PAST MASTERS 229

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Anthony Hope
Emile C. Tepperman
Robert W. Chambers
H. P. Lovecraft
Temple Bailey

and more

PAST MASTERS 229

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

16 July 2025

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1: The Judgment of Vulcan

Lee Foster Hartman

1879-1941

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TO DINE ON THE VERANDA of the Marine Hotel is the one delightful surprise which Port Charlotte affords the adventurer who has broken from the customary paths of travel in the South Seas. On an eminence above the town, solitary and aloof like a monastery, and deep in its garden of lemon-trees, it commands a wide prospect of sea and sky. By day, the Pacific is a vast stretch of blue, flat like a floor, with a blur of distant islands on the horizon— chief among them Muloa, with its single volcanic cone tapering off into the sky. At night, this smithy of Vulcan becomes a glow of red, throbbing faintly against the darkness, a capricious and sullen beacon immeasurably removed from the path of men. Viewed from the veranda of the Marine Hotel, its vast flare on the horizon seems hardly more than an insignificant spark, like the glowing cigar-end of some guest strolling in the garden after dinner.

It may very likely have been my lighted cigar that guided Eleanor Stanleigh to where I was sitting in the shadows. Her uncle, Major Stanleigh, had left me a few minutes before, and I was glad of the respite from the queer business he had involved me in. The two of us had returned that afternoon from Muloa, where I had taken him in my schooner, the *Sylph*, to seek out Leavitt and make some inquiries— very important inquiries, it seemed, in Miss Stanleigh's behalf.

Three days in Muloa, under the shadow of the grim and flame-throated mountain, while I was forced to listen to Major Stanleigh's persistent questionnaire and Leavitt's erratic and garrulous responses— all this, as I was to discover later, at the instigation of the Major's niece— had made me frankly curious about the girl.

I had seen her only once, and then at a distance across the veranda, one night when I had been dining there with a friend; but that single vision of her remained vivid and unforgettable— a tall girl of a slender shapeliness, crowned by a mass of reddish-gold hair that smoldered above the clear olive pallor of her skin. With that flawless and brilliant colouring she was marked for observation— had doubtless been schooled to a perfect indifference to it, for the slow, almost indolent, grace of her movements was that of a woman coldly unmindful of the gazes lingering upon her. She could not have been more than twenty-six or -seven, but I got an unmistakable impression of weariness or balked purpose emanating from her in spite of her youth and glorious physique. I looked up to see her crossing the veranda to join her uncle and aunt— correct, well-to-do English people that one placed instantly— and my stare was only one of many

that followed her as she took her seat and threw aside the light scarf that swathed her bare and gleaming shoulders.

My companion, who happened to be the editor of the local paper, promptly informed me regarding her name and previous residence— the gist of some "social item" which he had already put into print; but these meant nothing, and I could only wonder what had brought her to such an out-of-the-way part of the world as Port Charlotte. She did not seem like a girl who was traveling with her uncle and aunt; one got rather the impression that she was bent on a mission of her own and was dragging her relatives along because the conventions demanded it. I hazarded to my companion the notion that a woman like Miss Stanleigh could have but one of two purposes in this lonely part of the world— she was fleeing from a lover or seeking one.

"In that case," rejoined my friend, with the cynical shrug of the newspaper man, "she has very promptly succeeded. It's whispered that she is going to marry Joyce— of Malduna Island, you know. Only met him a fortnight ago. Quite a romance, I'm told."

I lifted my eyebrows at that, and looked again at Miss Stanleigh. Just at that instant she happened to look up. It was a wholly indifferent gaze; I am confident that she was no more aware of me than if I had been one of the veranda posts which her eyes bad chanced to encounter. But in the indescribable sensation of that moment I felt that here was a woman who bore a secret burden, although, as my informing host put it, her heart had romantically found its haven only two weeks ago.

She was endeavouring to get trace of a man named Farquharson, as I was permitted to learn a few days later. Ostensibly, it was Major Stanleigh who was bent on locating this young Englishman— Miss Stanleigh's interest in the quest was guardedly withheld— and the trail had led them a pretty chase around the world until some clue, which I never clearly understood, brought them to Port Charlotte. The major's immediate objective was an eccentric chap named Leavitt who had marooned himself in Muloa. The island offered an ideal retreat for one bent on shunning his own kind, if he did not object to the close proximity of a restive volcano. Clearly, Leavitt did not. He had a scientific interest in the phenomena exhibited by volcanic regions and was versed in geological lore, but the rumours about Leavitt— practically no one ever visited Muloa— did not stop at that. And, as Major Stanleigh and I were to discover, the fellow seemed to have developed a genuine affection for Lakalatcha, as the smoking cone was called by the natives of the adjoining islands. From long association he had come to know its whims and moods as one comes to know those of a petulant woman one lives with. It was a bizarre and preposterous intimacy, in which Leavitt seemed to find a wholly acceptable substitute for human society, and there was something repellant about the man's eccentricity. He had various names for the

smoking cone that towered a mile or more above his head: "Old Flame-eater," or "Lava-spitter," he would at times familiarly and irreverently call it; or, again, "The Maiden Who Never Sleeps," or "The Single-breasted Virgin"— these last, however, always in the musical Malay equivalent. He had no end of names— romantic, splenetic, of opprobrium, or outright endearment— to suit, I imagine, Lakalatcha's varying moods. In one respect they puzzled me— they were of conflicting genders, some feminine and some masculine, as if in Leavitt's loose-frayed imagination the mountain that beguiled his days and disturbed his nights were hermaphroditic.

Leavitt as a source of information regarding the missing Farquharson seemed preposterous when one reflected how out of touch with the world he had been, but, to my astonishment, Major Stanleigh's clue was right, for he had at last stumbled upon a man who had known Farquharson well and who was voluminous about him— quite willingly so. With the *Sylph* at anchor, we lay off Muloa for three nights, and Leavitt gave us our fill of Farquharson, along with innumerable digressions about volcanoes, neoplatonism, the Single Tax, and what not. There was no keeping Leavitt to a coherent narrative about the missing Farquharson. He was incapable of it, and Major Stanleigh and myself had simply to wait in patience while Leavitt, delighted to have an audience, dumped out for us the fantastic contents of his mind, odd vagaries, recondite trash, and all. He was always getting away from Farquharson, but, then, he was unfailingly bound to come back to him. We had only to wait and catch the solid grains that now and then fell in the winnowing of that unending stream of chaff. It was a tedious and exasperating process, but it had its compensations. At times Leavitt could be as uncannily brilliant as he was dull and boresome. The conviction grew upon me that he had become a little demented, as if his brain had been tainted by the sulphurous fumes exhaled by the smoking crater above his head. His mind smoked, flickered, and flared like an unsteady lamp, blown upon by choking gases, in which the oil had run low.

But of the wanderer Farquharson he spoke with precision and authority, for he had shared with Farquharson his bungalow there in Muloa— a period of about six months, it seemed— and there Farquharson had contracted a tropic fever and died.

"Well, at last we have got all the facts," Major Stanleigh sighed with satisfaction when the *Sylph* was heading back to Port Charlotte. Muloa, lying astern, we were no longer watching. Leavitt, at the water's edge, had waved us a last good-by and had then abruptly turned back into the forest, very likely to go clambering like a demented goat up the flanks of his beloved volcano and to resume poking about in its steaming fissures— an occupation of which he never tired.

"The evidence is conclusive, don't you think?— the grave, Farquharson's personal effects, those pages of the poor devil's diary."

I nodded assent. In my capacity as owner of the *Sylph* I had merely undertaken to furnish Major Stanleigh with passage to Muloa and back, but the events of the last three days had made me a party to the many conferences, and I was now on terms of something like intimacy with the rather stiff and pompous English gentleman. How far I was from sharing his real confidence I was to discover later when Eleanor Stanleigh gave me hers.

"My wife and niece will be much relieved to hear all this— a family matter, you understand, Mr. Barnaby," he had said to me when we landed. "I should like to present you to them before we leave Port Charlotte for home."

But, as it turned out, it was Eleanor Stanleigh who presented herself, coming upon me quite unexpectedly that night after our return while I sat smoking in the shadowy garden of the Marine Hotel. I had dined with the major, after he had explained that the ladies were worn out by the heat and general developments of the day and had begged to be excused. And I was frankly glad not to have to endure another discussion of the deceased Farquharson, of which I was heartily tired after hearing little else for the last three days. I could not help wondering how the verbose and pompous major had paraphrased and condensed that inchoate mass of biography and reminiscence into an orderly account for his wife and niece. He had doubtless devoted the whole afternoon to it. Sitting under the cool green of the lemon-trees, beneath a sky powdered with stars, I reflected that I, at least, was done with Farquharson forever. But I was not, for just then Eleanor Stanleigh appeared before me.

I was startled to hear her addressing me by name, and then calmly begging me to resume my seat on the bench under the arbor. She sat down also, her flame-coloured hair and bare shoulders gleaming in the darkness. She was the soul of directness and candour, and after a thoughtful, searching look into my face she came to the point at once. She wanted to hear about Farquharson— from me.

"Of course, my uncle has given me a very full account of what he learned from Mr. Leavitt, and yet many things puzzle me— this Mr. Leavitt most of all."

"A queer chap," I epitomized him. "Frankly, I don't quite make him out, Miss Stanleigh— marooning himself on that infernal island and seemingly content to spend his days there."

"Is he so old?" she caught me up quickly.

"No, he isn't," I reflected. "Of course, it's difficult to judge ages out here. The climate, you know. Leavitt's well under forty, I should say. But that's a most unhealthy spot he has chosen to live in."

"Why does he stay there?"

I explained about the volcano. "You can have no idea what an obsession it is with him. There isn't a square foot of its steaming, treacherous surface that he hasn't been over, mapping new fissures, poking into old lava-beds, delving into the crater itself on favourable days— "

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"In a way, yes. The volcano itself is harmless enough. It smokes unpleasantly now and then, splutters and rumbles as if about to obliterate all creation, but for all its bluster it only manages to spill a trickle or two of fresh lava down its sides— just tamely subsides after deluging Leavitt with a shower of cinders and ashes. But Leavitt won't leave it alone. He goes poking into the very crater, half strangling himself in its poisonous fumes, scorching the shoes off his feet, and once, I believe, he lost most of his hair and eyebrows— a narrow squeak. He throws his head back and laughs at any word of caution. To my notion, it's foolhardy to push a scientific curiosity to that extreme."

"Is it, then, just scientific curiosity?" mused Miss Stanleigh.

Something in her tone made me stop short. Her eyes had lifted to mine— almost appealingly, I fancied. Her innocence, her candour, her warm beauty, which was like a pale phosphorescence in the starlit darkness— all had their potent effect upon me in that moment. I felt impelled to a sudden burst of confidence.

"At times I wonder. I've caught a look in his eyes, when he's been down on his hands and knees, staring into some infernal vent-hole— a look that is— well, uncanny, as if he were peering into the bowels of the earth for something quite outside the conceptions of science. You might think that volcano had worked some spell over him, turned his mind. He prattles to it or storms at it as if it were a living creature. Queer, yes; and he's impressive, too, with a sort of magnetic personality that attracts and repels you violently at the same time. He's like a cake of ice dipped in alcohol and set aflame. I can't describe him. When he talks— "

"Does he talk about himself?"

I had to confess that he had told us practically not a word. He had discussed everything under heaven in his brilliant, erratic way, with a fleer of cynicism toward it all, but he had left himself out completely. He had given us Farquharson with relish, and in infinite detail, from the time the poor fellow first turned up in Muloa, put ashore by a native craft. Talking about Farquharson was second only to his delight in talking about volcanoes. And the result for me had been innumerable vivid but confused impressions of the young Englishman who had by chance invaded Leavitt's solitude and had lingered there, held by some attraction, until he sickened and died. It was like a jumbled mosaic put together again by inexpert hands.

"Did you get the impression that the two men had very much in common?"

"Quite the contrary," I answered. "But Major Stanleigh should know— "

"My uncle never met Mr. Farquharson."

I was fairly taken aback at that, and a silence fell between us. It was impossible to divine the drift of her questions. It was as if some profound mistrust weighed upon her and she was not so much seeking to interrogate me as she was groping blindly for some chance word of mine that might illuminate her doubts.

I looked at the girl in silent wonder, yes, and in admiration of her bronze and ivory beauty in the full flower of her glorious youth— and I thought of Joyce. I felt that it was like her to have fallen in love simply but passionately at the mere lifting of the finger of Fate. It was only another demonstration of the unfathomable mystery, or miracle, which love is. Joyce was lucky, indeed favoured of the gods, to have touched the spring in this girl's heart which no other man could reach, and by the rarest of chances— her coming out to this remote corner of the world. Lucky Joyce! I knew him slightly— a straightforward young fellow, very simple and whole-souled, enthusiastically absorbed in developing his rubber lands in Malduna.

Miss Stanleigh remained lost in thought while her fingers toyed with the pendant of the chain that she wore. In the darkness I caught the glitter of a small gold cross.

"My. Barnaby," she finally broke the silence, and paused. "I have decided to tell you something. This Mr. Farquharson was my husband."

Again a silence fell, heavy and prolonged, in which I sat as if drugged by the night air that hung soft and perfumed about us. It seemed incredible that in that fleeting instant she had spoken at all.

"I was young— and very foolish, I suppose."

With that confession, spoken with simple dignity, she broke off again. Clearly, some knowledge of the past she deemed it necessary to impart to me. If she halted over her words, it was rather to dismiss what was irrelevant to the matter in hand, in which she sought my counsel.

"I did not see him for four years— did not wish to…. And he vanished completely…. Four years!— just a welcome blank!"

Her shoulders lifted and a little shiver went over her.

"But even a blank like that can become unendurable. To be always dragging at a chain, and not knowing where it leads to…." Her hand slipped from the gold cross on her breast and fell to the other in her lap, which it clutched tightly. "Four years…. I tried to make myself believe that he was gone forever— was dead. It was wicked of me."

My murmur of polite dissent led her to repeat her words.

"Yes, and even worse than that. During the past month I have actually prayed that he might be dead…. I shall be punished for it."

I ventured no rejoinder to these words of self-condemnation. Joyce, I reflected, mundanely, had clearly swept her off her feet in the ardour of their first meeting and instant love.

"It must be a great relief to you," I murmured at length, "to have it all definitely settled at last."

"If I could only feel that it was!"

I turned in amazement, to see her leaning a little forward, her hands still tightly clasped in her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the distant horizon where the red spark of Lakalatcha's stertorous breathing flamed and died away. Her breast rose and fell, as if timed to the throbbing of that distant flare. "I want you to take me to that island— to-morrow."

"Why, surely, Miss Stanleigh," I burst forth, "there can't be any reasonable doubt. Leavitt's mind may be a little flighty— he may have embroidered his story with a few gratuitous details; but Farquharson's books and things— the material evidence of his having lived there— "

"And having died there?"

"Surely Leavitt wouldn't have fabricated that! If you had talked with him— "

"I should not care to talk with Mr. Leavitt," Miss Stanleigh cut me short. "I want only to go and see— if he *is* Mr. Leavitt."

"If he *is* Mr. Leavitt!" For a moment I was mystified, and then in a sudden flash I understood. "But that's pre-posterous— impossible!"

I tried to conceive of Leavitt in so monstrous a rôle, tried to imagine the missing Farquharson still in the flesh and beguiling Major Stanleigh and myself with so outlandish a story, devising all that ingenious detail to trick us into a belief in his own death. It would indeed have argued a warped mind, guided by some unfathomable purpose.

"I devoutly hope you are right," Miss Stanleigh was saying, with deliberation. "But it is not preposterous, and it is not impossible— if you had known Mr. Farquharson as I have."

It was a discreet confession. She wished me to understand— without the necessity of words. My surmise was that she had met and married Farquharson, whoever he was, under the spell of some momentary infatuation, and that he had proved himself to be an unspeakable brute whom she had speedily abandoned.

"I am determined to go to Muloa, Mr. Barnaby," she announced, with decision. "I want you to make the arrangements, and with as much secrecy as possible. I shall ask my aunt to go with me."

I assured Miss Stanleigh that the *Sylph* was at her service.

Mrs. Stanleigh was a large bland woman, inclined to stoutness and to making confidences, with an intense dislike of the tropics and physical discomforts of any sort. How her niece prevailed upon her to make that

surreptitious trip to Muloa, which we set out upon two days later, I have never been able to imagine. The accommodations aboard the schooner were cramped, to say the least, and the good lady had a perfect horror of volcanoes. The fact that Lakalatcha had behind it a record of a century or more of good conduct did not weigh with her in the least. She was convinced that it would blow its head off the moment the *Sylph* got within range. She was fidgety, talkative, and continually concerned over the state of her complexion, inspecting it in the mirror of her bag at frequent intervals and using a powder-puff liberally to mitigate the pernicious effects of the tropic sun. But once having been induced to make the voyage, I must admit she stuck manfully by her decision, ensconcing herself on deck with books and cushions and numerous other necessities to her comfort, and making the best of the sleeping quarters below. As the captain of the *Sylph*, she wanted me to understand that she had intrusted her soul to my charge, declaring that she would not draw an easy breath until we were safe again in Port Charlotte.

"This dreadful business of Eleanor's," was the way she referred to our mission, and she got round quite naturally to telling me of Farquharson while acquainting me with her fears about volcanoes. Some years before, Pompeii and Herculaneum had had a most unsettling effect upon her nerves. Vesuvius was slightly in eruption at the time. She confessed to never having had an easy moment while in Naples. And it was in Naples that her niece and Farquharson had met. It had been, as I surmised, a swift, romantic courtship, in which Farquharson, quite irreproachable in antecedents and manners, had played the part of an impetuous lover. Italian skies had done the rest. There was an immediate marriage, in spite of Mrs. Stanleigh's protests, and the young couple were off on a honeymoon trip by themselves. But when Mrs. Stanleigh rejoined her husband at Nice, and together they returned to their home in Sussex, a surprise was in store for them. Eleanor was already there— alone, crushed, and with lips absolutely sealed. She had divested herself of everything that linked her to Farquharson; she refused to adopt her married name.

"I shall bless every saint in heaven when we have quite done with this dreadful business of Eleanor's," Mrs. Stanleigh confided to me from her deck-chair. "This trip that she insists on making herself seems quite uncalled for. But you needn't think, Captain Barnaby, that I'm going to set foot on that dreadful island— not even for the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Farquharson's grave— and I'm shameless enough to say that it *would* be a satisfaction. If you could imagine the tenth part of what I have had to put up with, all these months we've been traveling about trying to locate the wretch! No, indeed— I shall stay right here on this boat and entrust Eleanor to your care while ashore. And I should not think it ought to take long, now should it?"

I confessed aloud that I did not see how it could. If by any chance the girl's secret conjecture about Leavitt's identity was right, it would be verified in the mere act of coming face to face with him, and in that event it would be just as well to spare the unsuspecting aunt the shock of that discovery.

We reached Muloa just before nightfall, letting go the anchor in placid water under the lee of the shore while the *Sylph* swung to and the sails fluttered and fell. A vast hush lay over the world. From the shore the dark green of the forest confronted us with no sound or sign of life. Above, and at this close distance blotting out half the sky over our heads, towered the huge cone of Lakalatcha with scarred and blackened flanks. It was in one of its querulous moods. The feathery white plume of steam, woven by the wind into soft, fantastic shapes, no longer capped the crater; its place had been usurped by thick, dark fumes of smoke swirling sullenly about. In the fading light I marked the red, malignant glow of a fissure newly broken out in the side of the ragged cone, from which came a thin, white trickle of lava.

There was no sign of Leavitt, although the *Sylph* must have been visible to him for several hours, obviously making for the island. I fancied that he must have been unusually absorbed in the vagaries of his beloved volcano. Otherwise he would have wondered what was bringing us back again and his tall figure in shabby white drill would have greeted us from the shore. Instead, there confronted us only the belt of dark, matted green girdling the huge bulk of Lakalatcha which soared skyward, sinister, mysterious, eternal.

In the brief twilight the shore vanished into dim obscurity. Miss Stanleigh, who for the last hour had been standing by the rail, silently watching the island, at last spoke to me over her shoulder:

"Is it far inland— the place? Will it be difficult to find in the dark?"

Her question staggered me, for she was clearly bent on seeking out Leavitt at once. A strange calmness overlay her. She paid no heed to Lakalatcha's gigantic, smoke-belching cone, but, with fingers gripping the rail, scanned the forbidding and inscrutable forest, behind which lay the answer to her torturing doubt.

I acceded to her wish without protest. Leavitt's bungalow lay a quarter of a mile distant. There would be no difficulty in following the path. I would have a boat put over at once, I announced in a casual way which belied my real feelings, for I was beginning to share some of her own secret tension at this night invasion of Leavitt's haunts.

This feeling deepened within me as we drew near the shore. Leavitt's failure to appear seemed sinister and enigmatic. I began to evolve a fantastic image of him as I recalled his queer ways and his uncanny tricks of speech. It was as if we were seeking out the presiding deity of the island, who had assumed the guise of a Caliban holding unearthly sway over its unnatural processes.

With Williams, the boatswain, carrying a lantern, we pushed into the brush, following the choked trail that led to Leavitt's abode. But the bungalow, when we had reached the clearing and could discern the outlines of the building against the masses of the forest, was dark and deserted. As we mounted the veranda, the loose boards creaked hollowly under our tread; the doorway, from which depended a tattered curtain of coarse burlap, gaped black and empty.

The lantern, lifted high in the boatswain's hand, cleft at a stroke the darkness within. On the writing-table, cluttered with papers and bits of volcanic rock, stood a bottle and half-empty glass. Things lay about in lugubrious disorder, as if the place had been hurriedly ransacked by a thief. Some of the geological specimens had tumbled from the table to the floor, and stray sheets of Leavitt's manuscripts lay under his chair. Leavitt's books, ranged on shelving against the wall, alone seemed undisturbed. Upon the top of the shelving stood two enormous stuffed birds, moldering and decrepit, regarding the sudden illumination with unblinking, bead-like eyes. Between them a small dancing faun in greenish bronze tripped a Bacchic measure with head thrown back in a transport of derisive laughter.

For a long moment the three of us faced the silent, disordered room, in which the little bronze faun alone seemed alive, convulsed with diabolical mirth at our entrance. Somehow it recalled to me Leavitt's own cynical laugh. Suddenly Miss Stanleigh made toward the photographs above the bookshelves.

"This is he," she said, taking up one of the faded prints.

"Yes— Leavitt," I answered.

"*Leavitt*?" Her fingers tightened upon the photograph. Then, abruptly, it fell to the floor. "Yes, yes— of course." Her eyes closed very slowly, as if an extreme weakness had seized her.

In the shock of that moment I reached out to support her, but she checked my hand. Her gray eyes opened again. A shudder visibly went over her, as if the night air had suddenly become chill. From the shelf the two stuffed birds regarded us dolefully, while the dancing faun, with head thrown back in an attitude of immortal art, laughed derisively.

"Where is he? I must speak to him," said Miss Stanleigh.

"One might think he were deliberately hiding," I muttered, for I was at a loss to account for Leavitt's absence.

"Then find him," the girl commanded. I cut short my speculations to direct Williams to search the hut in the rear of the bungalow, where, behind bamboo palings, Leavitt's Malay servant maintained an aloof and mysterious existence. I sat down beside Miss Stanleigh on the veranda steps to find my hands sooty from the touch of the boards. A fine volcanic ash was evidently drifting in the air, and now to my ear, attuned to the profound stillness, the wind bore a faint humming sound.

"Do you hear that?" I whispered. It was like the far-off murmur of a gigantic caldron, softly a-boil— a dull vibration that seemed to reach us through the ground as well as through the air.

The girl listened a moment, and then started up. "I hear voices— somewhere,"

"Voices?" I strained my ears for sounds other than the insistent ferment of the great cone above our heads. "Perhaps Leavitt— "

"Why do you still call him Leavitt?"

"Then you're quite certain— " I began, but an involuntary exclamation from her cut me short.

The light of Williams's lantern, emerging from behind the bamboo palings, disclosed the burly form of the boatswain with a shrinking Malay in tow. He was jabbering in his native tongue, with much gesticulation of his thin arms, and going into contortions at every dozen paces in a sort of pantomime to emphasize his words. Williams urged him along unceremoniously to the steps of the veranda.

"Perhaps you can get the straight of this, Mr. Barnaby," said the boatswain. "He swears that the flame-devil in the volcano has swallowed his master alive."

The poor fellow seemed indeed in a state of complete funk. With his thin legs quaking under him, he poured forth in Malay a crazed, distorted tale. According to Wadakimba, Leavitt— or Farquharson, to give him his real name— had awakened the high displeasure of the flame-devil within the mountain. Had we not observed that the cone was smoking furiously? And the dust and heavy taint of sulphur in the air? Surely we could feel the very tremor of the ground under our feet. All that day the enraged monster had been spouting mud and lava down upon the white *tuan* who had remained in the bungalow, drinking heavily and bawling out maledictions upon his enemy. At length, in spite of Wadakimba's efforts to dissuade him, he had set out to climb to the crater, vowing to show the flame-devil who was master. He had compelled the terrified Wadakimba to go with him a part of the way. The white *tuan*— was he really a god, as he declared himself to be?— had gone alone up the tortuous, fissured slopes, at times lost to sight in yellowish clouds of gas and steam, while his screams and threats of vengeance came back to Wadakimba's ears. Overhead, Lakalatcha continued to rumble and quiver and clear his throat with great showers of mud and stones.

Farquharson must have indeed parted with his reason to have attempted that grotesque sally. Listening to Wadakimba's tale, I pictured the crazed man, scorched to tatters, heedless of bruises and burns, scrambling up that difficult and perilous ascent, and hurling his ridiculous blasphemy into the flares of smoke and steam that issued from that vast caldron lit by subterranean fires. At its simmering the whole island trembled. A mere whiff of the monster's breath

and he would have been snuffed out, annihilated in an instant. According to Wadakimba, the end had indeed come in that fashion. It was as if the mountain had suddenly given a deep sigh. The blast had carried away solid rock. A sheet of flame had licked the spot where Farquharson had been hurled headlong, and he was not.

Wadakimba, viewing all this from afar, had scuttled off to his hut. Later he had ventured back to the scene of the tragedy. He had picked up Farquharson's scorched helmet, which had been blown off to some distance, and he also exhibited a pair of binoculars washed down by the tide of lava, scarred and twisted by the heat, from which the lenses had melted away.

