could get my hands on that man he would die even as John Parsons died.

"But I'm jumping ahead. Why we chose Richmond Park for our last day I don't know— though it wouldn't have mattered much where we'd gone: the result would have been the same. But it was there, in one of those little copses, that I said 'Good-bye' to her for the last time. She was leaving next day, and we sat there hand in hand. And after a while my arms went round her, and she clung to me helplessly.

"'Always and always; for ever and ever, my man,' she said again and again.

"What's the good of labouring it? The shadows were lengthening when I kissed her for the last time, and watched her stumble a little blindly back to the waiting car. It was the end, and from that moment I have only seen her twice. Once at Victoria Station the next morning, when for a moment her eyes met mine and she smiled pitifully: once amidst the pomp and ceremony of her marriage. I watched her from the crowd, as she bowed and smiled to the cheering people. But her face was white, Bill: and it seemed to me that she was looking for someone— always looking. But maybe that was my imagination.

"Once again I came back to London and tried to forget. Now it was over, definitely finished: I told myself over and over again that I was a fool.

" 'Cut it clean out, you ass: it's an episode— dead and finished.'

"But you can't cut out a part of you— a vital part, and I couldn't forget. I haven't forgotten yet: I never shall.

"It was a year later that she died. She died giving birth to a son, and a nation went into mourning. So did an obscure individual in London, but he didn't count— not until a little later. And then only he knew it and one other, and now you.

"It was the girl friend who came to me and told me what had happened. She came one morning and she had travelled over Europe without stopping. I take off my hat to that girl, Bill: she was superb—a thoroughbred clean through.

" 'They're after me, Mr. Featherstone,' she said. 'But they're a day behind.'

" 'What's happened?' I asked, staring at her, bewildered.

"She made no answer, but just took an envelope from her bag and handed it to me. I took out the contents and for a few moments I could hardly believe my eyes. There were six snapshots inside, and in every one of them there appeared my girl and me. They had been taken in Richmond Park, and subconsciously I recalled an occasional click-click that I had heard that wonderful afternoon. At the time I had hardly noticed it— put it down to a cricket or something. Now I knew. Some devil had been there hidden with a camera, and this was the result.

" 'How did you get these?' I asked her.

" 'They were sent to a man at Court,' she answered quietly. 'Never mind how I got them: if you want to know, I stole them. But you know what intrigue is out there, and the man to whom they were sent is the leader of the anti-Royalist clique. For years he has been working secretly to overthrow the existing Monarchy: in the country he has a large following. He is utterly unscrupulous and he proposes, I know, to publish those photographs and circulate them. You see what people will say, Mr. Featherstone: that the late Queen had a lover. Probably they will go further and say that the boy is not the son of the King. You must stop it. I don't care about the King or his house: I do care about her reputation. You loved her: you've got a day. Do something! *You see, the films are still in existence*. And that's the man who has them. I found his name and address when I took the prints.'

"I looked at the paper she held out to me, and then I laid my hand on her arm.

" 'Leave it all to me,' I said, and she went away comforted.

"Old friend, the rest you know. I rang that devil up twice on the telephone to fix an appointment. Each time he was out. So after dinner I went up to see him. He smiled when he saw me, and I had to control myself not to strike him in the face.

" 'And what can I do for you?' he asked, though he knew full well all the time.

" 'You can give me the films of those infamous pictures you took in Richmond Park,' I answered.

"He laughed again.

" 'But I value them highly,' he said. 'They've been worth a great deal of money to me, my dear boy.'

" 'You foul swine!' I cried, and he waved a deprecating hand.

" 'I regard it as a most creditable performance,' he continued. 'And really, you know, Richmond Park is a very public place for love-making. Anyone might have been there. In fact, as I followed your car and realised your destination I grew quite alarmed. But still, everything worked out very satisfactorily.'

"And at that moment the telephone bell rang beside him. He spoke into it and his face changed suddenly. I can still see him hanging up the receiver with a cold, sneering smile.

" 'So, my young friend, you have succeeded in stealing those photographs, have you? How very interesting.'

"I realised that the pursuers had arrived in London, and that time was even shorter than I thought.

" 'Photographs for which I have been paid a very large sum,' he continued. 'And here have I got all the trouble of printing another set.'

" 'You'll never do that, you blackmailer,' I said, and he leant back in his chair still smiling.

" 'May I ask how you propose to prevent me?' he remarked. 'The negatives are in that safe, the key of which is attached to my body by a steel chain. It is possible that you are a little stronger than I am, but not much. Anyway, there is a bell, and there are two menservants in this house who really are strong: specially engaged, in fact, for removing troublesome people. So may I ask you again how you propose to prevent me?'

" 'By killing you,' I said, and I pulled out the revolver.

"And still he smiled.

" 'They hang people for that in England, my dear boy. So I wouldn't if I were you. It's a stupid bluff, you know— that revolver game.'

"Bill, sometimes now I see the look in his eyes of cringing, hideous terror when he first realised it wasn't bluff. And I glory in it. He gave a sort of stifled scream, and reached for the bell, just as I plugged him through the heart.

"Then I locked the door and I burnt the films, and I knew that my darling was safe. Old friend, wouldn't you have done as I did?"

———————

11: A Cup of Tea

Maxwell Struthers Burt

1882-1954

Scribner's Magazine July 1917

YOUNG Burnaby was late. He was always late.

One associated him with lateness and certain eager, impossible excuses— he was always coming from somewhere to somewheres, and his "train was delayed," or his huge space-devouring motor "had broken down." You imagined him, enveloped in dust and dusk, his face disguised beyond human semblance, tearing up and down the highways of the world; or else in the corridor of a train, biting his nails with poorly concealed impatience. As a matter of fact, when you saw him, he was beyond average correctly attired, and his manner was suppressed, as if to conceal the keenness that glowed behind his dark eyes and kept the color mounting and receding in his sunburnt cheeks. All of which, except the keenness, was a strange thing in a man who spent half his life shooting big game and exploring. But then, one imagined that Burnaby on the trail and Burnaby in a town were two entirely different persons. He liked his life with a thrust to it, and in a great city there are so many thrusts that, it is to be supposed, one of Burnaby's temperament hardly has hours enough in a day to appreciate all of them and at the same time keep appointments.

On this February night, at all events, he was extremely late, even beyond his custom, and Mrs. Malcolm, having waited as long as she possibly could, sighed amusedly and told her man to announce dinner. There were only three others besides herself in the drawing-room, Masters— Sir John Masters, the English financier— and his wife, and Mrs. Selden, dark, a little silent, with a flushed, finely cut face and a slightly sorrow-stricken mouth. And already these people had reached the point where talk is interesting. People did in Mrs. Malcolm's house. One went there with anticipation, and came away with the delightful, a little vague, exhilaration that follows an evening where the perfection of the material background— lights, food, wine, flowers— has been almost forgotten in the thrill of contact with real persons, a rare enough circumstance in a period when the dullest people entertain the most. In the presence of Mrs. Malcolm even the very great forgot the suspicions that grow with success and became themselves, and, having come once, came again vividly, overlooking other people who really had more right to their attentions than had she.

This was the case with Sir John Masters. And he was a very great man indeed, not only as the world goes but in himself : a short, heavy man, with a long, heavy head crowned with vibrant, still entirely dark hair and pointed by a black, carefully kept beard, above which arose— " arose " is the word, for Sir John's face was architectural— a splendid, slightly curved nose— a buccaneering

nose; a nose that, willy-nilly, would have made its possessor famous. One suspected, far back in the yeoman strain, a hurried, possibly furtive marriage with gypsy or Jew; a sudden blossoming into lyricism on the part of a soil-stained Masters. Certainly from somewhere Sir John had inherited an imagination which was not insular. Dangerous men, these Sir Johns, with their hooked noses and their lyric eyes !

Mrs. Malcolm described him as fascinating. There was about him that sense of secret power that only politicians, usually meretriciously, and diplomats, and, above all, great bankers as a rule possess ; yet he seldom talked of his own life, or the mission that had brought him to New York ; instead, in his sonorous, slightly Hebraic voice, he drew other people on to talk about themselves, or else, to artists and writers and their sort, discovered an amazing, discouraging knowledge of the trades by which they earned their living. "One feels," said Mrs. Malcolm, "that one is eyeing a sensitive python. He uncoils beautifully."

They were seated at the round, candle-lit table, the rest of the room in partial shadow, Sir John looking like a lost Rembrandt, and his blonde wife, with her soft English face, like a rose-and-gray portrait by Reynolds, when Burnaby strode in upon them... strode in upon them, and then, as if remembering the repression he believed in, hesitated, and finally advanced quietly toward Mrs. Malcolm. One could smell the snowy February night still about him.

"I'm so sorry," he said. " I—"

"You broke down, I suppose," said Mrs. Malcolm, "or the noon train from Washington was late for the first time in six years. What do you do in Washington, anyway? Moon about the Smithsonian?"

"No," said Burnaby, as he sank into a chair and unfolded his napkin. "Y'see— well, that is— I ran across a fellow— an Englishman— who knew a chap I met last summer up on the Francis River— I didn't exactly meet him, that is, I ran into him, and it wasn't the Francis River really, it was the Upper Liara, a branch that comes in from the northwest. Strange, wasn't it?— this fellow, this Englishman, got to talking about tea, and that reminded me of the whole thing." He paused on the last word and, with a peculiar habit that is much his own, stared across the table at Lady Masters, but over and through her, as if that pretty pink-and-white woman had entirely disappeared,— and the warm shadows behind her,— and in her place were no one could guess what vistas of tumbling rivers and barren tundras.

"Tea!" ejaculated Mrs. Malcolm.

Burnaby came back to the flower-scented circle of light.

"Yes," he said soberly, "tea. Exactly."

Mrs. Malcolm's delicate eyebrows rose to a point. "What," she asked, in the tones of delighted motherhood overlaid with a slight exasperation which she

habitually used toward Burnaby, " has tea got to do with a man you met on the Upper Liara last summer and a man you met this afternoon? Why tea?"

"A lot," said Burnaby cryptically, and proceeded to apply himself to his salad, for lie had refused the courses his lateness had made him miss. "Y'see," he said, after a moment's reflection, " it was this way— and it's worth telling, for it's queer. I ran into this Terhune this afternoon at a club— a big, blond Englishman who's been in the army, but now he's out making money. Owns a tea house in London. Terhune & Terhune— perhaps you know them?" He turned to Sir John.

"Yes, very well. I imagine this is Arthur Terhune."

"That's the man. Well, his being in tea and that sort of thing got me to telling him about an adventure I had last summer, and, the first crack out of the box, he said he remembered the other chap perfectly— had known him fairly well at one time. Odd. wasn't it, when you come to think of it? A big, blond, freshly bathed Englishman in a club, and that other man away up there!"

"And the other man? Is he in the tea business too?" asked Mrs. Selden. She was interested by now, leaning across the table, her dark eyes catching light from the candles. It was something— to interest Mrs. Selden.

"No," said Burnaby abruptly. "No. He's in no business at all, except going to perdition. Y'see. he's a squaw-man— a big, black squaw-man, with a nose like a Norman king's. The sort of person you imagine in evening clothes in the Carleton lounge. He might have been anything but what he is."

"I wonder," said Sir John, "why we do that sort of thing so much more than other nations? Our very best, too. It's odd."

"It was odd enough the way it happened to me, anyhow," said Burnaby. "I'd been knocking around up there all summer, just an Indian and myself— around what they call Fort Francis and the Pelly Lakes, and toward the end of August we came down the Liara in a canoe. We were headed for Lower Post on the Francis, and it was all very lovely until, one day, we ran into a rapid, a devil of a thing, and my Indian got drowned."

"How dreadful!" murmured Lady Masters.

"It was," agreed Burnaby; "but it might have been worse— for me, that is. It couldn't have been much worse for the poor devil of an Indian, could it? But I had a pretty fair idea of the country, and had only about fifty miles to walk, and a little waterproof box of grub turned up out of the wreck, so I wasn't in any danger of starving. It was lonely, though— it's lonely enough country, anyhow, and of course I couldn't help thinking about that Indian and the way big rapids roar. I couldn't sleep when night came— saw black rocks sticking up out of white water like the fangs of a mad dog. I was pretty near the horrors, I guess. So you can imagine I wasn't sorry when, about four o'clock of the next afternoon, I came back to the river again and a teepee standing up all by itself on a little pine-crowned bluff. In front of the teepee was an old squaw— she wasn't very

old, really, but you know how Indians get— boiling something over a fire in a big pot. 'How!' I said, and she grunted. 'If you'll lend me part of your fire, I'll make some tea,' I continued. 'And if you're good, I'll give you some when it's done.' Tea was one of the things cached in the little box that had been saved. She moved the pot to one side, so I judged she understood, and I trotted down to the river for water and set to work. As you can guess, I was pretty anxious for any kind of conversation by then, so after a while I said brightly: 'All alone?' She grunted again and pointed over her shoulder to the teepee. 'Well, seeing you're so interested,' said I, 'and that the tea's done, we'll all go inside and ask your man to a party— if you'll dig up two tin cups. I've got one of my own.' She raised the flap of the teepee and I followed her. I could see she wasn't a person who wasted words. Inside a little fire was smouldering, and seated with his back to us was a big, broad-shouldered buck, with a dark blanket wrapped around him. 'Your good wife,' I began cheerily— I was getting pretty darned sick of silence— 'has allowed me to make some tea over your fire. Have some? I'm shipwrecked from a canoe and on my way to Lower Post. If you don't understand what I say, it doesn't make the slightest difference, but for God's sake grunt— just once, to show you're interested.' He grunted. 'Thanks!' I said, and poured the tea into the three tin cups. The squaw handed one to her buck. Then I sat down.

"There was nothing to be heard but the gurgling of the river outside and the rather noisy breathing we three made as we drank; and then— very clearly, just as if we'd been sitting in an English drawing-room— in the silence a voice said: 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' Yes, just that! 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' I looked at the buck, but he hadn't moved, and then I looked at the squaw, and she was still squatting and sipping her tea, and then I said, very quietly, for I knew my nerves were still ragged, 'Did any one speak?' and the buck turned slowly and looked me up and down, and I saw the nose I was talking about— the nose like a Norman king's. I was rattled, I admit; I forgot my manners. 'You're English!' I gasped out ; and the buck said very sweetly: 'That's none of your damned business.' "

Burnaby paused and looked about the circle of attentive faces. "That's all. But it's enough, isn't it? To come out of nothing, going nowheres, and run into a dirty Indian who says: 'By Jove, that's the first decent cup of tea I've had in ten years!' And then along comes this Terhune and says that he knows the man."

Mrs. Malcolm raised her chin from the hand that had been supporting it. "I don't blame you," she said, "for being late."

"And this man,", interrupted Sir John's sonorous voice, " this squaw-man, did he tell you anything about himself?"

Burnaby shook his head. "Not likely," he answered. "I tried to draw him out, but he wasn't drawable. Finally he said: 'If you'll shut your damned mouth I'll

give you two dirty blankets to sleep on. If you won't, I'll kick you out of here.' The next morning I pulled out, leaving him crouched over the little teepee fire nursing his knees. But I hadn't gone twenty yards when he came to the flap and called out after me: 'I say!' I turned about sullenly. His dirty face had a queer, cracked smile on it. 'Look here ! Do you— where did you get that tea from, anyway? I— there's a lot of skins I've got; I don't suppose you'd care to trade, would you?' I took the tea out of the air-tight box and put it on the ground. Then I set off down river. Henderson, the factor at Lower Post, told me a little about him: his name— it wasn't assumed, it seems; and that he'd been in the country about fifteen years, going from bad to worse. He was certainly at 'worse' when I saw him." Burnaby paused and stared across the table again with his curious, far-away look. "Beastly, isn't it?" he said, as if to himself. "Cold up there now, too! The snow must be deep." He came back to the present. "And I suppose, you know," he said, smiling deprecatingly at Mrs. Selden, "he's just as fond of flowers and lights and things as we are."

Mrs. Selden shivered.

"Fonder!" said Sir John. "Probably fonder. That sort is. It's the poets of the world who can't write poetry who go to smash that way. They ought to take a term at business, and"— he reflected— "the business men, of course, at poetry." He regarded Burnaby with his incrutable eyes, in the depths of which danced little flecks of light.

"What did you say this man's name was?" asked Lady Masters, in her soft voice. She had an extraordinary way of advancing, with a timid rush, as it were, into the foreground, and then receding again, melting back into the shadows. She rarely ever spoke without a sensation of astonishment making itself felt. "She is like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm.

"Bewsher," said Burnaby— "Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher. Quite a name, isn't it? He was in the cavalry. His family are rather swells in an old-fashioned way. He is the fifth son— or seventh, or whatever it is— of a baronet and, Terhune says, was very much in evidence about London twenty-odd years ago. Terhune used to see him in clubs, and every now and then dining out. Although he himself, of course, was a much younger man. Very handsome he was, too, Terhune said, and a favorite. And then one day he just disappeared— got out— no one knows exactly why. Terhune doesn't. Lost his money, or a woman, or something like that. The usual thing, I suppose. I— You didn't hurt yourself, did you?" ...

He had paused abruptly and was looking across the table ; for there had been a little tinkle and a crash of breaking glass, and now a pool of champagne was forming beside Lady Masters's plate, and finding its way in a thin thread of gold along the cloth. There was a moment's silence, and then she advanced again out of the shadows with her curious soft rush. "How clumsy I am ! " she murmured. "My arm— My bracelet! I— I'm so sorry!" She looked swiftly about

her, and then at Burnaby. "Oh, no! I'm not cut, thanks!" Her eyes held a pained embarrassment. Lie caught the look, and her eyelids flickered and fell before his gaze, and then, as the footman repaired the damage, she sank back once more into the half-light beyond the radiance of the candles. "How shy she is!" thought Burnaby. "So many of these English women are. She's an important woman in her own right, too." He studied her furtively.

Into the soft silence came Sir John's carefully modulated voice. "Barbara and I," he explained, "will feel this very much. We both knew Bewsher." His eyes became somber. "This is very distressing," he said abruptly.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Burnaby, and raised his head like an alert hound.

"How odd it all is!" said Mrs. Malcolm. But she was wondering why men are so queer with their wives— resent so much the slightest social clumsiness on their part, while in other women— provided the offense is not too great— it merely amuses them. Even the guarded manners of Sir John had been disturbed. For a moment he had been very angry with the shadow that bore his name; one could tell by the swift glance he had cast in her direction. After all, upsetting a glass of champagne was a very natural sequel to a story such as Burnaby had told, a story about a former acquaintance— perhaps friend.

Sir John thoughtfully helped himself to a spoonful of his dessert before he looked up; when he did so he laid down his spoon and sat back in his chair with the manner of a man who has made a sudden decision. "No," he said, and an unexpected little smile hovered about his lips, "it isn't so odd. Bewsher was rather a figure of a man twenty years ago. Shall I tell you his history?"

To Mrs. Malcolm, watching with alert, humorous eyes, there came a curious impression, faint but distinct, like wind touching her hair; as if, that is, a door into the room had opened and shut. She leaned forward, supporting her chin in her hand.

"Of course," she said.

Sir John twisted between his fingers the stem of his champagne-glass and studied thoughtfully the motes of light at the heart of the amber wine. "You see," he began thoughtfully, "it's such a difficult story to tell— difficult because it took twenty-five— and, now that Mr. Burnaby has furnished the sequel, forty-five years— to live; and difficult because it is largely a matter of psychology. I can only give you the high lights, as it were. You must fill in the rest for yourselves. You must imagine, that is, Bewsher and this other fellow— this Morton. I can't give you his real name— it is too important; you would know it. No, it isn't obviously dramatic. And yet— "his voice suddenly became vibrant— "such things compose, as a matter of fact, the real drama of the world. It— "he looked about the table swiftly and leaned forward, and then, as if interrupting himself, "but what was obviously dramatic," he said— and the little dancing

sparks in the depths of his eyes were peculiarly noticeable— " was the way I, of all people, heard it. Yes. You see, I heard it at a dinner party like this, in London; and Morton— the man himself— told the story." He paused, and with half-closed eyes studied the effect of his announcement.

"You mean—?" asked Burnaby.

"Exactly." Sir John spoke with a certain cool eagerness. "He sat up before all those people and told the inner secrets of his life; and of them all I was the only one who suspected the truth. Of course, he was comparatively safe, none of them knew him well except myself, but think of it! The bravado— the audacity! Rather magnificent, wasn't it?" He sank back once more in his chair.

Mrs. Malcolm agreed. " Yes," she said. "Magnificent and insulting."

Sir John smiled. "My dear lady," he asked, "doesn't life consist largely of insults from the strong to the weak?"

"And were all these people so weak, then? "

"No, in their own way they were fairly important, I suppose, but compared to Morton they were weak— very weak— Ah, yes ! I like this custom of smoking at table. Thanks!" He selected a cigarette deliberately, and stooped toward the proffered match. The flame illumined the swarthy curve of his beard and the heavy lines of his dark face. "You see," he began, straightening up in his chair, "the whole thing— that part of it, and the part I'm to tell— is really, if you choose, an allegory of strength, of strength and weakness. On the one side Morton— there's strength, sheer, undiluted power, the thing that runs the world; and on the other Bewsher, the ordinary man, with all his mixed-up ideas of right and wrong and the impossible, confused thing he calls a 'code'— Bewsher, and later on the girl. She too is part of the allegory. She represents— what shall I say? A composite portrait of the ordinary young woman? Religion, I suppose. Worldly religion. The religion of most of my good friends in England. A vague but none the less passionate belief in a heaven populated by ladies and gentlemen who dine out with a God who resembles royalty. And coupled with this religion the girl had, of course, as have most of her class, a very distinct sense of her own importance in the world; not that exactly— personally she was over-modest; a sense rather of her importance as a unit of an important family, and a deep-rooted conviction of the fundamental necessity of unimportant things: parties, and class-worship, and the whole jumbled-up order as it is. The usual young woman, that is, if you lay aside her unusual beauty. And, you see, people like Bewsher and the girl haven't much chance against a man like Morton, have they? Do you remember the girl, my dear?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"Yes," murmured Lady Masters.

"Well, then," continued Sir John, "you must imagine this Morton, an ugly little boy of twelve, going up on a scholarship to a great public school— a rather

bitter little boy, without any particular prospects ahead of him except those his scholarship held out; and back of him a poor, stunted life, with a mother in it— a sad dehumanized creature, I gathered, who subsisted on the bounty of a niggardly brother. And this, you can understand, was the first thing that made Morton hate virtue devoid of strength. His mother, he told me, was the best woman he had ever known. The world had beaten her unmercifully. His earliest recollection was hearing her cry at night.... And there, at the school, he had his first glimpse of the great world that up to then he had only dimly suspected. Dramatic enough in itself, isn't it?— if you can visualize the little dark chap. A common enough drama, too, the Lord knows. We people on top are bequeathing misery to our posterity when we let the Mortons of the world hate the rich. And head and shoulders above the other boys of his age at the school was Bewsher; not that materially, of course, there weren't others more important; Bewsher's family was old and rich as such families go, but he was very much a younger son, and his people lived mostly in the country; yet even then there was something about him— a manner, an adeptness in sports, an unsought popularity, that picked him out; the beginnings of that Norman nose that Mr. Burnaby has mentioned. And here"— Sir John paused and pufifed thoughtfully at his cigarette— "is the first high light.

"To begin with, of course, Morton hated Bewsher and all he represented, hated him in a way that only a boy of his nature can; and then, one day— I don't know exactly when it could have been, probably a year or two after he had gone up to school— he began to see quite clearly what this hate meant; began to see that for such as he to hate the Bewshers of the world was the sheerest folly— a luxury far beyond his means. Quaint, wasn't it ? In a boy of his age ! You can imagine him working it out at night, in his narrow dormitory bed, when the other boys were asleep. You see, he realized, dimly at first, clearly at last, that through Bewsher and his kind lay the hope of Morton and his kind. Nice little boys think the same thing, only they are trained not to admit it. That was the first big moment of Morton's life, and with the determination characteristic of him he set out to accomplish what he had decided. In England we make our future through our friends, in this country you make it through your enemies. But it wasn't easy for Morton; such tasks never are. He had a good many insults to swallow. In the end, however, from being tolerated he came to be indispensable, and from being indispensable eventually to be liked. He had planned his campaign with care. Carefulness, recklessly carried out, has been, I think, the guiding rule of his life. He had modelled himself on Bewsher; he walked like Bewsher; tried to think like Bewsher— that is, in the less important things of life— and, with the divination that marks his type of man, the little money he had, the little money that as a schoolboy he could borrow, he had spent with precision on clothes and other things that brought him personal

distinction ; in what people call necessities he starved himself. By the time he was ready to leave school you could hardly have told him from the man he had set out to follow: he was equally well-mannered; equally at his ease; if anything, more conscious of prerogative than Bewsher. He had come to spend most of his holidays at Bewsher's great old house in Gloucestershire. That, too, was an illumination. It showed him what money was made for— the sunny quiet of the place, the wheels of a spacious living that ran so smoothly, the long gardens, the inevitableness of it all. Some day, he told himself, he would have just such a house. He has. It is his mistress. The world has not allowed him much of the poetry that, as you must already see, the man has in him; he takes it out on his place.

"It was in Morton's last year at Oxford, just before his graduation, that the second great moment of his life occurred. He had done well at his college, not a poor college either; and all the while, you must remember, he was borrowing money and running up bills. But this didn't bother him. He was perfectly assured in his own mind concerning his future. He had counted costs. In that May, Bewsher, who from school had gone to Sandhurst, came up on a visit with two or three other fledgling officers, and they had a dinner in Morton's rooms. It turned into rather a 'rag,' as those things do, and it was there, across a flower-strewn, wine-stained table, that Morton had his second revelation. He wasn't drunk— he never got drunk; the others were. The thing came in upon him slowly, warmingly, like the breeze that stirred the curtains. He felt himself, as never before, a man. You can see him sitting back in his chair, in the smoke and the noise and the foolish singing, cool, his eyes a little closed. He knew now that he had passed the level of these men; yes, even the shining mark Bewsher had set. He had gone on, while they had stood still. To him, he suddenly realized, and to such as he, belonged the heritage of the years, not to these men who thought they held it. These old gray buildings stretching away into the May dusk, the history of a thousand years, were his. These sprawled young aristocrats before him— they, whether they eventually came to know it or not, they, and Bewsher with them— would one day do his bidding: come when he beckoned, go when he sent. It was a big thought, wasn't it, for a man of twenty-two?" Sir John paused and puffed at his cigarette.

"That was the second high light," he continued, "and the third did not come until fifteen years later. Bewsher went into the Indian army— his family had ideas of service— and Morton into a banking-house in London. And there, as deliberately as he had taken them up, he laid aside for the time being all the social perquisites which he had with so much pains acquired. Do you know— he told me that for fifteen years not once had he dined out, except when he thought his ambitions would be furthered by so doing, and then, as one turns on a tap, he turned on the charm he now knew himself to possess. It is not

astonishing, is it, when you come to think of it, that eventually he became rich and famous? Most people are unwilling to sacrifice their youth to their future. He wasn't. But it wasn't a happy time. He hated it. He paid off his debts, however, and at the end of the fifteen years found himself a big man in a small way, with every prospect of becoming a big man in a big way. Then, of course— such men do— he began to look about him. He wanted wider horizons, he wanted luxury, he wanted a wife; and he wanted them as a starved man wants food. He experienced comparatively little difficulty in getting started. Some of his school and university friends remembered him, and there was a whisper about that he was a man that bore watching. But afterward he stuck. The inner citadel of London is by no means as assailable as the outer fortifications lead one to suppose.

"They say a man never has a desire but there's an angel or a devil to write it down. Morton had hardly made his discovery when Bewsher turned up from India, transferred to a crack cavalry regiment; a sunburnt, cordial Bewsher, devilishly determined to enjoy the 'fulness. of his prime. On his skirts, as he' had done once before, Morton penetrated farther and farther into the esoteric heart of society. I'm not sure just how Bewsher felt toward Morton at the time; he liked him, I think; at all events, he had the habit of him. As for Morton, he liked Bewsher as much as he dared; he never permitted himself to like any one too much.

"I don't know how it is with you, but I have noticed again and again that intimate friends are prone to fall in love with the same woman: perhaps it is because they have so many tastes in common; perhaps it is jealousy— I don't know. Anyhow, that is what happened to these two, Morton first, then Bewsher; and it is characteristic that the former mentioned it to no one, while the latter was confidential and expansive. Such men do not deserve women, and yet they are often the very men women fall most in love with. At first the girl had been attracted to Morton, it seems; he intrigued her— no doubt the sense of power about him; but the handsomer man, when he entered the running, speedily drew ahead. You can imagine the effect of this upon her earlier suitor. It was the first rebuff that for a long time had occurred to him in his ordered plan of life. He resented it and turned it over in his mind, and eventually, as it always does to men of his kind, his opportunity came. You see, unlike Bewsher and his class, all his days had been an exercise in the recognition and appreciation of chances. He isolated the inevitable fly in the ointment, and in this particular ointment the fly happened to be Bewsher's lack of money and the education the girl had received. She was poor in the way that only the daughter of a great house can be. To Morton, once he was aware of the fly, and once he had combined the knowledge of it with what these two people most lacked, it was a simple thing. They lacked, as you have already guessed, .courage and directness. On Morton's

side was all the dunderheadism of an aristocracy, all its romanticism, all its gross materialism, all its confusion of ideals. But you mustn't think that he, Morton, was cold or objective in all this: far from it; he was desperately in love with the girl himself, and he was' playing his game like a man in a corner— all his wits about him, but fever in his heart.

"There was the situation, an old one— a girl who dare not marry a poor man, and a poor man cracking his brains to know where to get money from. I dare say Bewsher never questioned the rightness of it all— he was too much in love with the girl, his own training had been too similar. And Morton, hovering on the outskirts, talked— to weak people the most fatal doctrine in the world— the doctrine of power, the doctrine that each man and woman can have just what they want if they will only get out and seek it. That's true for the big people; for the small it usually spells death. They falter on methods. They are too afraid of unimportant details. His insistence had its results even more speedily than he had hoped. Before long the girl, too, was urging Bewsher on to effort. It isn't the first time goodness has sent weakness to the devil. Meanwhile the instigator dropped from his one-time position of tentative lover to that of adviser in particular. It was just the position that at the time he most desired.

"Things came to a head on a warm night in April. Bewsher dropped in upon Morton in his chambers. Very handsome he looked, too, I dare say, in his evening clothes, with an opera-coat thrown back from his shoulders. I remember well myself his grand air, with a touch of cavalry swagger about it. I've no doubt he leaned against the chimney-piece and tapped his leg with his stick. And the upshot of it was that he wanted money. "Oh, no! not a loan. It wasn't as bad as that. He had enough to screw along with himself; although he was frightfully in debt. He wanted a big sum. An income. To make money, that was. He didn't want to go into business if he could help it; hadn't any ability that way; hated it. But perhaps Morton could put him in the way of something? He didn't mind chances."

"Do you see?" Sir John leaned forward. "And he never realized the vulgarity of it— that product of five centuries, that English gentleman. Never realized the vulgarity of demanding of life something for nothing; of asking from a man as a free gift what that man had sweated for and starved for all his life; yes, literally, all his life. It was an illumination, as Morton said, upon that pitiful thing we call 'class.' He demanded all this as his right, too; demanded power, the one precious possession. Well, the other man had his code as well, and the first paragraph in it was that a man shall get only what he works for. Can you imagine him, the little ugly man, sitting at his table and thinking all this? And suddenly he got to his feet. 'Yes,' he said. 'I'll make you a rich man.' But he didn't say he would keep him one. That was the third high light— the little man standing where all through the ages had stood men like him, the secret movers of the

world, while before them, supplicating, had passed the beauty and the pride of their times. In the end they all beg at the feet of power— the kings and the fighting men. And yet, although this was thegreat, hidden triumph of his life, and, moreover, beyond his hopes a realization of the game he had been playing— for it put Bewsher, you see, utterly in his power— Morton said at the moment it made him a little sick. It was too crude; Bewsher's request too unashamed; it made suddenly too cheap, since men could ask for it so lightly, all the stakes for which he, Morton, had sacrificed the slow minutes and hours of his life. And then, of course, there was this as well: Bewsher had been to Morton an ideal, and ideals can't die, even the memory of them, without some pain."

Mrs. Malcolm, watching with lips a little parted, said to herself: " He has uncoiled too much."

"Yes"— Sir John reached out his hand and, picking up a long-stemmed rose from the table, began idly to twist it in his fingers. "And that was the end. From then on the matter was simple. It was like a duel between a trained swordsman and a novice; only it wasn't really a duel at all, for one of the antagonists was unaware that he was fighting. I suppose that most people would call it unfair. I have wondered. And yet Bewsher, in a polo game, or in the game of social life, would not have hesitated to use all the skill and craft he knew. But, you say, he would not have played against beginners. Well, he had asked himself into this game; he had not been invited. And so, all through that spring and into the summer and autumn the three-cornered contest went on, and into the winter and on to the spring beyond. Unwittingly, the girl was playing more surely than ever into Morton's hand. The increasing number of Bewsher's platitudes about wealth, about keeping up tradition, about religion, showed that. He even talked vaguely about giving up the army and going into business. 'It must have its fascinations, you know,' he remarked lightly. In the eyes of both of them Morton had become a sort of fairy godfather— a mysterious, wonderful gnome at whose beck gold leaped from the mountainside. It was just the illusion he wished to create. In the final analysis the figure of the gnome is the most beloved figure in the rotten class to which we belong.

"And then, just as spontaneously as it had come, Bewsher's money began to melt away— slowly at first; faster afterward until, finally, he was back again to his original income. This was a time of stress, of hurried consultations, of sympathy on the part of Morton, of some rather ugly funk on the part of Bewsher ; and Morton realized that in the eyes of the girl he was rapidly becoming once more the dominant figure. It didn't do him much good"— Sir John broke the stem of the rose between his fingers.

"Soon there was an end to it all. There came, finally, a very unpleasant evening. This too was in April; April a year after Bewsher's visit to Morton's chambers, only this time the scene was laid in an office. Bewsher had put a

check on the desk. 'Here,' he said, 'that will tide me over until I can get on my feet,' and his voice was curiously thick; and Morton, looking down, had seen that the signature wasn't genuine— a clumsy business done by a clumsy man— and, despite all his training, from what he said, a little cold shiver had run up and down his back. This had gone farther than he had planned. Blit he made no remark, simply pocketed the check, and the next day settled out of his own pockets Bewsher's sorry affairs; put him back, that is, where he had started, with a small income mortgaged beyond hope. Then he sent a note to the girl requesting an interview on urgent business. She saw him that night in her drawing-room. She was very lovely. Morton was all friendly sympathy. It wasn't altogether unreal, either. I think, from what he told me, he was genuinely touched. But he felt, you know— the urge, the goad, of his own career. His kind do. Ultimately they are not their own masters. He showed the girl the check— not at first, you understand, but delicately, after preliminary discussion; reluctantly, upon repeated urging. What was he to do? What would she advise? Bewsher was safe, of course; he had seen to that; but the whole unintelligible, shocking aspect of the thing!' He tore the check up and threw it in the fire. He was not unaware that the girl's eyes admired him. It was a warm night. He said good-by and walked home along the deserted street. He remembered, he told me, how sweet the trees smelled. He was not happy. You see, Bewsher had been the nearest approach to a friend he had ever had.

"That practically finished the sordid business. What the girl said to Bewsher Morton never knew; he trusted to her conventionalized religion and her family pride to break Bewsher's heart, and to Bewsher's sentimentality to eliminate him forever from the scene. In both surmises he was correct; he was only not aware that at the same time the girl had broken her own heart. He found that out afterward. And Bewsher eliminated himself more thoroughly than necessary. I suppose the shame of the thing was to him like a blow to a thoroughbred, instead of an incentive, as it would have been to a man of coarser fibre. He went from bad to worse, resigned from his regiment, finally disappeared. Personally, I had hoped that he had begun again somewhere on the outskirts of the world. But he isn't that sort. There's not much of the Norman king to him except his nose. The girl married Morton. He gave her no time to recover from her gratitude. He felt very happy, he told me, the day of his wedding, very elated. It was one of those rare occasions when lie felt that the world was a good place. Another high light, you see. And it was no mean thing, if you consider it, for a man such as he to marry the daughter of a peer, and at the same time to love her. He was not a gentleman, you understand, he could never be that— it was the one secret thing that always hurt him— no amount of brains, no amount of courage could make him what he wasn't; he never lied to himself as most men do; so he had acquired a habit of secretly triumphing over

those who possessed the gift. The other thing that hurt him was when, a few months later, he discovered that his wife still loved Bewsher and always would. And that"— Sir John picked up the broken rose again— "is, I suppose, the end of the story."

There was a moment's silence and then Burnaby lifted his pointed chin. " By George!" he said, "it is interesting to know how things really happen, isn't it? But I think— you have, haven't you, left out the real point. Do you— would you mind telling just why you imagine Morton did this thing? Told his secret before all those people? It wasn't like him, was it?"

Sir John slowly lighted another cigarette, and then he turned to Burnaby and smiled. "Yes," he said, "it was extremely like him. Still, it's very clever of you, very clever. Can't you guess? It isn't so very difficult."

"No," said Burnaby," I can't guess at all."

"Well, then, listen." And to Mrs. Malcolm it seemed as if Sir John had grown larger, had merged in the shadows about him; at least he gave that impression, for he sat up very straight and threw back his shoulders. Lor a moment he hesitated, then he began. "You must go back to the dinner I was describing," he said— "the dinner in London. I too was intrigued as you are, and when it was over I followed Morton out and walked with him toward his club. And, like you, I asked the question. I think that he had known all along that I suspected; at all events, it is characteristic of the man that he did not try to bluff me. He walked on for a little while in silence, and then he laughed abruptly. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll tell you. Yes. Just this. What there is to be got, I've got; what work can win I've won; but back of it all there's something else, and back even of that there's a careless god who gives his gifts where they are least deserved. That's one reason why I talked as I did to-night. To all of us— the men like me— there comes in the end a time when we realize that what a man can do we can do, but that love, the touch of other people's minds, these two things are the gifts of the careless god. And it irritates us, I suppose, irritates us! We want them in a way that the ordinary man who has them cannot understand. We want them as damned souls in hell want water. And sometimes the strain's too much. It was to-night. To touch other minds, even for a moment, even if they hate you while you are doing it, that's the thing! To lay yourself, just once, bare to the gaze of ordinary people! With the hope, perhaps, that even then they may still find in you something to admire or love. Self-revelation! Every man confesses sometime. It happened that I chose a dinner party. Do you understand?' " It was almost as if Sir John himself had asked the question.

"And then"— he was speaking in his usual calm tones again— "there happened a curious thing, a very curious thing, for Morton stopped and turned toward me and began to laugh. I thought he would never stop. It was rather uncanny, under the street lamp there, this usually rather quiet man. 'And that,'

he said at length, 'that's only half the story. The cream of it is this: the way I myself felt, sitting there among all those soft, easily lived people. That's the cream of it. To flout them, to sting them, to laugh at them, to know you had more courage than all of them put together, you who were once so afraid of them! To feel that— even if they knew it was about yourself you were talking— that even then they were afraid of you, and would to-morrow ask you back again to their houses. That's power! That's worth doing! After all, you can keep your love and your sympathy and your gentlemen; it's only to men like me, men who've sweated and come up, that moments arise such as I've had to-night.' And then, 'It's rather a pity,' he said, after a pause, 'that of them all you alone knew of whom I was talking. Rather a pity, isn't it?' " Sir John hesitated and looked about the table. "It was unusual, wasn't it?" he said at length gently. "Have I been too dramatic?"

In the little silence that followed, Mrs. Malcolm leaned forward, her eyes starry. "I would rather," she said, "talk to Bewsher in his teepee than talk to Morton with all his money."

Sir John looked at her and smiled— his charming smile. "Oh, no, you wouldn't," he said. "Oh, no ! We say those things, but we don't mean them. If you sat next to Morton at dinner you'd like him; but as for Bewsher you'd despise him, as all right-minded women despise a failure. Oh, no; you'd prefer Morton."

"Perhaps you're right," sighed Mrs. Malcolm; "pirates are fascinating, I suppose." She arose to her feet. Out of the shadows Lady Masters advanced to meet her. "She is like a mist," thought Mrs. Malcolm. "Exactly like a rather faint mist."

Burnaby leaned over and lit a cigarette at one of the candles. "And, of course," he said quietly, without raising his head, "the curious thing is that this fellow Morton, despite all his talk of power, in the end is merely a ghost of Bewsher, after all, isn't he?"

Sir John turned and looked at the bowed sleek head with a puzzled expression. "A ghost!" he murmured. "I don't think I quite understand."

"It's very simple," said Burnaby, and raised his head. "Despite all Morton has done, in the things worth while, in the things he wants the most, he can at best be only a shadow of the shadow Bewsher has left— a shadow of a man to the woman who loves Bewsher, a shadow of a friend to the men who liked Bewsher, a shadow of a gentleman to the gentlemen about him. A ghost, in other words. It's the inevitable end of all selfishness. I think Bewsher has rather the best of it, don't you?"

"I— I had never thought of it in quite that light," said Sir John, and followed Mrs. Malcolm.

They went into the drawing-room beyond— across a hallway, and up a half-flight of stairs, and through glass doors. "Play for us!" said Mrs. Malcolm, and Burnaby, that remarkable young man, sat down to the piano and for perhaps an hour made the chords sob to a strange music, mostly his own.

"That's Bewsher!" he said when he was through, and had sat back on his stool, and was sipping a long-neglected cordial.

"Br-r-r-!" shivered Mrs. Selden from her place by the fire. "How unpleasant you are! "

Sir John looked troubled. "I hope," he said, "my story hasn't depressed you too much. Burnaby's was really worse, you know. Well, I must be going." He turned to Mrs. Malcolm. "You are one of the few women who can make me sit up late."

He bade each in turn good-night in his suave, charming, slightly Hebraic manner. To Burnaby he said: "Thank you for the music. Improvisation is perhaps the happiest of gifts."

But Burnaby for once was awkward. He was watching Sir John's face with the curious, intent look of a forest animal that so often possessed his long, dark eyes. Suddenly he remembered himself. "Oh, yes," he said hastily, "I beg your pardon. Thanks, very much."

"Good-night!" Sir John and Lady Alasters passed through the glass doors.

Burnaby paused a moment where he had shaken hands, and then, with the long stride characteristic of him, went to the window and, drawing aside the curtain, peered into the darkness beyond. He stood listening until the purr of a great motor rose and died on the snow-muffled air. " He's gone ! " he said, and turned back into the room. He spread his arms out and dropped them to his sides. " Swastika! " he said. " And God keep us from the evil eye ! "

"What do you mean?" asked Airs. ATalcolm.

"Sir John," said Burnaby. " He has ' a bad heart.' "

"Stop talking your Indian talk and tell us what you mean."

Burnaby balanced himself on the hearth. "Am I to understand you don't know?" he asked. "Well, Morton's Masters, and the girl's Lady Masters, and Bewsher— well, he's just a squawman."

"I don't believe it ! " said Mrs. Malcolm. "He wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't dare?" Burnaby laughed shortly. "My dear Minna, he'd dare anything if it gave him a sense of power."

"But why— why did he choose us ? We're not so important as all that ? "

"Because— well, Bewsher's name came up. Because, well, you heard what he said— self-revelation— men who had sweated. Because—" suddenly Burnaby took a step forward and his jaw shot out— "because that shadow of his, that wife of his, broke a champagne glass when I said Geoffrey Boisselier Bewsher; broke her champagne-glass and, I've no doubt, cried out loud in her

heart. Power can't buy love— no; but power can stamp to death anything that won't love it. That's Masters. I can tell a timber-wolf far off. Can you see him now in his motor? He'll have turned the lights out, and she— his wife— will be looking out of the window at the snow. All you can see of him would be his nose and his beard and the glow of his cigar— except his smile. You could see that when the car passed a corner lamp, couldn't you?"

"I don't believe it yet," said Mrs. Malcolm. "It's too preposterous."

12: Trapped

Albert Richard Wetjen

1900-1948

Collier's, 14 Sep 1935

Australian Women's Weekly, 7 Aug 1937

CAPTAIN CARSTAIRS better known through all the Islands as Wallaby Jim, was smoking a final cheroot on the the poop deck of his barque *Kestrel* when it happened. It was late; the night was very dark, and it was uncomfortably hot. The *Kestrel*, under all plan sail, was slipping languidly round the southern tip of the Louisade Archipelago, with the loom of Rossell Island to starboard, heading for the greater Sudest Island where Wallaby had to make a final call before heading back to Brisbane. It was Wallaby's habit, every six months or so, to make a tour of his many trading posts and plantations, not only as an inspection trip, but also to pick up the more valuable items his men bad garnered from half the South Pacific, and which his schooner captains did not care to have on board while they combed the Islands, sometimes for a year or more.

This present cruise bad been even more satisfactory than usual. Wal-laby was reflecting, as he leaned back against bis weather taffrail, clad only in duck pants and a cotton singlet; and be smoked his cheroot with the calm satisfaction of a man at peace with the world and whose affairs are going well.

He had the cheroot about half finished. when his mate came on deck, a lean, sallow-faced man. almost as tall as Wallaby him-self, and wiry enough, but without the master's spread of shoulder and the deliberate grace that always re-minded men of a panther. He re-mained at the head of the cabin scuttle for a moment, staring to-wards the dark-hidden island, and then, giving a nervous hitch to his belt, he came to where Wallaby was leaning.

"You need not have bothered to turn out, Walters." said Wallaby pleasantly. "I'll keep the watch until dawn. I don't feel like steep."

Walters coughed and ran the back of his hand arrows his month

"Yeah, I know." he said harshly. "It's too hot"

The mate stooped then, as if to adjust one of his rope-soled canvas shoes, and the next thing Wallaby knew was that savage hands had gripped his ankles, jerked him up and back, and he was falling head first into the water. He was too astonished to call out. He even retained hold of his cheroot as he went under, and be went deep.

By the time he had instinctively fought to the surface again, the stern light of the *Kestrel* was a hundred feet away and needing every moment. He choked out salt water and shouted, and even as he did so he heard, faint against the wind, the voice of Walters shouting too, or rather roaring some order for'ard. Obviously to drown any sound Wallaby might make.

Another few minutes and the Kes-trel was too far away for Wallaby to be heard, and he subsided with a strangled oath. It would be a joke if the Islands knew, except it wasn't a joke Wallaby Jim being caught off guard. The straightest and fastest shot in the south, the cool adventurer of a score of desperate undertakings, the man who had wrested a million and more from the welter of savagery, fever and death that men called the Islands. Pitched overside and disposed of as quickly and as easily as a greenhorn on a homing sealer with the crew on shares.

He trod water automatically until he had regained his calmness and mentally adjusted himself to his changed condition. He discovered he still retained hold of his sodden cheroot and be flung the limp mesa away. Then doubling in the warm sea, while the lazy swells lifted him and dropped him, he rolled his duck pants to the knees so they would be less hindrance. He tightened his belt, carefully studied the few stars that were showing, and started a long, slow side-stroke towards Rossell Island.

thought of many things as he slid through the phosphorescent sea. A little about his chances, a little about sharks, a little about old wounds which he knew would bother him before long. But mostly he thought about Walters, his mate, and the effrontery of the man in attacking him. Well, that could be figured out later. The main thing now was to save himself.

Walters, of course, must have felt pretty safe in throwing the Kestrel's master overside as he had. Otherwise he would have slugged him first, or doped him. But it was reasonable for Walters to suppose that Wallaby could not swim five or six miles to shore, and the odds were all that if he did manage that and the sharks didn't get him, then he would be smashed to pieces in the welter of the iron reefs. Yes, Walters could feel pretty safe, Wallaby thought. But it was a rotten way to go out, after all he had been through. Rotten. He might last until dawn. He might not. He set his jaw and concentrated on his swimming.

Two things saved Wallaby Jim that night and morning. The first was that about an hour before dawn, when he was rapidly tiring, he ran full into a floating barnacle-covered log, still with branches at one end; toppled over in some storm and washed down some mysterious river. He grasped it thankfully, unmindful of the sucker fish adhering to it and the multitude of sea vermin that infested its length. He managed to hoist himself up and wedge himself in the branches, and then he half-slept for a while.

He was jarred back to conciousness again by the distinct darting of a sail, and raising himself up he saw the flood tide had carried the log close in towards Rossell and there, not fifty yards away, was the white hull of a little gig just going about. He yelled. The three occupants of the gig. two young Kanaka women and a white girl, stared at him pop-eyed, and then with a quick gesture the white girl jammed the tiller over and the gig headed towards him.

She was a sensible girl. She asked no questions until after Wallaby had drunk the milk of two green coconuts and eaten a thick slab of cold pork pressed between slices of home-made bread. Then she said:

"Were you adrift long?"

'Overnight," said Wallaby grimly. "Lucky for me you came along,"

"Oh, Tara and Manui... they're my personal girls... often go fishing with me early." She indicated a dozen or more big red snapper lying on the bottom boards. "I suppose," she eyed him steadily, even if a little nervously, with blue eyes. "I suppose you're from the *Kestrel*."

FOR one of the few times in his life Wallaby Jim was distinctly shocked. He stared at the girl and his Jaw fell.

"The Kestrel," he managed at last. "How did you know?"

She laughed shakily.

"I'm so glad. I… we came out this morning really to see... that is I hoped there might be a chance."

Wallaby bent frowning, picked up the heavy bush knife lying by the green coconuts, slashed the top off one and drank again.

"May I ask who you are?" he in-quired, wiping his lips.

"Myrna Lawrence," she said. "My stepfather runs the Carson trading post at Brills Inlet over there." She nodded at the near coast. "You... you must be..."

"Captain Carstairs," he gravely agreed "Wallaby Jim."

"Wallaby Jim," she said in a strained voice. "I'm glad. I thought perhaps he would have shot you or stunned you before throwing you overboard."

"Who?"

"Why, Mr. Walters. He's... he and my stepfather are partners. I don't know quite how, nor in what. Not in the trading-post. That is supposed to belong to me. It was my father's and he left it to me. But when my mother married again," she shuddered and stopped. "I think I'm glad she died. He's a devil. He won't let me go away. He runs everything."

Wallaby beat down the natural craving for a cheroot and considered.

"I think I'm beginning to see the light, Miss Lawrence," he said at last. "Your stepfather, Carson, and this Walters are partners. This was all planned. Even to getting rid of me here."

She nodded, keeping the gig tacking back and forth while they talked, as if she realised things must be settled before they landed.

"I used to hear them planning it months ago. Months ago. It was so cold-blooded I've known they've done other things, too, but I couldn't stop them. I couldn't stop them this time, but I thought I'd come out and cruise around a while and see if a miracle might have happened and you were still alive."

Wallaby nodded and leaned forward to press her hand.

"Haven't you any other relatives you could have written to or got word to, so they could take you away, or at least get this trading-post business straightened out?"

She shook her head.

"There's no one. Only," she flushed a little, "the Captain of the trading schooner *Tamarack,* and my step-father had forbidden him to anchor in Brills Inlet any more, after he found out we were thinking of getting married."

WALLABY smiled grimly and his grey eyes became twin slits of ice.

"I seem to have fallen into something interesting," he observed drily. "And I like interesting things. What did they plan to do with my second mate and crew, and what are they going to do with the *Kestrel*?"

She bit her lip.

"I believe the crew was to be enticed ashore and captured and sold to the hill natives. You know what that means. The *Kestrel* must be in Brills Inlet by now. Walters used to be a forger, and he's going to fix up the proper papers, saying you sold the ship to him. Then he's going to sell her and sell the cargo somewhere. I'm not certain of the details."

Wallaby frowned.

"I wonder why they didn't arrange to get rid of me before the Kestrel got this far," he mused. She shook her head.

"I don't know. Perhaps they thought there would be trouble with your second mate and the men. But your disappearing here would give Walters an excuse to anchor in Brills Inlet. There would be no excuse otherwise, and I heard Walters telling my stepfather once that your crew would probably be hard to handle, unless things looked just right."

Wallaby nodded.

"Most of the men have been with me for years," he agreed drily. "And since my disappearance probably wouldn't have been discovered until the steward came to call me this morning, Walters counted on having the *Kestrel* almost at the Inlet by that time, the men thinking it was by my orders. Well, we'll attend to all that."

She watched him with eyes that were suddenly bright and hard.

"What do you intend to do, Captain Carstairs?"

"Land me some place ashore near the trading-post, but out of sight," he said decisively. "Behave as though you knew nothing about me, but when you have a chance, smuggle me out a cartridge-belt and gun. Leave the rest to me."

"It won't be easy," she warned him. "Besides Mr. Walters and my step-father, there's a half-caste Chinaman named Lanton who helps with the post work and... other things. I'm frightened of him. He flogs his women sometimes, and you can hear them screaming..." She shuddered and stopped. "You think

you can do anything against the three of them? Your crew won't be able to help, because it's all arranged for them to be shut up as soon as the Kestrel is in. She must be in now."

"I'll handle things," the white man promised grimly.

ON THE verandah of the Carson bungalow at Brills Inlet, three men sat drinking in the cool of the young morning. There was Carson, a mas-sive, dark, pock-marked man, still in his pyjamas at this early hour. His assistant, Lanton, a half caste Chinaman, sat on one side of him, thin, vicious and hairless, naked to the waist. Walters, mate of the Kestrel, sprawled scowling in a long cane chair some distance away, and angrily swirled his gin round his glass. There had been some heated words.

"I tell you it wasn't necessary," he protested. "No white man could live through that surf, even if he did make the five or six miles to shore through the sharks. A Kanaka maybe... but a white man, no!"

"You ought to have stunned him or shot him first, anyway," Carson swore. "There's no sense in taking chances."

"If I'd tried to stun him or if I'd shot him, there'd have been an alarm. You don't know that crew. They think Wallaby Jim's about the next thing to Napoleon or something."

"The fact probably is, you were scared of him," Carson sneered. "Too scared to make a pass or try a gun."

The half-caste shrugged and looked up, his beady eyes glittering.

"Why so concerned about one man?" he demanded. "Even if he is Wallaby Jim. There's three of us, and we've got a dozen boys."

Carson glowered at him.

"It's all right for you to talk, Lanton," he blazed. "You've never met the devil! I have!"

Walters grunted a moody assent

He stood up and shook himself irritably. "Let's forget it. I tell you Wallaby's gone. We've got the *Kestrel* anchored in the inlet here; we've got the crew in the stockade there," he jerked his head towards a heavily fenced patch of ground round which armed native guards patrolled. "To-night the hill chiefs come down and we unload. Kill two birds with one stone. Get rid of awkward witnesses and cash in on the sale."

Lanton laughed a little.

"What do we care about the crew?" And he added, carefully, with a side glance at Carson, "it's the girl that worries me."

Carson Jerked up and stared at him.

"Meaning what?"

"She knows too much. She guesses a lot more. Twice you've had trouble with her, keeping her from running away with that young captain of the *Tamarack*."

Carson swore.

"I put a stop to that," he said grimly. "A couple of the boys and me went over him properly last time he came here and we got him alone. And I told him If he came again I'd flog the hide of Myrna." He brooded a moment. "I'll tame that little devil yet," he added then. Lanton laughed, half-sneeringly.

"You'd better marry her first."

"That'll all be taken care of as soon as this deal's finished. Well be fixed for life with what we've already got cached away. I've got a buyer for the post in Samarai, a friend of mine who ain't too par-ticular."

Walters hitched at his cartridge belt and began to walk nervously back and forth.

"I suppose I've got to forge papers for that deal too?" he said petulantly. Carson nodded.

"Why not? Her father left the post to her. You'll draw me up an assignment or something, turning it over to me so I can make the sale legal. Shouldn't be hard."

"Not too hard," Walters agreed. "But it don't seem to me you're giving the girl any sort of a deal, Carson."

"No!" the big man exploded. He glared. "You mind your own darn business anyway. I'm running this outfit. And I might tell you while we're at it that I don't like the way you look at Myrna."

"Now, now," said Lanton soothingly. "Let's get this business of the *Kestrel* finished first. You've got all the papers drawn up?"

"I've had 'em drawn up for days," Walters snapped. "I've got Wallaby Jim's signature down so good he'd acknowledge it himself. But we ought to have the second mate witness it, and I can't find a specimen of his handwriting. He'll be obstinate."

Lanton smiled thinly.

"I think a few lighted matches under his toes will make him change his mind. And the bos'n?"

"He's a bullock of a Samoan, mission-raised, but I copied his signature from a receipt I found in the skipper's desk. That's all O.K. No one's going to question the thing much anyway."

"Not the way we've got it planned," Carson agreed. "Well run the *Kestrel* to the China coast. Lanton says he knows the right people, once we're there. What d'you figure the ship and cargo's worth, Walters?"

The lean man shrugged.

"I'm no assessor. Plenty anyway. The pearls alone ought to bring twenty thousand dollars."

"All that for the nest-egg," gloated Carson, licking his lips. "And a ship for a clean getaway."

"What d'you mean, getaway?" asked Walters curiously. "Anything bad turned up since I've been gone? You seem mighty anxious to drop the post now."

"A Government cutter blew in a week or so back," explained Lanton smoothly. "Seems like our young friend of the *Tamarack* had dropped a bee or two into the official ear. The Resident Magistrate said he was coming back in six or seven weeks and that he'd want a full accounting for Miss Myrna Lawrence."