I translated for Miss Stanleigh briefly, while she stood turning over in her hands the twisted and blackened binoculars, which were still warm. She heard me through without question or comment, and when I proposed that we get back to the *Sylph* at once, mindful of her aunt's distressed nerves, she assented with a nod. She seemed to have lost the power of speech. In a daze she followed as I led the way back through the forest.

MAJOR STANLEIGH and his wife deferred their departure for England until their niece should be properly married to Joyce. At Eleanor's wish, it was a very simple affair, and as Joyce's bride she was as eager to be off to his rubber-plantation in Malduna as he was to set her up there as mistress of his household. I had agreed to give them passage on the *Sylph*, since the next sailing of the mail-boat would have necessitated a further fortnight's delay.

Mrs. Stanleigh, with visions of seeing England again, and profoundly grateful to a benevolent Providence that had not only brought "this dreadful business of Eleanor's" to a happy termination, but had averted Lakalatcha's baptism of fire from descending upon her own head, thanked me profusely and a little tearfully. It was during the general chorus of farewells at the last moment before the *Sylph* cast off. Her last appeal, cried after us from the wharf where she stood frantically waving a wet handkerchief, was that I should give Muloa a wide berth.

It brought a laugh from Joyce. He had discovered the good lady's extreme perturbation in regard to Lakalatcha, and had promptly declared for spending a day there with his bride. It was an exceptional opportunity to witness the volcano in its active mood. Each time that Joyce had essayed this teasing pleasantry, which never failed to draw Mrs. Stanleigh's protests, I observed that his wife remained silent. I assumed that she had decided to keep her own counsel in regard to the trip she had made there.

"I'm trusting you not to take Eleanor near that dreadful island, Mr. Barnaby," was the admonition shouted across the widening gap of water.

It was a quite unnecessary appeal, for Joyce, who was presently sitting with his wife in a sheltered quarter of the deck, had not the slightest interest in the smoking cone which was as yet a mere smudge upon the horizon. Eleanor, with one hand in Joyce's possession, at times watched it with a seemingly vast apathy until some ardent word from Joyce would draw her eyes back to his and she would lift to him a smile that was like a caress. The look of weariness and balked purpose that had once marked her expression had vanished. In the week since she had married Joyce she seemed to have grown younger and to be again standing on the very threshold of life with girlish eagerness. She hung on Joyce's every word, communing with him hour after hour, utterly content, indifferent to all the world about her.

In the cabin that evening at dinner, when the two of them deigned to take polite cognizance of my existence, I announced to Joyce that I proposed to hug the island pretty close during the night. It would save considerable time.

"Just as you like, Captain," Joyce replied, indifferently.

"We may get a shower of ashes by doing so, if the wind should shift."
I looked across the table at Mrs. Joyce.

"But we shall reach Malduna that much sooner?" she queried.

I nodded. "However, if you feel any uneasiness, I'll give the island a wide berth." I didn't like the idea of dragging her— the bride of a week— past that place with its unspeakable memories, if it should really distress her.

Her eyes thanked me silently across the table. "It's very kind of you, but"— she chose her words with significant deliberation— "I haven't a fear in the world, Mr. Barnaby."

Evening had fallen when we came up on deck. Joyce bethought himself of some cigars in his stateroom and went back. For the moment I was alone with his wife by the rail, watching the stars beginning to prick through the darkening sky. The *Sylph* was running smoothly, with the wind almost aft; the scud of water past her bows and the occasional creak of a block aloft were the only sounds audible in the silence that lay like a benediction upon the sea.

"You may think it unfeeling of me," she began, quite abruptly, "but all this past trouble of mine, now that it is ended, I have completely dismissed. Already it begins to seem like a horrid dream. And as for that island"— her eyes looked off toward Muloa now impending upon us and lighting up the heavens with its sullen flare— "it seems incredible that I ever set foot upon it.

"Perhaps you understand," she went on, after a pause, "that I have not told my husband. But I have not deceived him. He knows that I was once married, and that the man is no longer living. He does not wish to know more. Of course he is aware that Uncle Geoffrey came out here to— to see a Mr. Leavitt, a matter which he has no idea concerned me. He thanks the stars for whatever it was that did bring us out here, for otherwise he would not have met me."

"It has turned out most happily," I murmured.

"It was almost disaster. After meeting Mr. Joyce— and I was weak enough to let myself become engaged— to have discovered that I was still chained to a living creature like that…. I should have killed myself."

"But surely the courts— "

She shook her head with decision. "My church does not recognize that sort of freedom."

We were drawing steadily nearer to Muloa. The mountain was breathing slowly and heavily— a vast flare that lifted fanlike in the skies and died away. Lightning played fitfully through the dense mass of smoke and choking gases that hung like a pall over the great cone. It was like the night sky that overhangs a city of gigantic blast-furnaces, only infinitely multiplied. The sails of the *Sylph* caught the ruddy tinge like a phantom craft gliding through the black night, its canvas still dyed with the sunset glow. The faces of the crew, turned to watch the spectacle, curiously fixed and inhuman, were picked out of the gloom by the same fantastic light. It was as if the schooner, with masts and riggings etched black against the lurid sky, sailed on into the Day of Judgment.

IT WAS after midnight. The *Sylph* came about, with sails trembling, and lost headway. Suddenly she vibrated from stem to stern, and with a soft grating sound that was unmistakable came to rest. We were aground in what should have been clear water, with the forest-clad shore of Muloa lying close off to port.

The helmsman turned to me with a look of silly fright on his face, as the wheel revolved useless in his hands. We had shelved with scarcely a jar sufficient to disturb those sleeping below, but in a twinkling Jackson, the mate, appeared on deck in his pajamas, and after a swift glance toward the familiar shore turned to me with the same dumfounded look that had frozen upon the face of the steersman.

"What do you make of this?" he exclaimed, as I called for the lead.

"Be quiet about it," I said to the hands that had started into movement. "Look sharp now, and make no noise." Then I turned to the mate, who was perplexedly rubbing one bare foot against the other and measuring with his eye our distance from the shore. The *Sylph* should have turned the point of the island without mishap, as she had done scores of times.

"It's the volcano we have to thank for this," was my conjecture. "Its recent activity has caused some displacement of the sea bottom."

Jackson's head went back in sudden comprehension. "It's a miracle you didn't plow into it under full sail."

We had indeed come about in the very nick of time to avoid disaster. As matters stood I was hopeful. "With any sort of luck we ought to float clear with the tide."

The mate cocked a doubtful eye at Lakalatcha, uncomfortably close above our heads, flaming at intervals and bathing the deck with an angry glare of light. "If she should begin spitting up a little livelier…" he speculated with a shrug, and presently took himself off to his bunk after an inspection below had shown that none of the schooner's seams had started. There was nothing to do but to wait for the tide to make and lift the vessel clear. It would be a matter of three or four hours. I dismissed the helmsman; and the watch forward, taking advantage of the respite from duty, were soon recumbent in attitudes of heavy sleep.

The wind had died out and a heavy torpor lay upon the water. It was as if the stars alone held to their slow courses above a world rigid and inanimate. The *Sylph* lay with a slight list, her spars looking inexpressibly helpless against the sky, and, as the minutes dragged, a fine volcanic ash, like some mortal pestilence exhaled by the monster cone, settled down upon the deck, where, forward in the shadow, the watch lay curled like dead men.

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2: Middleton's Model

Anthony Hope

1863-1933

Collected in: *Sport Royal and Other Stories*, 1893

MIDDLETON was doing very well; everybody admitted that— some patronizingly, others enviously. And yet Middleton aimed high. He eschewed pot-boilers, and devoted himself to important subject pictures, often of an allegorical description. Nevertheless, his works sold, and that so well that Middleton thought himself justified in taking a wife. Here, again, good fortune attended him. Miss Angela Dove was fair to see, possessed of a nice little income, and, finally, a lady of taste, for she accepted Middleton's addresses. Decidedly a lucky fellow all round was Middleton. But, in spite of all his luck, his face was clouded with care as he sat in his studio one summer evening. Three months before he had been the recipient of a most flattering commission from that wealthy and esteemed connoisseur the Earl of Moneyton. The earl desired two panels for his hall. "I want," he wrote, "two full-length female figures— the one representing Heavenly Love, the other Earthly Love. Not a very new subject, you will say; but I have a fancy for it, and I can rely on your talent to impart freshness even to a well-worn theme."

Of course there was no difficulty about Heavenly Love. Angela filled the bill (the expression was Middleton's own) to a nicety. Her pretty golden hair, her sweet smile, her candid blue eyes, were exactly what was wanted. Middleton clapped on a pair of wings, and felt that he had done his duty. But when he came to Earthly Love the path was not so smooth. The earl demanded the acme of physical beauty, and that was rather hard to find. Middleton tried all the models in vain; he frequented the theaters and music-halls to no purpose; he tried to combine all the beauties of his acquaintance in one harmonious whole, but they did not make what tea-dealers call a "nice blend." Then he tried to evolve Earthly Love out of his own consciousness, but he could get nothing there but Angela again; and although he did violence to his feelings by giving her black hair and an evil cast in her eye, he knew that, even thus transformed, she would not satisfy the earl. Middleton was in despair; his reputation was at stake. The thought of Angela could not console him.

"I'd give my soul for a model!" cried he, flinging aside his pencil in despair.

At this moment he heard a knock at the door. He existed on the charwoman system, and after six o'clock in the evening had to open his own door. A lady stood outside, and a neat brougham was vanishing round the corner. Even in the darkness Middleton was struck by the grace and dignity of his visitor's figure.

"Mr. Middleton's, is it not?" she asked, in a very sweet voice.

Middleton bowed. It was late for a call, but if the lady ignored that fact, he could not remind her of it. Fortunately there was no chance of Angela coming at such an hour. He led the way to his studio.

"May I ask," he began, "to what I am indebted for this honor?"

"I see you like coming to business directly," she answered, her neatly gloved hands busy unpinning her veil. She seemed to find the task a little difficult.

"You see, it's rather late," said Middleton.

"Not at all. I am only just up. Well, then, to business. I hear you want a model for an Earthly Love."

"Exactly. May I ask if you— "

"If I am a model? Oh, now and then— not habitually."

"You know my requirements are somewhat hard to fulfill?"

"I can fulfill them," and she raised her veil. She certainly could. She realized his wildest dreams— the wildest dream of poets and painters since the world began. Middleton stood half-stupefied before her.

"Well, shall I do?" she asked, turning her smile on him.

Middleton felt as if it were a battery of guns, as he answered that he would be the happiest painter in the world if she would honor him.

"Head only, of course," she continued.

"Of course," said he hastily; "unless, that is, you will give me hands and arms too."

"I think not. My hands are not so good." And she glanced at her kid gauntlets with a smile.

"And— er— as to terms?" he stammered.

"Oh, the usual terms," she answered briskly.

Middleton hinted at pre-payment.

"I'm not allowed to take that," she said. "Come, I will ask for what I want when the time comes. You won't refuse me?"

"It's a little vague," he said, with an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, I can go away." And she turned toward the door.

"Whatever you like," he cried hastily.

"Ah, that's better. I shall not take anything of great value."

She gave him her hand. He ventured on a slight pressure. The lady did not seem to notice it, and her hand lay quite motionless in his.

"To-morrow, then?" he said.

"Yes. I won't trouble you to call a cab. I shall walk."

"Have you far to go?"

"Oh, some little way; but it's an easy road."

"Can't I escort you?"

"Not to-night. Some day, I hope"— and she stepped into the street and disappeared round the corner.

Punctually the next day she reappeared. Apart from her incomparable beauty— and every time she came, Middleton was more convinced that it was incomparable— she was a charming companion. She was very well read, and her knowledge of the world was wonderful.

"I wish it wasn't rude to ask your age!" he exclaimed one day.

"Ah, I am older than I look. My work keeps me young."

"Are you very busy, then?"

"I am always busy. But I don't grudge the time I give to you. No, don't thank me. I am to be paid, you know." And she laughed merrily. If there were a flaw in her, it was her laugh. Middleton thought it rather a cruel laugh.

"Do you know," he resumed, "you have never told me your name yet."

"I am here incognita."

"You will tell me some day?"

"Yes, you shall know some day."

"Before we part forever?"

"Perhaps we shall not part— forever."

Middleton said he hoped not; but what would Angela say?

"My name is not so pretty a one as your fiancée's," the lady continued.

"How do you know I am engaged?"

"I always know that sort of thing. It's so useful. Angela Dove, isn't it?"

"Yes; I hope you like it?"

"To be candid, not very much. It happens to have unpleasant associations."

It was fortunate that Angela was staying out of town. Middleton felt that the two ladies would not have got on well together; and— He checked himself in shame; for his thought had been that not even for Angela could he send the stranger away. Middleton struggled against the treacherous passion that grew upon him; but he struggled in vain. He was guilty of postponing the finishing of his panel as long as he could. At last the lady grew impatient.

"I shall not come after to-day," she announced. "You can finish it to-day."

"Oh, hardly!" he protested.

"I'll stay late; but I can't come again."

Middleton worked hard, and by evening the panel was finished.

"A thousand thanks," he said. "And now you'll have something to eat, won't you?"

She agreed, and they sat down to a merry meal. The lady surpassed herself in brilliancy, and her mad gayety infected Middleton. Forgetful of his honor and allegiance, he leaned over to toast his guest, with a passionate gaze in his eyes. Insensibly the evening sped away; suddenly the clock struck twelve.

"I am going now," she said.

"Ah, you won't leave me!" cried Middleton.

"For the moment."

"But when shall I see you again?"

"As soon as you like, but not later than you must."

"You are charmingly mysterious. Tell me where you are going?"

"To my home."

"If you won't come to me, I shall come to you," he insisted.

"Yes, you will come to me," she answered, smiling.

"And we shall be together?"

"Yes."

"As long as ever I like?"

"Yes— longer."

"Impossible! Eternity would not be too long."

"Nous verrons," said she, with a laugh.

"At least you will write? You'll send me your picture?"

"I never write, and you have my picture."

"And another in my heart," he cried hotly.

"I have tried to put it there."

"But give me some token— anything— a ribbon— a glove— anything."

"Well, let it be a glove. As I go I will give you a glove."

She rose from her chair and rested her right hand on the table.

"Till we meet again!" she said.

"I am yours for ever!" he cried, seizing her hand.

"True! true!" she answered triumphantly. "You are mine forever!" and with a sudden movement she drew her arm away from him and left on the table— her glove, was it, or her hand? It seemed her very hand! and as Middleton looked up he had a vision of a blood-red claw shaken in his face, and devilish laughter rattled in his ears. The lady was gone, and Middleton fell full length on his studio floor.

Middleton is a very devoted husband to Angela Dove. When he is well and cheerful, he blames himself for having made love to a model, and laughs at himself for having been fool enough to fancy— well, all sorts of rubbish. But when he is out of sorts he does not like to be complimented on his figure of Earthly Love, and he gives a shudder if he happens to come across an article which lies hidden in his cupboard— a perfect model of the human hand covered with black kid; the model is hollow, and there is a curious black mark inside it.

And the earl? The earl was delighted with the panel.

"Was she a professional model?" he asked.

"She made it a matter of business with me," said Middleton uneasily. It was one of his bad days.

"I must know that girl," continued the earl, with a cunning look in his eye.

"I expect you will some day."

"What's her name?"

"I don't know. She didn't tell me."

"Didn't she sign anything when you paid her?"

"I haven't paid her yet."

"But you're going to?"

"I— I suppose so," answered Middleton.

"Well, you'll find out who she is then. And, I say, Middleton, just let me know."

"I will if I can— unless you've found it out before."

The earl took up his hat with a sigh.

"A glorious creature!" he said. "I hope I shall see her sometime."

"I think it's very likely, my lord," said Middleton.

"Have you any notion where she comes from?"

Middleton compromised. He said he understood that the lady was from Monte Carlo.

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3: Parade of the Wooden Kimonos

Emile C. Tepperman

1899-1951

Ten Detective Aces, Feb 1941

THE Japanese gentleman was very apologetic. He stood in the doorway of Marty Quade's hotel room, with a flashlight in one hand and a small twenty-two calibre pistol in the other. Right behind him there was a second Japanese gentleman, who had no flashlight, but who made no effort to hide the gun in his hand.

"I am so sorry to intrude, Mr. Quade," said the first Japanese gentleman, speaking very politely and in precise English. "Believe me, it is very necessary."

Marty sat up in bed and blinked at the two uninvited guests. The hair on his chest glistened in the beam of the flashlight. He slept only in his pajama pants, and the upper part of his body felt chilly in the cold draft which the open door was causing.

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded.

The first Japanese gentleman stepped farther into the room. His companion, right in back of him, felt for the electric light switch, and flicked it on. The light from the ceiling lamp revealed them both to be faultlessly attired in evening clothes, with white tie, stiff shirt-front, handsome dark topcoats, and opera hats.

The second of the two closed the door carefully, and double-locked it. Then the first one put away his flashlight and advanced toward the bed. Keeping the pistol pointed at Marty, he showed two gleaming rows of false teeth in a smile that was supposed to be dazzlingly genial.

"Please do nothing rash, Mr. Quade," he begged. "I am aware of your reputation for toughness. But believe me, if you should get out of bed, we would be compelled to kill you at once."

Marty looked at them soberly for a moment, then he began to grin. He propped himself up on one elbow, keeping the blankets over him. His other hand was under the blanket, gripping the thirty-two calibre automatic which he had picked up from the night table when he had been awakened by the fumbling at his door.

"Come right in," he invited. "Make yourselves at home, Mister— er—"

"Hito," supplied the first Japanese gentleman. "Matsuma Hito. And this"— he waved at his companion, who blinked owlishly from behind a pair of horn-rimmed glasses— "is my assistant, Mr. Nugo."

"And what's the idea, Mr. Hito," Marty Quade demanded, "of breaking into my room at three o'clock in the morning?"

"We did not break in, Mr. Quade," Hito protested gently. "We merely opened the door with a passkey."

"Where did you get the passkey?"

Mr. Hito smiled once more and raised one shoulder slightly. "From the night clerk. The poor fellow saw fit to try to resist, and Mr. Nugo was regretfully compelled to kill him. We have put his body in the vault."

MARTY'S fingers curled around the butt of the automatic under the blanket. His eyes narrowed. Mr. Hito was certainly not bluffing. His calm statement about murdering the night clerk had been made too matter-of-factly.

"If you wanted to get in here," Marty said, "why didn't you just knock instead of going to the trouble of killing the night clerk?"

Mr. Hito smiled deprecatingly. "We hoped to catch you— napping, so to speak. We wanted no trouble with you, Mr. Quade. We thought it wiser to talk with you— with the advantage on our side."

To illustrate what he meant by "having the advantage on his side," he thrust his pistol a little closer to Marty's bare chest.

"Go ahead and talk," Marty said. "But don't expect that little pop-gun of yours to do you any good. I've been shown bigger guns than that."

Mr. Nugo, who had come around to the foot of the bed, snickered. But Mr. Hito remained very grave. "I have been warned that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Quade. That is why we took such precautions tonight. I do not think that we will have any trouble with you."

"Get down to business," Marty said impatiently.

Mr. Hito removed his top hat, flattened it carefully, using only one hand, and then sat down in the chair near the bed. He put the hat in his lap and held the pistol over it.

"You are a very unconventional private detective, Mr. Quade," he began. "You have no office, and you transact all your business from your hotel room here, or from any bar where you may happen to be. In this manner, you are always within reach of any client who has immediate and pressing need of your services. Perhaps one reason for operating in this peculiar way is that you have clients in so many different and out-of-the-way walks of life."

"Look, Mr. Hito," Marty said in an exasperated voice. "For the sake of saving time, you can assume that I know as much about myself as you do. Skip the biography and get down to the bare facts. I want to get some sleep tonight."

Mr. Hito smiled. "Have no fear, Mr. Quade. You shall sleep well, tonight. Very well indeed."

Mr. Nugo snickered again.

"I see," said Marty. "Curtains for me, eh?"

Hito shrugged deprecatingly. "No one dislikes bloodshed more than I do. But in your case, there is no other way."

"In plain English then, you're here to knock me off?"

"Yes. Unfortunately, yes. My humble apologies, but we must kill you in a few minutes."

"Why in a few minutes? Why not right now?"

"You do not understand, Mr. Quade. We are waiting for the telephone call."

"Telephone call? From whom?"

"From Andrew Gaxton."

"Ah!" said Marty. "Andrew Gaxton! But what has he got to do with all this. He's a writer of crime stories. And besides, he's in Mexico City—"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Quade. Andrew Gaxton arrived in New York by plane only a few minutes ago. We are quite sure that his first action will be to call you. He will ask you to meet him at once and act as his bodyguard. He has the utmost confidence in your ability to protect him, Mr. Quade."

"Thanks for the compliment," Marty said sourly. "But what's he afraid of?"

"Of me!" Mr. Hito said, with a show of becoming modesty. "He knows that I plan to— er— eliminate him, unless he complies with certain requests of mine. When he phones you, I shall let you answer. Then I shall take the phone, and inform him that I am here. I shall let him hear the shot which will— ah— deprive you of your life. When he understands that I have killed the one man upon whom he relied for safety, he will quickly come to terms with me."

Mr. Hito smiled, as if in appreciation of his own cleverness.

"You amaze me," Marty said. "You positively amaze me."

"Thank you," acknowledged Mr. Hito. "I always try to do a piece of work thoroughly. It is my profession."

"You mean you're a professional murderer?"

"No, no. I, Mister Quade, am a—"

Mr. Hito had no opportunity to say what he was, for the telephone on the night table rang.

Mr. Hito smiled, and bobbed his head. He waved toward the instrument with his pistol.

"Answer, please!"

A QUEER sort of tenseness seemed to take possession of both Mr. Hito and his assistant, Mr. Nugo. Nugo's breath left his lips in a sibilant hiss, and he leaned over a little, across the foot of the bed. His eyes, behind the horn-rimmed glasses, actually grew wider. The pistol in his hand moved forward, and the veins began to stand out on his skinny yellow hand.

Mr. Hito, however, remained outwardly calm, except for an almost imperceptible hunching of the right shoulder.

Marty pushed himself back in the bed, so that he rested against the headboard. He still kept his right hand under the blanket. With his left he reached out and removed the telephone from its cradle. He raised it and said:

"Quade speaking. How are you, Gaxton?"

There was a gasp at the other end of the wire. Then a voice said: "Marty! How did you know it was I?"

Marty Quade chuckled. "A little bird. In fact, two little birds. The name of one is Mr. Hito, and the name of the other is Mr. Nugo. They're here to kill me, so as to put a scare into you."

"Holy Moses!" Andrew Gaxton groaned. "I should have known better than to drag you into this. I could kick myself for having boasted, down in Mexico City, that my friend Quade would take care of me once I got to the States. You're as good as dead, Marty, and I am lost. That Hito is worse than a rattlesnake!"

"Tut, tut," said Marty. "Mr. Hito is easy to get along with. I'll take five to one that I buy you a cup of coffee at the lunch counter downstairs— in a half hour."

Mr. Hito and Mr. Nugo, who had been watching and listening very carefully, now exchanged glances. Mr. Hito nodded, and reached over and took the phone out of Marty's hand. He put the speaker to his mouth and said:

"Do not accept the wager, Mr. Gaxton. It is impossible to collect from a dead man. Listen closely now, and you will hear the shot—"

He nodded to Mr. Nugo, who snicked the safety catch off his pistol and thrust the gun all the way forward to bring the muzzle nearer to Marty.

Marty sighed, and took his own automatic out from under the blanket. The safety catch had been off all the time, and all Marty had to do was to pull the trigger.

He did so, and the gun cracked.

A big, round hole appeared in the center of the triangle formed by Mr. Nugo's eyes and the top of his forehead. Mr. Nugo let the pistol drop out of his hand. It fell to the bed. His horn-rimmed glasses fell off his nose. Then Mr. Nugo, looking quite bewildered, toppled forward. Blood spattered the white sheet. Mr. Nugo lay still. The reverberating echoes of Marty's shot bounced back from the four walls like the rumbling of a metal drum.

Mr. Hito was taken entirely by surprise. He had remained seated alongside the bed, with his opera hat in his lap, and the pistol held above it.

But he had been so sure that Mr. Nugo would be capable of handling the simple matter of murder, that he had devoted his entire attention to turning the phone in such a manner that it would catch the full blast of the revolver shot. Marty's swift and unexpected action had caught him flat-footed.

For a fraction of a second he certainly did not realize what had actually happened. Then, as Nugo fell across the bed, Mr. Hito uttered a sibilant sound and lifted his gun.

But Marty Quade was already swinging the automatic around. He could have shot Mr. Hito through the head, just as he had shot Nugo. And perhaps he later

had occasion to regret that he had not done so. But instead of shooting, Marty merely struck down at Mr. Hito's wrist with the barrel of the automatic.

The sound of metal striking against bone was drowned out by the still-reverberating echoes of the gunshot. But the feel of it was very satisfactory to Marty. The barrel thudded solidly against Hito's wrist, and the Japanese gentleman opened up his fingers and dropped his pistol, as if it were white hot.

For a second he looked with uncomprehending eyes at the dead body of Nugo, and at Marty's grinning face. Then he jumped up from the chair, spilling his opera hat and dropping the phone. He turned, crouched low, and dashed for the door. He twisted the catch, and yanked the door wide open.

"Hey, you!" Marty yelled. "Stand still, or I'll shoot—"

Mr. Hito threw himself flat on the floor, wriggled forward a foot or two into the hall, and then rolled out of the line of fire.

Marty swore under his breath, threw the blankets off, and leaped out of bed. Clad only in his pajama pants, he dashed out after Mr. Hito.

HE SWUNG out into the hall and stopped still, his face going a brick red. Mr. Hito was already far down the end of the corridor, near the fire exit. But there was some one else, less than ten feet away, coming toward the door.

She was a black-haired, black-eyed beauty, with a short fur jacket and a pair of blazing emerald pendants in her ears. A red silk dress swished around her long legs and clung to her narrow hips like cellophane.

But it wasn't her legs or her dress or her earrings or her hips that Marty was noticing at that moment. He was noticing the heavy black Luger which she was holding in one slender hand.

Besides noticing that Luger, Marty was also supremely conscious of his own lack of clothing. He uttered a gasp, and turned and dived back into his room.

But the black-haired girl came after him relentlessly, and started shooting. She was a terrible shot, and the bullets went everywhere except in Marty's direction.

The Luger was entirely too heavy for her, and the recoil threw her aim wild. The gun boomed four times before Marty got inside the room, and then he took another step and tripped over something. It was the body of the dead Mr. Nugo, which had rolled off the bed and was lying on the floor on its face, directly in Marty's path.