"Did Myrna get to talk to the R.M.?" asked Walters anxiously. "If she spilled..."

"Don't worry," Carson snarled. "As soon as we spotted the cutter, Myrna got a sudden idea she wanted to go up-country for a little hunting. She left a note explaining."

"We had to have something to show the R.M. in case he wanted to see her, or insisted on it," Lanton chuckled. "She was very obstinate for a while."

"Oh, I can handle her," Carson growled, and his eyes narrowed as he saw his white gig ground in the shallows of the inlet. "Here she ls now. Been fooling around with her morning fishing again, I guess."

The three men were silent as the girl walked up to the bungalow, one of her native women behind her. She looked calmly along the veran-dah as she came up the steps, and would have gone into the house without a word, had not Carson checked her.

"Where you been?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Where I usually go mornings," she said. "For a swim and to fish. I thought some fresh snapper would be good for dinner."

"I thought you took Tara and Manui both along," he said, flicking a glance at the stolid-faced Kanaka woman behind Myrna. Myrna shrugged.

"Oh, Manui wanted to go and see her sick brother in the village, so I let her off. Tara and I can manage the gig alone."

Carson grunted.

"All right. Get some grub ready. And if you've got anything to pack, get it packed. We're sailing from here to-night, as soon as I've finished a little business with the hill chiefs."

She stared at him, suddenly white. "Sailing," she faltered. "Sailing where?"

"China," he said harshly. "And that's all you need to know."

"But... but we cant leave here," she said desperately. "I... this is all the home I know. I was born here. The post belongs to me. My father," she choked and blt her lip. She was going to add that the young Captain of the *Tamarack* had

promised to call for her again soon, and this time he would not be alone. Instead she nodded. "Very well," she said. Lanton looked after her with shrewd eyes as she disappeared.

"She's acting queer this morning," he observed suddenly. "No argument."

Carson grunted his scorn.

"Women are always queer," he stated. "Forget it. I've got everything under control." But Lanton, disturbed by some inward warning voice, shook his head and after a while got up and strolled down to the beach where the gig still lay drawn up in the shallows. His keen eyes scanned the little craft carefully. He noted three fish spears, which was curious if Myrna had only taken one woman with her. He noted also in the jumble of footprints that blurred the dried sand-and-mud coating of the bottom boards one or two prints that seemed curiously large for women.

Lanton did not know. But he did have some very dark suspicions. He went slowly back to the bungalow saying nothing to his companions, and when later he saw Manui, Myrna's missing Kanaka woman, cautiously emerge from a taro patch back of the house and, after a quick look around, run swiftly for the kitchen door, he smiled twistedly and slid his sheath-knife along his belt so it was closer to his hand. He liked to take care of things himself, did Lanton.

TORMENTED by flies and crawling things, panting in the steamy heat of the jungle, Wallaby Jim waited all morning and half the afternoon in a thicket perhaps two hundred yards from where the Carson bungalow sat in the shade of the palms. He could see the topmasts of the *Kestrel* as she rode at anchor off-shore.

Myrna had landed him up the coast a way and sent Manui with him to guide him to his present hiding-place, but when she would herself be able to put in an appear-ance she confessed was problema-tical. Her stepfather and Walters, and especially the half-caste Lanton, were always suspicious of her, besides which she was the official mistress of the post and her stepfather insisted she look after him and the others, more often than not demanding that she wait upon them in per-son. Wallaby ruminated on these things, swearing when he thought of a cheroot, and thinking over the whole business.

He should have been suspicious from the first, he told himself. Bancroft, his faithful old mate, whom he trusted implicitly, had got into some sort of a waterfront brawl at Woodlark Island a week or more before, and had been so badly hurt that Wallaby had perforce to leave him in the hospital.

In the first place, Bancroft was not the sort of man who got into waterfront brawls, certainly not to the extent where he emerged with broken ribs and concussion of the brain. And Wallaby did remember someone mentioning to him, on the verandah of Steve's Bar at Woodlark, that it was funny that Walters

should sign with the Kestrel when he had previously turned down two offers of berths on other ships.

One thing was certain now, any-way. It was all a well-laid plan. The Kestrel was a prize worth while, and Walters had obviously been planted at Woodlark to pick her up on her return trip, when she would be loaded. Bancroft had probably been put out of the way designedly, and the chances were worth it.

But just how Walters expected to get away with the deal, even allowing for forged papers and disposal of the crew, rather puzzled Wallaby. Why had the *Kestrel* been picked on particularly? Granted, she was a rich ship when homeward bound, but there were several ships almost as rich that called at Woodlark and pertaining Islands, and any one of them would have been safer to handle than the *Kestrel*.

It was late when Myrna came. Wallaby heard her ploughing through the brush and eased out of sight behind a koa tree until he was sure of whom lt was. She was frightened, that was obvious, casting glances every now and then over her shoulder. She carried a filled cartridge belt with a holstered gun; a package of food, a flask of water, and, blessed more than anything else, a handful of cigars and some matches.

SHE dropped her supplies with a thankful gasp and sat exhausted on the fallen log, while Wallaby tightened his belt and listened for possible followers.

"Everything all right?" he asked quietly. She stared at him and nodded, wetting her lips.

"I think so. But Lanton seemed to act queerly, as if he suspected something. He's been watching me all day. I've only just dodged him. And I saw him questioning Manui earlier, but I don't think she would talk."

He nodded and, after a drink of water, gratefully lighted a cigar. She gave him such details as she knew; the crew of the *Kestrel* imprisoned behind a stockade, some of them persuaded ashore by Walters with the promise of stretching their legs and getting a drink or two perhaps, while he inquired if the body of a white man had been found along the beaches. The rest of them had been taken by surprise when a boat-load of armed natives under Carson had come alongside. All done very neatly and without trouble. The hill chiefs would come after dark to close the deal.

"And as soon as that's finished, we're sailing for China," she added. And bitterly, "All of us."

"So he's clearing out," Wallaby commented grimly and frowned. "There must be some reason for the hurry. Any idea?"

"No," she said listlessly. "Unless… Bob... that's the captain of the Tamarack, is coming back soon and they know it. He promised he would. I don't know." She suddenly began to cry.

Wallaby paced irritably up and down the confined space of the little clearing they were in, gnawing at his cigar.

"You mustn't risk your own life foolishly," said the girl. "Perhaps you can get away from this place and do something. I think…"

Then she screamed.

Some sixth sense had warned Wallaby even a fraction of a second be-fore her scream began. He had be-come aware of a faint, very faint new movement in the thicket behind him that did not seem caused by the activities of small rodents, or land crabs or insects. He spun round and ducked all in one motion, had a glimpse of a distorted hairless face and snarling lips, and then he was locked with a slender, wiry devil of a man who ripped up with a razor keen knife.

WALLABY escaped being disembowelled by a fraction of an inch, for the knife slit the skin of his abdomen, soaking him with blood. But then his hand clamped on the other man's wrist and from there it was easy. The knife was forced back, back and in, and the attacker gave a bubbling scream and fell away, the knife-haft sticking out of his ribs. He turned and staggered, half-running towards the bungalow, mouthing inarticulate curses.

Wallaby swore and jumped for the cartridge-belt lying at the girl's feet, but before he could get the gun clear the other man had disappeared in the brush. Myrna caught his arm.

"It's no use," she moaned. "No use now. That was Lanton. He must have followed me here.

"You had better run. I'll... I'll try and hold them for a while."

Wallaby buckled the cartridge-belt about him, patted her shoulder and then calmly lighted a fresh cigar.

"If he gets as far as the bungalow I'll be surprised," he said shortly. "He was dying on his feet. You get back and carry on as if nothing was the matter. I'm taking over now."

"But..." He gave her a half push and there was something about his face that frightened her back to calmness. She said nothing further, but turned and ran. Wallaby waited until the sound of her progress had gone and then hurriedly ate and drank, moving to a position some distance to one side and nearer the beach than the one he had been oc-cupying. He hoped he had been right when he had told Myrna that Lanton would never reach the bun-galow and his friends. But just in case, he must hurry and see. No time to plan now. Only time to act.

CARSON and Walters were both watching the house-boys carrying cases of stores, furniture and personal effects down to the beach when Lanton arrived. Carson had just been swearing because he was not around to help them pack, and when Walters sud-denly ejaculated, "There's Lanton," the big man turned

with an oath on his lips to reprimand his assistant. But instead of the oath he choked.

Lanton was just emerging from palms that surrounded the bungalow, weaving drunkenly, coughing blood and holding both hands to his breast. Instinctively both Carson and Walters dropped hands to their gun-butts and searched the palms behind the dying man, expecting a native raid such as sometimes happened.

"If those thieving, head-hunting hill chiefs count on getting our livestock without paying," Carson grated, "they'll have a surprise." He roared to the armed guards about the stockade to stand ready.

"That's no native work," snapped Walters. "Lanton wouldn't have a head now if it had been."

Lanton fell within twenty feet of them, crawled along the sand, one hand dragging him like a claw, the other clutched to his wound. Hard eyed and callous, his two com-panions walked towards him and stopped while the half-caste rolled over, turned up his eyes and tried to speak.

"What is it?" Carson demanded.

"A raid?"

Lanton rolled his head, coughed blood, but only his throat worked as he tried to form words. Walters swore and looked at the knife.

"That's his own," he said, puzzled.

"Then what?"

Carson bent and roughly shook the half-caste.

"Talk, you fool! Who was it?"

Lanton coughed once again, tried again to speak, and then sank slowly on his side and died. Carson cursed.

"I suppose he was down at the village fooling with the women again, and one of the men finally taught him something. With his own knife, too."

Walters shook his head and stood gnawing his lips.

"That doesn't make sense. Lanton may be a fool, but not that kind of a fool. He knew this was no time to start native trouble. It's somebody else."

He suddenly touched Carson's arm and pointed. Myrna could be seen for a moment as she slipped from between the palms and ran for the bungalow's back door. Carson looked at Walters.

"D'you suppose the yellow rat was chasing her and she got him some way? We'll see." He strode grimly for the bungalow, Walters at his heels.

The white men found Myrna in the house.

"MYRNA!" snapped Carson harshly. She spun about, one hand to her throat and her eyes wide. That something had shaken her terribly there could be no

question, and the dark suspicions leaped and blazed in Carson's brain. He glared at her, and then at the native women.

"Did you kill Lanton?"

"Kill ... kill!" she breathed. "Oh, no, no!"

"Then you knew he was dead?"

"I... no."

"You lying little devil!" Carson grated. He caught her wrist and wrenched her towards him. "What were you doing back in the bush there? Who knifed Lanton? Tell me!"

He twisted her wrist until she was forced to her knees, moaning.

Then light struck him. This was a man's work, this killing. Wallaby Jim! Myrna's morning cruise! Now he saw the whole thing.

"So you picked up a man at sea," he blazed at the white girl. "You dirty double-crosser. Who was it? Was it...." He licked his lips, shaken. "Was it... no, it couldn't have been. No man could have lived through six miles of sharks and the Buri."

"I don't know who he was," Myrna said faintly. "We found him hanging on a log and we landed him up the coast. I don't know who he was."

Walters whipped round on Carson, and shook the whip he invariably carried.

"We've got to get it out of her hide, Carson. If it was Wallaby Jim we've got to get him if we ransack the whole island. If that devil's alive, we're none of us safe. You know that."

"I told you you ought to have slugged or shot him before you dumped him." Carson exploded. "You fool! Give me that whip!" He seized the whip the other man always carried.

He brought the lash down hard across the white girl's thin blouse, ripping it off and drawing blood. She wilted, but did not speak.

"Who was the man you picked up this morning?" raved Carson. "Was it Wallaby Jim?" But Myrna had fainted. Carson threw the whip to the other side of the room and drew back one foot to kick her, and then stopped.

"Yes, it was Wallaby Jim," said a calm voice. "The party's over, Carson."

There was a long hard silence. Carson and Walters stared open mouthed at the tall white man framed in the kitchen doorway, and subconsciously they noted the heavy gun at his thigh. Wallaby Jim smiled, an unpleasant thing, and his eyes were like ice.

"I think I'm beginning to get it," he observed dryly. "Just in particular why you picked on me and the *Kestrel*, to make your clean-up. A grudge, eh? I've met you somewhere before, Carson, except you weren't Carson then."

Carson's eyes were vicious.

"No, confound you!" he spat. "I was Brent Owens six years ago, when you shot up Balata Beach. You burned my saloon and sank my schooner. And..."

"Shot you in the left shoulder, if I'm not wrong," added Wallaby. "I remember now. You were one of the head rats in the nest. So it was a grudge after all."

"Call it what you want. And get out. I've got a dozen armed boys within call."

Wallaby laughed, genuinely amused.

"It's not so easy as that, Carson, I've got a little business to settle both with you and Walters, especially Walters. I don't like my mates throwing me overside."

Walters backed a step or two as if to run. His face was beaded with sweat and was ashen.

"I'm not giving you a break," said Wallaby evenly. "I reserve that privilege for men." He dropped a hand to his gun and the others watched him fascinated, too fascin-ated even to go for their own weapons. And then suddenly Carson's face lit in a relieved smile. At the same moment Wallaby felt something hard jammed in his spine, and a clipped voice in mission-school English grated in his ear.

"Still, white man. Keep still."

WALLABY half-turned his head and saw the broad, brutal face of one of Carson's armed guards, the head guard as it hap-pened, come to report something to his master and accidentally stumb-ling on the critical scene. Carson screamed.

"Kill him, Sanda! Don't wait. Kill him now!'' And simultaneously both he and Walters went for their guns. For just a fraction of a second Sanda hesitated. It was always dangerous to kill a white man, and he was a little startled by Carson's screaming vehemence. That cost him his life. Wallaby Jim did three things almost together, with the quickness of a cat. He dropped flat on his face, so that the carbine bullet scored along his shoulder muscles instead of breaking his back. Then he rolled rapidly to one side and shot upwards. Sanda's bullet, ploughing on, took Carson full in the chest. Wallaby's shot hit Walters under the heart and dropped him like a pole-axed steer.

Wallaby was on his knees then and the room was filled with the crashing jars of explosions. Carson was staggering, but shooting wildly, and Sanda was pumping frantic lead in all directions, his head completely confused. He toppled suddenly, and Carson, lurching forward with a last furious oath, fell over him riddled with lead.

Wallaby rose slowly and cautiously through the heavy-lying blue powder fumes, looked at the shaking form of Myrna, and then carefully reloaded his gun. He picked up Sanaa's carbine, filled the magazine with shells from the dead native's bandolier, and, tight-lipped, padded for the front verandah.

The native guards about the stockade were in confusion. One or two were running for the bungalow. The others were milling about, shouting and

undecided. Wallaby dropped to one knee, rested the carbine on the verandah rail and shot with care. The running guards dropped, rolled, and lay still. Three of those milling near the stockade crumpled. The rest scattered and began firing at the verandah, knowing only that something terrible must have happened to their masters and that death was seeking them out. Lead whined and flickered about the lone white man, and suddenly he laughed.

OVER the top of the stockade appeared a brown arm, then a leg, then another arm and leg. In fifteen seconds half a dozen of his imprisoned crew were running for the dead guards, had picked up their weapons, and were blazing away.

It was all over then in less time than it takes to tell. Not one of Carson's men escaped, and when Wallaby stood up and called, the jubilant crew of the *Kestrel*, headed by the second mate, came up towards the bungalow. Wallaby spoke shortly, without emotion, an was his custom, and gave specific orders. Then he turned and went back to the bungalow.

Myrna was in a chair in the living room, crying, her blouse slit down the back while her native women were dressing the livid marks of the whip. Wallaby laid a hand on her shoulder, soothing her, and she looked up.

"I'm leaving my second mate in charge here with a few men," said Wallaby gently. "I think you'd better come to Brisbane with me. Later you can decide what you want to do."

"Brisbane?" she faltered uncertainly. "But why...."

"Wasn't there a young man commanding the *Tamarack*?" inquired Wallaby, smiling. "The chances are well find him at Brisbane. And if not, I'll locate him and send him there."

He left her smiling through her tears and went outside again. His second mate came up and touched his cap, waiting more orders.

"I sail at once," said Wallaby crisply. "You can attend to things here." And he made a curious characteristic chopping gesture with his right hand. "This business is finished."

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13: Clubhauling of Monohan

Frederick R. Bechdolt

1874-1950

Redbook Oct 1912

MOTHER MONOHAN'S SALOON," the sign says; but sailormen always say ''Mother Monohan's place." A dingy, wooden building, hard by the city front. Just across the street, San Francisco Bay hisses against the prows of vessels as they come from the Seven Seas. Before the door a procession is always passing, made up of men from foreign parts. Sailors' boarding houses have disappeared in this country; but Mother Monohan's Place survives. Seamen find lodging upstairs, and loaf down in the bar, yarning about past voyages. For the most part Mother Monohan's trade comes from deep-water vessels.

Like the men, the bar-room bears marks of forecastle, deck and ocean. Upon its walls you will see various quaint adornments, each carrying its suggestion of wild adventure or ancient marine tradition: a life buoy from a lost ship; the skin of an albatross, wings outstretched a square-rigged vessel under full sail in a bottle; and an old-style harpoon, all rusty and encrusted with salt. These and divers others sailors' treasures— gifts of steady customers returning from distant shores— flavor the atmosphere with romance, the romance of the deep and of the coasts that lie beyond the sky's rim.

Hither I wandered often. I gossiped sedately with Mother Monohan, who always passed me a pleasant word and then resumed her knitting in her chair behind the bar. I drank with bronzeskinned habitués— who labored faithfully to make me, a landsman, understand their technical accounts of shipwrecks wherein they had been frost-numbed and brine-drenched participants, or freely told of hot feuds and hotter loves in tropic ports and Arctic settlements. Thus in time I came to own a group of intimate acquaintances, composed, for the most part, of those to whom the years had given ability in the art of storytelling. .

By the time December came, with its long rainy evenings, we fell into the habit of gathering about the round-bellied coal stove in the back of the room. And January found us looking forward to such sessions— four or five of us, pipes alight, a fog of smoke around.us. The spirit of emulation did its work; each adventurer strove to do his best with what material he had in mind. And he who lied had to be skillful, for his audience knew just what each.man was talking about. As a consequence the truth got no more than proper adornment.

One wet and windy night, when customers were few and far between, I sat with several of these grizzled, hard faced men of the sea; and I listened while each produced the choicest of his longgathered store of yarns. We started, oddly enough, by discussing Monohan.

Monohan appeared in his wife's bar by day and in the early evening. A quiet man, grey-haired, and curiously tattooed on his hands and wrists; a well-built man, and his walk was that of an old sailor. His bearing here was more like that of an old customer who had the freedom of the sacred space behind the bar, than like that of an owner. But what was most peculiar about him was his evident repression. He showed it in voice and look. Yet his eyes were those of one who would be a hard man in action. Every evening at eight o'clock Mother Monohan would say, 'Come, Jack," and Monohan would follow her upstairs.

We had just begun to settle ourselves around the stove, this night, when she went through that brief and time-worn formula.

Duffy, the night bartender— flannel-shirted and clad as he used to be when he was mate on a windjammer, for they never wear white aprons in Mother Monohan's Place— came to take his chair as a member of our circle. He winked and jerked his head in the direction of the door through which the pair had gone, saying,

"Answers to the helm first rate, don't he?"

Rose, who got his captain's papers when I was neglecting my geography lessons for dreams of running away to sea, looked up and smiled quizzically. He was sitting astride of his chair with the back in front of him and his arms crossed over the top.

"I knew Monohan when he was wilder than the run o' men."

This was Rose's manner of introducing a yarn— a bit of comment, then silence once more.

"Yes?" said I, striving to hide my eagerness; and "Aye," said Duffy in a matter of fact manner. Rose smoked on. Then:

"I mind," he went on slowly, "the manner of a two-handed fighter that he was; and always lookin' for it. He's quiet now, is Monohan. And I am telling you there is no better sailor in this port to-day." He stopped, and he gave no sign of intending to resume.

"How in blazes did he settle down in this berth?" demanded Duffy at last.

Rose was lighting his pipe. In the flare of the match his face showed thrusting forward over the chair back, all reddened by wind and weather; and little lines of laughter were chasing one another across it.

"Well," he said, "I seen that. It come of a bit of good seamanship. Did you ever hear of clubhauling?" He looked around from one of us to another.

To me the word sounded vaguely familiar; somehow it suggested pirates and wild storms. I said as much. The others owned ignorance as to method, but claimed some general understanding of this nautical procedure. They embarked on technical discussion. Rose lifted his hand.

"Belay," said he; "vow're only mixing up the lad, here, him being a landsman. And you don't know any more than I did when Monohan showed me how to

clubhaul a ship. Give me way and I'll spin the yarn, and I'll try and make it plain enough so all hands will see. For, after all is said, it is simple enough What I was headed for is this: Monohan did what there is not ten men on this city front to-day knows how to do. And, doing that, he steered himself into this snug harbor."

"I'll draw a round of steam beers," said Duffy. " 'Tis a good night to be inside, and the chances is nobody will bother us. We'll take it comfortable."

The sounds of rain and heavy weather came to us from East Street while Duffy was busy at the taps. When he had come back and we had wet our throats, Rose began. He talked over his chair's back ; and with an even-toned deliberation.

"First I clapped my eyes on Monohan," said he, "was in Montevideo, in Harry the Greek's boardin' house. I was with the *Tamerlane* and she was a-taking on a cargo of hides for New York. I'd come ashore for an hour or two and was taking a turn about the place. I dropped into the Greek's to see a sailor that wanted to sell a set of bluebacks cheap."

"Blue-backs ?" I interrupted.

"Aye," said Rose, "admiralty charts. Well, I did not get them. The reason was one hell of a fight that had started before I went in. I seen all hands a-surging around; and I sort of stood by in a quiet corner. It was one man against a dozen. And the one was Monohan. He was holding down one end o' the barroom with a bit of timber.

"I had no more than got in when they tried to rush him. He took it cool enough, picking out his men before he clouted them, as fast as they come in reach. He got three that first rush.

"Well, they tried it twice more, but they was not so anxious as the first time.

"Then the police come a-busting in and I did not wait for fear o' being arrested along with the others. I dug out without my blue-backs. When I left, Monohan was taking all hands as they come, showing no favors, police and runners alike. It was that free-for-all with him by himself that made me remember the face of Monohan.

"The next time I run acrost him was on the bark *Lily Moore*. I was first mate. We sailed from Baltimore for Puget Sound.

"I found out, that voyage, that he was as. good a sailor as he was a fighter. And I got acquainted with the *Lily Moore*, as fine a ship as ever sailed into the wind.

"It was off the West Indies that I got to size up Monohan. The hurricane season was on; and one of them sudden squalls come up— a cloud, white and harmless looking enough, but a few minutes later down on top of us as black as night, with wind that took all before it. Monohan was at the wheel.

"Before we could shorten sail, things was a-roaring. And an awful sea! As quick almost as I can tell it— Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang— away went what canvas she had on. The sails whipped loose with a noise like cannons and flew out of sight in the smother to leeward. She shipped a sea that filled her main deck as high as the top of the rail. Man! She trembled in every timber, like a scared horse, and she give one big, slow groan.

"I seen Monohan, his eyes as quiet and stiddy as they ever was, a-holding her up into the wind. It was a nasty minute, it was. Six of one and half a dozen of the other, whether she'd weather it. And a greener hand, or one that was not all sand would most likely've eased her off a point and then she would of foundered. But not Monohan! He knowed his business and he was a-doing it. He held her up into it. She stood there a-shaking; and then the weight of the water busted out her bulwarks and she freed herself.

"Later on, the day before we crossed the line, the skipper died, and I was left in command. It was my first voyage around the Horn. We had a crew that was pretty nigh half o' them green hands. That made it harder on the able seamen.

"Comin' round, we found a lot of heavy weather and head winds. First it ooked like we would never weather the Cape; and then it looked like we was going to be carried down into the ice. We had to sail the *Lily Moore* right into the wind almost, or get nowheres. Which takes a good ship and good men. We did it all right; but by the time we found ourselves headed north'ard with a fair wind, all hands was nursing frosted fingers.

"During them days I saw two things. One was Monohan, one of them old time sailors that has learned his business on the windjammers and knows that a seaman's duty is by the ship he sails in, and to hell with himself. The other was the *Lily Moore*. Man! I did like her. She was willin', she was; and I honestly— believe she would answer her helm a little quicker and do a little more for it than any ship I ever handled.

"Well, I left her later on, and I sailed with other ships. The years: went by. I knocked about the world. At last I come to Frisco again. I was older and I had seen much more than when I took that first voyage around the Horn.

"I fetched up here in Mother Monohan's Place. Only she was not Mother Monohan then. A widow woman, a-keeping this here saloon with lodgings upstairs, the same as there is now. In them times the laws had not changed to what they are to-day; and the whole city front was full of sailors' boarding houses. The crimps owned the port. But there was no robbing of sailors here nor the like o' that. You could come and buy your drink or hire a room, and pay for it; and if you was stiddy, you could get trusted reasonable. Of course that there did not make a big hit with the run of deep-sea sailors; and the bulk of the

lodgers here was holding their mate's or master's papers. But there was a good lively trade downstairs; and it took a man to handle things sometimes.

"Well, here was Monohan, a-handling it. He was a swamper and general bouncer. He done all the rough work. I knew him the minute I set eyes on him; but he was not the Monohan he had been when we sailed on the Lily Moore years before. He had bucked up against one fight that was too big for him. The whiskey was a-getting the best of him.

"Of course the years had been a-doing their work too. His hair was good and grey now, and the spring was gone from him. But in the main it was the drink that had done the harm. It makes you feel bad when you lay your eves on a good, capable ; man like that headed for the boneyard before his time.

"We had a word together, him and me, about the old *Lily Moore*. I mind now how he spoke of the ship as if she was a friend of his— that fond like. It was when we took a drink and I got a look at his hand a-shakin' as he held the glass, that I seen how things was with him. His fingers a-fidging! And I had seen him hold a ship into the teeth of God's hurricane and never bat an eye!

"I had a bit of money laid by and I aimed to spend the winter in port, and to go north with the fishing fleet in the spring. So I took my room upstairs ; and I loafed about. Every evening I would go out to some show like a gentleman; and every afternoon I would have a walk if the weather was pleasant. In the morning I would come downstairs and drink a pint of English ale before breakfast, a habit I had then. I would see Monohan a-sweeping out the place. Always he would look a little worse than he had looked the morning before. His back would bend a little further, and his hand would be a little shakier.

"I was a-speaking of him one day to the old woman, a-telling her the manner of a man he used to be when he was on the *Lily Moore*. She told me how she had give him this berth, because she felt the same way as I did about him. It seems like he had been on the beach for six months or so, down and out from too much drinking. It was the beginning of the steamship days, and smaller crews on sailing vessels. He did not fancy the steamers, and it was not so easy to ship as it used to be on a windjammer. That and the drink was ailing Monohan. When she had picked him up, he was in the gutter. Now, he managed to hold himself together for a month or two at a time; then he would go under and fetch up in jail. Still, she hung onto him.

" 'If only,' says she, 'he would sort of straighten up. Then he would be as good as he ever was.'

"Matter of fact, the thing that was bothering her was the waste of a fine able-bodied seaman. It seemed wrong to see a sailor like him become a common bum. That was the way she used to put it to me. You see, she was a thrifty woman, she was, and capable herself. She was a woman that was made to run things, to be in command of the ship, ye might say. She had that way with

her. And I think she had sort of set her mind on this job of getting Monohan back to where he used to be, and she had found it a little too big for her; and she would not own that she was beat.

"The winter went along and Monohan made out to hold his job between two or three spells in jail for fighting or drunkenness. The old woman was bothering more than ever over it. He was worrying her, having got on her mind like.

"Now, along in the month of February, I begun to see that I had overplayed my hand when it come to money. It was a case of heave to; and even then the chances was I was not a-going to weather out the winter. I seen that I had better look for a chance to earn a few more dollars. Just as I got to casting up accounts and figgering on day's allowance, I got a chance at a job. It was to take one of the coal barges between this port and Puget Sound. Six men in the crew and one in command. There is not much to do in ordinary weather, the old huik bein' in tow. No berth for a navigator to be proud of ; but I am not one of them that lets a bit of pride stand between me and a bit of money if I need it. So I took it. I was to leave inside of the week."

Rose paused. Duffy caught my eye and went to fill the glasses. While we were waiting for him, the old narrator smiled at me. "I was jest figuring," said he, "how I could put things simple like, so you can get the lay of them. Sea-faring talk is hard for a landsman to get, and this yarn comes to a matter of ship handling."

With which he fell to musing; and was silent until after he had slaked his thirst along with the rest of us. Then:

"I was coming down East Street from the barge office," he went on slowly, "when I heard a fracas in a saloon down near the end of Clay Street. I am not one of those that pokes his nose into other men's troubles; but something or other made me go to see what it was. It makes me laugh now when I think of it.