Marty went down head first, and his temple struck a glancing blow against the baseboard of the bed. It knocked him groggy for a second, and he lay still, his hands outstretched, one paw still gripping the automatic.

He heard the black-haired girl fire two more shots behind him. One slug hit the bed, and the other plowed into the floor almost a foot from his head.

She was certainly the rottenest shot who had ever popped a gun off at Marty Quade. But she must have thought that she had hit him, for he heard her say with a strong Spanish accent:

"Let that be wan lesson to you, peeg. I, Esperanza Torres, 'ave keel you, weeth my own 'and!"

Then he heard her light footsteps swiftly retreating down the hall.

Marty wiped sweat from his forehead, shook his head to free it from dizziness, and got to his feet. He grabbed his robe lying on a chair, flung it around him quickly, then sprang to the door.

The Señorita Esperanza Torres was just disappearing through the same fire-door through which Mr. Matsuma Hito had made his exit a few moments ago. There was a flutter of her red dress, and then the fire-door closed behind her.

Marty started to give chase, and then realized that half a dozen doors in the corridor were open, and that people were peering out at him.

He swore under his breath, and gave up in disgust. He turned and went back into his room, shut the door behind him. Then, picking up the phone which Hito had dropped, he said:

"Gaxton! Hello, Gaxton!"

There was no answer. Marty scowled, and tried again. Still no answer. Then the hotel telephone operator cut in.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Quade?"

"What happened to the call I had on here?" he' demanded.

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps you were disconnected. Do you know the number? Perhaps I could call them for you?"

"I don't know the number."

"Then maybe the party will phone back—"

"I'm afraid they won't!" he mumbled.

"What's that, sir?"

"Nothing. Listen— have you seen the desk clerk down there?"

"No, sir. That's very funny. I just rang the desk clerk to get the list of morning calls, but there was no answer—"

"All right," Marty said wearily. "Maybe you better phone down to police headquarters. Get hold of Inspector Hanson of Homicide. Tell him to come right over."

"Homicide! Did you say homicide, Mr. Quade?"

"Homicide."

"But— but that means murder. Is— is there some one dead?"

Marty threw a jaundiced glance at the body of Mr. Nugo. "If he isn't dead," he growled, "he's giving the best imitation of it that I ever saw!"

AT SIX-THIRTY that morning, Marty Quade was downstairs in the hotel restaurant, having coffee and ham-and-eggs with Inspector Hanson. The room upstairs was cleaned up, but there was a uniformed policeman on guard. Chalk marks on the floor indicated where Mr. Nugo's body had lain, and there was fingerprint dusting powder all over the place, and on the halls and stairways of the hotel.

Needless to say, Marty had not gotten back to bed that night. And Inspector Hanson was still firing questions at him, in between mouthfuls of ham and eggs.

"Damn it, Quade," he growled, "you say this Spanish dame fired at you six times, and we've found all six slugs. But it just doesn't sound reasonable that she should have missed you that many times at such close range!"

"All right, all right!" Marty snapped. "We'll do a re-take of it and have her hit me next time. Just get the dame back, and we'll give her another chance."

"Now don't get tough, Quade," Hanson barked. "I'm just trying to get a straight story, and I don't think you're giving me everything you know. We've checked with Pan-American, and they have no one by the name of Gaxton on their passenger list on the clipper last night. That was the only airliner that made connections with Mexico City. It's the only ship Andrew Gaxton could have arrived on. But they haven't got him down—"

"Maybe he used an alias. He was afraid of being knocked off. Maybe he tried to conceal his arrival by booking passage under another name."

"We're checking on that," Hanson told him. "There were nineteen passengers on the plane, and we've located eighteen of them. The nineteenth, a chap named Smith, didn't come in on the regular bus. He took a cab, and the porter heard him tell the driver to go to the Beverly Hotel, but no one registered there by that name— "

"Smith, eh?" Marty interrupted. "I suppose it never occurred to you that it might be Gaxton?"

"Sure it did!" Hanson growled. "But we haven't proved it. There are plenty of men whose real name is Smith. Every time you see a guy who calls himself Smith, it doesn't mean that he's traveling under an alias."

"All right, skip it," Marty snapped. "What about Mr. Hito? Did he disappear off the face of the earth, too?"

Hanson shrugged helplessly, "We've picked up a hundred and sixteen Japs for questioning in the last two hours. You've been down to headquarters and looked them over, and none of them is Mr. Hito. I'm beginning to think there never was a Mr. Hito, or a Spanish dame, or a call from Andrew Gaxton. I think you made it all up, to cover something else you're trying to hide from me."

"What about the telephone operator?" Marty pointed out. "She told you there was a call at three ten—"

"Sure. But it might have been from anyone. She didn't listen in. We've checked back on that call, and it came from an all-night drug store in Long Island City, which fits in all right, because Gaxton— or whoever he was— could have stopped off on the way from LaGuardia Airport to make the call. But that doesn't prove it was Gaxton."

"So?" Marty asked.

"So," Hanson finished, "you're still not out of the woods, Quade. If it turns out—"

Hanson stopped talking abruptly, his face going a dull red. He had been talking so loud and forcefully that his voice had been drowning out the voice of the newscaster, coming over the radio at the cashier's desk.

But just then a few of the announcer's words penetrated to their ears through Hanson's bellowing, and it was that which had caused him to shut up. The announcer was saying:

"...body has been identified as that of Andrew Gaxton, the noted writer of crime stories, who has been in Mexico investigating Fifth Column activities for a series of articles he was preparing.

"The taxicab apparently went out of control when a bullet fired from a high-powered rifle pierced the windshield and struck the taxi driver in the head. The cab was speeding across Queensboro Bridge at the time. It went wild, struck one of the steel girders, and immediately burst into flame.

"Fire-fighting apparatus from Welfare Island, in the middle of the river, immediately below the bridge, were rushed up by the elevator which connects the island with the bridge, but it was too late. When the taxicab driver and Andrew Gaxton were removed from the smouldering wreckage, they were burned to cinders.

"Mr. Gaxton was identified by a leather wallet which he must have been holding at the moment of the accident, and which was thrown from his hand, out of the car window on to the bridge roadbed. It will be recalled that Andrew Gaxton recently announced that he would return soon from Mexico City with information on Fifth Column activities there which would be dynamite..."

Marty Quade's face was grim and tight as he listened to the radio announcement.

"So," he said softly, "They got him, after all!"

"Hell!" Hanson swore. "I should have been notified. It's a homicide—"

He was interrupted by a waiter who came to the table.

"Inspector Hanson?" the waiter asked. "You're wanted on the phone, sir. It's police headquarters."

Hanson nodded brusquely and got up. "That's the desk sergeant calling to report," he grumbled. "It's a wonder they wouldn't move a little faster. Don't go away, Quade. I got plenty to ask you yet."

HE WENT toward the phone booths, and Marty waited only until he was out of sight. Then he got up from the table, leaving the check for Hanson to pay, and hurried out the back exit of the restaurant, passing through the kitchen.

The night cook, a Greek by the name of Ulysses Macropulos, had his arms elbow-deep in a pie batter. He looked up and recognized Marty, and grinned broadly.

"Halloo, Mistair Ku-vade. I hearing dat you gatting caught oopstairs by does woman, vid half your pajamas on, hah?"

"Nuts," said Marty. "I never sleep in a coat. That's why I grow hair on my chest."

"Hah!" said Ulysses Macropolos. "Vat you do if dere is fire, hah?"

"Listen, Ulysses," Marty growled. "I got caught in worse than a fire last night." He passed the cook's table and got to the back door, which opened into an alley alongside the hotel. "Do me a favor, Ulysses, will you?"

The cook grinned, and winked. "Sure. I knowing w'at you wants. W'en dose cop come, I ain't seeing you. I catch wise, hah?"

"Good boy, Ulysses," Marty praised. "That's the idea. You do me this favor, and I promise to taste your meatballs and spaghetti tomorrow."

"You promise? Hah! I making special for you tonight. But don't gatting you'self keel today."

"I'll do my best," Marty told him, and slipped out into the alley.

He made his way along the alley and stepped out into the street, trying to look as nonchalant as possible. Hanson's police car was at the curb in front of the hotel entrance, and behind it was parked a small station wagon belonging to the homicide division, in which they carried their fingerprint and photographic paraphernalia. But there were no police in evidence out here.

Marty turned west toward Eighth Avenue. He threw a quick glance across the street, and his lips tightened. A small, wiry man had come out of the lunchroom directly opposite, and he began to pace Marty, keeping just a little behind, but remaining on the other side of the street. After that first quick glance, Marty didn't look again, but he had seen enough. The man was Japanese.

Marty kept walking steadily west, though he felt prickles along his spine. Those Japs had got to Andrew Gaxton swiftly and terribly. Now the only reason they could have for shadowing Marty Quade would be for the purpose of completing the task which Mr. Hito had left unfinished last night— that simple little job of murder. If Quade were taken out of the picture now, it would leave no one to testify against Mr. Hito.

At this unholy hour of the morning, there were only a few people out, all men, obviously early commuters, and laborers.

Marty slowed up, so that the man on the other side of the street was almost abreast of him. The man made no move to slacken his pace, but continued on, past Marty. But a little farther on, he stopped and looked in a store window displaying women's lingerie.

Marty grinned thinly, and continued on. He couldn't afford to lose too much time here, because Hanson would be coming out after him very soon now. But neither could he afford to let that Jap get behind him.

Just then, a taxicab which had been cruising slowly down the street, pulled up alongside Marty. Some one leaned out of the window and said: "Ps-st!"

iii

BY INSTINCT, Marty's hand streaked to his shoulder holster as he whirled. But he let the gun slide back when he saw whose face was framed in the open window of the cab. In fact, he almost slid through the sidewalk himself. For the face in the window was none other than that of Andrew Gaxton, the man who had just been reported murdered over the radio.

Gaxton had a round, cherubic face, and immense ears. He also had a flabby extra chin, which was jellying now, in his excitement. He thrust open the door of the cab and croaked: "Jump in, Quade. Quick, for Heaven's sake!"

Marty glanced across the street at the Jap. The wiry little fellow was still admiring the ladies' lingerie.

Marty stepped into the cab and pulled the door closed without slamming it.

"Get going!" he said to the driver, and then he dropped to the floor, crouching on hands and knees. "Pull that hat down over your face!" he commanded Gaxton. "And look natural. Keep your eyes straight ahead!"

Andrew Gaxton obeyed mechanically. "But— but—"

From where he crouched, almost at Gaxton's feet, Marty couldn't see a thing out on the street. "Take a gander across the way," he ordered, "and tell me if that Jap over there is wise to where I disappeared."

Gaxton looked, and exclaimed: "Oh, Lord! You didn't fool him, Quade. He's running toward us, and he has a gun out. He'll kill us both."

"Yeah?" Marty said, and poked his head up, sliding out his automatic at the same time.

The Jap had already reached the cab, and jumped on the running board. He was poking his gun in through the window, and Marty came up, his face only inches from the muzzle. The Jap grinned triumphantly and pulled the trigger.

The gun thundered. Flame belched from the muzzle, and a slug whipped out. But Marty's hand had come up at the same time as his head— the hand which held the automatic.

His automatic struck the barrel of the Jap's gun, driving it upward, and the slug instead of ploughing through Marty Quade's face, slapped into the roof of the cab, burying itself in the upholstery.

The Jap never got a chance to fire a second shot, because Marty smiled at him sweetly, and lunged with the muzzle of the automatic, driving it smack into the fellow's chin. It cut a gash an inch and a half long from the point of his jaw up to his lower lip. And it drove his head far back. The Jap gurgled, let go his hold on the window frame. He went toppling off the running board and rolled away, limply.

Marty swung to the cab driver, who had automatically stepped on the brake.

"Keep going, my friend," Marty said. He emphasized his point by touching the cold muzzle of the automatic to the back of the man's neck.

The driver got the point all right. He took his foot off the brake and put it on the gas. They shot ahead to the corner like a projectile out of a cannon's mouth, and crossed Eighth Avenue against the red light without losing an iota of their speed. At Ninth Avenue Marty said:

"Turn right, my friend, and go uptown."

At the next corner Marty took the muzzle from the driver's neck. "All right," he said. "You can stop here."

They got out, and Marty smiled winningly at the driver. "You did us quite a favor, my friend."

"L-listen, m-mister," the cabby stuttered. "I d-don't w-want n-no t-trouble—
"

"No trouble at all," Marty told him, "as long as you keep mum about us." He turned to Gaxton and said: "Give him some money."

Andrew Gaxton nodded eagerly and pulled out a roll of bills which was so fat that he had difficulty holding it. He peeled off two twenties, handed them to the driver.

"You better forget you had us for a fare," Marty warned.

"M-mister," the driver said, "I'm b-blind and d-deaf and d-dumb—"

"S-swell!" said Marty. And then he snapped his fingers in disgust. "Oh, hell! I'm doing it too! Get going!"

They watched the cab disappear up Ninth Avenue, and then Marty took Andrew Gaxton by the arm and hurried him down the side street, back to Eighth.

Gaxton tried to hold back. "We can't go right back, Quade. The police will be looking for us."

"Not at Eighth Avenue, they won't," Marty told him. "They'll figure we're miles away."

"But where can we hide? I don't dare let the police get their hands on me!"

"Why not?" Marty demanded. "Look, Gaxton, if you've committed murder, I'll have no part of you. I'm in Dutch with Hanson already."

"No, no, Quade. It— it's nothing like that. But if the police get hold of me, they'll grill me. I can't take it, and I'll talk. And if I talk, then Esperanza's brother, Juan, will get boiled alive in a vat of oil—"

"Whoa up!" Marty exclaimed. "You're running the film too fast. Did you say Esperanza? Is it Esperanza Torres, by any chance?"

"Yes, yes! How do you know?"

"I've met the young lady."

"You have! Good Lord, Quade, you couldn't. She's in Mexico City."

"Nuts," said Marty. "She talked to me right in my room, this morning."

"What— what did she say?"

"She said: 'Let that be a lesson to you, you peeg!' I'll never forget those words, Gaxton!"

"I don't understand," the writer murmured. "I left her in Mexico City yesterday." He looked up suddenly, and blurted: "Quade, we're almost at Eighth Avenue! I daren't take the chance."

"We're not going any further," Marty told him. "Here's where we turn in."

He steered him into the entrance of a seedy looking hotel which sported the name ARGUS on a hanging speckled sign over the doorway.

"This is where you hole up."

Reluctantly, Gaxton permitted himself to be steered over to the desk. There was a large sign on the wall which said,

ALL RENT PAYABLE IN ADVANCE
NO CHECKS
ROOMS RENTED BY THE DAY MUST BE
VACATED BEFORE THREE P.M.
PRICE LIST
Inside Room— 60c
Outside Room— 75c
Soap & Towel— 10c
Shower— Free

THE clerk at the desk looked up from a racing sheet when they came in. He grunted: "Hullo, Quade. Been a year since I seen you last."

Marty nodded. "Give us one of your broken-down rooms, Oliver. On the top floor, next to the fire escape."

Oliver nodded, and reached for a key. "Room seventeen. You want it with, or without?"

"With," said Marty.

"That'll be fifty fish," Oliver told him.

Marty glanced at Gaxton. "Give him fifty bucks."

"Fifty dollars!" Gaxton exclaimed. "That's outrageous. And what's this about with or without? I don't feel in the mood for—"

"Take it easy," Marty said. "We're just getting a room with silence. If the cops inquire about you, silence will be the watchword. Is that worth fifty bucks to you? Or isn't it?"

"Oh," said Gaxton. "I see."

He took out his roll and counted fifty dollars on the counter.

Oliver took the money nonchalantly and stuffed it in his pants' pocket. Then he came around the desk, led them to the elevator and said: "Step in, gents."

The old cage creaked miserably on the way up, and Gaxton fidgeted nervously. At the seventh floor they got out. Oliver gave them the key.

"To the right, at the end of the hall," he said. "The fire escape is right at the hall window, next to your door. If anything comes up, I'll ring the hall bell three times. That'll be your signal to scram."

Marty nodded and led Gaxton down the corridor. He opened the door of Room Seventeen, and they went in. There was a single old bed, a dresser without a mirror, and a table with a pitcher of water and one glass. There was no chair in the room, and no closet. A cord tacked to the wall had two coat hangars attached to it. The bulb in the ceiling light was twenty-five watts, to discourage late reading.

"Holy Moses," Gaxton said, "is this where we must spend the day?"

"You must," Marty told him. "Sit down."

He fairly pushed him on to the bed. "Now! Let's have the story. How come you're reported dead, but still alive?"

Gaxton shrugged. "It was a mistake. After I called you and heard the shots over the phone, I got panicky. I dropped the phone and ran back to my cab. I told him to drive me out to Forest Hills. There I hid out in a hotel room till six o'clock this morning.

"Then I couldn't rest any longer, and went out for a cup of coffee. In the dining car, I heard over the radio about what had happened in your room. It was only then that I realized you were still alive. So I decided to go to see you at once. I got another cab, and we started for the Queensboro Bridge. I was sure I had lost Hito's Japs, but I kept watching all the time, and sure enough, I saw a car parked just at the entrance to the bridge, with two of the yellow killers in it.

"They saw me at the same time, and as we passed them they started after us. I told my driver to hurry, and he raced over the bridge. We overtook and passed another cab, just like ours, and the Japs must have mistaken that one for mine. They blasted it."

Marty nodded. "They got the wrong man?"

"Yes. I heard the shot, and then the crash of the car. I looked back and saw the flames. I paid off my driver and let him go. Then I walked back to the burning cab and threw my wallet on the ground nearby. That's how they figured me for dead."

"I see," said Marty. "And what about the car with the Japs in it?"

"It must have escaped, back into Queens. I didn't see it."

"Are you sure those Japs didn't stick around and spot you leaving the wallet?"

Andrew Gaxton turned white. "You— you mean— they could have followed me— all the way—"

"Anything is possible," Marty told him. "I suppose you never looked behind you once, all the time you were waiting in that cab for me to come out of the hotel?"

"Well, no," Gaxton admitted. He was nervously cracking the knuckles of his right hand by squeezing them with his left. "It never occurred to me that they might have picked up my trail— "

"Stop cracking your knuckles!" Marty barked. "You'll have me nuts in no time!" He waved angrily at the writer's hands. "What about Esperanza Torres? Where does she fit in the picture?"

GAXTON shook his head. "I don't understand it at all. I left her in Mexico City. I even kissed her goodby at the plane. She couldn't possibly have been here ahead of me, which is what she must have been, if she was at your hotel room while I was on the wire—"

"Is she a long and slinky dame," Marty asked, "with black hair and black eyes, slender and beautiful as all hell?"

"That's she!" Gaxton exclaimed. "It's incredible that she should have been here! She's my fiancée. It's for her that I'm doing all this— taking all these awful risks— "

"Doing all what?"

"Bringing the papers to New York."

He produced an envelope from his pocket. Out of the envelope he took a folded batch of onionskin papers, which he opened.

"Here is conclusive proof that the Japanese are conducting a Fifth Column campaign in Mexico and that they plan to establish bases down there, from which to launch an air attack against the United States!"

"Ah!" said Marty, taking the papers. "So this is Mr. Hito's profession. He's a spy!"

"Of course!" exclaimed Gaxton. "He'd do anything under the sun to get these papers back!"

Marty looked through them swiftly, and whistled. They were photo-static copies of original documents, mostly written in Spanish. One of them was a

photograph of an order from the Mexican Division of the Imperial Japanese Secret Service. The order directed local commanders of Fifth Column units to report to Mexico City to receive orders for "Q" Day, which would be the day upon which an uprising was scheduled in the Province of Sonora.

Another was a copy of a letter from a Mexican official, asking for additional funds. Attached to it was the reply from the Chief of the Imperial Japanese Intelligence Service, instructing him that money had been placed on deposit in a certain bank to his credit. It was signed Colonel Matsuma Hito.

"Wow!" said Marty. "I should have shot that guy through the gizzard!" He swung angrily on Gaxton. "Why didn't you take this stuff straight to the State Department in Washington?"

"That's what I was going to do, but I got a radiogram while I was on the plane. It was from Esperanza. Here." He pulled the crumpled form from his coat pocket and thrust it at Marty.

The radiogram was in Spanish, but in between the lines, Gaxton had scribbled the English translation:

JUAN IN OIL IF PAPERS ARRIVE WASHINGTON. FOR MY SAKE GO NEW YORK AND MAKE DEAL WITH HITO WHO IS NOW THERE.

ESPERANZA.

"You see," explained Gaxton, "it means that the Japanese spies down in Mexico City have kidnaped her brother, Juan, and threaten to boil him in oil if I deliver these papers to the U. S. State Department. Juan Torres and his sister, Esperanza, have been collecting these documents for me.

"In fact, Juan Torres even posed as a traitor to Mexico in order to get into the confidence of the Japanese Intelligence Service. Now that they got him down there, it means that he'll die a slow death— no matter if I give up the papers or not. But I decided to see if I couldn't trick Hito into ordering him released. That's why I decided to get you to protect me while I carried on the negotiations."

Marty tapped the radiogram. "If Esperanza Torres sent you this from Mexico City while you were on the plane, she certainly couldn't have reached New York before you."

"That's right—"

Marty suddenly put up a hand to stop him. Out in the hall, the bell was ringing. It was muffled, so that it would not awake anyone asleep on the floor. But it was perfectly audible to anyone listening for it. It rang three times, swiftly, then three times again.

"The police!" Gaxton exclaimed.

"Worse!" said Marty, shaking his head. "Three times is the signal for cops. Two three's is the signal that something else has come up— also calling for a quick lam."

"The Japs!"

Marty nodded. "It looks like they trailed you, after all. Let's be going, Gaxton!"

iv

HE HUSTLED Gaxton out into the hall and over to the window. Behind them they could hear the old-fashioned elevator machinery creaking as the cage rose slowly.

"They're coming up!" Gaxton groaned. "Lord, we'll never escape them. They're devils—"

Marty wasn't listening. He was working like a Trojan at the window, trying to pry it up. It hadn't been opened in so long a time that it stuck stubbornly.

"Didn't I pay that Oliver fifty dollars for silence?" Gaxton demanded. "How come he's bringing those Japs up here? How come he talked? How come he told them what room we were in?"

"Mr. Hito's Japs have nasty ways of persuading people to talk," Marty said drily. "I don't blame Oliver at all. You wouldn't expect him to let his eyes be put out for a mere fifty bucks, do you?"

The window still refused to yield, and the creaking of the machinery became louder as the cage neared their floor. Desperately, Marty reversed his revolver, wrapped his hat around the butt and smashed out the window pane.

It tinkled against the fire escape outside, some of the broken glass spattering against the wall of the adjoining building, which was only a few feet across the alley. Marty trimmed off the jagged ends of the remaining glass, and pushed Gaxton out on the fire escape. He followed him closely.

Gaxton wanted to go down, but Marty pulled him the other way.

"Up!" he ordered.

"But we'll be trapped on the roof—"

"Up!" Marty repeated, glaring at him.

Gaxton was too scared to put up much opposition. He started climbing.

Marty remained at the fire escape, peering in through the broken window. He heard the elevator cage come to a stop, and saw the shaft door slide open. There were half a dozen wiry little Japanese men in there, and it was one of them who was operating the elevator. They started to surge out into the corridor, naked guns ominous in their hands.

Marty Quade's eyes were bleak and hard. He raised his automatic and pulled the trigger five times fast, sending a flailing barrage of death into the huddled

group of men. Cries of pain and surprise rose among them, forming a sort of high-pitched threnody to the thundering chorus of Marty's automatic obbligato.

The smashing slugs from Marty's gun hurled those men back into the cage, threw them into a confused mass of dead and wounded. Some one fired over the prostrate bodies of his fellows. The bullet whispered in Marty's ear, then clanged an anvil chorus against the iron railing of the fire escape behind him.

Grimly, Marty fired twice more, emptying his automatic. Turning quickly, he dashed up the fire escape ladder after Gaxton.

The writer was waiting on the roof, trembling, in a cold sweat of fear.

"I— I was wondering what I'd do if you got killed—"

"If I get killed," Marty told him, "you might just as well jump off the roof! Now come on!"

He led the other at a run across the top of the building to the other side. Here, the roof connected with the roof of the adjoining building.

"This is the way all of Oliver's tenants make their getaway when the bell rings," he explained.

They crossed on to the next roof, and Marty pointed to a faint red line, drawn in chalk, with arrows spotted on it every ten feet.

"We just follow the red line," he told Gaxton. "Isn't it worth fifty bucks?"

The red line ended in front of a skylight, the door of which was swinging open. Gaxton eagerly lunged for it, but Marty pulled him away. "That's only for the people who follow us. We go around."

CIRCLING the skylight, Marty came to a stop in front of a dumbwaiter shaft. He opened the door, and there was the dumbwaiter, empty and waiting to receive them.

Some alterations had been made in it, so that it was twice as long as the usual dumbwaiter, with a sturdy, two-inch-thick shelf in the middle. Each compartment was large enough to accommodate a full-grown man, doubled over.

Marty stuffed Gaxton into the lower half and then climbed into the upper half, himself. He reached out and pulled the door shut. The daylight was immediately blotted out, leaving them in darkness. Marty felt around and, finding the rope, hauled on it cautiously. They began to descend, without sound.

Marty chuckled in the dark. "This is a remodeled tenement house," he explained. "Now it's a furnished-room house, and they don't use dumbwaiters any more. In fact, they've probably forgotten that there ever was a dumbwaiter in the building. Oliver owns it. While we're going down here to the cellar, those Japs— if any of them are still alive— will be trooping down through the skylight on the false trail."

"Look here, Quade," Gaxton said suddenly. "I begin to think you're going to get me out of this. A little while ago, I had lost hope. Now I'm beginning to breathe more freely."

"Don't get too optimistic," Marty warned, hauling on the rope. "This Mr. Hito is a very clever man. He may pop up where you least expect him."

They finally reached the bottom of the shaft, and Marty pushed the shaft door open. They rolled out of their cramped position, onto the basement floor. The dumbwaiter shaft was located in a corner of the cellar, and the coal bin had been built up in front of it, to screen it from observation.

They had to step gingerly over the coal, which slid and danced under their feet. Finally, however they managed to scramble out, alongside the furnace.

"Whew!" said Gaxton. "It's hot down here!"

Marty led the way toward the back door. "Go easy here," he warned. "This takes us out into the same back yard as the hotel. If Hito has posted any men out there, we'll have a fight on our hands."

As he talked he slipped a fresh clip into his automatic.