"There was old Monohan, standing nigh the door at the end o' the bar, with one of them heavy glass beer mugs helt up over his shoulder, ready to let fly. The back of the room: was packed tight with longshoremen and coal heavers and stokers, all: trying to get behind each other at once. As I come, he hove that big mug into the middle of them, and I heard it crack again' the ribs of some unlucky devil. He did not stop at that; he picked up another glass and started to throw it at the mirror behind the bar. But I made out to grab his arm in time to spoil his aim. I dragged him out.

"It seems like the gang of them had got to abusing him— him looking smaller than he really is— and when he had stood it as long as he thought he ought to, he had started after them. There was a long line of them thick glasses on the bar, and before any o' them bullies had knowed what his intentions really was, Monohan had turned loose with the first that come to hand. They had tried to rush him and he had let fly again. Then they give way; but he kept on.

"Well, I dragged him down East Street. He fought me half the way down and cursed the other half, so that I was afraid the police would take him away from me. I got him here and I told the old woman what had happened. The two of us stowed him away upstairs and locked the door on him. Then we laid our heads together. A bit of a sea voyage would do him no harm, and it might be the makin's of him. Anyhow we would try it; I was to take him on the coal barge. Better that, than he should go to jail again.

"We kept Monohan under hatches for the balance of the week. I signed him for the voyage as mate. You know the way it is on them barges; only the captain has to have papers.

"Well, sir, until the day we was to sail, I never went nigh the barge. One of them is the same as another— old hulks with the masts cut down to stumps. Nothing in a craft like that, and it in tow, to make a skipper proud.

"That morning I took Monohan with me to the bunkers. I had sent my dunnage on down ahead; he went with his bag over his shoulder, not saying much to me. When we got down to the slip, the tug had her lines fast. I took one leok at my ship.

"I did not know her at first. But I heard Monohan rip out a curse and I seen his eyes a-hanging onto her. Then I reckonized her. Her poor old hull was black and the coal dust was thick upon her decks. Her hawseholes had been patched over with planks and new ones pierced higher above waterline, making her look like some poor blind thing. Her lofty masts was gone, and all her spars. Only three short stumps stuck up, ugly and thick. But no eyes could mistake the— lines of her; as pretty yet— and in that greasy water— as the lines of any rich man's yacht. For all that her bowspirit was cut down to a stub, I seen her graceful shape. It was the *Lily Moore*!

"Monohan was quiet now after that curse. But his eyes was a-hanging on her and he swallered sort of hard. Then, says he, 'Same with ships as men these days. They do not want the good ones any more, with their pot-bellied steam tramps.' I knew how he felt, for I have always stuck to the windjammers myself.

"We went aboard. The crew was there already. Good men, I will say that for them, and most of them knew what was what, being old men. Broken down sailors, you might say. And so, away we went to sea, the poor old *Lily Moore* a-pegging away in the wake of a dirty sea-going tug. Monohan seemed to wake up a bit as soon as we had passed the heads and he felt the move of the ocean under his feet. The lead color went away from him and his face became more fresh like.

"But, for all that he had picked up in his body, Monohan was troubled in his mind. He used to walk the deck— and not the quarterdeck either. But he got a habit of going for'ard and taking a turn up and down amidships; or most

frequent, he would stand, taking his turn at the wheel like any sailor; and then I would see a curious thing.

"He would stand there, a-looking aloft— way up beyond them stumps, where aloft used to be. I seen that many times. It would start with him a-taking a glance in that direction; and then his eyes would hang there, like he could see the old lofty masts and the rigging of the Lily Moore. Do you know— it seems funny to be a-telling it— but I often think that Monohan did see them in his mind.

"He had not much to say to me. Only once did he do any talking to amount to anything. We was three days out and I made some remark about the ship, a-speaking of her for what she was now— 'Old hulk,' says I. He turned as red as fire and he looked me in the eye. 'They cut down the masts of her,' says he, 'but they can't spile her lines. She'll out-handle one of them pot-bellied steam tramps to-day.'

"Well that was crazy talk, and so I did not misname the poor old girl again when Monohan was standing by. No use o' talking, he was a-taking it to heart, the way they had dismantled her. I could not help feeling bad myself when I thought of that first voyage of mine around the Horn and her a-behaving like a lady, that true and willing.

"As I said, we come up the Straits and up Puget Sound and we took on cargo in Seattle. There was a shortage of coal in Frisco that winter and we did not waste any time about it. It was a case of getting what you could and being thankful for it, so far as the company was concerned; and so we went to sea again, the only tow that the tug had.

"Now, while we laid over in port, I was afraid of Monohan's going ashore and finding some old shipmates in the saloons. But he did not set foot on shore.

"We sailed one mornin', with the glass a-falling. We was plugging along down the Sound, with the Lily Moore low in the water, when Monohan come on deck, and the two of us had a word together. I was grumbling a bit at the idee of towing down the coast' with weather brewing ; for the big storm of the winter was due now. .

" 'Aye,' says Monohan, 'there'll be a blow. I hope to God there is.'

" 'And why,' says I, 'do you want that ?"

" 'Well, sir,' says he, 'I would like to hold the old girl into the wind once more.'

"Which made me mad, because it was crazy talk; and, 'Monohan,' says I, 'ye forget her sticks is gone and her canvas; and she is only an old hulk.'

'He give me a look between the eyes. 'Do ye mind the old days in her? says he.

"I told him that I had thought of them a-many times.

" 'Well,' he says, not looking at me now, but with his eyes way aloft where her royals used to be, 'so have I. It's with her like it is with me,' he says. 'But, for all we're both headed for the boneyard, we're better than we look to-day.'

"We went down the Straits and out to sea with the glass a-falling steady. And yet the wind did not come up. Only a sort of sticky puff now and again, with the sea all greasy like.

"What is more, it kept up this way all the next day; and then the storm begun to come. I was a-cursing the tugboat captain pretty constant, for we was hugging the coast as if he had fell in love with it. When the blow started, he paid out more line, and that was all. That night it blowed great guns and the sea begun to rise. Right out of the southwest it come, too. I was on deck with Monohan, and the two of us a-watching the tugboat's lights— a-showing now, then going out of sight behind a sea. And I said to him that I did not like the looks of the weather and the course we was a-taking along a lee shore. He give a nasty sort of laugh.

" 'Tug boat captain has got to be a saving man,' says he, 'if he wants to hold his job. Sea room burns too much coal.' And that was true.

"So the wind kept coming and the seas kept coming in front of it; and the poor old *Lily Moore*, she kept a-taking them in a manner which made me feel sorry for her. A-rolling along, with her hold jam full of coal and low in the water; and getting no show at all, but being dragged— broadside on to the weather sometimes.

"And what was more, now and again, when the murk would lift off to the east'ard, I could make out the line o' the coast. That all the next day.

"Monohan,' says I, 'if that lubber ahead of us does not fetch up with him and us on a lee shore, I'm mistaken.'

"Don't bother your head about him, Captain,' says Monohan. 'He'll cut loose in time. Company's rule, ye know; save the tugboat and forget the tow when it gets down to cases. If only she had what she used to have! She would laugh at this bit of a breeze.'

"I wont string this out too long, men. The trouble begun to come when we was down off Cape Blanco. A dirty afternoon, and the tugboat was atrying to get us out to sea. But he'd waited too long. We was having one big time, if I do say it myself. And the worst of it was that we was a doing nothing because there was nothing for us to do.

"Line a-trying to jerk the bitts out of her ; and every now and again a slackening away in way that made you sick to see it, before taking a new jerk. "And the poor old *Lily Moore* a-taking the seas so that there was minutes when all we could see up for'ard was water and the stumps of her a-sticking up out of it. Aye, men; that is God's truth.

"And we was amaking no headway. We had no mortal chance. All the wind and water in the old Pacific a-belting us and holding us to that lee shore. A-holding us; and, what is more, a-driving us bit by bit torards the land.

"As near as we could make it we was a matter of six or seven miles off shore; and a half an hour later we seen that we had drifted further in. Then we heard what I had looked to hear all that day: "Toot-toot- toot-toot-toot,' come from the tugboat.

" 'Aye, damn you,' says I. 'Let us go now that you've got us here.'

"And I had not much more than got the words out before the signal come and the tug cast off. We was adrift.

"We got all hands to work and had sail on those stumps of masts as quick as possible. And then we began to try and do the best we could with her. There was one thing: to bring her around on the other tack.

"You see, we was headed almost parallel with the coast; and the wind was coming over the starboard bow driving us shorewards. And if we could turn the ship against the wind, a-getting her around so that she got on the other tack; we would be sailing off shore.

"That is what we tried to do— and knew we could not do it when we made the try. For she was heavy-laden and she had only them stumps for masts. And when she headed up into the wind she hung there for a minute, a-trembling like a tired old horse, with them big seas a-thundering against the bows of her.

" 'No use,' says I to Monohan, who was at the wheel. 'We lose the old hulk, I guess.'

"It is not fair by her,' he yelled. 'I'd sooner die than pile her up.'

"I knew things was beyond me now, and all my seamanship. So, 'What do you make of it?' I yelled. 'Do you see any show?'

"He shook his head like a bull and he yelled back: 'Clubhaul her. It is the only chanst.'

"I had heard the word, but I was like you men when I started this yarn: I had cnly an idea, and no real knowledge. It is an old-time trick. So, 'If ye can claw offshore,' says I, 'ye are a better sailor than I am. Go to it. Take command and give me the wheel.'

"I grabbed it from his hands and he made a leap for'ard, a-yelling for me to hold her up into the wind. Then I heard him bellow at the crew. And here is what they done:

"They slipped a hawser around the bitts just abaft the mainmast; then they dragged it aft and passed it through the lee hawsepipe. And in a jiffy two of them was on the lee rail with the head of the line in their arms. They started for'ard with it; and as it went with them, the others took holds and passed it along behind them. They carried it outside of everything.

"That sounds easy to you, lad, but remember that lee rail was buried half the time in the sea, and if a man would miss his hold— which he was a-getting by his teeth and eyebrows— he would be carried straight away from the ship. And them hands was wrestling with a ten inch line, too!

"They got the hawser up to the bows, clear of everything. They made it fast to the lee anchor. I stood there a-sinking my fingers into the wheel, a-trying to keep my eyes on them and do my work at the same time. To the windward the howling of that storm and the roar of the sea; and to the leeward the growling of the surf on Oxford reef. Time was getting mighty short.

"As soon as they had made the line fast to the lee anchor, 'Hard a-lee,' sung out Monohan. I jammed the wheel hard down and the old Lily Moore done the best she could do come up into the wind. At the same minute they let go the anchor and the chain roared through the hawsepipe. Down and down.

"Now the bottom off Cape Blanco is rocky and there is no holding ground; and we was a-putting our last bet on a scratch, as the saying goes. But that scratch was all there was; and we had to take it. Well, luck was with us. The anchor found something and it held.

"The *Lily Moore* got the tug of it and she did what a ship always does: she pulled against her anchor chain. And that brought her up a little further into the wind. Still she was in irons.

"The sails was fluttering something awful, and things was all a-bang. I held the wheel hard down and hoped.

"Monohan was amidships now. He give a yell. And I seen two of the crew a-pounding at the chain, driving the pin out of the shackle. It come; the chain parted. And now the hawser through the after pipe was a-holding her by the stern, the anchor hanging to the bottom near her bow.

"Monohan and two of the men had hold of the hawser at the bitts, a-paying it out very slowly. It pulled her stern to the leeward. I hung onto the wheel, aholding her up into the wind. Now she begun to come around. For a few seconds it was like a fight; it was that. The line a-pulling that whole ship and cargo against the strength of the sea and the storm.

"But the sails filled! We was on the off-shore tack !

"Monohan give the two men a word. They let go the hawser; and it flickered away, a-giving the deck a bang for luck. I held her up into the wind as clost as she would stand it, and the growling of the breakers went away.

" 'Well,' says I to Monohan, 'ye saved her and it was good seamanship.'

" 'Aye,' says he; 'all she needed was a bit of help.'

"We sailed the old *Lily Moore* all night; and the next morning the tug picked us up again. And we got into Frisco bay without any further trouble.

"I told the story to the old woman here, the day we got ashore. I had got through with the yarn, not making so much of it as I have to-night, when

Monohan come in. He was a-drinking once more.. He swaggered up to the bar and he banged a dollar down onto it. and called for whiskey. The old woman, she took one look at him. Then:

" 'Clubhauled,' says she, quiet as if she was a-thinking. 'Humph?'

"She sort of nodded, and Monohan was beginning to pour out his drink up there at the end of the bar. She looked me in the eye. 'I'll try it,' she says. 'Oh, Menohan"'

"She barked out his name like a mate giving an order; and he did not wait to drink but come on over. Says she:

" 'Mr. Rose tells me ye clubhauled the Lily Moore'

" 'Aye,' says Monohan, and I seen how his fingers was a-shaking again. 'All she needed was a little help. Give her wot is coming to her and she is a good ship yet, she is.'

"'Just so,' says she. 'Like enough.How much money have ye, Monohan?"

"He grinned and pulled it out of his pocket. She did not say anything but she took it from him and give it to the bartender. 'Put it in the safe,' says she.

"When she come back Monohan was starting to make a kick. She gave him a look between the eyes. 'Listen to me,' says she. 'No use of bothering with many words. You know where you are headed for if you keep on. I tell you what you do. You go with Rose, here, to the county clerk?s office, and he will help you get a license all ship-shape. Then you will come back here to the place, and I will look out for a preacher.'

" 'A license,' says Monohan, sort of dreamy like, and holding his mouth half open. 'Wot would that be for?'

" 'What for?' says she, and she was talking snappy. 'Why, to marry. Do you get the meaning? To marry me. I'm at the helm now, and I aim to do a bit of clubhauling myself. See to it, Mr. Rose, that he is back within the hour.'

"Monohan walked out with me, like he was half asleep. He did not talk until we was half way back; then he says: 'I guess she means it. What do you think?'

" 'Mean it!' says I. 'Of course, she means it. Do you think she would be fooling? Haven't you got the license?"

"That seemed to wake him up. Then he stopped. 'I don't aim to marry,' says he. 'Why, she'll cut off the whiskey !

" 'Come on,' says I. 'You are wasting time. I'm here to fetch you. What's more, you are in luck to get that woman.'

"He come on without any more words, only shaking his head as if it bothered him. And when we got back, here was a preacher man. We had the wedding all ship-shape, and I am a-telling you, men, Monohan went through it like a man that is walking in his sleep, or dreaming —that dazed. And since that day, he has gone on allowance. Three steam beers a day, no more. Every night at eight o'clock, 'Come, Jack,' she says, like you have heard her; and he goes

upstairs to home with her. That was the manner of Monohan's clubhauling the *Lily Moore*, and then being clubhauled himself."

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14: The Realm of the Unreal

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner, 20 July 1890

Collected in: *Can Such Things Be?*, 1893

FOR A PART of the distance between Auburn and Newcastle the road— first on one side of a creek and then on the other— occupies the whole bottom of the ravine, being partly cut out of the steep hillside, and partly built up with bowlders removed from the creek-bed by the miners. The hills are wooded, the course of the ravine is sinuous. In a dark night careful driving is required in order not to go off into the water. The night that I have in memory was dark, the creek a torrent, swollen by a recent storm. I had driven up from Newcastle and was within about a mile of Auburn in the darkest and narrowest part of the ravine, looking intently ahead of my horse for the roadway. Suddenly I saw a man almost under the animal's nose, and reined in with a jerk that came near setting the creature upon its haunches.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I did not see you, sir."

"You could hardly be expected to see me," the man replied, civilly, approaching the side of the vehicle; "and the noise of the creek prevented my hearing you."

I at once recognized the voice, although five years had passed since I had heard it. I was not particularly well pleased to hear it now.

"You are Dr. Dorrimore, I think," said I.

"Yes; and you are my good friend Mr. Manrich. I am more than glad to see you— the excess," he added, with a light laugh, "being due to the fact that I am going your way, and naturally expect an invitation to ride with you."

"Which I extend with all my heart."

That was not altogether true.

Dr. Dorrimore thanked me as he seated himself beside me, and I drove cautiously forward, as before. Doubtless it is fancy, but it seems to me now that the remaining distance was made in a chill fog; that I was uncomfortably cold; that the way was longer than ever before, and the town, when we reached it, cheerless, forbidding, and desolate. It must have been early in the evening, yet I do not recollect a light in any of the houses nor a living thing in the streets. Dorrimore explained at some length how he happened to be there, and where he had been during the years that had elapsed since I had seen him. I recall the fact of the narrative, but none of the facts narrated. He had been in foreign countries and had returned— this is all that my memory retains, and this I already knew. As to myself I cannot remember that I spoke a word, though doubtless I did. Of one thing I am distinctly conscious: the man's presence at my

side was strangely distasteful and disquieting— so much so that when I at last pulled up under the lights of the Putnam House I experienced a sense of having escaped some spiritual peril of a nature peculiarly forbidding. This sense of relief was somewhat modified by the discovery that Dr. Dorrimore was living at the same hotel.

ii

IN PARTIAL EXPLANATION of my feelings regarding Dr. Dorrimore I will relate briefly the circumstances under which I had met him some years before. One evening a half-dozen men of whom I was one were sitting in the library of the Bohemian Club in San Francisco. The conversation had turned to the subject of sleight-of-hand and the feats of the prestidigitateurs, one of whom was then exhibiting at a local theatre.

"These fellows are pretenders in a double sense," said one of the party; "they can do nothing which it is worth one's while to be made a dupe by. The humblest wayside juggler in India could mystify them to the verge of lunacy."

"For example, how?" asked another, lighting a cigar.

"For example, by all their common and familiar performances— throwing large objects into the air which never come down; causing plants to sprout, grow visibly and blossom, in bare ground chosen by spectators; putting a man into a wicker basket, piercing him through and through with a sword while he shrieks and bleeds, and then— the basket being opened nothing is there; tossing the free end of a silken ladder into the air, mounting it and disappearing."

"Nonsense!" I said, rather uncivilly, I fear. "You surely do not believe such things?"

"Certainly not: I have seen them too often."

"But I do," said a journalist of considerable local fame as a picturesque reporter. "I have so frequently related them that nothing but observation could shake my conviction. Why, gentlemen, I have my own word for it."

Nobody laughed— all were looking at something behind me. Turning in my seat I saw a man in evening dress who had just entered the room. He was exceedingly dark, almost swarthy, with a thin face, black-bearded to the lips, an abundance of coarse black hair in some disorder, a high nose and eyes that glittered with as soulless an expression as those of a cobra. One of the group rose and introduced him as Dr. Dorrimore, of Calcutta. As each of us was presented in turn he acknowledged the fact with a profound bow in the Oriental manner, but with nothing of Oriental gravity. His smile impressed me as cynical and a trifle contemptuous. His whole demeanor I can describe only as disagreeably engaging.

His presence led the conversation into other channels. He said little— I do not recall anything of what he did say. I thought his voice singularly rich and melodious, but it affected me in the same way as his eyes and smile. In a few minutes I rose to go. He also rose and put on his overcoat.

"Mr. Manrich," he said, "I am going your way."

"The devil you are!" I thought. "How do you know which way I am going?" Then I said, "I shall be pleased to have your company."

We left the building together. No cabs were in sight, the street cars had gone to bed, there was a full moon and the cool night air was delightful; we walked up the California street hill. I took that direction thinking he would naturally wish to take another, toward one of the hotels.

"You do not believe what is told of the Hindu jugglers," he said abruptly.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

Without replying he laid his hand lightly upon my arm and with the other pointed to the stone sidewalk directly in front. There, almost at our feet, lay the dead body of a man, the face upturned and white in the moonlight! A sword whose hilt sparkled with gems stood fixed and upright in the breast; a pool of blood had collected on the stones of the sidewalk.

I was startled and terrified— not only by what I saw, but by the circumstances under which I saw it. Repeatedly during our ascent of the hill my eyes, I thought, had traversed the whole reach of that sidewalk, from street to street. How could they have been insensible to this dreadful object now so conspicuous in the white moonlight?

As my dazed faculties cleared I observed that the body was in evening dress; the overcoat thrown wide open revealed the dress-coat, the white tie, the broad expanse of shirt front pierced by the sword. And— horrible revelation!— the face, except for its pallor, was that of my companion! It was to the minutest detail of dress and feature Dr. Dorrimore himself. Bewildered and horrified, I turned to look for the living man. He was nowhere visible, and with an added terror I retired from the place, down the hill in the direction whence I had come. I had taken but a few strides when a strong grasp upon my shoulder arrested me. I came near crying out with terror: the dead man, the sword still fixed in his breast, stood beside me! Pulling out the sword with his disengaged hand, he flung it from him, the moonlight glinting upon the jewels of its hilt and the unsullied steel of its blade. It fell with a clang upon the sidewalk ahead and— vanished! The man, swarthy as before, relaxed his grasp upon my shoulder and looked at me with the same cynical regard that I had observed on first meeting him. The dead have not that look— it partly restored me, and turning my head backward, I saw the smooth white expanse of sidewalk, unbroken from street to street.

"What is all this nonsense, you devil?" I demanded, fiercely enough, though weak and trembling in every limb.

"It is what some are pleased to call jugglery," he answered, with a light, hard laugh.

He turned down Dupont street and I saw him no more until we met in the Auburn ravine.

iii

ON THE day after my second meeting with Dr. Dorrimore I did not see him: the clerk in the Putnam House explained that a slight illness confined him to his rooms. That afternoon at the railway station I was surprised and made happy by the unexpected arrival of Miss Margaret Corray and her mother, from Oakland.

This is not a love story. I am no storyteller, and love as it is cannot be portrayed in a literature dominated and enthralled by the debasing tyranny which "sentences letters" in the name of the Young Girl. Under the Young Girl's blighting reign— or rather under the rule of those false Ministers of the Censure who have appointed themselves to the custody of her welfare— love

veils her sacred fires,

And, unaware, Morality expires,

famished upon the sifted meal and distilled water of a prudish purveyance.

Let it suffice that Miss Corray and I were engaged in marriage. She and her mother went to the hotel at which I lived, and for two weeks I saw her daily. That I was happy needs hardly be said; the only bar to my perfect enjoyment of those golden days was the presence of Dr. Dorrimore, whom I had felt compelled to introduce to the ladies.

By them he was evidently held in favor. What could I say? I knew absolutely nothing to his discredit. His manners were those of a cultivated and considerate gentleman; and to women a man's manner is the man. On one or two occasions when I saw Miss Corray walking with him I was furious, and once had the indiscretion to protest. Asked for reasons, I had none to give and fancied I saw in her expression a shade of contempt for the vagaries of a jealous mind. In time I grew morose and consciously disagreeable, and resolved in my madness to return to San Francisco the next day. Of this, however, I said nothing.

iv

THERE WAS at Auburn an old, abandoned cemetery. It was nearly in the heart of the town, yet by night it was as gruesome a place as the most dismal of human moods could crave. The railings about the plats were prostrate, decayed, or altogether gone. Many of the graves were sunken, from others grew sturdy

pines, whose roots had committed unspeakable sin. The headstones were fallen and broken across; brambles overran the ground; the fence was mostly gone, and cows and pigs wandered there at will; the place was a dishonor to the living, a calumny on the dead, a blasphemy against God.

The evening of the day on which I had taken my madman's resolution to depart in anger from all that was dear to me found me in that congenial spot. The light of the half moon fell ghostly through the foliage of trees in spots and patches, revealing much that was unsightly, and the black shadows seemed conspiracies withholding to the proper time revelations of darker import. Passing along what had been a gravel path, I saw emerging from shadow the figure of Dr. Dorrimore. I was myself in shadow, and stood still with clenched hands and set teeth, trying to control the impulse to leap upon and strangle him. A moment later a second figure joined him and clung to his arm. It was Margaret Corray!

I cannot rightly relate what occurred. I know that I sprang forward, bent upon murder; I know that I was found in the gray of the morning, bruised and bloody, with finger marks upon my throat. I was taken to the Putnam House, where for days I lay in a delirium. All this I know, for I have been told. And of my own knowledge I know that when consciousness returned with convalescence I sent for the clerk of the hotel.

"Are Mrs. Corray and her daughter still here?" I asked.

"What name did you say?"

"Corray."

"Nobody of that name has been here."

"I beg you will not trifle with me," I said petulantly. "You see that I am all right now; tell me the truth."

"I give you my word," he replied with evident sincerity, "we have had no guests of that name."

His words stupefied me. I lay for a few moments in silence; then I asked: "Where is Dr. Dorrimore?"

"He left on the morning of your fight and has not been heard of since. It was a rough deal he gave you."

v

SUCH ARE the facts of this case. Margaret Corray is now my wife. She has never seen Auburn, and during the weeks whose history as it shaped itself in my brain I have endeavored to relate, was living at her home in Oakland, wondering where her lover was and why he did not write. The other day I saw in the Baltimore Sun the following paragraph:

"Professor Valentine Dorrimore, the hypnotist, had a large audience last night. The lecturer, who has lived most of his life in India, gave some marvelous exhibitions of his power, hypnotizing anyone who chose to submit himself to the experiment, by merely looking at him. In fact, he twice hypnotized the entire audience (reporters alone exempted), making all entertain the most extraordinary illusions. The most valuable feature of the lecture was the disclosure of the methods of the Hindu jugglers in their famous performances, familiar in the mouths of travelers. The professor declares that these thaumaturgists have acquired such skill in the art which he learned at their feet that they perform their miracles by simply throwing the 'spectators' into a state of hypnosis and telling them what to see and hear. His assertion that a peculiarly susceptible subject may be kept in the realm of the unreal for weeks, months, and even years, dominated by whatever delusions and hallucinations the operator may from time to time suggest, is a trifle disquieting."

15: Night Errantry

Anonymous

Swan Express (West Aust) 13 Nov 1914

MARJORY BOLTON was absolutely *It*.

Undoubtedly many men wooed her, but the world said they wooed in vain. Among a large field of starters it could not point to a single favourite.

It happened that one week in December Marjory was staying at a big house in Leicestershire, the home of a land-ridden colonel. There she golfed or hunted by day and danced by night.

Among the party were three of her best desperate admirers. There was Captain West, generally allowed to be a bit of an ass, but a fine rider, and in intrepid dancer; he had known Marjory for years. There was Oliver James, a big, heavy man who rode like a centaur and danced like an elephant. And, lastly, there was Jimmy Hawkins, who was thoroughly out of place in the country; if there was one thing he hated more than horses, it was riding them. But he was goodlooking and he kept his hair very nicely brushed back, and his dancing was perfection.

Marjory distributed her favours— if favours is the right name— impartially amongst these three. That is to say, the time she spent in the company of each was about equal. But whereas she treated West to an open contumely, she had no mercy on the shortcomings of Oliver and Jimmy.

She called Jimmy "Nervy," and when he proposed in a fit of sheer, melancholy desperation she gave him her views on his partiality for gates and gaps, and stated her opinion that hedges were made to be jumped, not looked at. Nevertheless, she concluded, he was a nice little boy, and when he rode as well as he danced, or revealed some other claim to heroism, some nice girl might look at him.

Oliver proposed on the same day. Her pet name for him was "Clumsy."

"I'm awfully sorry, Clumsy," she said; "you're a very good sort, and all that. But I couldn't possibly contemplate becoming engaged to a man who jumps round like you and calls it dancing. Your waltzing is positively awful— you know yourself it is. And you've refused to learn the Boston or the one-step. And I don't suppose you've ever heard of the Tango."

"I wish to goodness I could hear of something else," put in Oliver, with justifiable savagery.

"So you see, my dear Clumsy," went on Marjory suavely, "it's no good. Now if you only danced as well as you rode it might be some good talking— but I'm afraid Nature didn't mean you to," she concluded encouragingly.

Oliver thought of killing her, but finally departed in a ruffled silence.

Jimmy had entertained similar thoughts, and similarly discarded them. That evening they moped apart— from each other and the rest of the world. What Jimmy said to himself was that it was jolly hard luck to have one's chance of happiness queered because one hadn't been brought up in a stable.

What Oliver said to himself was that it was the outside edge to be refused by a girl just because vou weren't a dancing doll, and didn't spend three hours every day of your life practising "hesitating circular scissors" and kindred tomfooleries. Both went to bed sore, sorrowful, and brooding after passing the evening in unsociable juxtaposition in two billiard-room armchairs.

Once in bed they exhausted their melancholia, and their thoughts took a brighter line. After all, thought Jimmy, proficiency with horses had not been stated as a *sine qua non*. Marjory had as good as promised him that any proof of valour would make him acceptable. He did not think he would ever do such with horses... but there were other tests— lions, and railway accidents, and fires.