"Listen, Quade," said Gaxton. "I haven't talked about money with you. So far, you've earned more than I can ever pay you. If you get me out of this alive, just name your fee."

"Yeah!" Marty grunted. "I've had experience with guys who were willing to give me their shirt while the heat was on. But after I got them in the clear, they didn't remember how grateful they'd said they would be. Me, I like to get paid in advance."

"I've got plenty of money!" Gaxton rushed on, pulling out his roll of bills. "Just say how much!"

Marty looked at the roll, estimating its value. "So far," he said "I've given you about five thousand dollars' worth of service. If we come out of this alive, I'll probably earn another five thousand. I'll settle with you now for two grand."

"Make it three thousand!" Gaxton gurgled, and started peeling hundreds off the back of the roll. He thrust the money into Marty's hand.

Marty didn't count it, but slipped it casually into his pocket. He grinned in the semi-darkness of the basement. "Always strike while the iron is hot!" he said. "That's a damn good motto."

He led the way out of the cellar. At the back door he paused for a moment, peering into the back yard. It was a cloudy, sunless day, but there was enough light to perceive that the back yard was empty. Marty nodded, and stepped out, but did not relax his vigilance. Behind him, Gaxton crowded closely.

Marty nodded to the left. "There's an alley around the side of this building. We go halfway up the alley and then step in through the cellar door of the next house. That's the corner. We go out the front way, and we'll be on Eighth Avenue. We can mix with the crowd and grab a cab. Let's go."

They swung into the alley, and as soon as they had done so, Marty knew they had walked into a trap. At the far end of the alley there were two Japs with sub-machine guns. At the same time, Gaxton exclaimed:

"They're after us, Quade! Behind us!"

Gaxton's last words were drowned out by the thunderous roar of Marty's automatic. He hadn't waited for those machine gunners to open up, but had started shooting the moment he spotted them.

This time he conserved his ammunition, because he knew the fight wouldn't be over with the killing of those two. There were others behind them. He fired only twice, and the two Jap machine gunners went spinning backward, the weapons flying out of their hands.

They had been so supremely confident of the efficacy of their quick-firers ever Marty's pistol, that they had waited just that extra moment, to relish the taste of their triumph. And it was that extra moment which meant the difference between life and death to them. Marty hadn't waited to think. He had just started shooting.

He didn't wait now to see where those two Japs fell. He whirled around to see what was behind. At the same time he thrust Gaxton in back of him.

IN the rear of the alley were several wiry, yellow men, guns in their hands. The trap had been well-planned. Hito must have surveyed the ground, like a good general, and decided just where the enemy could retreat to if he should escape the killers who had gone upstairs. Then he had stationed men down here, to insure the success of his campaign.

The Japanese started shooting, and Marty, disdaining to kneel or crouch, faced them, spraddle-legged, and traded shots with them. Japanese, endowed with poor eyesight, are notoriously bad shots.

Their bullets sang all around Marty and Gaxton, caroming off the brick walls on either side, and ploughing into the ground. Marty shot carefully, picking them off one by one.

He yelled over his shoulder to Gaxton: "Get going! Find that side door and amscray!"

"But you'll be killed—"

"Get going, I say! I took your money, didn't I?"

There was no more opposition from Gaxton. Marty devoted his attention solely to the fight. The thundering guns drowned out any possible sound Gaxton might have made in retreating, so Marty couldn't tell whether he had obeyed or not.

He was down to his last cartridge. He had knocked over a couple or so of the yellow men, but more came crowding into the alley. They formed a solid line across the width of the alley, and began to charge. They came in at a run, their guns blazing in front of them.

Marty fired his last shot. This was the end. Well, it was all in the game. By his peculiar code of ethics, he deemed it his duty, once he had taken a client's money, to serve that client, even at the cost of his life. He had made plenty of money in his career, and he had lived a fast, full life.

But he had always known that the end would come like this one day, without notice and without preparation, and without benefit of clergy. Well, he was ready for it.

He smiled grimly, and went into a crouch, running to meet that charging line of death.

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FROM behind him came a frantic, desperate shout in a voice so distorted that he had difficulty in recognizing it as Gaxton's: "Down, Quade! Get down! Down!"

At the first sound of that voice, Marty caught the play. A great feeling of elation warmed his blood at the thought that Gaxton was coming through. He threw himself forward, flat on his face. He slid along the concrete walk for a couple of feet, toward the charging Japs.

And then, from behind him, there came the brittle staccato chattering of a sub-machine gun. Bullets whined above Marty's head. In front of him, the Japanese gunmen began to go down as if a high wind were carrying them backward irresistibly.

The charge broke up. Those in front fell, writhing, to the ground. Those behind turned to run, but were mowed down before they could take more than a few steps. The withering hail of lead from the sub-machine gun did not cease until the alley was entirely cleared of the enemy.

Marty jumped to his feet and turned to where Gaxton knelt on one knee, with one of the discarded submachine guns at his shoulder. Gaxton grinned broadly and threw the gun away. Then he came running toward Marty.

Marty dashed past him, knelt beside that sub-machine gun, and vigorously wiped fingerprints from the stock. Then, jumping to his feet, he seized Gaxton by the shoulder and propelled him toward the side door of the adjoining building. He pulled it open, yanked Gaxton in after him, and closed it.

Already, people were running toward the alley. Peering in from the street, Marty glimpsed their faces as he closed the door. Also, he heard a shrill police whistle, repeated over and over again.

He made sure the door was closed, then found the latch and turned it. Gaxton was breathing noisily behind him.

Marty took him by the arm and led him down a flight of stairs, then across the basement, and up another flight of stairs. They found themselves in the rear of a motion picture theatre.

It was dark in here, and the house was empty and deserted. The show wouldn't begin for hours. Marty hurried up the aisle to the front, found the small office which opened into the lobby. He turned the catch and pushed it open, and they stepped through.

In the street, a crowd had gathered at the mouth of the alley, watching the uniformed policeman who had bravely gone in there with his whistle blowing. But none of the crowd dared follow him.

Just as Marty and Gaxton got out on the sidewalk, a police radio car pulled up with squealing brakes, and two more officers got out on the run. The crowd was growing thicker by the second.

Marty nodded, and piloted Gaxton down Eighth Avenue to the next corner. They found a cab, and Marty said: "Grand Central Station."

As the taxi wound through traffic, Marty put a new clip in his automatic. Then he looked at Gaxton.

"Andy," he said, "you're okay by me. That was a nice piece of work you did back there. I never figured you for so much guts."

Gaxton blushed. "Aw, hell, Marty, I had to keep you alive. With you dead, I'd have been in the soup for fair. I wouldn't have known which way to turn."

"All the same," Marty said, "you saved my life, when you could have got away clean. I won't forget it."

They got out at Grand Central Station. Inside, Marty led Gaxton over to the operator-serviced phone booths in the Concourse, and shoved him into one of them.

"You call the State Department in Washington," he ordered, "and tell them what you have. Make an appointment to meet some one there in a couple of hours. Then we'll go across the street to the Airlines Terminal and book passage in a Washington plane. We'll be out of New York before Hito's killers pick up our trail again."

"I can't do it, Marty!" Gaxton protested. "If I turn these papers over to the State Department, Hito's men in Mexico City will boil Juan Torres in oil. How could I face Esperanza, after having done that to her brother?"

MARTY nodded. He was beginning to understand the peculiar and steadfast loyalty of this Andrew Gaxton, whom he had underestimated. Just as Gaxton had been willing to pick up a machine gun and fight for Marty, he was willing to go to any lengths to save the brother of his sweetheart.

"All right, then," Marty said suddenly. "You get in there and put in a long distance call for Esperanza Torres."

"In Mexico City?"

"Sure."

"But you said you saw her here in New York this morning."

"I say I saw her in New York, and you say you left her in Mexico City. So suppose you call up and find out. Maybe she's crossing you. Otherwise, why would she want to shoot me in the seat of the pants?"

Shrugging, Gaxton went over to the operator and put through a person-to-person call for Esperanza Torres, in Mexico City.

"That will be seven dollars for three minutes, sir," the girl at the switchboard said. "Plus twenty cents tax. "

"Better give her twenty dollars," Marty advised. "You'll probably talk more than three minutes. You can get your change when you finish."

Gaxton gave her the money, and returned to the booth. It was only seventy-two seconds by Marty's watch when the connection with Mexico City was completed. Gaxton had to close the door so he could hear above the noises of the station.

Marty, watching him, saw him talking urgently and desperately, then he saw him become pale and taut. Gaxton took out paper and pencil and scribbled something down. After talking for another minute, he hung up.

He came out of the booth, shaken and trembling. He thrust the paper into Marty's hand. On it was written an address:

Bianca Torres, Hotel Hutton

"What's this?" Marty asked.

Gaxton seemed to be in a daze. "It— it's Esperanza's sister, Bianca. It was she who shot at you this morning. I'd forgotten that Esperanza ever had a sister. Bianca went to Spain to serve as a nurse in the Loyalist Army, and she was captured by Franco.

"She escaped, and wandered all over France for a year, then got passage on a refugee boat for New York. She's been here a couple of months. After I left in the plane, Esperanza cabled her that I was coming to New York, and that you would work with me. She also warned her that Hito was in New York. She said Bianca would co-operate with you and me—"

"She picked a fine way to co-operate!" Marty said bitterly.

"But that isn't all!" Gaxton exclaimed. He stopped, and gulped, then rushed on. "Juan Torres was killed last night! They fished his body out of the bay. He had been dipped in a vat of hot oil, then tossed into the ocean. They— they didn't wait to see if I'd turn the papers over to the State Department!"

"The devils!" Marty said hotly. He gripped Gaxton's arm. "Now you are free to hand those papers over."

"No, no!" the writer groaned. "Esperanza got a call from Hito's representative down in Mexico City. The fellow said that Hito knew the whereabouts of Bianca here in New York, and would give her the hot-oil treatment unless I return the papers to him. Hito figures that we might let Juan die, but that we'd never let a thing like that happen to a beautiful girl like Bianca!"

"Oh, hell!" said Marty. "Let's go and find this Bianca."

He took Gaxton's arm and started to turn around, and some one said: "Why, you're certainly going somewhere, Mr. Quade. But not to find any dames. You're coming down to a nice clean cell in police headquarters!"

Marty stopped short, facing Detective Sergeant Sloane, of the homicide detail.

"Fancy meeting you here!" Sloane said, taking out his handcuffs. "We've been combing the city for you, but we never figured you'd be sap enough to come to Grand Central Station."

"That's what I figured you'd figure," Marty said sourly. "That's why we came here."

"Only by accident did I see you," Sloane apologized. "I'm just going off duty, and I'm on my way home to Larchmont. But I'll give up my time off— for the privilege of taking you in!"

"Don't bother," Marty said, and swung for Sloane's jaw.

HIS short punch had all the power of his shoulder muscles behind it. Sloane said, "Ar-gh!" and buckled at the knees.

Marty caught him and let him down easily, taking the handcuffs out of his hands and slipping them into his own pocket as he did so. A number of people turned to look. No one had actually seen the punch, and they thought Sloane was just another drunk. A uniformed station guard came running over, and Marty yelled to him.

"Officer! Officer! This man needs medical attention!"

The guard knelt hastily alongside Sloane, and Marty stood up. He gave Gaxton the high-sign, and they faded away. They went out the Vanderbilt Avenue exit, and Marty started walking hurriedly north.

"Where are we going?" Gaxton demanded.

"To check on Bianca Torres. Maybe we're not too late to stop Hito from grabbing her!"

"With every cop on the police force looking for us," Gaxton commented breathlessly, "we have a fine chance of blocking Hito! I don't understand why he should have killed Juan, and switched to Bianca."

"I do!" Marty barked, swinging briskly into a side-street, and heading east. "Bianca is in New York, while Juan was in Mexico City. Knowing you, Hito figures

you'll make a try to save Bianca. And he'll be waiting for you, Andy. Make no mistake about that— if Bianca's still at the Hutton Hotel, then Hito and his killers won't be far away. They're waiting for us!"

"You think it's a trap?"

"Nothing else but!"

"Then why're we going?"

"Because there's nothing else for us to do. We can't wander around New York, waiting for some copper to pick us up. And we can't smack them all in the jaw, either. Our only out is to find Mr. Hito and have it out with him— win or lose, kill or die!"

"And I haven't even got a gun!" Gaxton said ruefully.

Marty grinned, and took a police service thirty-eight out of his coat pocket and handed it to him. "I did a little pickpocketing when I was kneeling alongside Sloane," he explained.

Gaxton took the gun gingerly. "I never handled one of these."

"You did all right with the submachine gun," Marty told him. "Just do as well with that, and we'll come out all right. Be sure the muzzle is turned toward the other guy when you pull the trigger."

Gaxton grinned. "Marty, I've been writing about crime and crime fighters for years. But today was the first time I ever held a gun in my hand. I like it. I think I'll become a man of action instead of just writing about them."

"Don't make plans for your future," Marty warned, "till you know Mr. Hito is six feet under ground."

They stopped in front of a small but highly conservative looking hotel, with a small brass plaque alongside the door. The plaque read:

HOTEL HUTTON

Marty took a quick look around. "No Japs in sight," he said. "But that doesn't mean they're not around. Keep your hand on the butt of that gun."

They entered the Hotel Hutton, and want up to the desk.

"We're calling on Miss Bianca Torres," Marty said.

The clerk raised his eyebrows. "Name, please?"

"Tell her it's Mr. Black and Mr. White."

"H'm!" The clerk coughed his disapproval, but went to the house phone. A moment later he returned, however, and said: "You may go right up, gentlemen. It's Suite 1212."

Marty nodded and led the way to the elevator. The cage took them up to the twelfth floor, and left them alone in the quiet, carpeted hallway. The walls were adorned with wallpaper, and imbued the place with an atmosphere of subdued respectability. But Gaxton shivered a little.

"I feel as if we were walking on a keg of T.N.T.!" he whispered.

Marty grinned, and stopped in front of Room 1212. He rapped twice, but there was no answer. He took out his gun, and pushed at the door. It was unlocked, and it came open, revealing a two-room suite with a little foyer.

He could see into the living room, and it was evident that there was no one there. At the right, a bathroom door was partly open, while at the left the door to the bedroom swung wide. Part of a bed was visible.

Upon it lay the motionless figure of a woman. A blanket covered her, but it came down only to her knees, exposing her dress. It was the same red dress Bianca Torres had worn that morning.

Marty cat-footed into the living room. He turned and whispered to Gaxton: "You stay right here in the foyer, and keep your back to the wall. Cover me."

Gaxton nodded, and gripped the police revolver tightly.

Marty crossed the living room, ignoring the open door of the bathroom, and stepped into the bedroom.

Almost at once, a head arose behind the bed.

IT WAS the familiar head of Mr. Matsuma Hito. Only his eyes showed, and one hand, which held a gun trained upon the temple of Bianca Torres. At the same time, two other Japanese heads arose from behind the two boudoir chairs in the room.

Guns appeared beside those heads, trained on Marty. At the same time, Hito whipped the blanket off Bianca Torres, revealing that her arms were tied cruelly behind her back.

"Good morning, Mr. Quade," Hito said pleasantly. "It was nice of you to come— so that I can complete my unfinished job of this morning."

"You fool!" Bianca exclaimed from the bed. "W'y you 'ave come? W'y you no 'ave let Andrew geev those paper to thee State Department, an' let me die!"

Marty glanced at the two Japs, barricaded behind the chairs on either side of him. Then he looked over at the cynical countenance of Mr. Matsuma Hito, behind the bed, and at Bianca's slim, bound figure. He grinned at her.

"You're certainly worried about me now— for a dame that tried to pump me full of lead this morning!"

"Eet was a meestake!" she exclaimed. "Thee cablegram from my sister— she 'ave been meex up in thee translation. Esperanza 'ave say that you work weeth Andrew, but thee translation 'ave say that you work weeth Hito. I 'ave theenk you are a traitor to your friend, Gaxton, an' I 'ave go to keel you."

"I see," said Marty. "And now we're all going to be killed by Mr. Hito."

"Quite so," said the Jap, still hiding behind the bed. "Mr. Gaxton will be taken care of in the next room, by my men who were hiding in the bathroom—"

From out in the living room there was a sudden flurry of shots. Marty could distinguish the deep booming of the police positive, throatily drowning out the spiteful bark of smaller calibre pistols.

Marty jumped forward into the bedroom, and the two Japs fired from behind their chairs. Marty paid no attention to them. He went for Hito. He leaped high up, on to the bed, alongside Bianca.

Now he was above the Japanese spy-master. Hito, squealing, raised his gun to shoot upward, but Marty slanted a shot downward from his automatic, and it took Mr. Hito right in the top of the head.

Marty bounced off the bed, amid a flying barrage of shots from the two Japs. He landed flat on the floor, snapped a shot at the right-hand chair, and saw that Jap's face disintegrate, then he rolled over and fired at the other Jap.

That fellow didn't seem to care much for the fight any more. He threw his gun away and raised his hands in the air. Marty's bullet had nicked him across the top of the scalp, and he looked groggy.

Marty grunted, sprang to his feet, and tapped the fellow on the head with the barrel of his automatic. Then he sprang out into the living room to see if Gaxton needed any help.

Two dead Japs were lying across the threshold of the bathroom, and a third was peering around the door jamb to get a shot at Gaxton, who had dropped to one knee. The Jap was hidden pretty well from Gaxton, but he was in full view of Marty. Grimly, Marty let him have one in the shoulder; and the fellow tumbled backward.

Gaxton sprang up and exclaimed: "Marty! We've won!"

Marty nodded soberly, and turned back into the bedroom. He went over to the bed and untied Bianca's arms. She smiled up at him, her lips full and warm.

"You weel forgeev me for that I 'ave shoot at you, no?"

"Baby," said Marty, "I'd forgive you anything!"

He helped her up and into the next room, just in time to greet a rushing deputation of uniformed police and detectives who barged in with drawn guns. It took him a little while to explain things, and by that time Inspector Hanson arrived, and he had to explain everything over again.

There were calls to the State Department, and the F.B.I., and to Mexico City, and at the end of it all, Marty took Bianca's arm with one hand and Gaxton's with the other and said:

"Let's go get some more breakfast. I never had a chance to finish my first."

Inspector Hanson came over and took his arm in a grip of steel. "There's only one place you are going, my fine-feathered friend. That's back to the hotel restaurant and pay that check you tried to stick me with!"

Marty grinned. "It's a pleasure, Hanson. I earned enough today to pay your salary for six months. I can afford a breakfast."

Bianca Torres pushed Hanson away, and wrapped her arm around Marty's. She snuggled close, and looked up at him with a warm smile.

"He shall go weeth none of you. 'E 'ave promise' that 'e forgeev me for that I 'ave shoot at heem. 'E mus' come weeth me. Eet shall take heem a long time—thees forgeeving!"

She thrust them all aside, and led Marty out of the room.

Watching him angrily, Hanson growled: "You always were a lucky skunk, Quade!"

Marty turned at the door, with Bianca on his arm, and bowed.

"Better luck next time, Inspector Hanson," he said, grinning.

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4: The Debt

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Argosy 17 April 1920

AT THE END of a prosperous winter Stowe brought home a wife to keep house for him and his partner, David Burns, in the log-cabin on Mink Hill. She had been Molly Martin, of Twin Ponds, and everybody said that a nicer girl never wore shoe-leather. Nobody called her pretty, because she wasn't; but there had been a baker's dozen of men ready to marry her in spite of the fact that her father didn't have a dollar, and it had taken all the best manners and bold courting of handsome Harry Stowe to get her away from the strapping woodsmen and well-to-do farmers who wanted her. Dave Burns took to her right away. He liked her clear skin, her white teeth, and the way her dark-blue eyes contrasted with the brown hair that never hung in strings over her ears or down the back of her neck. Too many of the girls in the Mink Hill neighborhcod were like that when they were at home. But Molly was as neat as a pin, always; and when she had cleared out their litter of guns and traps and hounddogs without hurting the feelings of the dogs or jamming the sights on the guns he acknowledged her, in a wholly unemotional way, as peerless among the women he knew.

The attitude of the partners toward Molly differed, naturally, because of the difference in relationship; but there was something more than that. Stowe accepted her and her ministrations as a matter of course, while Burns considered her a blessing unequaled and undeserved. This was the first time that they had looked at the same thing with different-seeing eyes, but David would have said that the divergent view-point was a matter of no importance.

Through summer and autumn, life was very pleasant in the log-house. Money from the previous winter's trapping bought everything that they needed— flour and corn-meal, bacon and tea and tobacco— and various small sources of income that could be tapped during the warm weather provided luxuries: Molly had a white dress, her husband a new suit of clothes, and Burns got a good, second-hand cook-stove to replace the rusty cripple that had served their bachelor days.

For months Molly sang as she worked in their four-room home; and the men, each after his nature, expressed the conviction that life was good. The shoulders of Harry Stowe took on a wider swing and he caressed his mustache with an air of satisfaction as he talked; which forced David to suppress many a smile of friendly amusement.. He felt exactly as Stowe did, with the difference that he took his feelings out in roundabout attentions to Molly, whom he held to be a kind of human rabbit's foot. She'd brought luck, comfort, and, although he did not name it that, an ideal into their lives.

Winter brought the beginning of a change; a change that worked slowly and pitilessly, like a malicious fate, until all those external influences which affected greatly the lives of the three were the opposite of what they had been a year before. Snow, for one thing, piled up in layer upon layer until the trapping was practically spoiled. An ice-fishing venture on Lake Champlain brought hardly enough to cover the cost of the shanty and outfit. Burns tried to get a job chopping at last, but it had grown late and the difficulties of drawing wood out from the mountains were so great that year that he failed.

And so a March blizzard, that came roaring down upon Mink Hill just after there had been promise of a thaw, found the two men and the woman penned up, something after the manner of the animals that furnished them the greater part of their living.

Like all of their breed, neither Burns nor Stowe saved. A tireless body, a steady hafd with a rifle, and the friendliness of the out-of-doors were thought to be suffcient insurance against the future; but David, feeding wood to the stove on the second day of the blizzard, began to doubt these gods.

He looked at Molly, paring potatoes in the afternoon twilight for their supper. Her cheeks, so curved and faintly pink even at Christmas, had hollows in them now; he knew that she had not been a dozen yards away from the door in weeks, because her moccasins and overshoes had gone beyond repair. Stowe sat behind the stove, elbows on knees and head in hands. He had hardly spoken during all that dark, wind-pierced day. At the clatter of the griddles he roused and drew the bitten corner of a plug of chewing-tobacco from his pocket. He bit off a carefully measured piece. "What you got for supper?" he asked, turning his head toward Molly. With the hint of a smile that always preceded her words to him she answered cheerfully.

"Boiled potatoes, Harry," she said.

"And salt!" grinned Burns, dropping into a chair with a thud.

"Bah!" Stowe spat at a stove-leg. "Why don't you fry 'em? We had boiled potatoes for dinner!"

"The pork-grease is all gone."

Burns was looking up under his eyebrows as she answered, watching her face. He saw that she framed the words mechanically, with her gaze upon the ugly blotch her husband had made upon the clean kitchen floor. Before her coming, as was common enough among Mink Hill bachelors, the floor had served as a cuspidor. But her mere presence, without a word of protest or nagging, had been enoughto change all that until this hour when Stowe, coming out of his day-long brooding, broke restraint.

"This is a hell of a life!"

The master of the house got up and shook his six feet of toughened muscle and sinew. Neat darns were upon the elbows of his blue flannel shirt, and

patches, equally skilful, upon his trousers. His eye found in them now fresh evidence of his poverty, and he growled into his mustache as he tried to rub the frost from a window-pane and look out. "We're tied up here like a couple of old women!"

Molly winced at that. Dave, his thick, powerful shoulders squared against the bacl: of his chair and his head still bent, saw her; and resentment began to burn within him like the slow flame of a sulfur-match. He could no more have been brutal to Molly than he could have struck his own mother— and Harry was her husband! Harry! who was now rummaging on the partry shelves and muttering to himself.

"Say!" he cried, turning back into the room suddenly. "Ain't I got another plug of tobacco?"

"No." Molly held her head lower as she began to sort the potatoes out of the parings, and Burns saw a drop of water that was not from the pan splash on her hand. "It was the last one I brought you yesterday, Harry."

"You can chew my smoking at a ninch," offered Dave. '' There's quite a lot of it yet."

"All right." He began to pace the fivor, hands deep thrust in pockets and his oiled moccasins padding heavily. "The spring drives will begin the first of the month, Dave, if the snow goes like it usually does. Three dollars a day and board for the best men!"

"Yes," agreed Burns. "I was thinking of that a little while ago."

"Drat the luck! Six to ten weeks of work on the river, and a good time thrown in!"

It was as much as to say, that he was not going and Burns, wondering, was about to ask him why when a second thought stopped the question. There was Molly. It had been just after the river work of the spring before that Stowe had brought her home and so the problem had not been faced before. Of course one of them would have to stay with her— at least, that was the way it looked to Dave—and there was no doubt that it must be her husband. He knew many a man who left his wife to split wood and carry water, but it did not occur to him that Harry Stowe would his— not such a wife as he had.

"I won't need much of my pay," said Dave, at length. "Now I got a home I won't need it and I'll send it along, Harry, every time we hit a post-office on the river."

"Hey?" Stowe halted and glared, although not in anger at Burns. His wrath was against fate. "Nobody's going to support me!"

"Why— why—" Dave did not know exactly how to deal with this unexpected turn. "Ain't we partners?"

Then Molly turned from the stove, where she had put the potatoes to boil, laughed a ragged laugh.

"Why, Dave! You've put in everything you've earned since I been here— you can't keep on doing that!"

"I got my pay back all right," said Burns, "Don't you cook and wash and mend for me? I ain't been taken care of like that since I was knee-high to a grasshopper and lived at home."

"That don't amount to anything!" This time her laugh was wrought with a little note of pleasure. "That's what I'm for, I guess!"

"If I ain't left out of this," came rumbling from Stowe, "I'll say I guess we are pardners! Same house, same grub, same traps, same wife, same—"

"Harry!" Her utterance of his name was more poignant than a scream. It stopped him, and he and she faced each other, motionless.

He was too saturated with the sullenness of the discontent he had been nursing to feel the import of the moment— but it went to Burns, after a fashion. Dave knew that Molly had been given a wound that would leave a scar, although it might be ever so minute. He saw it in her hurt, blue eyes and in the slack muscles of her face.

As for him, his first impulse was to catapult from his chair and strike down the insolence of that outburst. Then the thought of the woman held him, and reason told him that Harry Stowe did not mean what his mouth had said. And it was so; for a deeper red than the snow and wind had given brushed Stowe's face from chin -to forehead and his eyes fell before the combined gaze of wife and friend.

"Aw, don't get on your high horse!'' he exclauned, apologetically. "I'm only talking! It's no joke to be kept off the river when we need money the way we do!"

"You can go, Harry," said his wife, very quietly. "You didn't marry a doll!"

"You can stay right here and work or the place," put in Burns. "We're pardners— and that goes for what I earn this spring!"

Stowe swept his sheepskin coat from its peg and jabbed his arms into it. He put a hand to the door-latch.

"I won't go in debt to nobody," he muttered, and swung himself out into the driving white curtain that flapped and sifted into the room before the door closed behind him.

Dave and Molly looked at each other; and then she turned her face away to hide the trembling of lips and the threatened dimming of her eyes. He wriggled uneasily, stricken with that embarrassment natural to man in the presence of tears.

"You cheer up!" he said gruffly. "Harry's kind of crotchety on account of the bad luck this winter, but he don't mean a word he says. I've seen him like that before, Molly. He'll get over it."

"He thinks— I'm a drawback!"

"Shucks!" He got up and stamped around the room. "He don't think no such thing as that! Why, he could go and I'd stay here, only—"

David, not given to the habit of concealing his thoughts, had blurted out something he would rather not have said—or so nearly blurted it out that she understood.

"Only he might even be jealous of us!" she finished for him.

That, somehow, made further talk impossible. Burns, even though he hated to entertain the thought, knew that Molly had spoken the truth. For the first time he realized that Harry Stowe, brooding over bad luck and burdened with an obligation that hindered his freedom, was not his prosperous and unfettered partner of other years, This puzzled David, and he felt as though he were mentally stumbling through underbrush.

How could a man with a wife like Molly fail to be happy? How could anybody doubt her perfect fidelity, even in a tantrum? Of course, he told himself, Harry would not even think such a thing except when he was in a fit of the blues.

A long meditation was broken by the return of Stowe. He came staggering into the kitchen, in a swirl of wind-blown snow, with a clanking burden over his shoulder. He dumped a score or more traps down in the light of the single oil-lamp to which necessity had reduced them and stood panting from his battle with the storm. Burns walked over and knelt beside the pile, wondering.

"What in the world are you taking in traps in this storm for?" he began, and let his voice die away as he looked closer. He rubbed the snow from one of them and lifted it to the light. "Why, this has got Fred Abare's mark on it!"

"It won't have, after I've put a file on it," said Stowe, calmly. "We'll have a big to-morrow if the storm lets up so I can get down to the village— and I'll buy enough chewing to last for a while, you can bet your bottom dollar on that!"

David stood still, holding the trap in his hand. He saw that Molly was standing still, too, and looking at her husband. Dave did not know what to say. It was far from good form to question the ethics of another man, even one's partner, on Mink Hill: on the other hand, it passed the boundary line of what was square to tamper in any way with another man's line of traps. It was not done except by those individuals who were more or less pariahs in the mountains. Yet Burns made allowance for his partner, knowing how tight their belts were.

"So you're going to sell Abare's traps?" he asked, rather feebly.

"Yes, and what of it?" retorted Stowe with an out-thrust lower lip. "I'll make it up to him some way out of my pay on the drive."

Burns guessed that this was a sop for Molly, because it could not be made up without seli-betrayal; but he was more concerned with the announcement that Stowe was gojng on the drive, after all. He went back to the fire and sat down again before he spoke.

"If we're both going on the drive we can get trusted for all we want down to the village," he suggested.

"Ask favors and go in debt?" Stowe shrugged. "You get in debt to a man and he's got a hold on you. I won't do it."

With that flat refusal the matter was dropped; nor did either of the men revive the discussion when Stowe came home the next afternoon through a sparkling, sunlit world of white with his shoulders bent under a pack of provisions. He had a dozen plugs of tobacco, bacon and tea and. sugar and other staples: and Burns saw that the hands of Molly were not quite steady as she sorted the packages out upon the kitchen-table.

That supper, although it was prepared with all the deliciousness that Molly knew how to give to food, tasted like chips in the mouth of David Burns; and he saw that she did not eat more than long enough to make the pretense of hunger. It was for her sake that he had sat down to the meal without protest and it was for her sake that he let the days slip on, one after another, without trying to settle the issue raised by the stealing of Fred Abare's traps. It remained open, with infinite possibilities of future trouble, while the snow sogged down at the touch of the spring thaw and the time for them to go on the drive drew near.

It was understood that both men were going. Stowe would not stay at home and David could not. Easy-going Mink Hill would not have gossiped, perhaps, about Molly, because even Harry's former sweethearts liked her; but Harry himself was ready to entertain any dark suspicion of anybody. He was oppressed by the weight of poverty, he was fettered by a wife, and he did not have enough chewing-tobacco to satisfy unstintedly his taste: such, finally, was the reluctant judgment of Burns.

He puzzled over this, sitting long hours in the kitchen thinking, until he remembered that neither Stowe nor himself had before been subjected to the grind of prolonged misfortune. Quick, hard blows, yes; and dangers overcome in a moment or an hour. But nothing like the past winter. He was both sorry and worried about his partner, and his partner's wife, and he was glad when at length there remained but one more night before they were to go north to the headwaters of the Skeene River to begin work.

It was the same river that ran within a few hundred yards of the log-house, and from which they carried their water in pails.

On the morning before the men were to leave it was Stowe's turn to-do the chores. He was more cheerful that day than he had been in weeks and as he

sauntered out after breakfast, with the pails clanking in his hand, he turned and called to the others to come out into the spring sunlight. Dave followed Molly out of doors and they stood together in the path that led to the river.

That path was like a dark-brown sponge beneath their feet. But only in such places, where the snow had been shoveled away did the earth show. The rest of the world was

covered by a damp, white covering that was plowed by gurgling rivulets— rivulets that flashed in the sun and sang joyously of the changing seasons. The river still held its ice bridge, black and gray-black and dirty white. It looked the treachery that was in it and it struck Burns suddenly that to go to-day to the water-hole, which had been cut well out from shore, was dangerous.

"Take a pole, Harry!" he shouted. "You're liable to get ducked if you don't!"

A pole to test the ice ahead of him, or to fling up horizontally as a support if he should go through— that was the precaution Stowe should have taken. But he laughed and shook his head from the bank, and leaped beyond the doubly dangerous strip at the edge. They saw him walk off confidently toward the water-hole; but both Molly and Burns were moved to go swiftly down to the river-bank. Again they stood side by side, not a stone's toss from Harry Stowe as he filled first one pail and then the other and turned so that he faced them on his way back.

He had taken two steps when the rotten ice refused the added weight of those two pails of water and broke into ragged cakes under his feet. The pails thudded and splashed away from him. He went down to the arm-pits in the welter of heaving fragments and then his instinctively clutching fingers found brief hold, so that he remained head and shoulders out of water. This was the moment in which he should have had the pole, to bridge over the broken . area until help could come. For his respite was of seconds only. His pale face, scowling and drawn by desperation, sank lower as his fingers dragged along the ice.

In the instant when the water-pails dropped and the feet of his partner went out of sight a strange thing happened to David Burns. He saw a picture of the future, as sharp and clear as though it had been photographed for him, and this was what he saw: Molly's firm, warm hand close within his own, her blue eyes lifted to his and filled with the light and happy tears of love, her red lips parted with a quick breath at the approach of his own. Of course Harry was dead, and she was his to love forever.

That vision was and was not, in the span of a second. Then Burns found himself actually looking into the eyes of his friend's wife.

He saw her soul stripped of every rag and ribbon that it wore. She loved him. Look answered look between them, as flame leaps to the snapping pitch-pine. And there was more than that: it was as though they had taken time to talk it all

out and explain to each other that by a little delay or carelessness or blundering the man out there in the river would go strangling under the ice and their only chance for happiness would be lost.

The fingers of Stowe had just begun to slip, the pails had not stopped rolling, when David leaped up the spongy path with feet that had never gone more swiftly upon any errand. He wrenched away a heavy plank that had served to guide the drippings from the eaves of the house and fairly hurled himself toward the river. He sent the plank sliding out over the ice and dropped upon it, face downward, as a boy rides a sled. The impetus carried him out to the opening that had broken about Stowe, and one end of the plank went within reach of Harry's hands just as his hold upon the ice relaxed.

They lay face to face for a moment, panting; Stowe's fingers pressed white against the plank and Burns striving to get back the breath that had been bumped out of him at the beginning of that quick slide.

A stone, with a rope slithering behind it, bounded to his hand and he realized that Molly had been as quick as he to act. He thanked God for that; and he cursed whatever devil had put the other black thought up to his mind.

Burns noosed the rope, threw it over the head of his partner, and drew it close after Stowe had worked it down under his armpits. Then he shouted to Molly to hold fast on the bank while he crept in on hands and knees, shoving the plank ahead of him, over ice that cracked and threatened momentarily to break up, now that it had been given the initial blow.

Dave reached shore and took the rope from Molly's hands without looking at her. Then he kept it taut while Stowe, to whom he had flung the plank, worked his slow way in. They stood together on the bank in silence for a moment, shaken and wet and trembling; and in silence they walked back to the cabin.

"Empty the Jamaica-ginger bottle into the dipper, Molly," said Stowe, "and fix it up with sugar and water. I got to get warm inside and out."

Burns, trying to dry out his own knees by the fire, heard the slap of wet garments as they fell from Stowe in the bedroom. Molly started to go in with the drink, but he met her coming out, dressed in the suit he had bought the summer before: He drained the dipper in two long drafts and sat down so that he faced David from the other side of the stove. His eyes grew a little clouded as they swung from the face of Burns to that of Molly, who was trying to smile at him as she hung his wet clothes upon a line back of the stove. It seemed to Dave almost as though there was a sneer under the mustache. of his partner as he spoke.

"You saved my life," he said, a little thickly because of the Jamaica-ginger, "and I owe you a debt."

"Oh, shucks!" wriggled Burns. "You'd have done as much for me— and it was more Molly than me, anyway!"

Stowe appeared not to have heard: he seemed searching for what he wanted to say—either that or struggling to keep down some tremendous press of emotion.

"By God, I'll pay that debt!" he roared with the suddenness of a crash of thunder.

Out of the silence that followed, the monotonous ticking of the clock made itself heard. The fire snapped. The sound of hurrying drops from the eaves penetrated into the room.

Stowe sat stiffly upright in his chair, arms curved and clenched fists resting upon his knees. He was a little bit loosened by the drink— enough so that. the things in his mind were ready to come out into the light. Molly had shrunk at the outburst; but her head lifted and her gaze held unwaveringly to the face of her husband. Dave, after the first shock of astonishment had passed, held determinedly to one thought— peace for the sake of Molly.

"You don't owe me nothing," he said, quietly.

"Maybe I wouldn't have owed you nothing a year ago!" Stowe had lowered his voice, but it was no less intense. "I do now— I saw you two look at each other on the bank!"

Without being conscious of any movement, Burns stood upon his feet. He saw Molly's lips part as the red surged into her face, but he spoke first.

"Hold on, Harry! You're a going to say something you'll be sorry for all your life if you don't stop right now! If you're mad at me we can fix up our business without bringing your wife into it at all!"

"That suits me," said Stowe. He cooled perceptibly and the cocksureness of his rage lessened, although there was no lessening in the steady anger with which he looked upon his recent friend.

"I'll leave here right off this morning," grumbled David, "and I won't come back after the drive is over. Now what do you want to do about the traps and fishingtackle and stuff we own together?"

"And the fish-shanty," added Stowe.

"And the boat— it ain't worth much, but it'll float." Burns scratched his head. "Neither one of us has got money to buy the other out."

"Nor we won't have after the drive— not and have anything to piece out through the summer. This winter has set us back."

Burns considered. He stole a glance at Molly and saw that she had gone about the business of washing the breakfast-dishes as though nothing had happened. Perhaps

Harry would see, in time, how foolish he was; certainly he would never have any cause to renew his wrath. And so David was led to think of the easiest solution, and the most profitable, and the one most filled with possibilities of trouble.

"The stuff has all been bought for a pardnership, Harry. For instance, there's only one first-class rifle, and one doublebarrel shot-gun."

"That's right."

"Well, trolling needs two men, one to row and one to tend the lines. So do lots of things. We can make half again as much money if we work together."

"Ye-ah "—doubtfully.

"I'll be living somewhere within a few miles of here," continued Burns, "and we can hunt and fish together same as usual if you want to. You ain't under any obligations to do it, Harry, but if you want to try it through the summer I'm agreeable. In the fall, or next spring, one of us 'll have enough money to buy the other out."

Suspicion slowly faded out of the face of Stowe; his expression became inscrutable as he chewed over in his mind this proposal. He was calm now, or at least, self-controlled. .

"All right," he agreed, after an interval, "YT guess that's the sensible thing to do."

With the agreement made, Dave climbed up to the loft where he had slept for nearly a year and packed his scant clothing into an old canvas grip. When he came down again Molly took her hands out of the dishpan and dried them.

"Good-by," she said; and she walked over and shook hands with him as a man might have done, giving look for look frankly and without any hint of that other glance on the river-bank.

Her husband watched them from his chair. He did not get up, but as Burns passed out of the door he called a carelessly spoken "So-long!"' and David answered him in kind as he set forth to look for another home.

He found a friendly welcome for that day . in the house of a neighbor and, as soon as he had made some half-explanation of his need for shelter, he went plodding off alone along an old wood road. It was in the depths of the brown woods, away from the complicated thoughts and purposes and desires of men, that he wanted to look into his own heart and find out what had happened there; for he was still in a measure stunned by that revelation that had come to him upon the bank of the river.

Over and over he swore to himself that never had he looked upon his friend's wife as other than the wife of his friend. He knew that this was true, but he needed to reiterate it to himself, for in this hour of introspection and self-analysis he wanted every prop that he could find for his self-respect, David Burns had sinned rather joyfully since he could remember, but never had he violated that somewhat loose code that the mountains taught him and his kind— such of them as cared to learn.

To be strong, to be fair to men and kind to women, and to be utterly faithful to a friend— these things were among the foundation-stones. Reason told him

that he had been faithful, but despite that he could not understand how it had come about that he and Molly loved each other. Being wife and friend to the same man, they had no right to; but they did. Their love was as sure as it was certain that the trees would bud and bear their richness of beauty.

All that remained to him was to live up to the letter of his self-made law. He knew that never again even by a glance would she reveal herself to him and he understood clearly that it was his part to keep away from her. Not to him or to her was given the right to shape events. That right was vested in Harry Stowe. If he should fling her away, like a wornout garment— David pulled himself back from thinking further in that direction. And yet a hope as faint as the first hint of a winter dawn comforted him minutely, although even as he took comfort in it he realized the folly of cherishing any hope. He must. stand on his feet and play the game with the score against him.

That was what he did through the months of spring and early summer, with a labor of spirit new and torturing to him. He worked in the same gang with Stowe, and often helped roll the same log into the river. All one day they struggled with a jam within sight of the log-house on Mink Hill— Molly went in and out about her duties gracefully and Burns cursed the fate that had sent the Skeene River flowing that way.

Between him and Stowe there was civility, neither more nor less. It required no eye of great discernment to see that his former partner hated him with a repressed hatred, but Burns, believing that it sought no outlet in action, gave it small thought. He was concertied solely with being more than fair to Stowe in their work and with settling up the partnership as quickly as it could be done without loss to either.

So he welcomed the return to the Mink Hill neighborhood and the opportunity to make woods and water yield all that was in them. They fished with considerable success, dug ginseng with profit, and even took to farm labor through the haying season in order the sooner to settle their affairs. They worked together without friction because neither spoke many words and each seemed to be intent upon his own end— David knew that his own was liberty, and supposed that the same was the sole desire of Stowe.

ON A sweltering morning in August they met in the village, according to their custom when there was no particular work planned for the day. Stowe wiped his beaded face with a hand that trembled lightly: there was a bruised look about his eyes, and Burns guessed inwardly that his partner had been where boot-leg whisky was plenty the night before, but he kept his thoughts to himself. Harry it was who proposed, after a desultory curse at the weather, that they forget work for the day.

"I'm a going to work anyway," Burns told him, "because it's just the blazing hot kind of weather I've been looking for. I'm going over to Red Rocks."

"Red Rocks?" stared Harry. " There ain't nothing there but rattlesnakes?"'

" That's it— rattlesnakes!"

"A rattlesnake ain't good for anything but an excuse to take a drink!"

"There's a bounty of a dollar apiece," said David. "They'll be lying out all over the rocks to-day and if we can't make fifteen or twenty dollars before night I'll eat a rattler! Nobody's thought of hunting 'em for a dozen years, not that I know of."

"I'm game!" cried Stowe, with a flush of enthusiasm. "They ain't as thick as you think for, but we'll make good money."

So they started, with their rifles in the crooks of their arms and their steps swift along the highway. That pace, however, did not last. At the end of a few miles Stowe lagged and more than once Burns halted to let him catch up. It was after an hour of this kind of progress that Stowe broke the silence which always enveloped their joint undertakings.

"Got any booze?" he ask, puffing. "We'd ought to have some for snake-bite."

"Yes." Burns hesitated before he added, slowly: "I've got some— for snake-bite."

"You mean that you will not give me a drink?"

"I don't want to be mean, Harry, but all I could get was a pint."

"Aw, come through with a nip! I was over to Thurman's Hollow last night— and you know what that means!"

"A pint ain't any more than enough, if one of us should get struck," he replied, stubbornly. "Ever see a man swell up with rattlesnake-poison?"

Stowe opened his mouth— and apparently remembered his pride and their quarrel. He reached to his pocket, drew out his plug of tobacco and bit off a chew. His face screwed up and he spat disgustedly.

"Can't even take corhfort chewing!" he growled, and started off with such a stride that for a time Dave labored to keep up with him.

It was close to noon when they reached the vicinity of Red Rocks, which was the name given to a lightly wooded section of treacherous ravines and sun-baked ledges. They ate the scant lunches they had brought and Burns prepared at once to go to work. He had provided himself with a bag, for it was necessary to take the rattles to the town clerk in order to collect the bounty, and now he went searching through the undergrowth for a couple of suitable forked sticks and two hardhack clubs. This labor he took upon himself willingly, for his partner, at the end of the journey, was in need of rest.

The hunting was successful from the first. The weather had had the effect that Burns predicted and the rattlesnake— at least, that member of the family

that dwells in the northern mountains— is not the terror he is reputed to be. He is inclined to be sluggish, and he fights only when attacked or surprised. So the partners, working near each other for safety in case of accident, caught half a dozen snakes with their forked sticks and clubs before an hour had passed.

It looked like a good day, and Burns was well pleased with everything except the chances Stowe was taking. Harry leaped carelessly over stones and fallen logs and walked with his gaze anywhere but upon the ground— and that was exactly the way in which one should not hunt rattlesnakes. Twice Burns cautioned him without effect; and at length David grew thoughtless of his own safety in the attempt to watch the feet of his partner. It was in one of those moments when his eyes were turned away from his own path that a warning drone came up from the jagged rocks over which he was walking. He crouched to spring away, but before his glance could find the source of that sound and tell him which way to flee a needle of pain pricked his thigh and he knew that death would make a decision in that place within the next handful of minutes. His first movement crushed the head of the snake with a blow of his club, his second whipped his big jack-knife from a pocket, and his third tore a slit from waist-band to knee of his trousers.

"Harry!" he shouted, as he worked. "I'm struck! Run and get the whisky in my coat!"

He slit away the cloth in strips— trousers and drawers— until the two purplish-red marks lay free and clear to view. Criss-cross twice he slashed that small wound and bore down with his hands against the solid flesh to make it bleed. Damn the beast! Why hadn't it struck lower, so that he could get at the wound better? He could have sucked the poison out, perhaps. Why hadn't he carried the whisky on his hip instead of in his coat?

Burns jerked up his head with the consciousness that something was wrong. And there was something wrong—incomprehensively wrong—for Harry Stowe was stumbling toward him over the rocks with a strange look upon his face.

"Why the hell don't you go?" yelled David. "I'm done for if you don't!"

Stowe came up to him, staring as though taken by some new and tremendous idea. He opened his mouth and his words jerked out:

"I drank that whisky— when you was gone after the clubs," he said.

For a moment Burns resigned himself, or tried to resign himself, to the thought of death. Then the hands of Stowe shot out, Burns was pushed backward upon a boulder, and his partner's lips set themselves against the wound.

At the end of a time that David took no thought to measure, Stowe stood away from him, still grimacing and wiping his mouth.

Even as Burns started to rise, searching for words out of his lean supply to express the gratitude that filled him, Harry backed away and started running toward the spot where they had eaten lunch and left their coats and rifles.

Burns was shaken— too shaken to give much heed to this eccentricity—and concerned with the angry swelling that now had gone to his hip. He believed that his life was safe and that Harry would soon be back, perhaps with a drink of water. He was filled with emotion rare to him, so that both of his hands went out eagerly when Stowe reappeared. That Harry carried a rifle in each hand meant nothing to him just then.

"I'm much obliged," he said, unsteadily, "much obliged— old feller—"

Stowe shoved a rifle at him. The barrel fell into one of his outstretched hands.

"There's your gun," said Harry, Eueue? a strange huskiness.

"Gun?" Burns looked at it stupidly.

"Yes— gun! I've paid my debt now, ain't I?"

"Debt? What debt?"

"You pulled me out of the river, didn't you?"

"Oh!" He tried to laugh, in spite of the strangeness of what was happening. "You've squared that, all right!"

"Yes, damn your soul! And now you're going to even up for something else! A man my wife looks at the way she did at you ain't going to live if I do!"

"Harry— you're stark crazy!"

"Crazy? I've been crazy enough to wait till I could square up with you before I plugged your black heart full of lead!"

"And you've been laying for me all this time!" The rifle slipped from Burns's inert hands and clattered at his feet. After all, he couldn't expect anything much better of a man who didn't appreciate Molly.

"Pick up your gun!" Stowe was backing away. His speech had thickened. "So help me, I'm a going to drill you as soon as I get over to that hemlock stump at the edge of the woods! You got— got your chance!"

He continued to move backward, facing toward Burns and pjcking his way among the rocks. At intervals he shook his head like a dog that has snapped at a hornet, and cursed his partner to the deepest hell he could picture.

David was weak and nauseated by pain, and stunned by the buffetings that sent him back and forth between life and death. His leg was useless from foot to waist and there was no possibility of flight. He was not sure that he could shoot, even if he wanted to. And he did not want to. If he were to kill the husband of Molly, then she would be forever and ever removed beyond hope. More than this— the mere fact that Stowe was her husband stayed the hand of Burns.

He could not have explained why, but he knew that it was impossible for him to send a bullet after that retreating figure. He watched it, wavering a little to his gaze, as it reached the hemlock stump and knelt for a surer aim.

The instinct of self-preservation made Dave move quickly; he slipped and rolled, with a jolt of agony, down beside the boulder so that it was between him and Stowe. A bullet took a chip from the rock and went whining on.

"Poor shooting!" muttered Burns, bracing himself up with his arms. "And damned slow!"

He leaned against the boulder and rested his head there. Harry would have to shift around now for the next shot, he thought; and wondered why it was that he felt neither regret nor fear nor any great interest. The answer came in a flash when he suddenly realized that his world had become hung with shadows, that it was darkening and going away from him. Dying? He decided that he was, with indifference. And contentedly he drifted into oblivion.

The sweetness of pine woods and the fresh smell of dawn were the first sensations of Burns as consciousness grew again into being within him. He was lying down, with his head very comfortably raised upon something soft. Stowe must have failed omehow of killing him—or had the man changed his mind? Dave was slow about opening his eyes, for fear of spoiling his deep and delicious comfort, but curiosity compelled him at length.

He was lying in a little grove of pine that he remembered having seen the day before near Red Rocks. He tried to move; and brought instantly a hand upon his arm— a firm, kind, shapely hand that he recognized, but which he believed was a ghost of his imagination until Molly moved into view and sat beside him.

Her blue eyes were dark and brimming with the look that he had seen there once before. She lifted his head and gave him a drink from a tin cup:

"Feel better, Dave?" she asked.

"Yes." He drank again. "I'm— all right. Where's Harry?"

"The boys carried him into the village," she replied, gravely. "We started out a searching-party when you didn't show up at midnight— but the doctor said you wasn't to be moved till you come to."

"Harry—is he—"

"Harry's dead." She looked away into the swaying tops of the pines, "laying on the other side of the rock from you, with his rifle in his hands and his head and face all swelled up. He must have been struck by a snake, but we couldn't find any marks on him."

David stared straight up into the blue of heaven and thought hard for a few moments. The poor shooting was explained now. Stowe had been on his way to get around the boulder and finish the job at close range when he himself had gone down. But how? No rattlesnake that Burns had ever heard of could strike as high as a man's head.

"Say, Molly," David looked into the beloved face bending over him, "Harry didn't have a cut lip, or anything like that, did he?"

"Why, no! But I guess he did have a sore mouth from chewing so much tobacco." Tenderness welled more deeply in her eyes as she rearranged the blanket under his head. "You mustn't talk any more now for I want you to get well quick."

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5: Lordly Ways

Sydney Horler

1888-1954

Journal (Adelaide) 24 March 1923

TO HORACE SLOCOMBE, sitting in the gloom of his thoughts and the fast-approaching twilight, there entered an apparition— an apparition wearing the very latest thing in overcoats (strap at the back, pronounced "waist," and with the hand of the Bradford profiteer heavy upon it) who slapped the moody Horace so heartily on the back that his eyeglasses slipped from their moorings.

"Cheer-o, old bean!" breezed the newcomer. "I thought you would be at the station with the town band and the rest of the happy gang. When do I receive the Freedom of the City? And why all alone, knee-deep in grief? Isn't your tea agreeing with you?"

"Shut up!" snapped the tormented thinker. "Why in the deuce can't you talk like a civilized human being, instead of an ass out of a tenth-rate musical comedy? I'm not in the mood for any rotting," he concluded, rising from the armchair and kicking savagely at a cushion that had fallen to the floor.

The breeziness departed from the visitor. He might have received a slap on the mouth. Into his somewhat heavy features crept a look that a man wears when he feels that the world has robbed him of his rights.

"Sit down! he snapped in turn; and, seizing Horace Slocombe's shoulder, he pushed him back into his resting place.

"Now," he said, when he had taken a chair opposite the other, "let's have the facts. I will lead for the prosecution, and you have been detained for the defence— follow?"

Before the steely glint in the prosecuting counsel's eye, the man who imagined he had a grievance wilted. Involuntarily Slocombe nodded his head.