Oliver in the meantime was facing the problem. A strong man, he felt, ought not to allow himself to be put off by his incapacity to dance. Why had Marjory suggested that it was a natural incapacity? It was just like her cheek. He would show her whether he could dance or not, as soon as he gave his mind to it. He would go to town and begin taking lessons in the Tango the very next day. Any ass could learn the Tango; it was only parrot work. Why, thousands of people were learning it out of newspapers daily. Oliver dozed indignantly.

Jimmy also dozed. And then he thought he heard a queer noise in the lower part of the house. First he lay in bed straining his ears. He felt an extraordinary impulse to remain in bed and to cease straining his ears, and in the loneliness of night Jimmy remembered his new role.

For a moment he heard nothing more. Then a very slight shuffling sort of noise mounted to his ears. It continued irregularly, stopped for a moment or two, and then began again. He went to the landing outside his bedroom, and looked over the staircase.

The noise was unmistakable; it seemed to come from the dancing-room. The big folding door into the dancing-room was open, and an eerie light, barely perceptible from where Jimmy stood, proceeded from it. In the library, separated frpm the dancing-room only by a thin wall, was Colonel Winthrop's safe.

Jimmy, listening to the old shuffling sounds, put things together rapidly in his mind. The library, he remembered, was kept very securely locked up, but to enter the house by the dailcing-room French window would be simple. Then, again, there were burglar alarms at every legitimate entance to the libraiy; but there was little more than a plaster partition between it and the dancing-room.

Jimmy lit one of the night-lights Colonel Winthrop provided for his visitors, and, shielding it with his hand, crept cautiously down the main staircase.

At last Jimmy gained the hall. As he did so the noise stopped. A shadow appeared to stoop over the light in the dancing-room, which was on the floor close to the doer. Jimmy moved softly down the hall, and peered round.

A figure was bending, with its back to him, over some papers. There was a night light beside the papers. Jimmy remembered his armlessness, and the necessity for prompt and glorious action. He was a bare two yards away from the crouching man, who was studying the papers intently, utterly unconscious of the proximity of a second person.

Jimmy braced himself for a spring and, just as the man seemed about to rise, he hurled himself upon him, pinioning his arms tightly with his own, and forcing him to the ground. The man shouted with surprise and struggled frantically. The noise rang like pandemonium through the silent house. Doors opened upstairs, and a sound of pattering bare feet followed.

Jimmy, putting forth the strengfh of ten Jimmies, if not of ten men, kept his lips tight shut, and hung on to his grip for dear life. As he did so his ecstasy of heroism left him, and he began to realise various small matters.

In the first place, his burglar was clad in a serviceable suit of Ceylon pyjamas, and hardly anything else; and the "papers" over which he was crouching were the leaves of an ordinary illustrated newspaper. He inspected the person of his captive, and gasped.

It was Oliver James!

"Good Lord!" said Jimmy, relaxing his grip, and springing to the other end of ike room.

Simultaneously Oliver recognised his tormentor. He stood still in blank amazement for a full five seconds: and in that five seconds the crowd arrived. They were in various stages of dress and coiffure; most of them looked sleepy, startled, and generally disorganised. Even Captain West was hardly so spruce as usual.

For a moment no one said a word; they all stood regarding the discomfited combatants censoriously. Then suddenly Marjory arrived downstairs. She alone was thoroughly self-possessed. She walked straight into the dancing-room, while the crowd still lingered about the doorway.

"What are you two idiots doing?" she began. Neither seemed in a communicative mood. She went and picked up the paper, and looked at the page that had been upturned. Then a glimmering of light came to her and she began shrieking with laughter. She turned to the crowd.

"All of you must go away, please," she said, in tones of decision and authority. "For a moment or two at all events. I think, though, perhaps, Captain West had better stay."

He stayed. The rest withdrew wonderingly.

"Now," she said to Oliver, "what were you doing here?"

Oliver ceased to think of devious explanations. Marjory had obviously guessed too much. "I was learning your beastly Tango out of the *Daily Error*— you'll see the diagrams of the 9th figure there." (He pointed to the paper.) "I understand you rather wanted me to."

"Of course I did," said Marjory, with lips still twitching dangerously. "But how ripping of you to sacrifice your beauty sleep to do it!"

Then she turned to Jimmy. "Well, Jimmy," she asked, "why did you come down and try to kill poor old Clumsy when he was putting himself out for my sake?"

"I thought he was a burglar, of course," said Jimmy sullenly.

"But why didn't you give the alarm, instead of running about the house jumping— er— at conclusions?"

"Because," said Jimmy, "you seem to hold a low opinion of my courage; and I thought this might be a slight opportunity of—"

"Of capturing a horrible great burglar single-handed and laying him at my feet— or on my table at breakfast to-morrow morning. Oh, Jimmy, you are good to me."

She appealed to Captain West.

"Billy," she said, "isn't it too sweet of them both? But really they musn't do it again— not for me, anyhow. It's hardly proper. I almost think, Billy, you and I had better announce our engagement, or goodness knows what they'll do next."

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16: Frenchman's Creek

Arthur Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

Collected in: *Shakespeare's Christmas and Other Stories*, 1905

Not to be confused with the famous novel of the same name by Daphne du Maurier.

FRENCHMAN'S CREEK runs up between overhanging woods from the southern shore of Helford River, which flows down through an earthly paradise and meets the sea midway between Falmouth and the dreadful Manacles— a river of gradual golden sunsets such as Wilson painted; broad-bosomed, holding here and there a village as in an arm maternally crook'd, but with a brooding face of solitude. Off the main flood lie creeks where the oaks dip their branches in the high tides, where the stars are glassed all night long without a ripple, and where you may spend whole days with no company but herons and sandpipers—

Helford River, Helford River,
Blessèd may you be!
We sailed up Helford River
By Durgan from the sea....

And about three-quarters of a mile above the ferry-crossing (where is the best anchorage) you will find the entrance of the creek they call Frenchman's, with a cob-built ruin beside it, and perhaps, if you come upon it in the morning sunlight, ten or a dozen herons aligned like statues on the dismantled walls.

Now, why they call it Frenchman's Creek no one is supposed to know, but this story will explain. And the story I heard on the spot from an old verderer, who had it from his grandfather, who bore no unimportant part in it— as will be seen. Maybe you will find it out of keeping with its scenery. In my own words you certainly would: and so I propose to relate it just as the verderer told it to me.

i

FIRST OF ALL you'll let me say that a bad temper is an affliction, whoever owns it, and shortening to life. I don't know what your opinion may be: but my grandfather was parish constable in these parts for forty-seven years, and you'll find it on his headstone in Manaccan churchyard that he never had a cross word for man, woman, or child. He took no credit for it: it ran in the family, and to this day we're all terribly mild to handle.

Well, if ever a man was born bad in his temper, 'twas Captain Bligh, that came from St. Tudy parish, and got himself known to all the world over that

dismal business aboard the *Bounty*. Yes, Sir, that's the man— "Breadfruit Bligh," as they called him. They made an Admiral of him in the end, but they never cured his cussedness: and my grandfather, that followed his history (and good reason for why) from the day he first set foot in this parish, used to rub his hands over every fresh item of news. "Darn it!" he'd say, "here's that old Turk broke loose again. Lord, if he ain't a warrior!" Seemed as if he took a delight in the man, and kept a sort of tenderness for him till the day of his death.

Bless you, though folks have forgotten it, that little affair of the *Bounty* was only the beginning of Bligh. He was a left'nant when it happened, and the King promoted him post-captain straight away. Later on, no doubt because of his experiences in mutinies, he was sent down to handle the big one at the Nore. "Now, then, you dogs!"— that's how he began with the men's delegates— "his Majesty will be graciously pleased to hear your grievances: and afterwards I'll be graciously pleased to hang the lot of you and rope-end every fifth man in the Fleet. That's plain sailing, I hope!" says he. The delegates made a rush at him, triced him up hand and foot, and in two two's would have heaved him to the fishes with an eighteen-pound shot for ballast if his boat's crew hadn't swarmed on board by the chains and carried him off.

After this, he commanded a ship at Camperdown, and another at Copenhagen, and being a good fighter as well as a man of science, was chosen for Governor of New South Wales. He hadn't been forty-eight hours in the colony, I'm told, before the music began, and it ended with his being clapped into irons by the military and stuck in prison for two years to cool his heels. At last they took him out, put him on board a ship of war and played farewell to him on a brass band: and, by George, Sir, if he didn't fight with the captain of the ship all the way home, making claim that as senior in the service he ought to command her! By this time, as you may guess, there was nothing to be done with the fellow but make him an Admiral; and so they did, and as Admiral of the Blue he died in the year 'seventeen, only a couple of weeks ahead of my poor grandfather, that would have set it down to the finger of Providence if he'd only lived to hear the news.

Well, now, the time that Bligh came down to Helford was a few months before he sailed for Australia, and that will be a hundred years ago next summer: and I guess the reason of his coming was that the folks at the Admiralty couldn't stand him in London, the weather just then being sultry. So they pulled out a map and said, "This Helford looks a nice cool far-away place; let the man go down and take soundings and chart the place"; for Bligh, you must know, had been a pupil of Captain Cook's, and at work of this kind there was no man cleverer in the Navy.

To do him justice, Bligh never complained of work. So off he packed and started from London by coach in the early days of June; and with him there

travelled down a friend of his, a retired naval officer by the name of Sharl, that was bound for Falmouth to take passage in the Lisbon packet; but whether on business or a pleasure trip is more than I can tell you.

So far as I know, nothing went wrong with them until they came to Torpoint Ferry: and there, on the Cornish side of the water, stood the Highflyer coach, the inside of it crammed full of parcels belonging to our Vicar's wife, Mrs. Polwhele, that always visited Plymouth once a year for a week's shopping. Having all these parcels to bring home, Mrs. Polwhele had crossed over by a waterman's boat two hours before, packed the coach as full as it would hold, and stepped into the Ferry Inn for a dish of tea. "And glad I am to be across the river in good time," she told the landlady; "for by the look of the sky there's a thunderstorm coming."

Sure enough there was, and it broke over the Hamoaze with a bang just as Captain Bligh and his friend put across in the ferry-boat. The lightning whizzed and the rain came down like the floods of Deva, and in five minutes' time the streets and gutters of Torpoint were pouring on to the quay like so many shutes, and turning all the inshore water to the colour of pea-soup. Another twenty minutes and 'twas over; blue sky above and the birds singing, and the roof and trees all a-twinkle in the sun; and out steps Mrs. Polwhele very gingerly in the landlady's pattens, to find the Highflyer ready to start, the guard unlashing the tarpaulin that he'd drawn over the outside luggage, the horses steaming and anxious to be off, and on the box-seat a couple of gentlemen wet to the skin, and one of them looking as ugly as a chained dog in a street fight. This was Bligh, of course. His friend, Mr. Sharl, sat alongside, talking low and trying to coax him back to a good temper: but Mrs. Polwhele missed taking notice of this. She hadn't seen the gentlemen arrive, by reason that, being timid of thunder, at the very first peal she'd run upstair, and crawled under one of the bed-ties: and there she bided until the chambermaid brought word that the sky was clear and the coach waiting.

If ever you've had to do with timmersome folks I daresay you've noted how talkative they get as soon as danger's over. Mrs. Polwhele took a glance at the inside of the coach to make sure that her belongings were safe, and then, turning to the ladder that the Boots was holding for her to mount, up she trips to her outside place behind the box-seat, all in a fluff and commotion, and chattering so fast that the words hitched in each other like beer in a narrow-necked bottle.

"Give you good morning, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Polwhele, "and I do hope and trust I haven't kept you waiting; but thunder makes me *that* nervous! 'Twas always the same with me from a girl; and la! what a storm while it lasted! I declare the first drops looked to me a'most so big as crown-pieces. Most unfortunate it should come on when you were crossing— most unfortunate, I

vow! There's nothing so unpleasant as sitting in damp clothes, especially if you're not accustomed to it. My husband, now— if he puts on a shirt that hasn't been double-aired I always know what's going to happen: it'll be lumbago next day to a certainty. But maybe, as travellers, you're not so susceptible. I find hotel-keepers so careless with their damp sheets! May I ask, gentlemen, if you've come from far? You'll be bound for Falmouth, as I guess: and so am I. You'll find much on the way to admire. But perhaps this is not your first visit to Cornwall?"

In this fashion she was rattling away, good soul— settling her wraps about her and scarcely drawing breath— when Bligh slewed himself around in his seat, and for answer treated her to a long stare.

Now, Bligh wasn't a beauty at the best of times, and he carried a scar on his cheek that didn't improve matters by turning white when his face was red, and red when his face was white. They say the King stepped up to him at Court once and asked him how he came by it and in what action. Bligh had to tell the truth— that he'd got it in the orchard at home: he and his father were trying to catch a horse there: the old man flung a hatchet to turn the horse and hit his boy in the face, marking him for life. Hastiness, you see, in the family.

Well, the sight of his face, glowering back on her over his shoulder, was enough to dry up the speech in Mrs. Polwhele or any woman. But Bligh, it seems, couldn't be content with this. After withering the poor soul for ten seconds or so, he takes his eyes off her, turns to his friend again in a lazy, insolent way, and begins to talk loud to him in French.

'Twas a terrible unmannerly thing to do for a fellow supposed to be a gentleman. I've naught to say against modern languages: but when I see it on the newspaper nowadays that naval officers ought to give what's called "increased attention" to French and German, I hope that they'll use it better than Bligh, that's all! Why, Sir, my eldest daughter threw up a situation as parlourmaid in London because her master and mistress pitched to parleyvooing whenever they wanted to talk secrets at table. "If you please, Ma'am," she told the lady, "you're mistaking me for the governess, and I never could abide compliments." She gave a month's warning then and there, and I commend the girl's spirit.

But the awkward thing for Bligh, as it turned out, was that Mrs. Polwhele didn't understand his insolence. Being a woman that wouldn't hurt a fly if she could help it, and coming from a parish where every man, her husband included, took pleasure in treating her respectfully, she never dreamed that an affront was meant. From the moment she heard Bligh's lingo, she firmly believed that here were two Frenchies on the coach; and first she went white to the lips and shivered all over, and then she caught at the seat to steady herself, and then she flung back a look at Jim the Guard, to make sure he had his blunderbuss handy.

She couldn't speak to Sammy Hosking, the coachman, or touch him by the arm without reaching across Bligh: and by this time the horses were at the top of the hill and settling into a gallop. She thought of the many times she'd sat up in bed at home in a fright that the Frenchmen had landed and were marching up to burn Manaccan Vicarage: and how often she had warned her husband against abusing Boney from the pulpit— 'twas dangerous, she always maintained, for a man living so nigh the seashore. The very shawl beside her was scarlet, same as the women-folk wore about the fields in those days in hopes that the invaders, if any came, would mistake them for red-coats. And here she was, perched up behind two of her country's enemies— one of them as ugly as Old Nick or Boney himself— and bowling down towards her peaceful home at anything from sixteen to eighteen miles an hour.

I daresay, too, the thunderstorm had given her nerves a shaking; at any rate, Jim the Guard came crawling over the coach-roof after a while, and, said he, "Why, Mrs. Polwhele, whatever is the matter? I han't heard you speak six words since we started."

And with that, just as he settled himself down for a comfortable chat with her, after his custom, the poor lady points to the two strangers, flings up both hands, and tumbles upon him in a fit of hysterics.

"Stop the hosses!" yells Jim; but already Sammy Hosking was pulling up for dear life at the sound of her screams.

"What in thunder's wrong with the female?" asks Bligh.

"Female yourself," answers up Sammy in a pretty passion. "Mrs. Polwhele's a lady, and I reckon your cussed rudeness upset her. I say nothing of your face, for that you can't help."

Bligh started up in a fury, but Mr. Sharl pulled him down on the seat, and then Jim the Guard took a turn.

"Pitch a lady's luggage into the road, would you?" for this, you must know, was the reason of Bligh's sulkiness at starting. He had come up soaking from Torpoint Ferry, walked straight to the coach, and pulled the door open to jump inside, when down on his head came rolling a couple of Dutch cheeses that Mrs. Polwhele had crammed on the top of her belongings. This raised his temper, and he began to drag parcel after parcel out and fling them in the mud, shouting that no passenger had a right to fill up the inside of a coach in that fashion. Thereupon Jim sent an ostler running to the landlady that owned the Highflyer, and she told Bligh that he hadn't booked his seat yet: that the inside was reserved for Mrs. Polwhele: and that he could either take an outside place and behave himself, or be left behind to learn manners. For a while he showed fight: but Mr. Sharl managed to talk sense into him, and the parcels were stowed again and the door shut but a minute before Mrs. Polwhele came downstairs and took her seat as innocent as a lamb.

"Pitch a lady's luggage into the road, would you?" struck in Jim the Guard, making himself heard above the pillaloo. "Carry on as if the coach belonged to ye, hey? Come down and take your coat off, like a man, and don't sit there making fool faces at me!"

"My friend is not making faces," began Mr. Sharl, very gentle-like, trying to keep the peace.

"Call yourself his friend!" Jim snapped him up. "Get off, the pair of you. Friend indeed! Go and buy him a veil."

But 'twas easily seen that Mrs. Polwhele couldn't be carried further. So Sammy Hosking pulled up at a farmhouse a mile beyond St. Germans: and there she was unloaded, with her traps, and put straight to bed: and a farm-boy sent back to Torpoint to fetch a chaise for her as soon as she recovered. And the Highflyer— that had been delayed three-quarters of an hour—rattled off at a gallop, with all on board in the worst of tempers.

When they reached Falmouth— which was not till after ten o'clock at night— and drew up at the Crown and Anchor, the first man to hail them was old Parson Polwhele, standing there under the lamp in the entry and taking snuff to keep himself awake.

"Well, my love," says he, stepping forward to help his wife down and give her a kiss. "And how have you enjoyed the journey?"

But instead of his wife 'twas a bull-necked-looking man that swung himself off the coach-roof, knocking the Parson aside, and bounced into the inn without so much as a "beg your pardon."

Parson Polwhele was taken aback for the moment by reason that he'd pretty nigh kissed the fellow by accident; and before he could recover, Jim the Guard leans out over the darkness, and, says he, speaking down: "Very sorry, Parson, but your missus was taken ill t'other side of St. Germans, and we've been forced to leave her 'pon the road."

Now, the Parson doted on his wife, as well he might. He was a very learned man, you must know, and wrote a thundering great history of Cornwall: but outside of book-learning his head rambled terribly, and Mrs. Polwhele managed him in all the little business of life. "'Tis like looking after a museum," she used to declare. "I don't understand the contents, I'm thankful to say; but, please God, I can keep 'em dusted." A better-suited couple you couldn't find, nor a more affectionate; and whenever Mrs. Polwhele tripped it to Plymouth, the Parson would be at Falmouth to welcome her back, and they'd sleep the night at the Crown and Anchor and drive home to Manaccan next morning.

"Taken ill?" cries the Parson. "Oh, my poor Mary— my poor, dear Mary!"

"'Tisn' so bad as all that," says Jim, as soothing as he could; but he thought it best to tell nothing about the rumpus.

"If 'tis on the wings of an eagle, I must fly to her!" cries the Parson, and he hurried indoors and called out for a chaise and pair.

He had some trouble in persuading a post-boy to turn out at such an hour, but before midnight the poor man was launched and rattling away eastward, chafing at the hills and singing out that he'd pay for speed, whatever it cost. And at Grampound in the grey of the morning he almost ran slap into a chaise and pair proceeding westward, and likewise as if its postilion wanted to break his neck.

Parson Polwhele stood up in his vehicle and looked out ahead. The two chaises had narrowly missed doubling each other into a cocked hat; in fact, the boys had pulled up within a dozen yards of smash, and there stood the horses face to face and steaming.

"Why, 'tis my Mary!" cries the Parson, and takes a leap out of the chaise.

"Oh, Richard! Richard!" sobs Mrs. Polwhele. "But you can't possibly come in here, my love," she went on, drying her eyes.

"Why not, my angel?"

"Because of the parcels, dearest. And Heaven only knows what's underneath me at this moment, but it feels like a flat-iron. Besides," says she, like the prudent woman she was, "we've paid for two chaises. But 'twas good of you to come in search of me, and I'll say what I've said a thousand times, that I've the best husband in the world."

The Parson grumbled a bit; but, indeed, the woman was piled about with packages up to the neck. So, very sad-like, he went back to his own chaise— that was now slewed about for Falmouth— and off the procession started at an easy trot, the good man bouncing up in his seat from time to time to blow back a kiss.

But after awhile he shouted to the post-boy to pull up again.

"What's the matter, love?" sings out Mrs. Polwhele, overtaking him and coming to a stand likewise.

"Why, it occurs to me, my angel, that *you* might get into *my* chaise, if you're not too tightly wedged."

"There's no saying what will happen when I once begin to move," said Mrs. Polwhele: "but I'll risk it. For I don't mind telling you that one of my legs went to sleep somewhere near St. Austell, and 'tis dreadfully uncomfortable."

So out she was fetched and climbed in beside her husband.

"But what was it that upset you?" he asked, as they started again.

Mrs. Polwhele laid her cheek to his shoulder and sobbed aloud; and so by degrees let out her story.

"BUT, my love, the thing's impossible," cried Parson Polwhele. "There's no Frenchman in Cornwall at this moment, unless maybe 'tis the Guernsey

merchant* or some poor wretch of a prisoner escaped from the hulks in the Hamoaze."

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*Smugglers' agent.

"Then, that's what these men were, you may be sure," said Mrs. Polwhele.

"Tut-tut-tut! You've just told me that they came across the ferry, like any ordinary passengers."

"Did I? Then I told more than I know; for I never saw them cross."

"A couple of escaped prisoners wouldn't travel by coach in broad daylight, and talk French in everyone's hearing."

"We live in the midst of mysteries," said Mrs. Polwhele. "There's my parcels, now— I packed 'em in the Highflyer most careful, and I'm sure Jim the Guard would be equally careful in handing them out— you know the sort of man he is: and yet I find a good dozen of them plastered in mud, and my new Moldavia cap, that I gave twenty-three shillings for only last Tuesday, pounded to a jelly, quite as if someone had flung it on the road and danced on it!"

The poor soul burst out into fresh tears, and there against her husband's shoulder cried herself fairly asleep, being tired out with travelling all night. By-and-by the Parson, that wanted a nap just as badly, dozed off beside her: and in this fashion they were brought back through Falmouth streets and into the yard of the Crown and Anchor, where Mrs. Polwhele woke up with a scream, crying out: "Prisoners or no prisoners, those men were up to no good: and I'll say it if I live to be a hundred!"

THAT SAME AFTERNOON they transhipped the parcels into a cart, and drove ahead themselves in a light gig, and so came down, a little before sunset, to the Passage Inn yonder. There, of course, they had to unload again and wait for the ferry to bring them across to their own parish. It surprised the Parson a bit to find the ferry-boat lying ready by the shore and my grandfather standing there head to head with old Arch'laus Spry, that was constable of Mawnan parish.

"Hullo, Calvin!" the Parson sings out. "This looks bad— Mawnan and Manaccan putting their heads together. I hope there's nothing gone wrong since I've been away?"

"Aw, Parson dear," says my grandfather, "I'm glad you've come— yea, glad sure 'nuff. We've a-been enjoying a terrible time!"

"Then something *has* gone wrong?" says the Parson.

"As for that," my grandfather answers, "I only wish I could say yes or no: for 'twould be a relief even to know the worst." He beckoned very mysterious-like and led the Parson a couple of hundred yards up the foreshore, with Arch'laus Spry following. And there they came to a halt, all three, before a rock that

someone had been daubing with whitewash. On the top of the cliff, right above, was planted a stick with a little white flag.

"Now, Sir, as a Justice of the Peace, what d'ee think of it?"

Parson Polwhele stared from the rock to the stick and couldn't say. So he turns to Arch'laus Spry and asks: "Any person taken ill in your parish?"

"No, Sir."

"You're sure Billy Johns hasn't been drinking again?" Billy Johns was the landlord of the Passage Inn, a very ordinary man by rule, but given to breaking loose among his own liquors. "He seemed all right yesterday when I hired the trap off him; but he does the most unaccountable things when he's taken bad."

"He never did anything so far out of nature as this here; and I can mind him in six outbreaks," answered my grandfather. "Besides, 'tis not Billy Johns nor anyone like him."

"Then you know who did it?"

"I do and I don't, Sir. But take a look round, if you please."

The Parson looked up and down and across the river; and, sure enough, whichever way he turned, his eyes fell on splashes of whitewash and little flags fluttering. They seemed to stretch right away from Porthnavas down to the river's mouth; and though he couldn't see it from where he stood, even Mawnan church-tower had been given a lick of the brush.

"But," said the Parson, fairly puzzled, "all this can only have happened in broad daylight, and you must have caught the fellow at it, whoever he is."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say I caught him," answered my grandfather, modest-like; "but I came upon him a little above Bosahan in the act of setting up one of his flags, and I asked him, in the King's name, what he meant by it."

"And what did he answer?"

My grandfather looked over his shoulder. "I couldn't, Sir, not for a pocketful of crowns, and your good lady, so to speak, within hearing."

"Nonsense, man! She's not within a hundred yards."

"Well, then, Sir, he up and hoped the devil would fly away with me, and from that he went on to say—" But here my grandfather came to a dead halt. "No, Sir, I can't; and as a minister of the Gospel, you'll never insist on it. He made such horrible statements that I had to go straight home and read over my old mother's marriage lines. It fairly dazed me to hear him talk so confident, and she in her grave, poor soul!"

"You ought to have demanded his name."

"I did, Sir; naturally I did. And he told me to go to the naughty place for it."

"Well, but what like is he?"

"Oh, as to that, Sir, a man of ordinary shape, like yourself, in a plain blue coat and a wig shorter than ordinary; nothing about him to prepare you for the language he lets fly."

"And," put in Arch'laus Spry, "he's taken lodgings down to Durgan with the Widow Polkinghorne, and eaten his dinner— a fowl and a jug of cider with it. After dinner he hired Robin's boat and went for a row. I thought it my duty, as he was pushing off, to sidle up in a friendly way. I said to him, 'The weather, Sir, looks nice and settled': that is what I said, neither more nor less, but using those very words. What d'ee think he answered? He said, 'That's capital, my man: now go along and annoy somebody else.' Wasn't that a disconnected way of talking? If you ask my opinion, putting two and two together, I say he's most likely some poor wandering loonatic."

The evening was dusking down by this time, and Parson Polwhele, though a good bit puzzled, called to mind that his wife would be getting anxious to cross the ferry and reach home before dark: so he determined that nothing could be done before morning, when he promised Arch'laus Spry to look into the matter. My grandfather he took across in the boat with him, to look after the parcels and help them up to the Vicarage: and on the way they talked about a grave that my grandfather had been digging— he being sexton and parish clerk, as well as constable and the Parson's right-hand man, as you might call it, in all public matters.

While they discoursed, Mrs. Polwhele was taking a look about her to make sure the country hadn't altered while she was away at Plymouth. And by-and-by she cries out—

"Why, my love, whatever are these dabs o' white stuck up and down the foreshore?"

The Parson takes a look at my grandfather before answering: "My angel, to tell you the truth, that's more than we know."

"Richard, you're concealing something from me," said Mrs. Polwhele. "If the French have landed and I'm going home to be burnt in my bed, it shall be with my eyes open."

"My dear Mary," the Parson argued, "you've a-got the French on your brain. If the French landed they wouldn't begin by sticking dabs of whitewash all over the parish; now, would they?"

"How in the world should I know what a lot of Papists would do or not do?" she answered. "'Tis no more foolish to my mind than eating frogs or kissing a man's toe."

Well, say what the Parson would, the notion had fixed itself in the poor lady's head. Three times that night she woke in the bed with her curl-papers crackling for very fright; and the fourth time 'twas at the sound of a real dido below stairs. Some person was down by the back-door knocking and rattling upon it with all his might.

The sun had been up for maybe an hour— the time of year, as I told you, being near about midsummer— and the Parson, that never wanted for pluck,

jumped out and into his breeches in a twinkling, while his wife pulled the counterpane over her head. Down along the passage he skipped to a little window opening over the back porch.

"Who's there!" he called, and out from the porch stepped my grandfather, that had risen early and gone to the churchyard to finish digging the grave before breakfast. "Why, what on the earth is wrong with ye? I made sure the French had landed, at the least."

"Couldn't be much worse if they had," said my grandfather. "Some person've a-stole my shovel, pick, and biddicks."

"Nonsense!" said the Parson.

"The corpse won't find it nonsense, Sir, if I don't get 'em back in time. I left 'em lying, all three, at the bottom of the grave overnight."

"And now they're missing?"

"Not a trace of 'em to be seen."

"Someone has been playing you a practical joke, Calvin. Here, stop a moment—" The Parson ran back to his room, fetched a key, and flung it out into the yard. "That'll unlock the tool-shed in the garden. Get what you want, and we'll talk about the theft after breakfast. How soon will the grave be ready?"