"So!" hissed the other, getting a reasonable amount of venom into the word, "we agree thus far. But to get to the facts. You, Horace Slocombe, beguiled me, Guy Titley, into spending a week's holiday with you in this benighted hole called Stoway-on-the-Fosse, You painted the truly rural delights of the place with the tongue of a master; you promised me that I shall never regret the sacrifice; we were going to have the real time of our lives, you said— and so on, and so forth.

"And yet, when I leave the friends of my youth, the companions of my simple but necessary pleasures in dear old Balham"— here the speaker's voice shook— "what do I find? What reception do I get? You are not at the station to meet me; I have to stumble my way here alone and in the dark; and when I do discover you and give you the cheery word as from one hardy explorer to another, you snap my head off and tell me you don't feel like my rot. What do you think of it all— eh?"

The last word was uttered with such tense ferocity that Slocombe hurtled from one side of the big armchair to the other. The damage which he sustained to his elbow in the process acted as a quickener to his conscience.

"Sorry, old man!" he said contritely. "You needn't rub it in. Fact is, I'm worried."

The big frame of the accuser towered above the slight one of the penitent.

"And don't you think it would have been more seemly if you had told me so at once?" Titley asked heavily, looking as an indulgent parent might look at an erring but favourite child. "Unburden yourself— open your mouth and let yourself go. What's the trouble? Is it man, woman, or beast that is worriting thee?"

"A girl!" replied Slocombe, with the simple directness of tragedy, and lapsed once more into abysmal gloom.

"What!" exclaimed Titley, jumping back in mock alarm. "Here have I been keeping you strictly under control, and directly my back is turned you go back on my principles! Don't you know that girls are a delusion and a snare? That they only want you to spend the hard earned money on them which might be profitably invested in snooker-pool or penny nap? I must say, Horace, that I am surprised at you. I leave you just for a week-end, and find you hopelessly entangled with a female!"

"I wish I was!" replied the criminal.

"You want some supper— you've growing morbid on an empty stomach, that's what the matter with you, m'lad," pronounced Titley gravely. "Even if you a don't want any grub, I do, which is even more important. Clang the totem, and summon the ministering Hebe."

Supper done, Titley brought forth seasoned briar, Slocombe contenting himself with a cigarette, which was more in keeping with his modest appearance, his views on life, and his slightly asthmatical chest.

"You'll find me all attention now, old son," announced Titley, puffing pungent clouds. "Haste thee with thy tale."

Horace Slocombe flushed a little, carefully flicked the ash off the end of his cigarette, coughed, straightened his necktie, and put a hand inside his collar. "I knew her slightly before I came down," he confessed, "that was why wanted to come here. I don't mind telling you that now," he added, reddening before the accusing gaze of his companion.

"I see," replied Titley, in bitter irony "Do you mind telling me where you expected me to come in?"

"She has a sister. I thought she would be down here with her, but she isn't. I'm sorry!"

"Your grief is nothing to mine," coolly retorted his deluded friend. "You have got a pretty poor opinion of my intelligence if you think that I am going to waste

a whole week down in this blighted cabbage patch! If there was any chance of getting away to-night, I'd!" he stormed; "but, as it is— the first train in the morning, my boy; and when I'm gone you can make 50 different kinds of fool of yourself!"

"You won't go?" cried Slocombe despairingly. "I was just thinking of a fine idea—" His voice trailed off.

"You bet I shall go!" replied Titley briskly. "Do you think I am ass enough to want to play gooseberry to a couple of—"

Words failing him at the prospect, he waved his arms, to the imminent peril of the lamp. "But what is this fine idea? You have had so many lately," he observed in heavy sarcasm.

Horace Slocombe rose and crossed to his friend. He placed an arm upon Titley a shoulder and looked at him appealingly.

"I want you to do me a favour, Guy," he said earnestly. "If you will do what I want you to, I promise you I will never forget it as long as I live. Will you do it?"

Startled by the earnestness of the other's tone, Titley found himself mechanically saying, "What is it?"

"I want you to be a lord," replied Slocombe seriously. "You've got the figure, and you have the clothes. Besides, it will give you a chance to wear that monocle of all the time, instead of merely when you wear evening dress," he added, as though clinching any possible argument.

The hand that held the pipe shook. Into the eyes of Titley came a strained look— a look almost of alarm.

"You don't want me to be the King of Siam, Robert Smillie, or Winston Churchill, I suppose?" he enquired, "because these are my best-known impersonations."

"Don't rot, Guy!" replied Slocombe, in hollow tones. "I'm serious. I want you to pose as an aristocrat, a lord, just for this week. I don't suppose you could stand the strain any longer, but I will explain."

"Do," soothed Titley. "I am afraid my poor brain is giving way."

"Since I last saw Margaret— I mean Miss Hope— a change has come over her," said Slocombe, trying unsuccessfully to control his voice. "I don't know whether she has been reading too much Charles Garvice, or what it is, but she seems to have got hold of a lot of inflated ideas."

"Inflated ideas?" echoed Titley.

"Yes. Thinks the ordinary fellow, like myself, beneath her. If she doesn't exactly say so, she acts it, which is perhaps worse. Can talk about nothing but the Earl of This and the Duchess of That since the Squire of the Manor invited her to a reception about a month ago. I thought that—"

"If you could introduce me as your bosom friend, Lord Rossamere, you'd come into the limelight again. Is that it? Sound schemer!" completed Titley. "Do you happen to have a photograph of this ambitious social climber?"

Fumbling in his pocket. Slocombe produced a pocket book. Extracting from this a photograph, he passed it with reverent care to his companion. Titley examined it with the eye of a connoisseur, and bit his lip to conceal a smile.

"I'm on with this Lord Rossamere stunt," he said, as he returned the photograph.

ii

MANY PEOPLE have a grievance against their destiny. Guy Titley regretted bitterly that only an accident of birth had prevented him from being a real lord, instead of a bogus one, when the introductions were made by Slocombe.

"Delighted to meet you, I'm sure, your Lordship," said Margaret Hope thrillingly, her piquant face alight with interest. "I met ever so many people you must know at a reception which Sir Walter Gascoigne— Sir Walter is our local magnate, you know— Squire of the Manor, and all that sort of thing— gave the other day. By the way, I expect you know Sir Walter?"

Before the horror-stricken Slocombe could warn him, Titley had plunged waist-high into duplicity. What! Wally Gascoigne— good old Wally? Why, I used to fag for him at Harrow!" he exclaimed.

"How awfully interesting!" rejoined Margaret Hope vivaciously, showing an adorable dimple as she smiled. "But I'm afraid I'm detaining you, your Lordship."

"Not at all, not at all reall-y!" drawled the newly-created nobleman. "Fact is, I was just goin' to ask you to be so kind as to take pity on a stranger, and show me round the place. Slocombe here says he can't spare the time—studyin' for an exam., or some rot like that, I believe."

"I always did think he was a bit backward," said the girl, before Slocombe could find words to express this feverish state of mind. "We, mustn't take him away from his studies, must we, your Lordship?"

"I wish you would forget my bally title, Miss Hope," retorted Lord Rossamere with what he fondly imagined was an ingratiating smile. "All my friends call me Rossy— can't you?"

Trembling with homicidal passions, Horace Slocombe saw the girl hang her head, blushing prettily the while.

"If you really wish it," she said softly.

"See you later, then, Slocombe," cried "Lord Rossamere" cheerily; and tucking Margaret's arm under his own, he disappeared with her down the road.

"THIS CURSED nonsense has gone far enough! Leave my girl alone, or I shall expose you!"

Eyes glaring through his thick glasses, Horace Slocombe, victim of circumstances over which he felt he had no control, took his stand by the fireplace and hurled his ultimatum. The Earl of Rossamere looked up from satisfied contemplation of his finger nails and yawned courteously.

"Really, dear fellow, you go too far," he admonished. "Miss Hope gave me no indication this afternoon that she aspired to such an honour. Indeed, on the contrary. But I will spare your feelings. And as for your ridiculous threat... if you went to Margaret— I mean Miss Hope and started blackguarding me, I fancy he would refuse to listen to you. Yes... I fancy so!"

Smiling bemusedly, Lord Rossamere took out his plain glass monocle (half a crown, with cord; eighteen pence, without) and started polishing it on a silk handkerchief.

"You don't mean to tell me that you're going to see Miss Hope again?" gasped Slocombe. "I won't allow it!"

"See her again! My dear boy, I'm going to see her constantly. In fact, I'm going to see her continuously. She has as good as asked me to. With you swotting for this tommyrot exam, it's really a kindness on my part. Beauty all forlorn, and all that sort of thing, you know. You know yourself that I can't help doing fellows favours. What about my being down here at all?"

When Slocombe had finished mentally calling himself names for housing such a snake in the grass, he gave speech.

"To-morrow," he said slowly and distinctly, "I shall make it my business to call at The Towers, Sir Walter Gascoigne's place, and tell him that Lord Rossamere, who was his fag at Harrow, is in the district. Staying"— here the speaker permitted himself a wintry smile— "at Mrs. Finder's boarding establishment in Acacia Cottages."

The insidious attack left Lord Rossamere unmoved.

"Quite between ourselves," he said, in a confidential tone, "I have taken the trouble to ascertain that Sir Walter Gascoigne is not at present in the district; while I have already explained to Margaret"— here he brushed his lips with the tips of his fingers— "that it was in order to study how the lower middle classes live that I consented to stay with you in these rooms. I have further explained that your employer happens to be the Rossamere family solicitor. I chanced to have taken a fancy to you— which explains the singular fact of our being together. Follow?"

Slocombe gritted his teeth. By nature a thinker rather than a fighter, he yet toyed desperately with the idea of flinging himself upon the bulky pseudo-aristocrat. But conventional caution conquered in the end.

"You're a darned scoundrel!" he cried.

"And Margaret Hope's a deucedly pretty girl!" rejoined Lord Rossamere.

iii

AS DAY succeeded day, Horace Slocombe grew paler and lost interest in his food. The fact proved profitable to Lord Rossamere, always a hearty feeder.

After calling his companion a scoundrel, Slocombe had kept his subsequent thoughts to himself. When alone, as he frequently was, he would pace excitedly up and down the room, abandoning himself to the murderous plans that filled his mind. The knife, poison, the revolver, the rope— all figured in the hot-brained schemes which came unbidden to him for the removal of the man who had purloined his girl in the same matter-of-fact way as another man might have purloined his umbrella or a spare pair of sock suspenders. It is true be received occasional invitations to accompany Lord Rossamere and Margaret Hope on some of their expeditions, but these only drove him into a fresh frenzy, and after the third day they ceased altogether.

"Both Margaret and I feel that we mustn't tempt you away from your studies, especially as you are so backward, Horace," remarked Lord Rossamere when Slocombe had curtly ignored the last of invitations to be given him. "You understand that it is purely out of politeness that we ask you."

It is true that Horace Slocombe studied, but it was not law manuals over which he pored, although his profession was that of solicitor's clerk; what he was studying was how he might get even with a man whom he considered had basely abused his trust.

At 10 o'clock on the last day the idea came. As he chuckled in ghastly mirth, Slocombe wore a smile that might have been possessed by a starving and anaemic tiger.

"Excuse me, please," said Margaret Hope, flashing a smile at Lord Rossamere, and hurried to the door.

Sitting unnoticed in his corner, Horace Slocombe watched the bogus lord intently, while a ghostly smile played about his face. The next few minutes promised to be worth all that he had gone through. He was glad he had accepted this invitation. From the direction of the passage came the sound of trampling feet, and then a voice— Margaret's voice.

"Do come in!" it said.

To the speechless amazement of at least one of the occupants of the sitting room, a number of obvious dwellers in Stoway-on-the-Fosse lurched in through the door. The strange procession was headed by a tall, earnest-looking man with a roving eye. After one or two flashes round the room, this centred itself on Lord Rossamere with embarrassing intensity.

"This is Lord Rossamere," sweetly announced Margaret Hope, motioning towards the nobleman: and the deputation made a number of noises that might have meant anything from pleasure to threatened summons for debt.

"And this," went on the girl, more sweetly than ever, and motioning towards the leader of the storming party, "'is Mr. Wiggleswade, the village undertaker."

Lord Rossamere started violently. He felt at peace with the world. He wasn't in the mood to see village undertakers. He considered they were blotches on the landscape— especially Mr. Wiggleswade.

"What in the deuce do you want?" he demanded, trying in vain to escape that penetrating orb that was fixed, it seemed, incriminatingly, upon him. Mr. Wiggleswade craned his long neck forward.

"I've come up for that bit of money your lordship," he replied. "And I brought my committee-men along with me for them to say how much they appreciates your kindness."

Lord Rossamere sat bolt upright in his chair. A feeling of uneasiness began to creep over him. The repetition of the word "money" increased this disturbing effect.

"What on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed indignantly. "I don't owe you money! Explain yourself."

The leader of the human vote of thanks shuffled forward.

"I hope there's no mistake," he said "Not that there very well can be. Your secretary, that young gentleman over here"— pointing at Horace Slocombe who nodded his head in eager corroboration— "comes to me last night and says that you would be very pleased to give 10 pounds— yes, 10 pounds, that was what he said— towards the object—"

"Object!" snapped Lord Rossamere. "What object? Yourself?"

"No, your Lordship," replied Mr. Wiggleswade seriously; "not me. A far worthier object than me. It's to go towards the fund for buying the able-bodied men of this parish concertinas so that hey can amuse themselves during the long winter evenings and not waste their money in public house. We thinks of starting a concertina band."

"Yes; it's such a good object, your Lordship!" put in Margaret Hope, before the bewildered Titley could collect his wandering faculties. "I'm subscribing 10 shillings myself, so I know that you won't mind fulfilling your promise."

"Promise!" repeated Lord Rossamere angrily. "But I made no promise!"

"Your Lordship forgets," soothed a voice from the corner— the voice of Horace Slocombe. "It was last night when we were talking about what charities you should subscribe to this month. You said you had heard of a most deserving charity that was being organized in the village by Mr. Wigglesworth here, and that you would subscribe ten pounds. You asked me to see Mr. Wigglesworth at once and acquaint him of the fact. His Lordship is unfortunately somewhat

absentminded," the speaker went on, addressing the members of the Concertina Fund Committee; "but once having pledged his word, as he has done in this case, he never goes back upon it."

Lord Rossamere took a deep breath. As he did so he was conscious that Margaret Hope was looking fixedly at him.

"I will send you a cheque," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. But the lank-faced Wiggleswade shook his head.

"I never did like those new-fangled ideas," he said. "Let's have the money in notes, your Lordship."

"Yes; that would be much simpler," came unexpectedly from Margaret Hope. "We always pay in notes at Stoway, don't we, Mr. Wiggleswade? And it won't be any inconvenience to you, as you always carry so much ready money about with you— at least, you told me so this afternoon."

Only then did the cheeks of Lord Rossamere blanch. With fingers that faltered he put his hand inside a breast pocket and drew out a pocket book. Extracting a pound note— the only one— he held it out to the expectant Wiggleswade.

"I seem to be temporarily short of funds for the moment," he said with a wan smile, "but if you will ask me to-morrow I shall be pleased to redeem the rest of my promise."

Bowing and scraping, the deputation withdrew, calculating as they went how many times a pint of beer would go into twenty shillings, cash down.

"That's one lot!" remarked Slocombe, when the three had the room to themselves once more.

"What do you mean?" cried the man who had been fleeced. "There aren't any others coming, are there?" There was real alarm in his Lordship's voice.

"Plenty!" grinned Slocombe succinctly. "There's the fund for the restoration of the schoolroom harmonium, the fund for the old people's winter firewood, the scheme for renovating the front of the Wesleyan Chapel, and the proposed subscription for the assistance of the aged curate. Your only chance," went on Slocombe, speaking with ringing distinctness, "is to get out of here to-night by the 9.10 train. It's not every day that Stoway-on-the-Fosse gets hold of a lord— even a bogus one— and they mean to make the most of his chance.... Keep still, Margaret; I'll see him to the door!"

Margaret Hope lifted a flushed face and burst into a ringing laugh.

"Oh, what a joke!" she cried. "It was really awfully clever of you— if a little cruel," she added.

"People have been cruel to me lately," replied Horace Slocombe. "I got tired of being made a fool of," he added bitterly. Leaning forward in his chair, he buried his face in his hands.

A subtle fragrance drifted to him. A warm cheek snuggled itself against his.

"I've been every kind of a fool, dear, I know," whispered Margaret Hope, "and I don't deserve to be forgiven— but I hope you will! I only meant to tease you when I commenced talking about the big people I met at that reception. As a matter of fact, they all bored me pallid. And then when this freak came along I went about with him just to try make you jealous You see, dear—" here the voice faltered— "I wasn't sure that— that—"

"You know now!" cried Horace Slocombe, gripping her tightly. "I was to blame, too— telling you lies about that chap being a lord. Of course, it was only a joke, you know."

"I know, replied the girl snuggling even closer. "I knew all along that fellow was a joke— a bad joke! I hope he caught that train!"

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6: The Midnight Marriage

Percy J. Brebner

1864-1922

Mercury (Hobart) 4 Feb 1939

A GARRET with a sloping ceiling and a patched window. A bed, a table wedged with paper under one leg to keep it steady, two chairs, a curious piece of ingenuity in one corner which served for toilet table, wash-hand stand and chest of drawers; in another corner a hanging shelf with a dozen well-worn books upon it. The boards were bare save for a strip of old carpet by the bed. In the grate was a tiny fire, in the fender a small, flat kettle. Seated before the fire was a man, a revolver in his hands. To this had I come.

My last literary effort had been an article on "The Utter Polly of Education," the manuscript, tattered with its many journeys, was In one of my drawers.

Friends! A man who lives in a garret does not have friends. Besides, I had some pride In spite of the fact that I had so often put It in my pocket. I had come to the end of my tether, had stretched It to the breaking point. Even the rent for this miserable lodging I was unable to pay. It was so easy to end my troubles by means of the friend I held in my hands— the revolver.

Some time since 11 had sounded from a neighbouring church clock. I would wait until 12. There is a sense of solemnity about midnight. At that hour there would be something almost sacrificial in my act. In this last hour time passed slowly. I had nothing to do, no farewell letter to write. There was not a person on the wide earth who would be concerned at my deed, or regret it. I would not allow myself to think of the past. I listened to the sounds rising from the street below, and occupied my thoughts by fitting a fanciful history to the tide of humanity passing my habitation. The night was cold, a drizzle of rain in it, a man passed, his quick steps echoing along the pavement. I did not think he carried an umbrella; his thoughts occupied him too deeply, I imagined, for him to be conscious of the rain; he was one full of optimism such as I had been. Then a motor purred swiftly by; good engines, those and costly, and within I pictured a man and woman and love. All the best in the world was theirs while I—

I STARTED at the sound of a heavy tread on the stairs, coming upwards. Surely midnight must have struck and I had not heard It. There was another garret next to mine, the lodging of an itinerant clarinet player. Sometimes he stumbled in his ascent, when he had money enough to buy drink; sometimes, his tread was merely heavy and tired, but he never came until after midnight, his working day did not end until the public-houses closed. I had thought of this. I had intended that my revolver should speak before he was in his garret to hear it. Even as he reached the top of the stairs the first stroke of 12 boomed out.

Then came a knock at my door, which was opened before I had time to answer, and a man entered, but it was not the clarinet player.

"Good evening. You are a long way up," he said.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Not a hearty welcome," he remarked, and he spoke with an accent which proclaimed him a foreigner, "yet it seems to me I have arrived at an opportune moment."

I looked at the revolver in my hand. "May I ask again who you are?" I said, putting the weapon on the mantelpiece."

"It is not well to ask the name of the bearer of good fortune. The wise man takes the fortune and asks no questions. I might give you a name, but, frankly, it would not be my right one, so why compel me to lie? Let us get to business, as time is pressing."

"I shall be glad to know the business which has brought you here."

"I have seen you before," he said. "It is no use your trying to remember where. Because I do not suppose you have noticed me. In short, I have been watching you for some days past. Yes, yes, most improper of me, I know, that is conceded; but let me tell you what I have discovered. You are hard up. You have been looking in vain for work. You are a gentleman totally unfit for a place like this. Perhaps you are more down on your luck than I imagined. The weapon on the mantelpiece suggests that it is so. I have a proposal to make which, if you accept, will put you beyond the possibility of a garret like this. Your part is easy; the fee is £5,000."

"So high a payment is not for nothing," I said.

"Exactly. The circumstances are peculiar. A certain type of man is required; you are the type. The man must be young; you are young. He must also be handsome— forgive the personality, but you fit the requirements in this respect, too. The fee is large because— well, because it is small. Paradoxical, you may say, but it is small in comparison to the money involved. I want you to marry a lady— a French lady— tonight."

"Marry!"

"ASTONISHING, Isn't it?" he laughed, and then he became suddenly serious. "The lady is dying. If she dies unmarried, a vast fortune goes to very distant relatives, to the detriment of those who are nearest and dearest to her. Why not marry anyone, you may ask, since she is dying? A very reasonable question. Some three years ago the lady met an Englishman named Rupert Templeton. I cannot tell you what passed between them, but I imagine that they exchanged vows; at any rate, the lady is obdurate and will only marry Rupert Templeton."

"And you want me to impersonate him?"

"I do, but it Is no great crime. Unfortunately, Mr. Templeton has been dead for over a year. This the lady does not know. You see our difficulty. Now, you are extremely like Rupert Templeton, so like that when I first saw you I thought he had come to life again."

"So I am to deceive the lady?"

"I can fully appreciate your feeling in the matter," he answered, "and I am not going to suggest that a paltry £5,000 is likely to bribe you to a dishonourable action. I would point out that you really do the lady no wrong. She is dying, and you will bring great contentment to her last hours. Some vow prevents her marrying anyone but Rupert Templeton. She is longing for us to find him, and very anxious to marry for the sake of those who are dear to her. To her and to them you will be doing a great service. Will you do it?"

He spoke with considerable agitation, and although I imagined he was nearly concerned in this marriage, I felt that his agitation was genuine.

"Very well, I will do it," I said.

"Thank you," he answered simply. "Thinking you might not be provided for such an occasion, I have taken the liberty of bringing suitable clothes. The contents of this portmanteau are at your service. I think you will find them a tolerable fit."

The clothes might have been made for me they fitted me so exactly. It was pleasant to put on new clothes; there was a sensation of being one's own man again.

"Do I look a worthy bridegroom?" I asked, turning to my companion.

"One any woman might be proud of," he answered with a grave bow. "Shall we put your other clothes in the portmanteau? For a few hours you will have to indulge the whims of a dying woman— your wife. You may find it convenient to have a change with you. Allow me to help you."

"Supposing she should not die? Supposing she should recover?" I said.

"There is no hope of that. The doctor will convince you. And now, Mr. Templeton, It Is time to go. My motor is waiting."

IT was a long drive through the cold and drizzling night, and for the most part we were silent. I can hardly put into words the confusion of thoughts which was In my brain. An hour ago I was a pauper about to commit suicide, and now I was travelling luxuriously, and should presently be the possessor of £5,000. The moral aspect of my position did not really trouble me much.

The car presently ran through open gates and along a short avenue, coming to a standstill before the porch of a large house standing in its own grounds. Only a dim light shone from one or two of the windows. The door was opened immediately by a man-servant, and we passed through the hall to a small room. A man rose from his chair to welcome us

"This is the doctor," said my companion. And then, turning to the doctor, he went on: "This gentleman has very kindly consented to help us, but he is, and quite naturally, I think, a little anxiously regarding the lady's exact state of health. You will be able to satisfy him."

"I do not think she will live through the night," answered the doctor. "I have been wondering whether you would arrive in time. At the most a few hours will see the end. Have all the circumstances been explained to you?"

"Yes."

"Then I do not think we ought to de-lay any longer. Shall we go?"

My companion nodded, and we re-crossed the hall to a room on the other side. It was a large room, dimly lighted. At one end was a bed carefully screened from draughts. The man servant who had opened the front door had evidently just entered, and was placing a small tray upon a side table. By the fire was a priest, and near the bed was an elderly woman, evidently, the nurse, although she wore no uniform. We approached the bed.

"I have brought Rupert Templeton." said my companion.

The patient moved slightly, and I fell that I was being scrutinised. The woman lay upon her back, straight in the bed; she only turned her head a little. Yet she had been prepared for her wedding. Over her head, and concealing her face, was a veil— a marriage veil— but of so thick a texture that I could not sec what the wearer was like. Whether the woman I was to marry was beautiful or hideous I could not tell, and she spoke no word of welcome. When my companion beckoned the priest, and he came to the bedside, she made no protest, and I concluded she believed I was the man she was willing to marry.

It was a strange ceremony, unreal and like a dream to me. I spoke the words required of me mechanically, and only a low and painful whisper came from the woman. My simple name Rupert seemed poor beside her many names, half a dozen at least. Marie and Celeste were two of them, and the others I did not think I had heard before. We were man and wife, and I asked myself what the real Rupert Templeton would have done at this moment. It was surely the time for some word of endearment, for a kiss perhaps. It may be that my companion saw the hesitation in my face, for he put his hand on my shoulder,

"She is greatly fatigued. Presently you can return," he whispered, and I followed him out across the hall to the room which we had first entered. The doctor came with us. On the table were glasses and two bottles of champagne.

"The wedding feast," said my companion, with a sad and weary little smile, and began uncorking one of the bottles. "I wish we could drink long life and happiness to both of you, but that is impossible. We can, however, wish you all prosperity, and thank you for what you have done for us tonight."

He filled the glasses, handed one to the doctor, another to me, and then raised his own.

"All good to you," he said, "and our thanks to Rupert Templeton."

SURELY this was a dream-this room, these men, the wine I drank to the dregs. Presently I should wake again in my own garret. Everything was curiously distinct and vivid, yet I felt strangely detached, and spoke, quite unconscious of what I said. It was necessary to pull myself together, and I did so with an effort.

To my astonishment, I found I was lying on a couch. The room looked dim, the glasses and the bottles on the table seemed unreal. I sat up. I was alone. My companions had gone. What had happened? The dim light in the room was daylight struggling through the Venetian blinds.

I went into the hall, and not a sound reached me. I went quickly to the room in which I had been married and knocked lightly. There was no answer. I went in. I had not been dreaming. There was the bed and the screens, but the bed was empty. I went into the hall again and half way up the stairs; then I paused and grew nervous. I was the victim of some plot. The conspirators had gone, and I was left alone. I had no right here. Any moment someone might come and question me, and what explanation could I give? I had been duped and drugged. There was no telling what crime I might have committed. Five thousand pounds! What a fool I had been!

At one end of the hall there was a door leading to the garden. I went on tiptoe towards It and let myself out. I ran round the house and down the short avenue into the road. I ran for some distance, to put the scene of my adventure ns far as possible behind me. Then I discovered that I was in Twickenham, a long way from my garret. It was early, the place was still asleep as I began my long tramp back to town. The end had only been delayed. Tonight at midnight I would—

Running had warmed me for a time, but the early morning air on the open road was keen. I thrust by hands deep into my trouser pockets, and then I stopped. From my pocket I drew an envelope and opened it. In Bank of England notes it contained my fee, £5,000!

A MAN in a garret has no friends, but with £5,000 behind him a man has a goodly company to choose from. I chose wisely. The proof may be found in the fact that I was spending a holiday at Monte Carlo. One does not go to Monte Carlo if he has to consider every shilling he spends.

Three years had passed since the morning I ran through Twickenham, eventful years full of hard work. I had bought a partnership in a small city business, which had increased by leaps and bounds, partly owing to my own exertions, partly to that element of chance which lurks in most successes. I was growing rich and was taking a well-earned rest.

My adventure remained a mystery. Not a particle of light had shone into it. Naturally I had made every possible inquiry concerning the house at Twickenham. It belonged to a widow who had let it furnished for a year to a Mr. Garfield. The rent had been paid in advance, and Mr. Garfield had certainly gone there with his family, but had only remained a few days. He had left quite suddenly, and nothing had since been heard of him. Comparing the time, I could not doubt that adventure had to do with this family, but all my efforts to discover Mr. Garfield, or any of the others who had taken part in my marriage, were fruitless.

Truth to tell, the fact that I was a married man without any idea who my wife was, had not troubled me much. Perhaps I had been too full of business to take notice of women; at least, love had played no part In my scheme of life. Yet this morning, as I sat in the hotel grounds reading my letters I was troubled, and my awkward position weighed heavily upon me. The cause, in the person of a very charming and beautiful English woman, presently came out of the hotel and walked in my direction. The direction was unintentional, she did not see me until I rose to meet her.

"I could stay in no longer," she said. "A walk was absolutely imperative on such a morning."

"I saw the Duke and Duchess in the rooms last night," I said. "They both played a little. You were not there."

"No, I pleaded a headache, I am afraid it was an excuse. I wanted to be alone and— and to write some letters. You have many to attend to, I see."

"They must wait— that is, If you will allow me to walk with you."

"Can they wait?" and the colour came into her cheeks as she asked the question.

I KNEW I should do wisely to say "no," still I said "yes." To say that I had fallen in love with Eileen Masterman hardly conveys a correct idea of the truth. It was rather that the right woman had walked into a man's life as naturally as she might walk into a room. She was there; there was no consciousness of falling in love: she was the complement of life which had been unconsciously waited for. I knew this the first moment my eyes rested on her.

She was a friend of the Grand Duchess of Swarla who, with her husband, was spending the Winter in Monte Carlo. The Duke and Duchess were young, not long married I understood. Swarla, as everyone knows, in an independent State, and I learned that the Duchess was the more important person, the Duke being her consort.

A slight service, unsought on my part, served as introduction to Miss Masterman, and a friendship had grown rapidly. I think both the Duke and Duchess saw how it was with me, and it never occurred to me that my

attentions could be unwelcome to Eileen Masterman. It seemed to me that she made it quite apparent that they were not unwelcome, and the first few days I enjoyed the new happiness which had come to me, with no thought of the future.

It is difficult to explain, but the affair at Twickenham seemed unreal, something which could be set aside and altogether forgotten when the time came. I had been thinking about it that morning when Eileen found me— indeed, one of my letters was from my solicitor; but I thought no more of it as I walked off with her. Her manner, everything she did and said, invited my confidence, and I talked to her as I had never talked to a woman before. Only at an actual declaration of love I stopped short— indeed, I believe she stopped me; but as we parted in the hall of the hotel I knew that friendship had developed into something else; I knew that I had said too much not to say more— that I should have to explain.

My solicitor's letter was not reassuring, but tried to read into it what I desired to see in it, and found a kind of pseudo-courage. After dinner that night the Duke and Duchess went to the rooms, but Eileen said she would Join them later.

"Perhaps she will come on with you, Castlewood," said the Duke.

The exodus to the rooms was pretty general, and I had little difficulty in finding a quiet corner. I had carefully rehearsed what I intended to say, and, as is usually the case, my carefully prepared arguments were of no use. I began where I left off that morning. Eileen did not pretend to misunderstand me.

"Mr. Castlewood, I feel that I am much to blame. I think I understand what you would say, and I ought to tell you that it is impossible for me to marry."

"Impossible!"

My own position was forgotten for a moment.

"Quite Impossible. I want to tell you why."

"Please," I said.

"THE Duchess of Swarla and I are very old friends. That may mean little or much; with us it means much. I don't suppose you are very learned in the history of Swarla, so I may tell you it is a tangled one— was particularly so a few years since. There was no question that the present Duchess was the rightful heir; but there was a party in the State, headed by her father's most trusted Ministers, which designed to put another on the throne on the death of the late Duke. The Duchess was then in love with her cousin Ferdinand, whom, as you know, she has since married. He was a *persona grata* with the Swarlan people, so the conspirators were surrounded with difficulties. Unfortunately, there was a man amongst them clever and subtle enough to deal with the situation. On a perfectly natural pretext, the Duchess was invited to visit Vienna, but on the

journey she was kidnapped. Having gone so far, the conspirators knew that only desperate measures could serve them. She was taken to England. Either she must die or she must purchase her freedom by marrying some Englishman of no importance."

"Yes," I said in a whisper.

"If she married a foreigner, it was quite certain the people of Swarla would not welcome her, and the way would be clear for the conspirator's candidate," Eileen continued. "She was in a desperate strait. Through a good, honest woman who was allowed to accompany her, I heard she was in England, and I visited her secretly. The scheme was mine. She was to feign illness, a weakness that should suggest she was past holding out against their infamous plan. She consented to the marriage."

"And was married?" I said.

"Yes, the patient was married, and her whim to wear a wedding veil was agreed to, but it was not the Duchess who wore it. With the help of the woman I took her place. For some days I had been concealed in the house, hoping against hope that some other means of escape would present itself, but it did not. So you see why I am not free to marry."

"Eileen!"

For a moment she looked at me as I spoke her name, and then she seemed to decide not to take any notice of my indiscretion.

"The Duchess was hurried from the house that night, and was set free in London, where I joined her. The conspirators returned to Swarla to spread the news; you can imagine with what results when the actual truth became known. How the villains procured an Englishman, worthy the name, to play such a part is beyond me."

"Perhaps I can tell you."

"You!"

"Was his name Templeton?"

"You know him?"

"Eileen, look at me. That wedding veil was thick, but surely—"

Then I told her the whole story of Rupert Templeton, keeping nothing back.

I will write no more. Eileen forbids me to set down what she said about Templeton. The one man and one woman met in Monte Carlo; that fail over-ruled all others, and in time I was forgiven. We were married anew in Swarla, and I doubt If the Duchess's own wedding could have been a more gorgeous function.

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7: The Golden Easter Egg

Temple Bailey

1869-1953

Sunday Times (Sydney, NSW), 23 April 1905

EVERYONE in the village called him the Dark Gentleman. To be sure, one letter came, to him through the little Post-office which bore this strange inscription:—

RAMMOHUN CHUNDER SEN

But, of course, the people of the God-fearing little town refused to call him by such a mixture of heathenish sounds.

Every morning when the Dark Gentleman passed where Fred was at work he would say:— "Good morning," and then he would walk on, with his eyes bent on the ground.

And Fred would leave, his chickens and run out into the road and watch the picturesque figure until it turned in at the village inn. For Fred was devoured with curiosity. What was the Dark Gentleman doing in the town?

Usually, however, Fred was too busy to think of these things. He was the only wage-earner of the family of two. Little grandmother kept the house for him, and he earned enough with his eggs and chickens to provide food and to pay interest on the mortgage. But it was hard work, and if Fred had not been a very merry little lad ho would have had a dreary time of it.

One Spring day Mrs. Butts, who kept the inn, called to Fred as he was going to the Post-office:—

"Are you getting many eggs, Fred?"

"Not many," said Fred.

"I know, that folks are saving their eggs for Easter," said Mrs. Butts, "but I am that put to it to get fresh ones. And it's fresh or nothing with the Dark Gentleman."

"Do you want them for him?" asked Fred, eagerly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Butts. "Over where he came from they don't eat meat, and the way I have to cook rice is enough to turn me into a pudding. Though, to be sure, he don't care for sweet thmgs and wants it plain with butter."

"There are my two little black hens," said Fred, thoughtfully. "You can have their eggs."

Evidently Mrs. Butts told the Dark Gentleman where the eggs were procured, for every day after that the strange little man came for his eggs. Once as he started away with his two warm little eggs, he looked back.

"Come and see me, Fre-ed, yes," he said. "I am alone, oh, very much alone." But Fred was not to be outdone in hospitality.

"Come in and have dinner with us," he said. So the little Dark" Gentleman, after a moment"s hesitation, accepted. They went into a bare little room to a plain meal— just pancakes and syrup. But the pancakes were delicate brown and the syrup shining as gold, and the Dark Gentleman was so glad to eat without the smell of boiled ham and fried beefsteak— which he abhorred— that he enjoyed himself immensely.

"You are kind— yes," he said to the little grandmother, as he touched her old, wrinkled hand, and then he bent and kissed it— actually kissed it— and when he had gone the little grandmother sat down breathless, for such a thing had never happened to her in her whole life.

After that he came often, and the little grandmother made him little salads, and treated him to her simple fare with the grace of a queen.

On one of his visits to the chicken yard he was unusually silent. Fred chatted to him for a while and then grew quiet, as he saw that the Dark Gentleman was not listening.

All at once the Dark Gentleman raised troubled eyes to the boy's. "See," he said. "I have a nest egg for you."

He took from his pocket a wooden egg painted white. Fred reached out his hand to take it, but the Dark Gentleman drew back.

"No," he said, "I wish to place it myself in the nest of a little black hen." He opened the hen house door, and, removing the nest egg from one of the nests he put his own in its place. Then he turned to Fred.

"Do not touch it," he warned, "you will promise me?"

Fred looked at him, mystified.

"Oh, I'll promise," he said. But it was a promise that it was not easy to keep. No matter what he did, his thoughts went always to the egg. Why wouldn"t the Dark Gentleman let him touch it? He felt like Fatima with the key to Blue Beard's chamber. What would happen if he disobeyed? But he managed to keep his promise, and the egg lay there many days.

Then a strange thing happened. Another Dark Gentleman came to the village.

"And they are alike as two peas," said Mrs. Butts, when Fred carried up the eggs "You can take up their coffee, and see.

Fred went up stairs with the tray in one hand; he opened the door with the other. His own Dark Gentleman sat in an arm chair looking sick and tired, and opposite to him sat his double. Fred could not understand what they were saying, for they talked in a strange tongue, but the expression on the double"s face made him shiver in his shoes. After this everywhere the Dark Gentleman went his double went also, though one could see that there was no love lost between them, and they never came to the chicken yard or to the little house.

But Fred had little time to think of the Dark Gentleman's desertion. He had troubles of his own. The interest on the mortgage was due, and not half of the money was ready. He had hoped to make enough on his eggs, but prices were low, and so it was a very depressed boy who went to bed on Easter Saturday evening.

He had slept, for some time when he was awakened with the feeling that some one had called him. He crept across the floor to the open window. He could see nothing. He leaned far out, and then he heard a tap" tap, tapping on; the side of the, house.

"Fre-d," called a familiar voice, very softly.

"Here," whispered Fred.

"Come down," and in a few minutes Fred was beside the dark gentleman.

"Come," said the man from India, and led the way to the hen house .

Safe within, he closed the door, and lighted a tiny bit of candle. The faint gleam served only to cast a feeble ray of light over the roosting fowls, sleeping with their heads tucked comfortably under their wings.

"I wish to tell you something," said the Dark Gentleman. "My cousin, whom you have seen, is a wicked man. He has followed me for a jewel which I possess. He shall not have it. He shall not, for I promised his father, my uncle, that he should do no more evil with the family wealth. But I am ill. I do not want it. Nor will it make any of my people happier. I will go away, and will leave it for you and the Little Grandmother, because I love you. And he will not come back, because he will think I have carried it with me."

"But where is it?" asked. Fred. "Where—?"

"Sh-sh," whispered the Dark Gentleman, and blew out the candle. Someone was moving just outside the door.

Breathless they waited, and then the steps passed on.

"It is my cousin," breathed the Dark Gentleman. "I must go, or he will find me here, and know—"

"Where—?" began Fred. But the Dark Gentleman was gone into the night.

And that was the last of him. How he left the little village no one knew, for there was no train that night, but he and his double had vanished as if they had never been.

"Not an eye have I laid on him," said Mrs. Butts, "since last night, and his board money laid out on the table."

"Was that all, Mrs. Butts?" asked Fred anxiously. He had hoped the Dark Gentleman might have left some word about the jewel.

"All? What does the boy expect? Were you looking for pay for your eggs?"

But Fred was gone, before she could finish. An idea had come to him. The jewel was in the nest egg. He fled to the hen house, rushed to the nest, and then staggered back in horror.

The egg was gone.

He searched through the straw desperately, but found nothing but the creamy eggs of the little black hens. He went dejectedly into the house, where the Little Grandmother was serving a breakfast of steaming hot potatoes and milk gravy.

"By the Way," she said, "you forgot to let the hens, out, so I did it I found a fine darning egg out there. I put a china one in its place. Where did you get such a nice wooden egg? It just fits the toes of your socks."

"What?" Fred jumped out of his chair.

"Bless the boy," said the Little Grand mother, "has he gone crazy?"

"Where is it, grandmother— where is it?" and Fred dived into the capacious basket, heaped with mending. And, sure enough, at the bottom was the nest egg.

How they got it open would make a long story. They hunted in vain for a spring, and pulled and screwed without effect.

"Fetch me the scissors," said grandmother, at last. Then she scraped the paint off," and they found that the egg was a box that screwed in the middle. They opened it, and found a smaller egg of ivory, with a golden clasp.

Fred touched the spring, and the case flew open, revealing the heart of gold. Within, like the yolk in an ordinary egg, lay the round ball of precious metal, and glowing in its very centre was a jewel that caught the light of the fire and seemed to illuminate the room.

"Oh! Grandmother, Little Grand mother!" shouted Fred. "We are rich!"

But the Little Grandmother could not take it in.

"I shall get two new tubs and a wash board," she announced, complacently "You don"t need them, Little Grand mother," said Fred. " 'You shall sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,' &c."

"Nonsense," said Little Grandmother.

"And we can have ice-cream every day."

"And a cow?" asked Grandmother tremulous with pleasure.

"Everything we want," cried Fred, ecstatically. "There never was another such Easter egg."

And, indeed, there never was.

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8: The Burden of Proof

Ralph Rodd

William North, 1869-1937

Australian Town and Country Journal, 8 Dec 1909

"STORIES IN REAL LIFE leave more to the imagination," objected the lawyer.

"As for example?" remarked the novelist encouragingly, for a man who prides himself on being a good host must suffer boredom gladly.

The lawyer hold his hands out to the fire. He was perfectly well aware that during dinner his companion had tried hard to appear interested in various topics which for him had no interest at all, so that it was only fair that he, in turn should make a valiant attempt to talk about the peculiarly, futile profession adopted by a man worthy of better things— his host would have made at least a third-rate lawyer!

"As, for example," Mr. Jeffson repeated, "Well, as for example, Regina v. Clifford."

The novelist's look of interest was really well done.

"Not an illuminating title," he remarked, "and so much depends upon a catchy title nowadays."

"You can call it what you like," snapped the other, " 'Cherchez La Femme",' or 'The Woman's Move.' "

"They've both been used before," objected the weary novelist. It seemed to him ironic that he, of all men, should be called upon, to listen to the stories of an amateur. Then, remembering his duties as host, "Never, mind the title; tell mo about the heroine; she should come first,."

"The woman was called Philippa," began Mr. Jeffson with startling abruptness. "Pretty, of course?. They always are."

"I don't agree with you," testily. "Pretty women are as rare as men with brains; you can't put it lower than that. You novelists make all your heroines like wax dolls! Philippa Garside was more than pretty, she was a— well, fascinating."

"And, of course, had lovers by the score?"

"I don't know anything about that, my department is Settlements, not Sentiment. At any rate, Philippa had two suitors. One, was a nice, weak, handsome boy called Neville, the other— John Clifford— was middle-aged. He was head and shoulders above Neville in every way, a strong man, clever, brilliant, and all the rest of it. He was just the one to have made Philippa a good husband."

"But she married the other."

"How did you know?" suspiciously.

"They always do," said the long-suffering author, and he felt that for once he had scored.

"I don't admit it," snapped Mr. Jeffson. "Still Philippa1 did marry Neville, and Clifford, instead of being thankful for his escape, seemed seriously annoyed. I never saw a man look more murderous at the wedding, and when I came out of the study where the bridegroom, the lady's father, and I, had been transacting the usual legal formalities, there was Clifford and the bride having their final quarrel in the hall. No one. saw them but myself; for my companions had lingered in the study. Neville was calling the old man 'Father' with unnecessary frequency; and the newly-made parent was urging the boy to treat his wife well. It would have been a great deal more to the point to have urged the bride to be kind to the poor young husband, but nobody did," cynically.

"So you disturbed the tete-a-tete in the hall!" remarked the novelist. The driest of facts were more to his liking than Mr. Jeffson's cynicisms.

"No, I only witnessed it. They were too full of their own affairs to notice me."

The speaker's expression had -changed oddly.

"As I stood there, watching, them, I knew that, for an instant, those two had flung aside the masks we most wear, from infancy to the grave. Clifford said something, I don't know what it was, but Philippa turned on the bottom step of the old oak staircase, and threw back a retort. I seemed to see it strike him full in the face . It left him white for an instant, and then the color came back. It was as though she had struck him. He spoke again. I believe he was pleading. I saw him hold out his hands, it was like a beggar supplicating for alms, but Philippa only shrugged her shoulders with infinite disdain, and she took no notice of his hand at all. Upon my word, I was almost sorry for the man, and I been thinking him fortunate all day."

The lawyer paused, as though to take a last. look at the picture his brain had conjured up, then went on briskly.

"And after that we sprinkled rice on the bride and bridegroom, and people threw old shoes about, and maiden aunts wept to think of their own escapes, no doubt! It was a hideous business! I had to stay out of my bed till midnight making up arrears of work."

"And that is the end of the first chapter; it is rather a conventional 'curtain'— ending, I mean."

"I don't agree with you at all," said Mr. Jeffson. "Wedding bells are generally the announcement of further trouble."

The misogynist helped himself from the decanter.

"It was some five years before I saw Philippa again, though I had heard that she had become quite a lady of fashion. Well, one morning she and her husband came to the office. Philippa was in a furious rage, the husband very much upset; and on the whole I was not surprised, for, according to their, story, the lady's old friend Mr. Clifford, had perpetrated about as gross a libel as I had

ever heard. He had openly, at a fashionable club, accused Neville of an outrageous breach of trust, had publicly branded him as a 'thief' and a 'liar.'

"It was too vile a charge to overlook, and I was not surprised that the wife insisted upon a prosecution being launched at once; indeed, it did not add to my respect for the husband to find him somewhat loth to take the only possible way of vindicating his character. It was Philippa who railed against Clifford. Neville actually talked of 'old friendship,' 'painful publicity,' and that sort of thing. He might just as well have talked to the stars, and when I remembered the little scene at the' foot of the oak staircase five years before, I knew that no words of mine would make any difference. Philippa was thirsting for her enemy's life—figuratively, of course."

"It is rather a good position," admitted the novelist.

"At the Police Court; Clifford pleaded 'not guilty,' and reserved his defence. The real fight was, of course, to be at the Old Bailey. Now, as the time, drew near for the hearing of the much-talked of case, Regina v. Clifford, Philippa grew more eager for the fray, but Philippa's husband, on the contrary, became more low-spirited, more peaceably inclined. The man was full of altruistic doctrines, which were ns embarrassing as unwanted, but I only told myself that, after all, Neville was not the first man to take fright at the thought of standing in the witness-box, and I determined to act accordingly. Sir Arthur Bramwell, Q.C.; was to lead for the prosecution, therefore Neville, the prosecutor, would be his chief witness, and so I mentioned the matter to him. A man of less experience might have made light of it. Sir Arthur knew too much about the vagaries of witnesses to do that, and so it was agreed that, under the guise of a conference, Mr. and Mrs. Neville should be taken to Sir Arthur's chambers in the Temple, there to be given something in the nature of 'a preliminary canter.' A nervous witness looks on every individual in a wig and gown as his enemy. Neville, we thought, would he more at ease in court after he had chatted familiarly with the great criminal lawyer."

"Yes, I see." The other had lost his flippancy; he was realising possibilities in the situation.

"I shall always remember that conference. There were just five of us present as it might be at that table," Mr. Jeffson turned to indicate with his hand the various positions as he mentioned them; "there was Sir Arthur, with the brief spread out before him. Valentine Schofield, who, of course, had done all the preliminary work, was by his side. I was standing, just behind them, Phillipa was in an easy chair near the window which overlooked the Temple gardens, while Neville himself had been manoeuvered into the seat at the side of the table a little to the left of Sir Arthur. I had seen a good many men in that chair. I knew that it was not by accident that the light from the big reading lamp fell full on the face of its occupant.

"He was a wonderful man was Sir Arthur, and never better than when he began to ask questions in that simple, bland way of his. He got a brief outline of the case from Schofield, his junior, a few technical points from me, made Philippa tell him quite naturally something of her previous friendship— that was what he called it— with Clifford, and then, gradually, almost imperceptibly, he drew Neville into the conversation. It was admirably done. The man, who with me had been constrained and nervous, was soon at his ease with Sir Arthur. One could almost see that he was surprised at finding it all so simple. The Q.C. played his fish very gently for a while, then he began to tighten the line, and the odd thing was how we all of us suddenly became aware of the fact. Philippa had been gazing out of the window. I saw her turn her head slowly and glance first at Sir Arthur, then at her husband.

"Valentine Schofield stopped turning over his papers, and he looked up quickly. As for myself I know that my heart was beating a trifle faster than usual— it is a good many years ago; I was comparatively young," apologetically.

"And Neville? What about Neville?"

"Over his handsome boyish face there had crept a look of dawning fear. Sir Arthur, in his own subtle way, was suggesting that the man who complained of a libel must, of course, be able to prove very fully that the words complained of were absolutely false. Now, mind, I had myself done the same thing, so had Schofield, yet apparently we had neither of us quite brought home to Oswald Neville the danger of attempting to fence with a skilled opponent. The man had always been afraid of having to do so, but he had been even more afraid of giving expression to his fears. Like many another who has met his doom in the witness-box, Neville had buoyed himself up with the hope that he would 'worry through.' From the first he was loth to take proceedings; now, in a flash, I saw why. The man had all along realised the danger of doing so yet he had lacked the courage to tell his wife, to let the world know that Clifford's words were not really libellous at all, and while he hesitated he had allowed Philippa to rush him into a position from which there was no withdrawing."

"By Jove!"

"Perhaps Philippa realised the significance of it all, even more than he did. I can see her expression now at she sat there, her costly furs thrown back, her lips a little parted, her eyes so full of startled horror. I thought to see in them contempt; there was nothing but pity there."

For just an instant old Jeffson's voice was gentle; then, remembering his role, he added, irritably, "Women are never logical."

"Thank God," said the novelist; and the lawyer sniffed contemptuously.

"Neville refused to withdraw; indeed he could hardly have done so. He pulled, himself together, and he vowed, he had all the evidence. Sir Arthur required, that he was prepared to meet all questions, and more than once I saw

him steal a glance at his wife as Sir Arthur explained what would surely happen if the prosecution should prove a fiasco. I believe, when the interview closed, we were all of us, each in our own way, dreading the case of Regina v. Clifford."

"I should rather think you were!"

"It came on two days later—" taking no notice of the interruption— "and, as was, of course, inevitable, the court was simply packed. I had never entered that familiar place with less heart; the bigger the crowd, the greater the interest, the more complete our discomfiture. I had begged Philippa not to attend, but all to no purpose. She was there, more arresting, more queenly, than ever, and she. calmly took her seat by my side at the solicitor's table just in front of the dock. Clifford, of course he had been allowed bail, sat with his solicitor at the other side of the table; there was only a yard or two between him and the woman he had wanted for his wife, and as I saw them there, and remembered the last occasion on which I had seen these two together, I wondered whether Philippa remembered how disdainfully she had refused to take the man's hand even in friendship. Neville himself was not there. He had come to the court with his wife, but she had sent him off on some errand or other. Perhaps she had done so because at that moment she preferred to sit alone, perhaps— But there, there are so many things about the case of Regina v. Clifford which have never been explained, which will never be explained.

"The case was called on. I suppose I ought to say there was a thrill, as Clifford, the society man, stepped into the prisoner's dock. I know a lot of women put up their glasses, that the Judge took a long look at the prisoner. I know that I was vexed with Philippa because she turned right round, the better, to look up into the face of the man who stood there grasping the edge of the dock. I know that I wished myself a hundred miles away, that Sir Arthur fumbled with his papers and said, something, disagreeable to his junior— Sir Arthur, who knew nothing of nerves and was the most courteous of men; I saw the reporters bend over their notebooks. I heard a sporting barrister behind whisper to his neighbor, 'Keep your eye on the old 'un, Johnnie. Valentine says he's riding for a fall.' It struck me as a hateful speech. I trust the gentleman is as briefless now as he was then!"— vindictively.

"Go on, Jeffson, go on. It's a— a very good yarn!"

"The clerk of the court read out the indictment, and he called upon the prisoner to plead, and the prisoner pleaded— guilty."

"Guilty, Jeffson?"

"Yes," testily. "Guilty."

"Well, but Jeffson—"

"My dear sir," irritably, "I am not a professional storyteller. As I said just now, the real stories in life do leave a lot to the imagination."

"Then what happened next?"— eagerly.

"Justice, a little staggered, took her course. Sir Arthur murmured, 'Dear, dear,' which was equivalent to an oath; three gentlemen, retained for the defence, nearly collapsed, severally and jointly, and their leader went and argued with the prisoner, who, however, persisted in his ridiculous plea. Then the Judge— he was a man of the world as well as a lawyer— passed as light a sentence as he possibly could, and Philippa went out to meet her husband."