"I can't say sooner than ten o'clock after what has happened."

"Say ten o'clock, then. This is Saturday, and I've my sermon to prepare after breakfast. At ten o'clock I'll join you in the churchyard."

ii

MY GRANDFATHER went off to unlock the tool-shed, and the Parson back to comfort Mrs. Polwhele—which was no easy matter. "There's something wrong with the parish since I've been away, and that you can't deny," she declared. "It don't feel like home any longer, and my poor flesh is shivering like a jelly, and my hand almost too hot to make the butter." She kept up this lidden all through breakfast, and the meal was no sooner cleared away than she slipped on a shawl and stepped across to the churchyard to discuss the robbery.

The Parson drew a chair to the window, lit his pipe, and pulled out his pocket-Bible to choose a text for his next day's sermon. But he couldn't fix his thoughts. Try how he would, they kept harking back to his travels in the post-chaise, and his wife's story, and those unaccountable flags and splashes of whitewash. His pipe went out, and he was getting up to find a light for it, when just at that moment the garden-gate rattled, and, looking down the path towards the sound, his eyes fell on a square-cut, fierce-looking man in blue, standing there with a dirty bag in one hand and a sheaf of tools over his right shoulder.

The man caught sight of the Parson at the window, and set down his tools inside the gate— shovel and pick and biddicks.

"Good-mornin'! I may come inside, I suppose?" says he, in a gruff tone of voice. He came up the path and the Parson unlatched the window, which was one of the long sort reaching down to the ground.

"My name's Bligh," said the visitor, gruff as before. "You're the Parson, eh? Bit of an antiquarian, I'm given to understand? These things ought to be in your line, then, and I hope they are not broken: I carried them as careful as I could." He opened the bag and emptied it out upon the table—an old earthenware pot, a rusted iron ring, four or five burnt bones, and a handful or so of ashes. "Human, you see," said he, picking up one of the bones and holding it under the Parson's nose. "One of your ancient Romans, no doubt."

"Ancient Romans? Ancient Romans?" stammered Parson Polwhele. "Pray, Sir, where did you get these— these articles?"

"By digging for them, Sir; in a mound just outside that old Roman camp of yours."

"Roman camp? There's no Roman camp within thirty miles of us as the crow flies: and I doubt if there's one within fifty!"

"Shows how much you know about it. That's what I complain about in you parsons: never glimpse a thing that's under your noses. Now, I come along, making no pretence to be an antiquarian, and the first thing I see out on your headland yonder, is a Roman camp, with a great mound beside it—"

"No such thing, Sir!" the Parson couldn't help interrupting.

Bligh stared at him for a moment, like a man hurt in his feelings but keeping hold on his Christian compassion. "Look here," he said; "you mayn't know it, but I'm a bad man to contradict. This here Roman camp, as I was sayin'—"

"If you mean Little Dinnis Camp, Sir, 'tis as round as my hat."

"Damme, if you interrupt again—"

"But I will. Here, in my own parlour, I tell you that Little Dinnis is as round as my hat!"

"All right; don't lose your temper, shouting out what I never denied. Round or square, it don't matter a ha'porth to me. This here round Roman camp—"

"But I tell you, once more, there's no such thing!" cried the Parson, stamping his foot. "The Romans never made a round camp in their lives. Little Dinnis is British; the encampment's British; the mound, as you call it, is a British barrow; and as for you—"

"As for me," thunders Bligh, "I'm British too, and don't you forget it. Confound you, Sir! What the devil do I care for your pettifogging bones? I'm a British sailor, Sir; I come to your God-forsaken parish on a Government job, and I happen on a whole shopful of ancient remains. In pure kindness— pure

kindness, mark you— I interrupt my work to dig 'em up; and this is all the thanks I get!"

"Thanks!" fairly yelled the Parson. "You ought to be horsewhipped, rather, for disturbing an ancient tomb that's been the apple of my eye ever since I was inducted to this parish!" Then, as Bligh drew back, staring: "My poor barrow!" he went on; "my poor, ransacked barrow! But there may be something to save yet—" and he fairly ran for the door, leaving Bligh at a standstill.

For awhile the man stood there like a fellow in a trance, opening and shutting his mouth, with his eyes set on the doorway where the Parson had disappeared. Then, his temper overmastering him, with a sweep of his arm he sent the whole bag of tricks flying on to the floor, kicked them to right and left through the garden, slammed the gate, pitched across the road, and flung through the churchyard towards the river like a whirlwind.

Now, while this was happening, Mrs. Polwhele had picked her way across the churchyard, and after chatting a bit with my grandfather over the theft of his tools, had stepped into the church to see that the place, and specially the table and communion-rails and the parsonage pew, was neat and dusted, this being her regular custom after a trip to Plymouth. And no sooner was she within the porch than who should come dandering along the road but Arch'laus Spry. The road, as you know, goes downhill after passing the parsonage gate, and holds on round the churchyard wall like a sunk way, the soil inside being piled up to the wall's coping. But, my grandfather being still behindhand with his job, his head and shoulders showed over the grave's edge. So Arch'laus Spry caught sight of him.

"Why, you're the very man I was looking for," says Arch'laus, stopping.

"Death halts for no man," answers my grandfather, shovelling away.

"That furrin' fellow is somewheres in this neighbourhood at this very moment," says Arch'laus, wagging his head. "I saw his boat moored down by the Passage as I landed. And I've a-got something to report. He was up and off by three o 'clock this morning, and knocked up the Widow Polkinghorne, trying to borrow a pick and shovel."

"Pick and shovel!" My grandfather stopped working and slapped his thigh. "Then he's the man that've walked off with mine: and a biddicks too."

"He said nothing of a biddicks, but he's quite capable of it."

"Surely in the midst of life we are in death," said my grandfather. "I was al'ays inclined to believe that text, and now I'm sure of it. Let's go and see the Parson."

He tossed his shovel on to the loose earth above the grave and was just about to scramble out after it when the churchyard gate shook on its hinges and across the path and by the church porch went Bligh, as I've said, like a whirlwind. Arch'laus Spry, that had pulled his chin up level with the coping,

ducked at the sight of him, and even my grandfather ducked down a little in the grave as he passed.

"The very man!" said Spry, under his breath.

"The wicked flee, whom no man pursueth," said my grandfather, looking after the man; but Bligh turned his head neither to the right hand nor to the left.

"Oh— oh— oh!" squealed a voice inside the church.

"Whatever was *that*," cries Arch'laus Spry, giving a jump. They both stared at the porch.

"Oh— oh— oh!" squealed the voice again.

"It certainly comes from inside," said Arch'laus Spry.

"It's Mrs. Polwhele!" said my grandfather; "and by the noise of it she's having hysterics."

And with that he scrambled up and ran; and Spry heaved himself over the wall and followed. And there, in the south aisle, they found Mrs. Polwhele lying back in a pew and kicking like a stallion in a loose-box.

My grandfather took her by the shoulders, while Spry ran for the jug of holy water that stood by the font. As it happened, 'twas empty: but the sight of it fetched her to, and she raised herself up with a shiver.

"The Frenchman!" she cries out, pointing. "The Frenchman— on the coach! O Lord, deliver us!"

For a moment, as you'll guess, my grandfather was puzzled: but he stared where the poor lady pointed, and after a bit he began to understand. I daresay you've seen our church, Sir, and if so, you must have taken note of a monstrous fine fig-tree growing out of the south wall— "the marvel of Manaccan," we used to call it. When they restored the church the other day nobody had the heart to destroy the tree, for all the damage it did to the building— having come there the Lord knows how, and grown there since the Lord knows when. So they took and patched up the wall around it, and there it thrives. But in the times I'm telling of, it had split the wall so that from inside you could look straight through the crack into the churchyard; and 'twas to this crack that Mrs. Polwhele's finger pointed.

"Eh?" said my grandfather. "The furriner that went by just now, was it he that frightened ye, Ma'am?"

Mrs. Polwhele nodded.

"But what put it into your head that he's a Frenchman?"

"Because French is his language. With these very ears I heard him talk it! He joined the coach at Torpoint, and when I spoke him fair in honest English not a word could he answer me. Oh, Calvin, Calvin! what have I done—a poor weak woman— to be mixed up in these plots and invasions?"

But my grandfather couldn't stop to answer that question, for a terrible light was breaking in upon him. "A Frenchman?" he called out. "And for these

twenty-four hours he's been marking out the river and taking soundings!" He glared at Arch'laus Spry, and Arch'laus dropped the brazen ewer upon the pavement and smote his forehead. "The Devil," says he, "is among us, having great wrath!"

"And for aught we know," says my grandfather, speaking in a slow and fearsome whisper, "the French ships may be hanging off the coast while we'm talking here!"

"You don't mean to tell us," cried Mrs. Polwhele, sitting up stiff in the pew, "that this man has been mapping out the river under your very noses!"

"He has, Ma'am. Oh, I see it all! What likelier place could they choose on the whole coast? And from here to Falmouth what is it but a step?"

"Let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains," said Arch'laus Spry solemn-like.

"And me just home from Plymouth with a fine new roasting-jack!" chimed in Mrs. Polwhele. "As though the day of wrath weren't bad enough without *that* waste o' money! Run, Calvin— run and tell the Vicar this instant— no, no, don't leave me behind! Take me home, that's a good man: else I shall faint at my own shadow!"

Well, they hurried off to the Vicarage: but, of course, there was no Parson to be found, for by this time he was half-way towards Little Dinnis, and running like a madman under the hot sun to see what damage had befallen his dearly-loved camp. The servants hadn't seen him leave the house; ne'er a word could they tell of him except that Martha, the cook, when she cleared away the breakfast things, had left him seated in his chair and smoking.

"But what's the meaning of this?" cried out Mrs. Polwhele, pointing to the tablecloth that Bligh had pulled all awry in his temper. "And the window open too!"

"And— hulloa!" says my grandfather, staring across the patch of turf outside. "Surely here's signs of a violent struggle. Human, by the look of it," says he, picking up a thigh-bone and holding it out towards Mrs. Polwhele.

She began to shake like a leaf. "Oh, Calvin!" she gasps out. "Oh, Calvin, not in this short time— it couldn't be!"

"Charred, too," says my grandfather, inspecting it: and with that they turned at a cry from Martha the cook, that was down on hands and knees upon the carpet.

"Ashes! See here, mistress— ashes all over your best carpet!"

The two women stared at the fireplace: but, of course, that told them nothing, being empty, as usual at the time of year, with only a few shavings stuck about it by way of ornament. Martha, the first to pick up her wits, dashed out into the front hall.

"Gone without his hat, too!" she fairly screamed, running her eye along the row of pegs.

Mrs. Polwhele clasped her hands. "In the midst of life we are in death," said Arch'laus Spry: "that's my opinion if you ask it."

"Gone! Gone without his hat, like the snuff of a candle!" Mrs. Polwhele dropped into a chair and rocked herself and moaned.

My grandfather banged his fist on the table. He never could abide the sight of a woman in trouble.

"Missus," says he, "if the Parson's anywhere alive, we'll find 'en: and if that Frenchman be Old Nick himself, he shall rue the day he ever set foot in Manaccan parish! Come'st along, Arch'laus—"

He took Spry by the arm and marched him out and down the garden path. There, by the gate, what should his eyes light upon but his own stolen tools! But by this time all power of astonishment was dried up within him. He just raised his eyes aloft, as much as to say, "Let the sky open and rain miracles!" and then and there he saw, coming down the road, the funeral that both he and the Parson had clean forgotten.

The corpse was an old man called 'Pollas Hockaday; and Sam Trewhella, a fish-curer that had married Hockaday's eldest daughter, walked next behind the coffin as chief mourner. My grandfather waited by the gate for the procession to come by, and with that Trewhella caught sight of him, and, says he, taking down the handkerchief from his nose—

"Well, you're a pretty fellow, I must say! What in thunder d'ee mean by not tolling the minute-bell?"

"Take 'en back," answers my grandfather, pointing to the coffin. "Take 'en back, 'co!"

"Eh?" says Trewhella. "Answer my question, I tell 'ee. You've hurt my feelings and the feelings of everyone connected with the deceased: and if this weren't not-azackly the place for it, I'd up and give you a dashed good hiding," says he.

"Aw, take 'en back," my grandfather goes on. "Take 'en back, my dears, and put 'en somewhere, cool and temporary! The grave's not digged, and the Parson's kidnapped, and the French be upon us, and down by the river ther's a furrin spy taking soundings at this moment! In the name of King George," said he, remembering that he was constable, "I command you all except the females to come along and collar 'en!"

WHILE THIS was going on, Sir, Bligh had found his boat— which he'd left by the shore— and was pulling up the river to work off his rage. Ne'er a thought had he, as he flounced through the churchyard, of the train of powder he dribbled behind him: but all the way he blew off steam, cursing Parson Polwhele

and the whole cloth from Land's End to Johnny Groats, and glowering at the very gates by the road as though he wanted to kick 'em to relieve his feelings. But when he reached his boat and began rowing, by little and little the exercise tamed him. With his flags and whitewash he'd marked out most of the lines he wanted for soundings: but there were two creeks he hadn't yet found time to explore— Porthnavas, on the opposite side, and the very creek by which we're sitting. So, as he came abreast of this one, he determined to have a look at it; and after rowing a hundred yards or so, lay on his oars, lit his pipe, and let his boat drift up with the tide.

The creek was just the same lonesome place that it is to-day, the only difference being that the pallace* at the entrance had a roof on it then, and was rented by Sam Trewhella—the same that followed old Hockaday's coffin, as I've told you. But above the pallace the woods grew close to the water's edge, and lined both shores with never a clearing till you reached the end, where the cottage stands now and the stream comes down beside it: in those days there wasn't any cottage, only a piece of swampy ground. I don't know that Bligh saw much in the scenery, but it may have helped to soothe his mind: for by-and-by he settled himself on the bottom-boards, lit another pipe, pulled his hat over his nose, and lay there blinking at the sky, while the boat drifted up, hitching sometimes in a bough and sometimes floating broadside-on to the current, until she reached this bit of marsh and took the mud very gently.

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*Fish-store.

After a while, finding she didn't move, Bligh lifted his head for a look about him and found that he'd come to the end of the creek. He put out a hand and felt the water, that was almost luke-warm with running over the mud. The trees shut him in; not a living soul was in sight; and by the quietness he might have been a hundred miles from anywhere. So what does my gentleman do but strip himself for a comfortable bathe.

He folded his clothes very neatly in the stern-sheets, waded out across the shallows as naked as a babe, and took to the water with so much delight that after a minute or so he must needs lie on his back and kick. He splashed away, one leg after the other, with his face turned towards the shore, and was just on the point of rolling over for another swim, when, as he lifted a leg for one last kick, his eyes fell on the boat. And there on the top of his clothes, in the stern of her, sat my grandfather sucking a pipe.

Bligh let down his legs and stood up, touching bottom, but neck-deep in water.

"Hi, you there!" he sings out.

"Wee, wee, parleyvou!" my grandfather answers, making use of pretty well all the French he knew.

"Confound you, Sir, for an impident dirty dog! What in the name of jiminy"— I can't give you, Sir, the exact words, for my grandfather could never be got to repeat 'em— "What in the name of jiminy d'ee mean by sitting on my clothes!"

"Wee, wee," my grandfather took him up, calm as you please. "You shocked me dreadful yesterday with your blasphemious talk: but now, seeing 'tis French, I don't mind so much. Take your time: but when you come out you go to prison. Wee, wee— preeson," says my grandfather.

"Are you drunk?" yells Bligh. "Get off my clothes this instant, you hobnailed son of a something-or-other!" And he began striding for shore.

"In the name of his Majesty King George the Third I charge you to come along quiet," says my grandfather, picking up a stretcher.

"Bligh, being naked and unarmed, casts a look round for some way to help himself. He was a plucky fellow enough in a fight, as I've said: but I leave you to guess what he felt like when to right and left of him the bushes parted, and forth stepped half-a-dozen men in black suits with black silk weepers a foot and a half wide tied in great bunches round their hats. These were Sam Trewhella, of course, and the rest of the funeral-party, that had left the coffin in a nice shady spot inside the Vicarage garden-gate, and come along to assist the law. They had brought along pretty nearly all the menkind of the parish beside: but these, being in their work-a-day clothes, didn't appear, and for a reason you'll learn by-and-by. All that Bligh saw was this dismal company of mourners backed by a rabble of school-children, the little ones lining the shore and staring at him fearsomely with their fingers in their mouths.

For the moment Bligh must have thought himself dreaming. But there they stood, the men in black and the crowd of children, and my grandfather with the stretcher ready, and the green woods so quiet all round. And there he stood up to the ribs in water, and the tide and his temper rising.

"Look here, you something-or-other yokels," he called out, "if this is one of your village jokes, I promise you shall smart for it. Leave the spot this moment, fetch that idiot out of the boat, and take away the children. I want to dress, and it isn't decent!"

"Mounseer," answers my grandfather, "I daresay you've a-done it for your country; but we've a-caught you, and now you must go to prison— wee, wee, to preeson," he says, lisping it in a Frenchified way so as to make himself understood.

Bligh began to foam. "The longer you keep up this farce, my fine fellows, the worse you'll smart for it! There's a magistrate in this parish, as I happen to know."

"There *was*," said my grandfather; "but we've strong reasons to believe he's been made away with."

"The only thing we could find of 'en," put in Arch'laus Spry, "was a shin-bone and a pint of ashes. I don't know if the others noticed it, but to my notion there was a sniff of brimstone about the premises; and I've always been remarkable for my sense of smell."

"You won't deny," my grandfather went on, "that you've been making a map of this here river; for here it is in your tail-coat pocket."

"You insolent ruffian, put that down at once! I tell you that I'm a British officer and a gentleman!"

"*And* a Papist," went on my grandfather, holding up a ribbon with a bullet threaded to it. ('Twas the bullet Bligh used to weigh out allowances with on his voyage in the open boat after the mutineers had turned him adrift from the *Bounty*, and he wore it ever after.) "See here, friends: did you ever know an honest Protestant to wear such a thing about him inside his clothes?"

"Whether you're a joker or a numskull is more than I can fathom," says Bligh; "but for the last time I warn you I'm a British officer, and you'll go to jail for this as sure as eggs."

"The question is, Will you surrender and come along quiet?"

"No, I won't," says Bligh, sulky as a bear; "not if I stay here all night!"

With that my grandfather gave a wink to Sam Trewhella, and Sam Trewhella gave a whistle, and round the point came Trewhella's sean-boat that the village lads had fetched out and launched from his store at the mouth of the creek. Four men pulled her with all their might; in the stern stood Trewhella's foreman, Jim Bunt, with his two-hundred-fathom net: and along the shore came running the rest of the lads to see the fun.

"Heva, heva!" yelled Sam Trewhella, waving his hat with the black streamers.

The sean-boat swooped up to Bligh with a rush, and then, just as he faced upon it with his fists up, to die fighting, it swerved off on a curve round him, and Jim Bunt began shooting the sean hand over hand like lightning. Then the poor man understood, and having no mind to be rolled up and afterwards tucked in a sean-net, he let out an oath, ducked his head, and broke for the shore like a bull. But 'twas no manner of use. As soon as he touched land a dozen jumped for him and pulled him down. They handled him as gentle as they could, for he fought with fists, legs, and teeth, and his language was awful: but my grandfather in his foresight had brought along a couple of wainropes, and within ten minutes they had my gentleman trussed, heaved him into the boat, covered him over, and were rowing him off and down the creek to land him at Helford quay.

BY THIS 'twas past noon; and at one o'clock, or a little before, Parson Polwhele come striding along home from Little Dinnis. He had tied a

handkerchief about his head to keep off the sun; his hands and knees were coated with earth; and he sweated like a furze-bush in a mist, for the footpath led through cornfields and the heat was something terrible. Moreover, he had just called the funeral to mind; and this and the damage he'd left at Little Dinnis fairly hurried him into a fever.

But worse was in store. As he drew near the Parsonage, he spied a man running towards him: and behind the man the most dreadful noises were sounding from the house. The Parson came to a halt and swayed where he stood.

"Oh, Calvin! Calvin!" he cried— for the man running was my grandfather— "don't try to break it gently, but let me know the worst!"

"Oh, blessed day! Oh, fearful and yet blessed day!" cries my grandfather, almost catching him in both arms. "So you're not dead! So you're not dead, the Lord be praised, but only hurt!"

"Hurt?" says the Parson. "Not a bit of it— or only in my feelings. Oh, 'tis the handkerchief you're looking at? I put that up against sunstroke. But whatever do these dreadful sounds mean? Tell me the worst, Calvin, I implore you!"

"Oh, as for that," says my grandfather cheerfully, "the Frenchman's the worst by a long way— not but what your good lady made noise enough when she thought you'd been made away with: and afterwards, when she went upstairs and, taking a glance out of window, spied a long black coffin laid out under the lilac bushes, I'm told you could hear her a mile away. But she've been weakening this half-hour: her nature couldn't keep it up: whereas the longer we keep that Frenchman, the louder he seems to bellow."

"Heaven defend us, Calvin!"— the Parson's eyes fairly rolled in his head— "are you gone clean crazed? Frenchman! What Frenchman?"

"The same that frightened Mrs. Polwhele, Sir, upon the coach. We caught him drawing maps of the river, and very nigh tucked him in Sam Trewhella's sean: and now he's in your tool-shed right and tight, and here's the key, Sir, making so bold, that you gave me this morning. But I didn't like to take him into the house, with your good lady tumbling out of one fit into another. Hark to 'en, now! Would you ever believe one man could make such a noise."

"Fits! My poor, dear, tender Mary having fits!" The Parson broke away for the house and dashed upstairs three steps at a time: and when she caught sight of him, Mrs. Polwhele let out a louder squeal than ever. But the next moment she was hanging round his neck, and laughing and sobbing by turns. And how long they'd have clung to one another there's no knowing, if it hadn't been for the language pouring from the tool-shed.

"My dear," said the Parson, holding himself up and listening, "I don't think that can possibly be a Frenchman. He's too fluent."

Mrs. Polwhele listened too, but after a while she was forced to cover her face with both hands. "Oh, Richard, I've often heard 'em described as gay, but— but they can't surely be so gay as all that!"

The Parson eased her into an armchair and went downstairs to the courtyard, and there, as you may suppose, he found the parish gathered.

"Stand back all of you," he ordered. "I've a notion that some mistake has been committed: but you had best hold yourselves ready in case the prisoner tries to escape."

"But, Parson dear, you're never going to unlock that door!" cried my grandfather.

"If you'll stand by me, Calvin," says the Parson, plucky as ginger, and up he steps to the very door, all the parish holding its breath.

He tapped once— no answer: twice— and no more answer than before. There was a small trap open in the roof and through this the language kept pouring with never a stop, only now and then a roar like a bull's. But at the third knock it died down to a sort of rumbling, and presently came a shout, "Who's there?"

"A clergyman and justice of the peace," answers the Parson.

"I'll have your skin for this!"

"But you'll excuse me—"

"I'll have your skin for this, and your blood in a bottle! I'm a British officer and a gentleman, and I'll have you stuffed and put in a glass case, so sure as my name's Bligh!"

"Bligh?" says the Parson, opening the door.

"Any relation to the Blighs of St. Tudy? Oh, no— it can't be!" he stammered, taken all aback to see the man stark naked on the threshold. "Why— why, you're the gentleman that called this morning!" he went on, the light breaking in upon him: "excuse me, I recognise you by— by the slight scar on your face."

WELL, SIR, there was nothing for Bligh to do— the whole parish staring at him— but to slip back into the shed and put on the clothes my grandfather handed in at the door: and while he was dressing the whole truth came out. I won't say that he took the Parson's explanations in a nice spirit: for he vowed to have the law on every one concerned. But that night he walked back to Falmouth and took the London coach. As for Helford River, 'twasn't charted that year nor for a score of years after. And now you know how this creek came by its name; and I'll say again, as I began, that a bad temper is an affliction, whoever owns it.

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17: The Trotting Cob

A Mystery of the Mia Mia Lagoon

"Vandorian"

Margaret Cox Taylor, 1864-1939

Evening News (Sydney) 9 July 1898

THE distant plains were bathed in the mellow light of a summer moon. Tall, slender saplings swayed gently in the balmy night wind, while, here and there, the skeleton form of a dead tree stretched its spectral limbs in rigid outline against the clear sky.

On a gentle rise, and under the shadow of a thick clump of trees, a group of drovers sat round a blazing log fire. One of them rose to pull the burning brands together.

'Ah! that's better,' said he, throwing on another log. 'My word! but there's a cold wind comin' up from the lagoon yonder, tho' it's so near Christmas.'

'It's a mis'rable place to my way o' thinkin'— even in the day time,' answered the oldest of the men, a drover known as Old Bob.

'It's a queer thing how a bad name sticks to a place just the same as it does to a man! Long as I can reckon back, the Mia Ma Lagoon were considered a unlucky place to camp,' and Big Jim glanced doubtfully at the swamp.

A chill air of sombre mystery seemed, in some intangible fashion, to pervade even the summer breeze that swept across its dark waters, yet but faintly stirred the mist which partly obscured them. The tall reeds on its margin rustled mournfully; the melancholy cry of a curlew came at regular intervals across the plains— otherwise the silence was unbroken.

'I never heard the rights of that yarn about the trottin' cob. You might tell it, Bob? Not that I believe in them kind of tales, myself,' and the youngest of the three drovers assumed an air of superior wisdom.

'Mebbe you do— mebbe you don't, my young jackeroo!'

The sceptic moved uneasily under this undeserved ignominy, and Bob added, 'But you mark my words, and believe what you see.'

'Don't mind hiin, Bob; he's only a youngster. Go ahead!' and the burly Jim gave a good-natured laugh

'Well, boys, it's a matter of migh on five and thirty years since I left off working on the Mia Mia run,' and Old Bob stared thoughtfully at the glowing embers. Once more he saw himself, young and smart, tall and straight of limb.

'I was five or six and twenty then, but I'd been on the station since I was a bit of a nipper; so it seemed as if I belonged to the place. 'Bout a year before I left, Mr. Edward Dawson, of Koolong, came over to spend Christmas at Mia Mia. And what sort of a horse did he ride?'

'A bit of a flyer, I s'pose,' interjected the youthful Johnson.

'Satan by name, likewise natur,' and the old drover blew a great cloud of smoke out of his mouth, and watched it curl round in little spiral columns in the air. 'Dawson himself were a good looking chap, but very dark, and with a. touch of colored blood In him, so they saia. Howsoever, he owned a big station, and them was good times, so he comes over to Mia Mia to look for a wife. And Miss Katie Heatherton was the one he'd set his mind on having.'

'Good looking, I reckon?' questioned Jim, who considered himself an authority.

'Pretty as a pictur,' answered Bob, with a mournful tenderness in his voice, 'with bright, shiny kind o' hair, and eyes— Ah! I don't know what color they were, for I never rightly looked at 'em. But it was her ways that got over a chap. You don't see 'em with them soft ways in these times!'

'It's the bicycle what spoils 'em— and the bloomers,' said Johnson in a melancholy tone. He had never seen an offend-female thus mounted and attired. Still, he saw the newspapers sometimes, and he liked to be up to date.

'Well, Dawson, he sets his mind on Miss Katie, but she never liked him. Besides, she had another sweetheart, a soldier chap who was up from Sydney. I mind him well, a better man in every way than Dawson—' and old Bob paused a moment. 'But he hadn't much money, and the old man favored the rich sweetheart. Captain Osborne— that was his name— took things quietly enough, howsoever; he knew he was on the winnin' horse!'

There was silence for a few minutes, for to the old rover it was the one tragedy in a humble, commonplace life.

'Throw on some more wood, boys,' he said presently, 'for I'm that cold I believe I've got a touch of the shakes,' and he shivered as if with ague. Two lean cattle dogs were stretched out in front of the fire, and one of them whimpered slightly, then rolled over. The other sat up with his ears cocked as if listening, and looked hard at the belt of timber beyond the swamp.

'I did think as how I heard a horse,' said Bob slowly; 'but it must be fancy.'

'Some of the cattle stirring, maybe,' and the others listened for a moment, too, but not a sound broke the still night air.

'Well to make a long story short,' resumed Bob, ' 'bout a couple o' days before Christmas I had orders to saddle up early. There was plenty of shootin' here then, and they was going to have a day with the guns. The ladies didn't go out at all that day, for in the evenin' there was to be a dance at the homestead. Off they started in the mornin', and what staggered me was to see Dawson ridin' with Captin Osborne as jolly and pleasant as if they was the best of friends.'

'Did they have a good day? It seems a pity to let a bit o' courtin' spoil a day with the guns,' said the matter-of-fact Johnson.

'That's neither here nor there,' retorted the old drover, rather sharply. 'Well, Dawson was riding his black horse as usual, a vicious brute, too; but for looks or pace there wasn't another like him in the district! Trot! I b'lieve I'd know the sound of his hoofs among a hundred! Ah! Well, Dawson went off side by side with the Captin', who was on a big grey mare of Miss Katie's.

' "No racin', mind," she says, smilin' away at her soldier sweetheart. "I won't have my mare knocked up; and you're not such a very good rider, either!" and she laughs in a saucy kind o' way at him. I was standin' quite near, and when they all got away Miss Katie turned to me. "Bob," she says, "I wish you had been going with them. "Yes, miss," I says, though I didn't rightly know what she meant; but without another word she went inside. And the next time I saw Captin' Osborne he was lyin' under them trees,' and the old drover pointed to a thick clump of timber beyond the margin of the swamp, 'shot through the heart.'

'Foul play, I reckon,' said Jim, who had heard the tale before. 'Ay! murder!' replied Bob, and his voice sounded unsteady; 'but, bless you, they never proved it. They said as his gun might have gone off accidental like, and they argyed this way and that; so Dawson was let off; but no one cared for him before this, and after— well, he never held up his head agen.'

'Came to a bad end, I believe,' put in one of the listeners.

'Ah, he never had a day's luck— broke his neck takin' a fence. His horse had to be shot. They didn't find them for a day or two— and— the dingoes had been there!'

There was a shudder— but no one spoke for a moment. The sudden scream of some startled night bird made the drovers rise to their feet.

'It's time to turn in, boys,' said Big Jim. 'I've no notion of waitin' up on the chance o' seein' Dawson on his black cob! And there's somethin' queer about this place— Why,Bob, what's up?'

'He brought bad luck, living— he broke her heart; but its worse luck to them as sees him— now,' and Bob paused. He had spoken with difficulty, and his eyes were like those of a man who speaks and walks in a dream.

How white the moonlight beat upon the plains! How still the summer night! Yet the sound, clear, and sharp, came ringing through the silence.

'I could swear I heard a horse trottin',' and Johnson the incredulous spoke in an awestruck tone. Nearer and nearer it came. There was no mistaking the sharp metallic clank, and the men stood silently, straining their eyes as if to pierce through the void of space. Big Jim was the first to speak, and in spite of himself his voice shook.

'Seems as if a horse were going like the devil through that low scrub; but I'm bothered if I can see anything!'

'Nor me 'either,' said Johnson, in a hoarse whisper; 'but I hear him plain enough.'

Just then the dogs whimpered, and one of them shivered, and gave a dismal howl. It was Bob's dog and he touched its head.

'Quiet, Beauty; it's all right, old girl!' His voice sounded thick and strange, and his breathing was labored. Suddenly he threw up his arms.

'My God! there he goes! I knew it was Dawson— dead these thirty years; but— but— I knew we'd meet again— the devil and his horse, ha! ha! He spoilt her life— but— we'll meet—' and the old man fell back in a sort of stupor.

When the faint grey dawn broke in the eastern sky the light showed the haggard faces of the living— the quiet stillness of the dead.

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18: A Dangerous Game

Guy Thorne

C. Ranger Gull, 1876-1923

World's News (Sydney) 10 June 1916

IT WAS half-past nine. Dinner was just over. The great Cricket dance, to which all the county were invited, would not begin till ten-thirty.

Walter Tremayne had stayed behind when the men left the dining-room. He had had a short conversation with his host, Lord Albcourt. Now he had passed through the blue drawing-room, and was standing by a long, open window which led on to the terrace.

The famous amateur batsman waited; there was a flush upon his face, his eyes were very bright. Then he turned swiftly, hearing what he had been expecting.

Lady Edith Groome came into the drawing room. She was dressed for the ball. In her hair, the color of ripe corn, was a star of sapphires. Her dress was of old-ivory satin, and she wore a cloak of sapphire-colored velvet lined with white brocade, on which here and there meandered a thread of gold.

"Come, Edith!" he said in a low voice.

Together they passed out upon the terrace into the moonlight, the girl's little shoes of gold and ivory making a soft sound upon the marble as Tremayne led her to a broad stairway leading down into the garden.

They went down a path of white, powdered gravel to where, in a little amphitheatre of turf, was a pillared dome of marble— one of those Italian summer-houses dedicated to Venus. Before it a fountain laughed, like a young girl at her own sweet thoughts. By the side of the fountain was a rustic bench.

"Dearest," he said, with quick, passionate utterance, "I have spoken to your father."

She did not answer him. The lids drooped over her eyes—he saw the long, black lashes resting on cheeks that were pale.

"You know why, Edith— why I have spoken to your father?"

She answered him, and her voice was like a sob. "Because "

"Because, dearest, I have dared"— his foot ground into the gravel with a crumbling sound— "yes, I have dared to hope that"— his voice died away for a moment and then he made an immense effort— "that you will marry me."

She never said a word, but stood there like some lovely statue, till he took her in his arms and knew that the prize was his at last.

The ball was held at the end of the famous "Cricket "Week" at the Cathedral city of Cottaford, a summer fixture second in importance to Canterbury alone. Lord Albcourt in youth and middle-age had been one of England's greatest bats. He was the Grand Old Man of cricket, and his eleven, comprising some of the

most celebrated living players, had this day defeated Sir John St. Just's team by three wickets and 110 runs.

It was all owing to the batting of Walter Tremayne, and a question which had been agitating the whole of England seemed on the way towards settlement.

At the moment, the country was divided in its opinion as to whether supreme batting excellence was of more avail in the winning of a match than supreme bowling excellence. The sporting columns of the newspapers talked of nothing else.

And now, at the end of the Cottaford week, with all England in suspense, the batsmen faction, headed by Tremayne, had won!

It was an hour or triumph for Lord Albcourt and his following, and Walter Tremayne was the hero of it.

The fact of the engagement became known about midnight.

It was while Edith and Walter were dancing Strauss's perfect waltz, "*Das treues liebes Herz*." that, people began to look at them with dawning comprehension in their eyes. Lord and Lady Albcourt were radiant. The news had been whispered to a few friends— the word had echoed throughout the great ballroom. Rumor had grown into certainty, until everyone there knew that Walter Tremayne and Lady Edith Groome were pledged.

By one o'clock men were pressing up to Tremayne and shaking him quietly by the hand. "I say, double triumph, what?"— "What price the bowling faction now, Walter?" All the enthusiastic young men of the day, whom Tremayne had led to victory after victory, swarmed round him with whole-hearted loyalty.

It was just at a quarter-past one that Sir John St. Just came into the ballroom. He had not dined with the other men; he had not been seen till now. A set of lancers was just over, and people were flocking to the supper rooms.

At first he gave an impression of extreme fragility, though he was obviously of great height. His hair was of a dead, lustreless black, and cropped closely to his head. His face was the color of old ivory, yet it was a natural complexion, and not the sallowness of ill-health. A tiny black moustache was half hidden by a narrow, beak-like nose which seemed to start out from the long, melancholy face. Under straight black brows eyes of a Spanish darkness burned with a steady intensity which never varied and was always disconcerting to those at whom Sir John St. Just looked.

Celebrated figure as he was in English cricket, St. Just was in no sense popular. He stood for bowling— he was the most perfect exponent of bowling cricket had ever known, but he was a symbol, nothing more. A man of forty, he never went into society of any sort, and was quite indifferent to popular applause. He had recently been captain of England— it was said the most disliked captain that the country had ever known. When he was not actually

playing cricket, he lived a secluded life in his country house in Kent, seeing no one. Mystery always seemed associated with him, and really all that people knew was the fact that he had made cricket his absolute god.

As St. Just came into the ballroom, Lady Edith was crossing it with her mother.

"Ah, Lady Edith," he said, "I am afraid that I have lost my chance!"

"And what was your chance, Sir John?" the countess said— she rather liked St. Just.

"Oh, Lady Albcourt, simply that Lady Edith promised me one dance to-night, and I am afraid I am too late."

"A promise is a promise, mother," Edith said happily; "no one is dancing how, Sir John— shall we have a turn all by ourselves?"

"I will leave you to settle it together," Lady Albcourt said, with a tap of her fan upon Sir John's shoulder.

She went away. The girl looked towards the band. "Shall we make them play for us?" she said, her eyes sparkling, the happiness of her whole being ringing out in the words.

"No, no," he said; "let us sit it out, shall we?"

The burning black eyes ranged round the empty ballroom.

"There, if you will, Lady Edith," he said.

"Oh yes, quite; there is a lovely view of the park from the conservatory. And the moon's up, too!"

When they were upon a settee among the palms and orchids of the conservatory, Edith suddenly felt a little embarrassed. She realised that Sir John had come down to the dance so late that he could hardly know what all the other guests knew.

"Sir John," she said, after a little hesitation, "I want you to congratulate me. I want to tell you something."

The reply startled her. "I want to tell you something! This is my chance! This is my hour!"

"Your hour? I don't understand!" The girl was not frightened, but offended, by the intensity of the man's voice. The long, capable hands, which could make the cricket ball swerve, dance, shoot as if it was a live thing, were clasping and unclasping. His eyes burnt like fire.

"Yes, my hour. This week I have been beaten."

Edith rose to the occasion. "Dear me, Sir John!" she said, "I hope not. By whom?"

The man almost growled. Edith became a little frightened.

"Don't play with me," he said. "You know perfectly well that the batsmen have triumphed over the bowlers for the moment."

''Was it to tell me that very obvious fact that you brought me here?"

"No," The voice dropped a full tone. "I brought you here to tell you that I adore you. You must marry me, Lady Edith. With you, I can prove to all the world that cricket—"

The girl rose from the settee. "Must, Sir John?" she said coldly.

He leapt up and caught her by the wrists. "Yes, he said, "must. You are free, you are..."

"My dear Sir John, when you have done holding my wrists I should like to tell you something."

St. Just straightened himself. "Lady Edith," he said, "I beg your pardon, indeed I beg your pardon. I was carried out of myself."

"I suppose you were, whatever that may mean. Never mind, I forgive you. I very nearly said 'Unhand me, Villain!' but I won't now. You see, Sir John, the point is that I am engaged to Walter Tremayne."

FOUR DAYS after the end of the Cricket Week and the dance at Albcourt Towers, Walter Tremayne entered the Willow Club in Piccadilly, and was given a letter by the hall porter

It was from Sir John St. Just, and made a curious proposal.

"Let us put the question between us to a decisive test. I hardly think the conditions at Albcourt were fair to either of us. Come down to my place in Kent; I hate got my own private practising grounds in the park, there is no better wicket in England. I'll bet you a hundred pounds that I will prove my bowling superior to your batting, and the whole controversy shall be decided upon the issue. What do you say?"

There could only be one answer to such a challenge. Tremayne accepted instantly, and two days afterwards went down to St. Just's house, Haggart Park, some four miles from Albcourt Towers.

Arriving about six, he found a gloomy house in the middle of a vast park surrounded by walls. He dined with St. Just, and it was not a pleasant feast. There were few servants in the great barrack of a house, and it seemed to the young man that they were all melancholy, furtive, and unduly silent. The conversation was strained; the dinner was bad, the service perfunctory.

Afterwards, in the smoking-room, St. Just's private professional cricketer was Shown in— a bullet-headed, sly-looking fellow.

Tremayne was surprised to find in this man— Driscoll by name— a former north country professional, who was dismissed from his county for deliberately accepting bribes and selling a match, and who had subsequently served a term of penal servitude for an abominable fraud quite unconnected with cricket.

He said nothing as St. Just gave directions about the morrow, but when the man had gone he turned to his host.

"That is Driscoll!" he said, without any preamble— "that's Driscoll, who used to play for Northumbrian remember the scandal very well. He's a ruffian, St. Just. What do you have him here for?"

"I saw you recognised him, Tremayne. He used to be the best all-round professional of his day. Now I use him as a ground man. I took him out of charity— the fellow would have starved else— and, after all, cricket is cricket."

"Yes, when it's played," Tremayne replied drily as he said good-night and sought his room.

TREMAYNE looked round him.

"By Jove," he said, "what a perfect place!"

He stood in the centre of five acres of greensward, flat as a billiard table and shaved like a tennis lawn. On every side of this private ground huge elms and oaks in full foliage barred the outer world.

St. Just nodded. He, like his guest, was in a sweater, white trousers, and cricket boots. "I spent a lot of money on this ground," he remarked, "but I think I am going to get full value for it now!"

Right in the centre of the private ground was the pitch upon which the supremacy of bat and ball was to be decided. The wicket was already prepared, the balls on the three stumps. At the howling end was a single stump with the two creases plainly marked in white.

Let us have a look at the pitch," Tremayne said.

"No, wait a minute till Driscoll comes— ah, here he is!"

Both men turned and saw the professional coming through the belt of trees which surrounded the house. He was leading a donkey, which drew a little cart.

"Well, here he comes," Tremayne said, "but what on earth, is the cart for?"

"Your bag is in it for one thing." said St. Just, "and the balls."

"The balls?"

"Yes, I am going to bowl you twenty-four balls."

"I know, St. Just, but..." Tremayne suddenly stood quite still. The sunlight which poured upon this retired place glinted on something which was pointed straight at him.

It was the barrel of an automatic pistol. The face behind it was terrible. Tremayne was a brave man, but he knew fear now.

"What do you mean by this, St. Just?" he cried hoarsely.

"Just our match. Tremayne; that is all. Only we are going to play it under conditions which I did not specify."

"Get on, can't you?" came in a rough voice from the left, and there was a resounding thwack as Driscoll brought up the donkey cart.

In the cart was Tremayne's leather bag, and a large wicker waste-paper basket filled with cricket balls. Driscoll was carrying something in the curve of his arm... Tremayne saw what it was at once— a repeating rifle.

He became calm. "I see," he said shortly; "assassination?"

"Don't be a fool, Tremayne," St. Just answered petulantly, and like a child. "Get out his bat, Driscoll. Now then, Tremayne, you see the wicket?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, we will inspect it together." The automatic pistol was levelled at his head by an unshaking hand, as Walter walked up to within two yards of the stumps.

"Queer color," he said, his brain working like a machine, alert for any chance.

St. Just gave him no chance at all. He stood three yards away and laughed. The laughter echoed horribly from the remote trees.

"Exactly, Tremayne; those three stumps are not wood at all; they are dynamite!"

Walter remained rigid where he stood. "Yes, dynamite! It one of my twenty-four balls hits your wicket— you vanish, my boy!"

Turning like lightning, Tremayne was about to leap upon the maniac, when a croaking voice came from the right. Driscoll, the ex-convict, held the rifle to his shoulder. "I am a crack shot. Mr. Tremayne," he said.

There was a horrible, tense silence. Sir John broke it.

"Shall we begin?" he said. Then Walter nodded. "Fair play?" he asked.

"Absolutely fair," was the reply. "If you can keep your wicket up for twenty-four balls, then you will be as safe as if you never came here."

St. Just turned on his heel, and ran lightly to the other end of the pitch. Driscoll moved out to cover point, his rifle on his arm. The waste-paper basket containing twenty-four balls was at the bowling end.

Sir John St. Just selected one, tossed it up into the air, and laughed as he did so.

"You will call 'Play' when you are ready, Tremayne," he said.

Walter Tremayne had captained England; he had been the last hope of many a famous match. Yet never had he felt so absolutely confident of himself as now. There was a swift revulsion of feeling; the blood ran red in his veins. He was gambling his own skill against death! He looked at the sinister stumps close to him. And then he laughed. Death, sudden, dreadful, irremediable, stood there, glistening yellow-purple in the sun. He did not care a scrap!

Power, the god-like sense of power, that comes to all men who do, was with him now as he called "Play!"

He had faced St. Just's bowling many times before, but he knew that every nerve had to be awake, his brain must work with lightning speed.

The first ball was a "googlie"— slow and high in flight. St. Just suggested by his action that it would break from the off. As every cricketer knows, the difficulty of playing a googlie consists in the fact that it generally breaks in a different direction from that which is suggested by the bowler's action.

Tremayne thought with lightning speed. Hand and brain worked together as he countered his insane adversary's manoeuvre. The ball did break from the off, and he easily cut it far down the field.

"One!" St. Just shouted as he took up another ball, and his voice was as hoarse and inhuman as the cawing of some rook in the great elm trees which bounded the park.

The next ball was worthy of an ex-captain of England. It was an incredibly swift half volley, pitched at the right spot and coming to the bat like a bullet from a pistol.

There was a sharp click as the best bats-man in England stepped forward, and met it on the upper part of the willow, blocking it with confident ease.

Then came the third ball. It was a deadly fast "yorker." The break was infinitesimal, but the "spin" was marvellous. The ball torched the ground, and at the touch seemed enormously accelerated. It skimmed the bails by the breadth of a sheet of paper, and went rolling far away to the end of the ground.

Tremayne's whole body suddenly became wet. The sweat poured from his skin, both hands trembled as he walked round the wicket —it had been so near, so deadly near!

A mighty rage came over him; he saw red. He grasped his bat in his hands and rushed down the pitch, carrying it over his shoulder like a club, rearing as he went, resolved to kill the sneering fiend who was putting him to such shameful agony.

But within five yards of St. Just, Tremayne stopped with a jerk. There was a loud explosion. The bat he brandished was twisted from his hands; and as he stooped to recover it he heard something like a singing wasp go past his ear.

He stood up to see the little shining circle of the pistol barrel.

"Please don't interrupt our match, Tremayne," came in a horrible chuckle from the bowling stump. "You have got your chance, either take it or—"

Walter was beaten. He walked slowly back to his wicket.

"Play!" he said again.

Never before in his life, never afterwards, did the best batsman England has yet known experience six balls like those which assailed him now.

Well had St. Just been called the "Demon Bowler." There was an almost devilish ingenuity in the methods of attack. It was not a mere contest of skill; it was a mental duel in which brain met brain— a supreme fight of the batsman against the bowler, when the stakes were death. Walter was fighting for his life, for his life and Edith! The glove upon his left hand was wringing wet; he saw

nothing of the lovely summer day. He heard nothing but the monotonous croak from the other end of the pitch, the mad chuckling "Play!"

It was at the end of the third over. He was leaning on his bat when he heard a strange, thundering noise. Languidly he raised his head, and saw two people galloping on horseback towards the pitch.

One of them— it was a girl in a long, dark green habit— waved a handkerchief, and he heard a cheery hail.

In fifteen seconds more, Lady Edith Groome had pulled up her cob.

"I have only just heard that you and Sir John were fighting out the great question," she cried merrily. "Sir John, how are you? Walter, how dare you not tell me! I should never have known if it was not for father." Her voice suddenly rose to a warning shout. "Father, be careful, you will spoil the pitch!"

The unfortunate Lord Albcourt, no good horseman at any time, had mounted a rather fresh young mare from the stables. Plunging after Lady Edith, the mare had taken the bit in her teeth, and the veteran of cricket was lying forward on the saddle with his arms round her neck.

Walter saw the imminent catastrophe as the mare reared at the sight of the wicket, and plunged down upon it with a crash.

As the pawing hoofs came down, everything flashed away.

He knew that this was death— extinction.

"OH, my dear boy, that maniac, that horrible maniac!"

Walter slowly opened his eyes. The dreadful cricket ground had disappeared; he was lying back in a deck chair upon the terrace of Sir John's house. Standing by him were Lady Edith Groome and Lord Albcourt.

"I don't understand," Walter said faintly. "I— the horse came down upon the stumps of dynamite, I thought—"

A thick and deferential voice interrupted. Driscoll was standing by, touching the cap upon his bullet head.

" 'Adn't a chance to tip you the wink, Mr. Tremayne, sir, but that there wicket was not dynamite at all. Sir John, 'e did 'ave some dynamite stumps made, but I looked after 'em. They're in the hay-loft now, where I put 'em from the first. You wouldn't 'ave come to no 'arm, Mr. Tremayne, sir, even if you 'adn't turned Sir John's bowling so brilliant."

At that, life, and anger too, returned to Walter.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he shouted, "you watched me there, undergoing agony...."

"No, sir," said the ex-professional, "batting magnificent, If I may say so, sir."

"And you knew all the time—"

"That Sir John was certain to go off his chump in a day or two, and meanwhile he'd given me an 'undred pounds! And, after all, Mr. Tremayne, sir, I hid them real dynamites—"

"Well, give me your hand," said Lord Albcourt, holding out his, "for, after all, you are not such a bad fellow at heart, and for a hundred pounds many a poor beggar has done worse. Anyway, come round to-morrow, and I will see what we can do by way of encouragement," he concluded, as Driscoll, his face bathed in smiles, moved away from the terrace.

"Let's forget all about it now, Walter darling!" said Lady Edith. "St. Just is halfway to the county asylum by now, in one of his own motors. Bats have won!"

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19: Hugh and Cry

A Tale of Two Christmas Tides

E. Everett-Green

1856-1932

West Australian (Perth) 24 Dec 1904

"WELL, I'm hanged if I do!" spoke Hugh Wildhawk, rising suddenly to his feet, and casting the end of his cigar into the fire.

His elder companion regarded him with an indulgent smile.

The well-knit, well-groomed soldierly figure was good to look at. The rather thin face, clean shaven and lighted by a pair of brilliant golden-brown eyes, was both singular and attractive, if not strictly handsome. Wildhawk was a fine soldier, with just that touch of daring and reckless courage which had probably won for his ancestors their name, and an enthusiasm for his profession which had won for him many prognostications of a distinguished career.

Charles Warner was one of his warmest friends. He was a well-to-do bachelor, thirty-five years old, seven years the senior of the cavalry captain. They had been at school together— big boy and little boy; Wildhawk had fagged for him, and he had helped to break him in to the discipline of school, after the spoiling of an adoring mother of her only child. He had never lost sight of his one-time fag. His pleasant rooms in Half Moon street were always open to him; in fact, he liked Wildhawk to make his headquarters there when on leave.

The soldier had no near relatives; his mother had died years ago. He was welcome at many houses; but he had a preference for Warner's society, which the elder man found gratifying. Warner made him free of his own world. Wildhawk's civilian friends were chiefly those to whom Warner had in the first place introduced him.

"It's awfully good of you and Lady Oakshott to think of it," spoke the soldier, quieting down after a few turns up and down the comfortable room; "but heiress-hunting is a thing I've always despised from the bottom of my heart. My horse and my sword and my profession have been enough for me all this while. I can't afford to marry a poor woman— even if I cared for her— and I won't marry a rich one. That's the case in a nutshell."

"Oh, all right; keep your hair on, old chappie. I don't know that I did anything to make you flare up like a sky rocket. We are both going to Garth Gowan to spend Christmas— that's settled; and if our hostess does send you a message that she has a golden-haired, charming American or Canadian girl there, Miss Avis C. Easterfield, with the reputation of a million to her banking account, I don't see that you need put yourself about. Girls with big fortunes can pick and choose. She's not likely to fall into your mouth like a ripe plum, though you cavalry officers do think yourselves such wonderful fine fellows."

Wildhawk laughed, his serenity of temper completely restored.

"Perhaps I was a bit of an ass; but I thought I read between the lines. Lady Oakshott has always been awfully kind to me. I like Garth Gowan better than any country house I know—"

"So do I— worse luck. For this is the last time we are likely to spend Christmas there— or any other season."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, their lease runs out in March, and they are not going to renew it. The place is too big for them now that all the girls are married, and the sons out in the world. It's a bit ramshackle, with all its charm, and I'm afraid we shall hear next that it's going to be pulled down and cut up for building lots! That's the fate of old properties in these degenerate days. So make the best of your last visit, my boy; and if a pretty heiress happens to be thrown in, don't turn up your nose at her without so much as a glance! Take the good the gods send you— and be thankful!"

"Well, I'll gladly go to Garth Gowan; but as for the heiress, I needn't tell you, Warner, that this isn't a time for thinking of marriage. You know I am expecting my orders soon. I told you I had volunteered for special service in West Africa. It's going to be a bit hot there; but I know the country and I know the people! It's the sort of thing I like. Married officers don't care so much about it. It's work for us young ones, and I'm on!"

The Wildhawk blood was working. Warner regarded him with approving and admiring eyes. He half wished he were ten years younger, and had had some training, that he might volunteer for service. Sometimes his idle, pleasant life wearied him. But to go with his friend he knew was impossible.

When Warner and his companion arrived at Garth Gowan upon the next evening, it was to find the old house lighted up from end to end, and filled with pleasant company, resolved that Christmas should be a season of rejoicing, and kept all the more merrily from the fact that it might probably be the last that many of them would spend in this delightful old house.

The great baronial hall was the gathering place at dusk; and it was there that Wildhawk saw for the first time the handsome golden-haired girl, who from her rich dress, her circle of admirers, and the easy confidence of her address, he knew instantly for Miss Easterfield, even before the formula of introduction had passed between them. She was attractive— there was no doubt about that. Her wonderful hair grew distractingly; its crisp waves setting off the clear fairness of her creamy complexion, and the delicate oval of the charming face. Her eyes were vividly blue, and filled with mischievous laugh-ing light. There was just the soupcon of a twang in her utterance— not enough to spoil it, but suficient to give it a piquancy and verve that was rather fetching. She seemed to have heard of Wildhawk. Evidently she was favourable to army men. She engrossed him in

talk for an appreciable time before she was called off elsewhere; and Wildhawk, who was familiar enough with his hostess to play the part of son of the house, looked about him to see if any of the company wanted attention.

Thus it came about that his eyes fell upon a young girl sitting alone in a shadowy corner. She had no tea; and the gay hubbub and chatter of the shift-ing throng seemed to have left her stranded alone. Wildhawk instantly secured tea and cakes, and made his way across to her. She looked young— insignificant— shy; perhaps this was her first visit to a country house. Perhaps she felt out of it. Wildhawk spoke to her in pleasant friendly fashion, brought his own tea and some more refresh-ment to the dim corner.

"I'm as hungry as a hunter; we only got a snack of lunch, and the drive from the station has given me the appetite of a wolf. I feel like making a good square meal, and I trust you do, too. I hope you don't mind my invading your comfortable corner like this, but it seemed the only way of securing peace and comfort."

She smiled in friendly fashion. When she spoke her voice was low and musical, with a little intonation which just suggested an echo of Miss Easterfield's. Now that he came to look at her he saw that she was pretty. Her face was very delicate in its contours, and lacked colour; but the lips were red and showed curves indicative of sweetness and generosity. Her dusky hair had something of the crisp beauty of the golden-haired heiress, and after they had talked awhile, he suddenly asked:

"Are you not a relation of Miss Easterfield's?"

"Yes— her cousin. We go about together. She wants somebody with her. She is charming— at least, I think so. You cannot think what she has been to me. I owe her more than I can ever say. I do want her to be happy!"

She looked across at the beautiful girl, the centre of a group of admirers, and a lovely light came into her eyes. They seemed fairly to shine.

"She is sure to make a great success," said Wildhawk heartily. "She is very beautiful, and they say very rich also."

It was not on this occasion, but on another soon after, for he and the dark-haired girl struck up a friendship very quickly, that she told him something of their history.

"People wonder sometimes at one of us being so rich and the other having nothing; but it was because our grand-father disinherited his younger son for making a marriage of which he disapproved. So everything went to Avis's father, and from him to her. Our two fathers were somewhat estranged; but Avis and I— never. We loved one another always, and would be friends, let the elders say what they liked. A few years ago we were both left orphans; but Avis could not touch her money till she was twenty-four. And it is tied up rather tightly— the capital, I mean— as it is. But there was the accumulation of interest; and she has

a large income. You must not think that she is selfish— that she does not care— "

She stopped, realising that she was talking of private affairs to one who was a comparative stranger; but he understood and smiled.

"I see that she takes good care of you— which is as it should be. She is more fitted to fight the battle of life than you— not that it ought to be a very hard battle for either of you— I hope."

His eyes were very kind. He liked this little shy creature with the soft rippling hair and big dark appealing eyes. She was small, and not over-strong. People, he fancied, somewhat overlooked her to pay court to the heiress. Avis Easterfield was certainly very attractive, but Crystal was the one who appealed to him most.

"It's a pretty name," he said when first he heard it. "I think you like curious names over your side of the Pond."

"Perhaps we do— Yes, Crystal is not bad; but I suppose I was a very fretful child, for I got the sobriquet of 'Cry,' or 'Cry Baby,' and that is not very attractive, is it?"

"Well, my name is Hugh," spoke Wildhawk, with a laugh; "so between us we make up a Hugh and Cry!"

They had a good many little jokes together by this time. He generally took her into dinner. They skated hand-in-hand over the smooth, well-kept ice of the private water of Garth Gowan. Both the American girls were proficient in this graceful exercise, and Wildhawk, who had passed the tests at Grindelwald and San Moritz, was able to compete with them better than any other mem-ber of the company.

Christmas Eve found them skating merrily to the strains of a band gathered round an immense fire lighted for them and the non-skaters. He was flying through the frosty air with Avis now. The brilliant hue of her fair cheek rivalled that of the ruby velvet she wore, while the delicate silver fox round her throat, and surmounting her golden hair seemed just the finishing touch to her dainty perfection.

"I am so glad you like Crystal " spoke the heiress, impulsively. "I do not know how it is that so many people seem to fight shy of her. She is the dearest little creature in creation! But she is so shy! How I have badgered her for it! But it is no use. She was made so. I am so glad somebody appreciates her at last."

Wildhawk found that he liked to talk about Crystal with one who admired and appreciated her. Lady Oakshott, and even his friend Warner, had both seemed to seek to detach him sometimes from the side of his quiet little companion. Warner had even given him a word of friendly warning.

"My dear fellow, don't you turn that little girl's head. You fail perhaps to understand that you are rather an attractive young fellow, and you do seek her

out a bit markedly. Don't give her a heartache just for your own amusement. It would not be like you."

And Lady Oakshott had once said laughingly, "Why not the other cousin— the golden one? I am not one to advocate marrying for money; but why not take the old farmer's advice— go where money is?"

But Avis talked openly of Crystal's perfections, and Wildhawk found himself listening greedily. He had never liked the golden-haired girl as well as to-day, when she set herself to talk of her cousin.

THAT NIGHT there was high revelry through Garth Gowan. There was a tenants' ball, and a monster Christmas tree, and tableaux vivants, and all the neighbourhood was feasted and entertained. Open house was kept, and all flocked thither, for it was known that it was the last Christmas that the Oakshotts would spend there, and nobody wanted to miss it, or to be absent when the family was toasted just as the Christmas bells rang out their peal of peace and joy and goodwill.

Was it chance, or was it purpose on his part that brought Crystal and Wildhawk together at that moment of strong emotion? They were together, and they were alone— in the sense that a little space separated them from the a excited company who were crying the names of Sir John and Lady Oakshott and their family in turn, waving their glasses, and making the very rafters ring with acclamation.

Wildhawk suddenly turned to his companion. His golden brown eyes were alight. There was subdued excitement in his manner.

"How I wish," he suddenly exclaimed, "that next Christmas you and I might be together at Garth Gowan, Crystal— that we might have another Christmas here—together!"

Without quite knowing what he did, he held out his hands, and she put hers into them. Her face was flushed from brow to chin. Her lips were quivering between smiles and tears. He was moved almost out of his self-command, which was not wont to desert him.

"May I wish you a very happy Christmas, Crystal?" he asked; and looking up he noted the great bough of mistletoe hanging overhead. A light leaped into his eyes— was it of laughter— or of what?

"You must not expect me to forego my privilege to-night," he said, and the next minute he had just touched her soft cheek with his lips.

It was like the match to the train. The veil fell from his eyes. He loved this girl. He, whose duty at this time was to his country and Queen, had fallen in love. If she had no love for him— heaven help him to bear it. If she had— heaven help them both!

She was gone like a shadow at this moment; but her presence filled his whole being that night, and all the next day, when she seemed rather to fight shy of him, and he had to manoeuvre somewhat cleverly to secure the place by her in church. They looked over the same book; their voices blended in psalm and hymn; and a curious sense of peace fell upon Wildhawk, he scarcely knew why.

The day following skating was still the favourite sport. It was bank holiday, and all the houses round had their contingent of guests, and there was no ice like that of Garth Gowan. So the lake was crowded; and perhaps this— or the slight rise in temperature— was the cause of the catastrophe; for with a sudden report and succession of detonations almost like a volley of musketry, the sheet of shining ice cracked and splintered, and despite the pell-mell rush for the banks, numbers of persons were immersed, and a scene of the wildest confusion ensued.

Wildhawk was in the thick of the fray. He had been skating with Avis Easterfield at the moment of the catastrophe; and her presence of mind had been equal to his own. They had shot away from the struggling crowd to the opposite side of the lake, where, if the ice were thinner, the pressure was far less.

In common with some score of skaters they had reached land, and instantly Wildhawk had flung off his skates and his heavy boots, and seizing a coil of rope which was lying ready for emergency, and pushing a ladder before him, he had made straight across the quaking ice in the direction of those struggling figures in the water.

Others were almost equally prompt; but none more skilful than he. A cold terror was clutching at his heart all the while. He was certain that Crystal had been somewhere out in the thick of the peril. Where was she now? It was growing dusk; it was hard to distinguish anything. He crawled out on his ladder; he drew out numbed and almost insensible figures; but Crystal— Crystal— where was she?

A voice reached him from the opposite bank.

"There— there— there! By the island! It is Crystal—save her!"

He heard—he looked— he saw the dark head beneath the shadow of the trees. With a bound and a dash— leaving rope and ladder behind him, he was scooting across the shaking ice— leaping yawning chasms, careless of personal safety, wrapped in his purpose. The ice shook and rocked beneath him, but he was at his goal's end now.

One spring, and he was in the water beside her. She was standing up to her neck, powerless to move, ready to go under. Her icy hands clung to an overhanging branch; but she had no power to struggle to the shore, though that

was near. But he had her in his strong arms. He broke the ice with his shoulder, and bore her to the little island, numbed and frozen, and almost insensible.

"My darling, my darling!" he cried aloud, "open your dear eyes and look at me! It is I— Hugh— who have come to help you. Oh! Why did you not call earlier? I should have heard you. My darling, my love!"

Then he knew that Avis was beside them. She had crossed the open piece of water behind the island on the punt. As he knelt beside the half-unconscious Crystal, holding her hands, and speaking words of love, she stood beside them, smiling, bright-eyed, strong, ready to direct him what to do, and to take command of the situation.

They got Crystal across to the mainland, and to the house. In the confusion there were none to help them; but had the distance been double, it would not have mattered. Wildhawk felt he could have carried her so for ever. He handed her over to Avis at the door of their room; she bid him change his own dripping garments. But when he had obeyed he could only pace the corridor in restless excitement, waiting for news which came quickly.

"She will do famously. She must stay in bed a day or two; but she will be none the worse in the long run. Captain Wildhawk— you know what you said to her! She heard it— I am certain of it. Forgive me if I have read your secret— you yourself betrayed it. And I am so glad— so glad! I do love Crystal so much. I want her to be happy; and sometimes I have been afraid."

He stood up straight and tall before her. It had come so suddenly this thing. He had scarcely time to face it out.

"I love Crystal," he said quite simply; "as soon as I am allowed to see her I must tell her so. Heaven grant that it may be for her happiness!"

With the most brilliant of smiles Avis left him.

"You shall see her soon," she said.

"YOU MUST marry her before you go!" Avis was the speaker. Her face was very pale and set. "Marry her before you sail. Let her feel herself your wife. If otherwise she will pine— ah! how she will pine. Do I not know her? Listen, Hugh; Cry is not like some women— some girls. She has never loved before— she will never love again. To be your wife for these weeks before you go; to be called by your name; to have the right to come to you if, if— oh, we will not forecast troubles; but I would bring her to you if she spoke the word— that would be almost happiness to her. Marry her at once— by special licence. Let her be with you just for the few last weeks. Then give her to me. I will take care of her. We will get together a little home for you. Oh, yes— you need not shake your head. I have my rights, too. When this trouble is over and you come back, covered with glory— or wounds— or whatever else soldiers acquire— there will be Crystal waiting for you, safe, and in comfort. Don't be afraid. You know how

things are. She has her rights— she shall have them. Only do your own part— and leave the rest to me."

It was all so bewildering! But how could he resist? To call Crystal his own before going forth! His friends gave him sympathy.

Avis was firm.

The thing was done. Man and wife they stood at the altar, and he lifted her veil and kissed her before the company of friends from Garth Gowan who had assisted at the ceremony with their presence. As the bride wrote her name in the great book he looked smilingly at her, and said: "I did not know till to-day that your name was Avis Crystal!"

"We are both Avis Crystal, after our grandmother," she answered; "but as Avis was the older she took the first name, and I always went by the second— perhaps, too, because I was such a Cry-baby!"

She looked up half appealingly at him. He had had occasion to wipe away many tears of late. But now that she was his wife new courage seemed to fill her heart. He was going, going where so many had gone— not to return; but she would not let herself think of that. The present was their own. It was God's gift to them. The days might be full of hurry and bustle; the honeymoon set aside for matters more urgent. But he was hers, and she was his— and that was enough.

THE GREAT OCEAN LINER was steaming homewards, and Lieutenant-Colonel Wildhawk— distinguished for many an act of gallantry— for many a dashing deed of valour— was among the passengers. Shattered and haggard and gaunt of aspect, and with his left arm in a sling, from which he might not be able to take it for many a long month, he looked something of a wreck. Yet he had gained ground during the voyage, and the approach home was putting new life into him. Unfit for service in the future he might be— that was the nightmare thought preying upon him. For the moment he was in ample funds; but what would the future be like for himself and his wife, if he had to retire on half-pay or a small pension? But though such thoughts had haunted him much of late, he was forgetting them all now. Here was England— soon there would be home. Crystal was in some little nest of her own, near to Garth Gowan; for the postal address, was Gowanthorp. There were several pretty cottages in the village. It was pleasant to think of her awaiting him in one.

Too eager to be tired, he strained out of the window as the train drew up; and there was golden-haired Avis smiling a welcome, and trying not to look shocked, as he came slowly towards her.

"I am staying with Crystal— I hope you don't mind! I won't be in the way. But I didn't like her to be alone. She was wild to come to the station; but I

thought it better not. It will be better to meet at home. Oh, leave every-thing— only come!"

Since the heiress was in command of the situation it was no puzzle to Wildhawk to be driven along in the easiest of easy carriages behind a pair of handsome horses. Avis talked all the while, told of Crystal, of the baby boy just two months old— the most splendid fellow that was ever seen.

"But for him, she would have been out to nurse you— I should have never held her back. Oh, yes, we have been to-gether most of the time; there was a lot to see to and think of; but we have got things ship-shape now. No; don't bother to keep staring out of the window. I'll tell you when we get there. Tell me about yourself—your expedition —anything. We are so hungry for news—"

So in hearing and telling minutes flew by; and in the dark there was no seeing where they were going. Suddenly a blaze encircled them. The carriage stopped; a small light figure sped out of the brightness. Crystal was in her husband's arms, and he was kissing her, and seeking that her tears should not run over, as he half led, half carried her into the house. And only after that silent heart-stirring welcome was over did he gaze about him in amazement, exclaiming:

"But— this is Garth Gowan!"

"Yes, dearest— our home," spoke Crystal, quietly, "and our little Hughie's inheritance." She stepped back, and he followed her confounded. Next moment a little white bundle was in his arms; and the strong man shook as he looked down into the sleeping face of his first-born child.

"Shut the doors, Avis, hold him while I tell you, Hugh— hold baby in your arms— then you cannot be angry with me. Garth Gowan is ours— the place you wanted to come back to for Christmas. It is I who was left rich— and Avis poor. But so far as I can that will be put right. In America it had been so dreadful. Men wanting me for my money, though they really wanted Avis for her beauty. It was terrible for us both. And can't you guess how I longed to be loved for myself? It was all so easy— our having the same name, and Avis being the elder, and so much more like an heiress. Nobody here knew then. Some do now, of course. And directly he knew that she was not so terribly rich, your nice friend, Mr. Warner, proposed to Avis, and she is here now to be married from Garth Gowan after Christmas. Darling, do you understand? I can't have you angry with me, just coming home like this! Perhaps I should have told before we mar-ried; but I was so frightened lest you should be angry with me— or at least if not angry, say that the maririage could not be rushed on like that. Ah! you smile. You know how it would have been. And I did want you so badly. I felt I could not have lived all those months without you. And then, when you were so ill— there was baby to comfort me. And now I have you both. Ah! you must not be angry, you cannot!"

No, he could not. With his wife at his side, and his boy in his arms, and the stately walls of the beautiful old house round him, seeming to smile a welcome to their master, he could only be filled with joy and thankfulness. Bewildered he might be— but angry— no!

They were alone for awhile; but then the door opened, and Avis appeared again, behind her Charles Warner, smiling— debonair. They grasped hands— those two old-time friends. Perhaps there came a lump into each throat; for at such a moment both found speech somewhat difficult, and it was easier to talk in a vein of light badinage than in sober earnest.

"Well, how does it feel to be a *pater familias*, and the master of Garth Gowan?"

"Can't quite come to it yet; have a feeling of its being all a dream."

"Pretty substantial sort of dream, though. So the impecunious soldier did marry the heiress after all!"

"Charlie!— for shame!" spoke Crystal, clinging to her husband's arm, and looking fondly in his face.

"Oh, she knows all the story; I've amused— and frightened— her with it a dozen times before," spoke the imperturbable Warner. "She knows what a squeak for a husband she has had, and has been shaking in her shoes ever since! Isn't it so, little heiress?"

"Well, of course, I didn't feel it had been quite right of me, and I didn't want Hugh to be angry!"

"Well, I told you that Hugh, though a bit of a crank, had some sense in that noddle of his, didn't I? And that though he might make a bit of a rum-pus at the start, he'd very soon settle down, and decide after all that a charming wife, a fine estate, a nice income, and a squalling baby was a heritage that did not warrant his raising a hue and cry about!"

"The Hugh and Cry being raised— and settled already," finished Avis, with a joyous laugh.

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20: On the Leads

A Ghost Story

S. Baring-Gould

1834-1924

West Australian (Perth) 22 Dec 1900

Anglican priest, novelist, eclectic scholar, and composer of the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers". Also with his wife Grace, father of 15 children.

HAVING realised a competence in Australia, and having a hankering after country life for the remainder of my days in the old home, on my return to England I went to an agent with the object of renting a house with shooting attached, over at least three thousand acres, with the option of a purchase should the place suit me. I was no more intending to buy a country seat without having tried what is was like than is a king disposed to go to war without knowing something of the force that can be brought against him.

I was rather taken with photographs of a manor called Fernwood, and I was still further engaged when I saw the place itself on a beautiful October day, when St. Luke's summer was turning the country into a world of rainbow tints under a warm sun, and a soft vaporous blue haze tinted all shadows cobalt, and gave to the hills a statelines that made them look like mountains.

Fernwood was an old house, built in the shape of the letter H, and, therefore, presumably dating from the time of the early Tudor monarchs. The porch opened into the hall, which was on the left of the cross stroke, and the drawing-room was on the right.

There was one inconvenience about the house; it had a stair-case at each extremity of the cross stroke, and there was no upstair communication between the two wings of the mansion. But as a practical man, I saw how this might be remedied. The front door faced the south, and the hall was windowless on the north. Nothing easier than to run a corridor along at the back, giving communication both upstairs and downstairs, without passing through the hall. The whole thing could be done for, at the outside, two hundred pounds, and would be no disfigurement to the place.

I agreed to become tenant of Fernwood for a twelve month in which time I should be able to judge whether the place would suit me, the neighbours be pleasant and the climate agree with my wife.

We went down to Fernwood at once, and settled ourselves comfortably in by the first week in November. The house was furnished; it was the property of an elderly gentleman, a bachelor named Framett, who lived in rooms in town, and spent most of his time at the club. He was supposed to have been jilted by his intended, after which he eschewed female society, and remained unmarried.

I called on him before taking up our residence at Fernwood, and found him a somewhat blasé, languid, cold-blooded creature, not at all proud of having a noble manor house that had belonged to his family for four centuries; very willing to sell it, so as to spite a cousin who calculated on coming in for the estate, and whom Mr. Framett, with the malignity that is sometimes found in old people, was particularly desirous of disappointing.

"The house has been let before, I suppose," said I.

"Oh, yes," he replied indifferently, "I believe so, several times."

"For long?"

"No—o. I believe, not for long."

"Have the tenants had any particular reasons for not remaining on there— if I may be so bold as to enquire?"

"All people have reasons to offer, but what they offer you are not supposed to receive as genuine."

I could get no more from him than this:

"I think, sir, if I were you I would not go down to Fernwood till after November was out."

"But," said I, "I want the shooting."

"Ah to be sure— the shooting, ah! I should have preferred if you could have waited till December began."

"That would not suit me." I said, and so the matter ended.

When we were settled in, we occupied the right wing of the house. The left, or west, wing was but scantily furnished, and looked cheerless, as thought rarely tenanted. We were not a large family, my wife and myself alone; there was consequently ample accommodation in the east wing for us.

The servants were placed above the kitchen, in a portion of the house I have not yet described. It was a half wing, if I may so describe it, built on the north side parallel with the upper arm of the western limb of the hall, and the H.

This block had a gable to the north like the wings, and a broad lead valley was between them, that, as I learned from the agent, had to be attended to after the fall of the leaf, and in times of snow, to clear it. Access to this valley could be had from within, by means of a little window in the roof, formed as a dormer. A short ladder allowed anyone to ascend from the passage to this windows and open or shut it.

The western staircase gave access to this passage, from which the servants' rooms in the new block were reached, as also the untenanted apartments in the old wing. And as there were no windows in the extremities of this passage, that ran due north and south, it derived all its light from the afore-mentioned dormer window.

One night, after we had been in the house about a week, I was sitting up smoking with a little whisky and water at my elbow, reading a review of an

absurd, ignorantly-written book on New South Wales, when I heard a tap at the door, and the parlour-maid came in, and said in a nervous tone of voice:

"Beg your pardon, sir, but cook nor I, nor none of us, dare go to bed."

"Why not'?" I asked, looking up in surprise.

"Please, sir, we dursn't go into the passage to get to our rooms."

"Whatever is the matter with the pas-sage?"

"Oh, nothing, sir, with the passage. Would you mind, sir, just coming to see? We don't know what to make of it."

I put down my *Review* with a grunt of dissatisfaction, laid my pipe aside, and followed the maid. She led me through the hall, and up the staircase at the western extremity. On reaching the upper landing, I saw all the maids there in a cluster, and all evidently much scared.

"Whatever is all this nonsense about?" I asked.

"Please, sir, will you look? We can't say."

The parlourmaid pointed to an oblong patch of moonlight on the wall of the passage. The night was cloudless, and the full moon shone slanting in through the dormer, and painted a brilliant silver strip on the wall opposite. The window being on the side of the roof to the east, we could not see that, but did see the light thrown through it against the wall. This patch of reflected light was about seven feet above the floor. The window itself was some ten feet up and the passage was but four feet wide. I enter into these particulars for reasons that will presently appear.

The window was divided into three parts by wooden mullions, and was composed of four panes of glass in each com-partment. Now I could distinctly see the reflection of the moon through the window with the black bars up and down, and the division of the panes.

But I saw more than that: I saw the shadow of a lean arm with a hand and thin lengthy fingers across a portion of the window, apparently groping at where was the latch by which the casement could be opened. My impression at that moment was that there was a burglar on the leads, trying to enter the house by means of this dormer.

Without a minute's hesitation I ran into the passage and looked up at the window, but could see only a portion of it, as in shape it was low, though broad, and, as already stated, was set at a great height. But at that moment something fluttered past it, like a rush of flapping draperies, obscuring the light.

I placed the ladder, which I found hooked up to the wall, in position, and planted my foot on the lowest rung, when my wife arrived. She had been alarmed by the housemaid, and now she clung to me, and protested that I was not to ascend without my pistol. To satisfy her, I got my Colt's revolver, that I always, kept loaded, and then, but only hesitatingly, did she allow me to mount.

I ascended to the casement, unhasped it, and looked out. I could see nothing. The ladder was over short, and it recuired an effort to heave oneself from it, through the casement on to the leads. I am stout, and not as nimble as I was when younger. After one or two efforts, and after presenting from below an appearance that would have provoked laughter at any other time, I succeeded in getting through and upon the leads. I looked up and down the valley— there was absolutely nothing to be seen except an accumulation of leaves carried there from the trees that were shedding their foliage.

The situation was vastly puzzling. As far as I could judge there was no way off the roof, no other window opening into the valley: I did not go along upon the leads, as it was night, and the moonlight is treacherous. Moreover, I was wholly unacquainted with the arrangement of the roof, and had no wish to risk a fall.

I descended from the window with my feet groping for the upper rung of the ladder, in a manner even more grotesque than my ascent through the casement, but neither my wife— usually extremely alive to anything ridiculous in my appearance— nor the domestics were in a mood to make merry. I fastened the window after me, and had hardly reached the bottom of the ladder before again a shadow flickered across the patch of moonlight. I was fairly perplexed, and stood musing.

Then I recalled that immediately behind the house the ground rose; that, in fact, the house lay under a considerable hill. It was just possible by ascending the slope, to reach the level of the gutter and rake the leads from one extremity to the other with my eye. I mentioned this to my wife and at once the whole set of maids trailed down the stairs after us. They were afraid to remain in the passage, and they were curious to see if there really were some person on the leads.

We went out at the back of the house, and ascended the bank till we were on a level with the broad gutter between the gables. I now saw that this gutter did not run through but stopped against the hall roof: consequently, unless there were some opening of which I knew nothing, the person on the leads could not leave the place, save by the dormer window, when open, or by swarming down the tall pipe.

It at once occurred to me that if what I had seen were the shadow of a burglar, he might have mounted by means of the rain water pipe. But if so— how had he vanished the moment my head was protruded through the window? and how was it I had seen the shadow flicker past the light immediately I had descended the ladder? It was conceivable that the man had concealed himself in the shadow of the hall roof, and had taken advan-tage of my withdrawal to run past the window so as to reach the fall pipe, and let

himself down by that. I could however, see no one running away, as I must have done going outside so soon after his supposed descent.

But the whole affair became more perplexing when, looking towards the leads, I saw in the moonlight something with fluttering garments running up and down them. There could be no mistake— the object was a woman, and her garments were mere tatters. We could not hear a sound. I looked round at my wife and the servants— they saw this weird object as distinctly as myself. It was more like a gigantic bat than a human being, and yet, that it was a woman we could not doubt, for the arms were now and then thrown above the head in wild gesticulation, and at a moment's notice a profile was presented, and then we saw or thought we saw, long flapping hair, unbound.

"I must go back to the ladder," said I, "you remain where you are watching."

"Oh, Edward! not alone," pleaded my wife. "My dear, who is to go with me?" I went. I had left the back door unlocked, and I ascended the staircase and entered the passage. Again I saw the shadow flicker past the moonlit patch on the wall opposite the window. I ascended the ladder and opened the casement. Then I heard the clock in the hall strike one. I heaved myself up to the sill with great labour, and endeavoured to thrust my short body through the window when I heard feet on the stairs, and next moment my wife's voice from below, at the foot of the ladder.

"Oh, Edward. Edward! please do not go out there again. It has vanished. All at once. There is nothing there now to be seen."

I returned, touched the ladder tentatively with my feet, refastened the window, and descended— perhaps inelegantly. I then went down with my wife, and with her returned up the bank, to the spot where stood clustered our servants. They had seen nothing further: and although I remained on the spot watching for half an hour, I also saw nothing more. The maids were too frightened to go to bed and so agreed to sit up in the kitchen for the rest of the night by a good fire and I gave them a bottle of sherry to mull and make themselves comfortable upon, and to help them to recover their courage.

Although I went to bed I could not sleep. I was completely baffled by what I had seen. I could in no way explain what the object was and how it had left the leads.

Next day I sent for the village mason and asked him to set a long ladder against the well head of the fall pipe, and examine the valley between the gables. At the same time I would mount to the little window and contemplate proceedings through that. The man had to send for a ladder sufficiently long and that occupied some time. However, at length he had it planted, and then mounted. When he approached the dormer window—

"Give me a hand." said I "and haul me up, I would like to satisfy myself with my own eyes, that there is no other means of getting upon or leaving the leads."

He took me under both shoulders, and heaved me out, and I stood with him in the broad lead gutter.

"There's no other opening whatever," said he, "and Lord love you, sir, I believe that what you saw was no more than this," and he pointed to a branch of a noble cedar that grew hard by the west side of the house. "I warrant, sir," said he, "that what you saw was this here bough as has been carried by a storm and thrown here, and the wind last night swept it up and down the leads."

"But was there any wind?" I asked. "I do not remember that there was."

"I can't say,"' said he; "before twelve o'clock I was fast asleep, and it might have blown a gale and I hear nothing of it."

"I suppose there must have been some wind," said I, "and that I was too surprised and— the women too frightened, to observe it," I laughed. "So this marvellous spectral phenomenon receives a very prosaic and natural explanation. Mason, throw down the bough, and we will burn it to-night."

The branch was cast over the ledge and fell at the back of the house. I left the leads, descended, and going out, picked, up the cedar branch, brought it into the hall, summoned the servants, and said, derisively—

"Here is an illustration of the way weak minded women get scared. Now we will burn the burglar or ghost that we saw. It turns out to be nothing but this branch, blown up and down the leads by the wind."

"But, Edward," said my wife, "there was not a breath stirring."

"There must have been. Only where we were we were sheltered, and did not observe it. Aloft, it blew across the roofs, and formed an eddy that caught the broken bough, lifted it, carried it first one way then spun it round and carried it the reverse way. In fact the wind between the two roofs assumed a spiral movement. I hope now you are all satisfed. I am."

So the bough was burnt, and our fears— I mean those of the females were allayed. In the evening, after dinner, as I sat with my wife, she said to me, "Half a bottle would have been enough, Edward. Indeed, I think half a bottle was too much; you should not give the girls a liking for sherry, it may lead to bad results. If it had been elderberry wine, that would have been different."

"But there is no elderberry wine in the house," I objected.

"Well, I hope no harm will come of it, but I greatly mistrust—"

"Please, sir, it is there again."

The parlour-maid with a blanched face was at the door.

"Nonsense," said I, "we burnt it."

"This comes of the sherry," observed my wife. "They will be seeing ghosts every night."

"But, my dear, you saw it as well as myself!"

I rose, my wife followed, and we went to the landing as before, and sure enough, against the patch of moonlight cast through the window in the roof, was the arm again, and then a flutter of shadows, as if cast by garments.

"It was not the bough," said my wife. "If this had been seen immediately after the sherry I should not have been surprised, but, as it is now it is most extraordinary.'

"I'll have this part of the house shut up," said I. Then I bade the maids once more spend the night in the kitchen. "and make yourselves lively on tea."

I said—for I knew my wife would not allow of another bottle of sherry being given them. "To-morrow your beds shall be moved to the east wing."

"Beg pardon,"said the cook, "I speaks in the name of all. We don't think we can remain in the house, but must leave the situation."

"That comes of the tea," said I to my wife. "Now," to the cook, "as you have had another fright— I will let you have a bottle of mulled port to-night."

"Sir," said the cook, "if you can get rid of the ghost, we don't want to leave so good a master. We withdraw the notice."

Next day, I had all the servant's goods transferred to the east wing and rooms were fitted up for them to sleep in. As their portion of the house was completely cut off from the west wing, the alarm of the domestics died away.

A heavy stormy ran came on next week, the first token of winter misery.I then found that— whether caused by the cedar bough, or by the nailed boots of the mason, I cannot say, but the lead of the valley between the two roofs was torn, and water came in, streaming down the walls, and threatening to severely damage the ceilings. I had to send for a plumber as soon as the weather mended.

At the same time I started for town to see Mr. Framett. I had made up my mind that Fernwood was not suitable; and by the terms of my agreement I might be off my bargain if I gave notice the first month, and then my tenancy would be for the six months only.

I found the squire at his club.

"Ah!" said he, "I told you not to go there in November. No one likes Fernwood in November, it is all right at other times."

"What do you mean?"

"There is no bother except in November."

"Why should there be bother, as you term it, then?"

Mr. Framett shrugged his shoulders. "How the deuce can I tell you? I've never been a spirit and all that sort of thing. Mme. Blavatsky might possibly tell you. I can't. But it is a fact."

"What is a fact?"

"Why, that there is no apparition at any other time. It is only in November, when she met with a little misfortune. That is when she is seen."

"Who is seen?"

"My Aunt Eliza— I mean my great aunt."

"You speak mysteries."

"I don't know much about it, and care less," said Mr. Framett, and called for a lemon squash. "It was this. I had a great aunt who was deranged. The family kept it quiet and did not send her to an asylum, but fastened her in a room in the west wing. You see, that part of the house is much separated from the rest. I believe she was rather shabbily treated, but she was difficult to manage, and tore her clothes to pieces. Somehow she succeeded in getting out on the roof and would race up and down there. They allowed her to do so, as by that means she obtained fresh air. But one night in November she scrambled up there and I believe, tumbled over. It was hushed up. Sorry you went there in November. I should have liked you to buy the place. I am sick of it."

I did buy Fernwood. What decided me was this: the plumbers in mending the leads, with that ingenuity to do mischief which they sometimes display, succeeded in setting fire to the roof, and the result was that the west wing was burnt down. Happily, a wall so completely separated the wing from the rest of the house— that the fire was arrested. The wing was not rebuilt and I— thinking, with the disappearance of the leads, that I should be freed from the apparition that haunted them, purchased Fernwood. I am happy to say we have been undisturbed since.

End