"But how had she got at him? At Clifford, I mean. She had squared him in spite of everything, what?"

"My dear sir; how should I know? If you're dealing with real life you mustn't expect to have little explanatory paragraphs on every page. Fate never condescends to give her reasons. Isn't it time we went to bed?"

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9: The Street of Our Lady of the Fields

Robert W. Chambers

1865-1933

In: *The King in Yellow*, 1895

"Et tout les jours passés dans la tristesse
Nous sont comptés comme des jours heureux!"

THE STREET is not fashionable, neither is it shabby. It is a pariah among streets—a street without a Quarter. It is generally understood to lie outside the pale of the aristocratic Avenue de l'Observatoire. The students of the Montparnasse Quarter consider it swell and will have none of it. The Latin Quarter, from the Luxembourg, its northern frontier, sneers at its respectability and regards with disfavour the correctly costumed students who haunt it. Few strangers go into it. At times, however, the Latin Quarter students use it as a thoroughfare between the rue de Rennes and the Bullier, but except for that and the weekly afternoon visits of parents and guardians to the Convent near the rue Vavin, the street of Our Lady of the Fields is as quiet as a Passy boulevard. Perhaps the most respectable portion lies between the rue de la Grande Chaumière and the rue Vavin, at least this was the conclusion arrived at by the Reverend Joel Byram, as he rambled through it with Hastings in charge. To Hastings the street looked pleasant in the bright June weather, and he had begun to hope for its selection when the Reverend Byram shied violently at the cross on the Convent opposite.

"Jesuits," he muttered.

"Well," said Hastings wearily, "I imagine we won't find anything better. You say yourself that vice is triumphant in Paris, and it seems to me that in every street we find Jesuits or something worse."

After a moment he repeated, "Or something worse, which of course I would not notice except for your kindness in warning me."

Dr. Byram sucked in his lips and looked about him. He was impressed by the evident respectability of the surroundings. Then frowning at the Convent he took Hastings' arm and shuffled across the street to an iron gateway which bore the number 201 *bis* painted in white on a blue ground. Below this was a notice printed in English:

For Porter please oppress once.
For Servant please oppress twice.
For Parlour please oppress thrice.

Hastings touched the electric button three times, and they were ushered through the garden and into the parlour by a trim maid. The dining-room door,

just beyond, was open, and from the table in plain view a stout woman hastily arose and came toward them. Hastings caught a glimpse of a young man with a big head and several snuffy old gentlemen at breakfast, before the door closed and the stout woman waddled into the room, bringing with her an aroma of coffee and a black poodle.

"It ees a plaisir to you receive!" she cried. "Monsieur is Anglish? No? Americain? Off course. My pension it ees for Americains surtout. Here all spik Angleesh, *c'est à dire*, ze personnel; ze sairvants do spik, plus ou moins, a little. I am happy to have you comme pensionnaires—"

"Madame," began Dr. Byram, but was cut short again.

"Ah, yess, I know, ah! *mon Dieu*! you do not spik Frainch but you have come to lairne! My husband does spik Frainch wiss ze pensionnaires. We have at ze moment a family Americaine who learn of my husband Frainch—"

Here the poodle growled at Dr. Byram and was promptly cuffed by his mistress.

"*Veux tu*!" she cried, with a slap, "*veux tu! Oh! le vilain, oh! le vilain*!"

"*Mais, madame*," said Hastings, smiling, "*il n'a pas l'air très féroce*."

The poodle fled, and his mistress cried, "Ah, ze accent charming! He does spik already Frainch like a Parisien young gentleman!"

Then Dr. Byram managed to get in a word or two and gathered more or less information with regard to prices.

"It ees a *pension serieux*; my clientèle ees of ze best, indeed a *pension de famille* where one ees at 'ome."

Then they went upstairs to examine Hastings' future quarters, test the bed-springs and arrange for the weekly towel allowance. Dr. Byram appeared satisfied.

Madame Marotte accompanied them to the door and rang for the maid, but as Hastings stepped out into the gravel walk, his guide and mentor paused a moment and fixed Madame with his watery eyes.

"You understand," he said, "that he is a youth of most careful bringing up, and his character and morals are without a stain. He is young and has never been abroad, never even seen a large city, and his parents have requested me, as an old family friend living in Paris, to see that he is placed under good influences. He is to study art, but on no account would his parents wish him to live in the Latin Quarter if they knew of the immorality which is rife there."

A sound like the click of a latch interrupted him and he raised his eyes, but not in time to see the maid slap the big-headed young man behind the parlour-door.

Madame coughed, cast a deadly glance behind her and then beamed on Dr. Byram.

"It ees well zat he come here. The pension more serious, *il n'en existe pas*, eet ees not any!" she announced with conviction.

So, as there was nothing more to add, Dr. Byram joined Hastings at the gate.

"I trust," he said, eyeing the Convent, "that you will make no acquaintances among Jesuits!"

Hastings looked at the Convent until a pretty girl passed before the gray façade, and then he looked at her. A young fellow with a paint-box and canvas came swinging along, stopped before the pretty girl, said something during a brief but vigorous handshake at which they both laughed, and he went his way, calling back, "*À demain* Valentine!" as in the same breath she cried, "*À demain*!"

"Valentine," thought Hastings, "what a quaint name;" and he started to follow the Reverend Joel Byram, who was shuffling towards the nearest tramway station.

ii

"An' you are pleas wiz Paris, Monsieur' Astang?" demanded Madame Marotte the next morning as Hastings came into the breakfast-room of the pension, rosy from his plunge in the limited bath above.

"I am sure I shall like it," he replied, wondering at his own depression of spirits.

The maid brought him coffee and rolls. He returned the vacant glance of the big-headed young man and acknowledged diffidently the salutes of the snuffy old gentlemen. He did not try to finish his coffee, and sat crumbling a roll, unconscious of the sympathetic glances of Madame Marotte, who had tact enough not to bother him.

Presently a maid entered with a tray on which were balanced two bowls of chocolate, and the snuffy old gentlemen leered at her ankles. The maid deposited the chocolate at a table near the window and smiled at Hastings. Then a thin young lady, followed by her counterpart in all except years, marched into the room and took the table near the window. They were evidently American, but Hastings, if he expected any sign of recognition, was disappointed. To be ignored by compatriots intensified his depression. He fumbled with his knife and looked at his plate.

The thin young lady was talkative enough. She was quite aware of Hastings' presence, ready to be flattered if he looked at her, but on the other hand she felt her superiority, for she had been three weeks in Paris and he, it was easy to see, had not yet unpacked his steamer-trunk.

Her conversation was complacent. She argued with her mother upon the relative merits of the Louvre and the Bon Marché, but her mother's part of the discussion was mostly confined to the observation, "Why, Susie!"

The snuffy old gentlemen had left the room in a body, outwardly polite and inwardly raging. They could not endure the Americans, who filled the room with their chatter.

The big-headed young man looked after them with a knowing cough, murmuring, "Gay old birds!"

"They look like bad old men, Mr. Bladen," said the girl.

To this Mr. Bladen smiled and said, "They've had their day," in a tone which implied that he was now having his.

"And that's why they all have baggy eyes," cried the girl. "I think it's a shame for young gentlemen— "

"Why, Susie!" said the mother, and the conversation lagged.

After a while Mr. Bladen threw down the *Petit Journal*, which he daily studied at the expense of the house, and turning to Hastings, started to make himself agreeable. He began by saying, "I see you are American."

To this brilliant and original opening, Hastings, deadly homesick, replied gratefully, and the conversation was judiciously nourished by observations from Miss Susie Byng distinctly addressed to Mr. Bladen. In the course of events Miss Susie, forgetting to address herself exclusively to Mr. Bladen, and Hastings replying to her general question, the *entente cordiale* was established, and Susie and her mother extended a protectorate over what was clearly neutral territory.

"Mr. Hastings, you must not desert the pension every evening as Mr. Bladen does. Paris is an awful place for young gentlemen, and Mr. Bladen is a horrid cynic."

Mr. Bladen looked gratified.

Hastings answered, "I shall be at the studio all day, and I imagine I shall be glad enough to come back at night."

Mr. Bladen, who, at a salary of fifteen dollars a week, acted as agent for the Pewly Manufacturing Company of Troy, N.Y., smiled a sceptical smile and withdrew to keep an appointment with a customer on the Boulevard Magenta.

Hastings walked into the garden with Mrs. Byng and Susie, and, at their invitation, sat down in the shade before the iron gate.

The chestnut trees still bore their fragrant spikes of pink and white, and the bees hummed among the roses, trellised on the white-walled house.

A faint freshness was in the air. The watering carts moved up and down the street, and a clear stream bubbled over the spotless gutters of the rue de la Grande Chaumière. The sparrows were merry along the curb-stones, taking bath after bath in the water and ruffling their feathers with delight. In a walled garden across the street a pair of blackbirds whistled among the almond trees.

Hastings swallowed the lump in his throat, for the song of the birds and the ripple of water in a Paris gutter brought back to him the sunny meadows of Millbrook.

"That's a blackbird," observed Miss Byng; "see him there on the bush with pink blossoms. He's all black except his bill, and that looks as if it had been dipped in an omelet, as some Frenchman says—"

"Why, Susie!" said Mrs. Byng.

"That garden belongs to a studio inhabited by two Americans," continued the girl serenely, "and I often see them pass. They seem to need a great many models, mostly young and feminine—"

"Why, Susie!"

"Perhaps they prefer painting that kind, but I don't see why they should invite five, with three more young gentlemen, and all get into two cabs and drive away singing. This street," she continued, "is dull. There is nothing to see except the garden and a glimpse of the Boulevard Montparnasse through the rue de la Grande Chaumière. No one ever passes except a policeman. There is a convent on the corner."

"I thought it was a Jesuit College," began Hastings, but was at once overwhelmed with a Baedecker description of the place, ending with, "On one side stand the palatial hotels of Jean Paul Laurens and Guillaume Bouguereau, and opposite, in the little Passage Stanislas, Carolus Duran paints the masterpieces which charm the world."

The blackbird burst into a ripple of golden throaty notes, and from some distant green spot in the city an unknown wild-bird answered with a frenzy of liquid trills until the sparrows paused in their ablutions to look up with restless chirps.

Then a butterfly came and sat on a cluster of heliotrope and waved his crimson-banded wings in the hot sunshine. Hastings knew him for a friend, and before his eyes there came a vision of tall mulleins and scented milkweed alive with painted wings, a vision of a white house and woodbine-covered piazza,— a glimpse of a man reading and a woman leaning over the pansy bed,— and his heart was full. He was startled a moment later by Miss Byng.

"I believe you are homesick!" Hastings blushed. Miss Byng looked at him with a sympathetic sigh and continued: "Whenever I felt homesick at first I used to go with mamma and walk in the Luxembourg Gardens. I don't know why it is, but those old-fashioned gardens seemed to bring me nearer home than anything in this artificial city."

"But they are full of marble statues," said Mrs. Byng mildly; "I don't see the resemblance myself."

"Where is the Luxembourg?" inquired Hastings after a silence.

"Come with me to the gate," said Miss Byng. He rose and followed her, and she pointed out the rue Vavin at the foot of the street.

"You pass by the convent to the right," she smiled; and Hastings went.

iii

THE LUXEMBOURG was a blaze of flowers. He walked slowly through the long avenues of trees, past mossy marbles and old-time columns, and threading the grove by the bronze lion, came upon the tree-crowned terrace above the fountain. Below lay the basin shining in the sunlight. Flowering almonds encircled the terrace, and, in a greater spiral, groves of chestnuts wound in and out and down among the moist thickets by the western palace wing. At one end of the avenue of trees the Observatory rose, its white domes piled up like an eastern mosque; at the other end stood the heavy palace, with every window-pane ablaze in the fierce sun of June.

Around the fountain, children and white-capped nurses armed with bamboo poles were pushing toy boats, whose sails hung limp in the sunshine. A dark policeman, wearing red epaulettes and a dress sword, watched them for a while and then went away to remonstrate with a young man who had unchained his dog. The dog was pleasantly occupied in rubbing grass and dirt into his back while his legs waved into the air.

The policeman pointed at the dog. He was speechless with indignation.

"Well, Captain," smiled the young fellow.

"Well, Monsieur Student," growled the policeman.

"What do you come and complain to me for?"

"If you don't chain him I'll take him," shouted the policeman.

"What's that to me, *mon capitaine*?"

"Wha— t! Isn't that bull-dog yours?"

"If it was, don't you suppose I'd chain him?"

The officer glared for a moment in silence, then deciding that as he was a student he was wicked, grabbed at the dog, who promptly dodged. Around and around the flower-beds they raced, and when the officer came too near for comfort, the bull-dog cut across a flower-bed, which perhaps was not playing fair.

The young man was amused, and the dog also seemed to enjoy the exercise.

The policeman noticed this and decided to strike at the fountain-head of the evil. He stormed up to the student and said, "As the owner of this public nuisance I arrest you!"

"But," objected the other, "I disclaim the dog."

That was a poser. It was useless to attempt to catch the dog until three gardeners lent a hand, but then the dog simply ran away and disappeared in the rue de Medici.

The policeman shambled off to find consolation among the white-capped nurses, and the student, looking at his watch, stood up yawning. Then catching

sight of Hastings, he smiled and bowed. Hastings walked over to the marble, laughing.

"Why, Clifford," he said, "I didn't recognize you."

"It's my moustache," sighed the other. "I sacrificed it to humour a whim of— of— a friend. What do you think of my dog?"

"Then he is yours?" cried Hastings.

"Of course. It's a pleasant change for him, this playing tag with policemen, but he is known now and I'll have to stop it. He's gone home. He always does when the gardeners take a hand. It's a pity; he's fond of rolling on lawns." Then they chatted for a moment of Hastings' prospects, and Clifford politely offered to stand his sponsor at the studio.

"You see, old tabby, I mean Dr. Byram, told me about you before I met you," explained Clifford, "and Elliott and I will be glad to do anything we can." Then looking at his watch again, he muttered, "I have just ten minutes to catch the Versailles train; au revoir," and started to go, but catching sight of a girl advancing by the fountain, took off his hat with a confused smile.

"Why are you not at Versailles?" she said, with an almost imperceptible acknowledgment of Hastings' presence.

"I— I'm going," murmured Clifford.

For a moment they faced each other, and then Clifford, very red, stammered, "With your permission I have the honour of presenting to you my friend, Monsieur Hastings."

Hastings bowed low. She smiled very sweetly, but there was something of malice in the quiet inclination of her small Parisienne head.

"I could have wished," she said, "that Monsieur Clifford might spare me more time when he brings with him so charming an American."

"Must— must I go, Valentine?" began Clifford.

"Certainly," she replied.

Clifford took his leave with very bad grace, wincing, when she added, "And give my dearest love to Cécile!" As he disappeared in the rue d'Assas, the girl turned as if to go, but then suddenly remembering Hastings, looked at him and shook her head.

"Monsieur Clifford is so perfectly harebrained," she smiled, "it is embarrassing sometimes. You have heard, of course, all about his success at the Salon?"

He looked puzzled and she noticed it.

"You have been to the Salon, of course?"

"Why, no," he answered, "I only arrived in Paris three days ago."

She seemed to pay little heed to his explanation, but continued: "Nobody imagined he had the energy to do anything good, but on varnishing day the Salon was astonished by the entrance of Monsieur Clifford, who strolled about

as bland as you please with an orchid in his buttonhole, and a beautiful picture on the line."

She smiled to herself at the reminiscence, and looked at the fountain.

"Monsieur Bouguereau told me that Monsieur Julian was so astonished that he only shook hands with Monsieur Clifford in a dazed manner, and actually forgot to pat him on the back! Fancy," she continued with much merriment, "fancy papa Julian forgetting to pat one on the back."

Hastings, wondering at her acquaintance with the great Bouguereau, looked at her with respect. "May I ask," he said diffidently, "whether you are a pupil of Bouguereau?"

"I?" she said in some surprise. Then she looked at him curiously. Was he permitting himself the liberty of joking on such short acquaintance?

His pleasant serious face questioned hers.

"Tiens," she thought, "what a droll man!"

"You surely study art?" he said.

She leaned back on the crooked stick of her parasol, and looked at him. "Why do you think so?"

"Because you speak as if you did."

"You are making fun of me," she said, "and it is not good taste."

She stopped, confused, as he coloured to the roots of his hair.

"How long have you been in Paris?" she said at length.

"Three days," he replied gravely.

"But— but— surely you are not a *nouveau*! You speak French too well!"

Then after a pause, "Really are you a *nouveau*?"

"I am," he said.

She sat down on the marble bench lately occupied by Clifford, and tilting her parasol over her small head looked at him.

"I don't believe it."

He felt the compliment, and for a moment hesitated to declare himself one of the despised. Then mustering up his courage, he told her how new and green he was, and all with a frankness which made her blue eyes open very wide and her lips part in the sweetest of smiles.

"You have never seen a studio?"

"Never."

"Nor a model?"

"No."

"How funny," she said solemnly. Then they both laughed.

"And you," he said, "have seen studios?"

"Hundreds."

"And models?"

"Millions."

"And you know Bouguereau?"

"Yes, and Henner, and Constant and Laurens, and Puvis de Chavannes and Dagnan and Courtois, and— and all the rest of them!"

"And yet you say you are not an artist."

"Pardon," she said gravely, "did I say I was not?"

"Won't you tell me?" he hesitated.

At first she looked at him, shaking her head and smiling, then of a sudden her eyes fell and she began tracing figures with her parasol in the gravel at her feet. Hastings had taken a place on the seat, and now, with his elbows on his knees, sat watching the spray drifting above the fountain jet. A small boy, dressed as a sailor, stood poking his yacht and crying, "I won't go home! I won't go home!" His nurse raised her hands to Heaven.

"Just like a little American boy," thought Hastings, and a pang of homesickness shot through him.

Presently the nurse captured the boat, and the small boy stood at bay.

"Monsieur René, when you decide to come here you may have your boat."

The boy backed away scowling.

"Give me my boat, I say," he cried, "and don't call me René, for my name's Randall and you know it!"

"Hello!" said Hastings,— "Randall?— that's English."

"I am American," announced the boy in perfectly good English, turning to look at Hastings, "and she's such a fool she calls me René because mamma calls me Ranny—"

Here he dodged the exasperated nurse and took up his station behind Hastings, who laughed, and catching him around the waist lifted him into his lap.

"One of my countrymen," he said to the girl beside him. He smiled while he spoke, but there was a queer feeling in his throat.

"Don't you see the stars and stripes on my yacht?" demanded Randall. Sure enough, the American colours hung limply under the nurse's arm.

"Oh," cried the girl, "he is charming," and impulsively stooped to kiss him, but the infant Randall wriggled out of Hastings' arms, and his nurse pounced upon him with an angry glance at the girl.

She reddened and then bit her lips as the nurse, with eyes still fixed on her, dragged the child away and ostentatiously wiped his lips with her handkerchief.

Then she stole a look at Hastings and bit her lip again.

"What an ill-tempered woman!" he said. "In America, most nurses are flattered when people kiss their children."

For an instant she tipped the parasol to hide her face, then closed it with a snap and looked at him defiantly.

"Do you think it strange that she objected?"

"Why not?" he said in surprise.

Again she looked at him with quick searching eyes.

His eyes were clear and bright, and he smiled back, repeating, "Why not?"

"You *are* droll," she murmured, bending her head.

"Why?"

But she made no answer, and sat silent, tracing curves and circles in the dust with her parasol. After a while he said— "I am glad to see that young people have so much liberty here. I understood that the French were not at all like us. You know in America— or at least where I live in Milbrook, girls have every liberty,— go out alone and receive their friends alone, and I was afraid I should miss it here. But I see how it is now, and I am glad I was mistaken."

She raised her eyes to his and kept them there.

He continued pleasantly— "Since I have sat here I have seen a lot of pretty girls walking alone on the terrace there,— and then *you* are alone too. Tell me, for I do not know French customs,— do you have the liberty of going to the theatre without a chaperone?"

For a long time she studied his face, and then with a trembling smile said, "Why do you ask me?"

"Because you must know, of course," he said gaily.

"Yes," she replied indifferently, "I know."

He waited for an answer, but getting none, decided that perhaps she had misunderstood him.

"I hope you don't think I mean to presume on our short acquaintance," he began,— "in fact it is very odd but I don't know your name. When Mr. Clifford presented me he only mentioned mine. Is that the custom in France?"

"It is the custom in the Latin Quarter," she said with a queer light in her eyes. Then suddenly she began talking almost feverishly.

"You must know, Monsieur Hastings, that we are all *un peu sans gêne* here in the Latin Quarter. We are very Bohemian, and etiquette and ceremony are out of place. It was for that Monsieur Clifford presented you to me with small ceremony, and left us together with less,— only for that, and I am his friend, and I have many friends in the Latin Quarter, and we all know each other very well— and I am not studying art, but— but— "

"But what?" he said, bewildered.

"I shall not tell you,— it is a secret," she said with an uncertain smile. On both cheeks a pink spot was burning, and her eyes were very bright.

Then in a moment her face fell. "Do you know Monsieur Clifford very intimately?"

"Not very."

After a while she turned to him, grave and a little pale.

"My name is Valentine— Valentine Tissot. Might— might I ask a service of you on such very short acquaintance?"

"Oh," he cried, "I should be honoured."

"It is only this," she said gently, "it is not much. Promise me not to speak to Monsieur Clifford about me. Promise me that you will speak to no one about me."

"I promise," he said, greatly puzzled.

She laughed nervously. "I wish to remain a mystery. It is a caprice."

"But," he began, "I had wished, I had hoped that you might give Monsieur Clifford permission to bring me, to present me at your house."

"My— my house!" she repeated.

"I mean, where you live, in fact, to present me to your family."

The change in the girl's face shocked him.

"I beg your pardon," he cried, "I have hurt you."

And as quick as a flash she understood him because she was a woman.

"My parents are dead," she said.

Presently he began again, very gently.

"Would it displease you if I beg you to receive me? It is the custom?"

"I cannot," she answered. Then glancing up at him, "I am sorry; I should like to; but believe me. I cannot."

He bowed seriously and looked vaguely uneasy.

"It isn't because I don't wish to. I— I like you; you are very kind to me."

"Kind?" he cried, surprised and puzzled.

"I like you," she said slowly, "and we will see each other sometimes if you will."

"At friends' houses."

"No, not at friends' houses."

"Where?"

"Here," she said with defiant eyes.

"Why," he cried, "in Paris you are much more liberal in your views than we are."

She looked at him curiously.

"Yes, we are very Bohemian."

"I think it is charming," he declared.

"You see, we shall be in the best of society," she ventured timidly, with a pretty gesture toward the statues of the dead queens, ranged in stately ranks above the terrace.

He looked at her, delighted, and she brightened at the success of her innocent little pleasantry.

"Indeed," she smiled, "I shall be well chaperoned, because you see we are under the protection of the gods themselves; look, there are Apollo, and Juno, and Venus, on their pedestals," counting them on her small gloved fingers, "and Ceres, Hercules, and— but I can't make out—"

Hastings turned to look up at the winged god under whose shadow they were seated.

"Why, it's Love," he said.

iv

"THERE IS a *nouveau* here," drawled Laffat, leaning around his easel and addressing his friend Bowles, "there is a nouveau here who is so tender and green and appetizing that Heaven help him if he should fall into a salad bowl."

"Hayseed?" inquired Bowles, plastering in a background with a broken palette-knife and squinting at the effect with approval.

"Yes, Squeedunk or Oshkosh, and how he ever grew up among the daisies and escaped the cows, Heaven alone knows!"

Bowles rubbed his thumb across the outlines of his study to "throw in a little atmosphere," as he said, glared at the model, pulled at his pipe and finding it out struck a match on his neighbour's back to relight it.

"His name," continued Laffat, hurling a bit of bread at the hat-rack, "his name is Hastings. He *is* a berry. He knows no more about the world,"— and here Mr. Laffat's face spoke volumes for his own knowledge of that planet,— "than a maiden cat on its first moonlight stroll."

Bowles now having succeeded in lighting his pipe, repeated the thumb touch on the other edge of the study and said, "Ah!"

"Yes," continued his friend, "and would you imagine it, he seems to think that everything here goes on as it does in his d— d little backwoods ranch at home; talks about the pretty girls who walk alone in the street; says how sensible it is; and how French parents are misrepresented in America; says that for his part he finds French girls,— and he confessed to only knowing one,— as jolly as American girls. I tried to set him right, tried to give him a pointer as to what sort of ladies walk about alone or with students, and he was either too stupid or too innocent to catch on. Then I gave it to him straight, and he said I was a vile-minded fool and marched off."

"Did you assist him with your shoe?" inquired Bowles, languidly interested.

"Well, no."

"He called you a vile-minded fool."

"He was correct," said Clifford from his easel in front.

"What— what do you mean?" demanded Laffat, turning red.

"*That*," replied Clifford.

"Who spoke to you? Is this your business?" sneered Bowles, but nearly lost his balance as Clifford swung about and eyed him.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it's my business."

No one spoke for some time.

Then Clifford sang out, "I say, Hastings!"

And when Hastings left his easel and came around, he nodded toward the astonished Laffat.

"This man has been disagreeable to you, and I want to tell you that any time you feel inclined to kick him, why, I will hold the other creature."

Hastings, embarrassed, said, "Why no, I don't agree with his ideas, nothing more."

Clifford said "Naturally," and slipping his arm through Hastings', strolled about with him, and introduced him to several of his own friends, at which all the *nouveaux* opened their eyes with envy, and the studio were given to understand that Hastings, although prepared to do menial work as the latest nouveau, was already within the charmed circle of the old, respected and feared, the truly great.

The rest finished, the model resumed his place, and work went on in a chorus of songs and yells and every ear-splitting noise which the art student utters when studying the beautiful.

Five o'clock struck,— the model yawned, stretched and climbed into his trousers, and the noisy contents of six studios crowded through the hall and down into the street. Ten minutes later, Hastings found himself on top of a Montrouge tram, and shortly afterward was joined by Clifford.

They climbed down at the rue Gay Lussac.

"I always stop here," observed Clifford, "I like the walk through the Luxembourg."

"By the way," said Hastings, "how can I call on you when I don't know where you live?"

"Why, I live opposite you."

"What— the studio in the garden where the almond trees are and the blackbirds— "

"Exactly," said Clifford. "I'm with my friend Elliott."

Hastings thought of the description of the two American artists which he had heard from Miss Susie Byng, and looked blank.

Clifford continued, "Perhaps you had better let me know when you think of coming so,— so that I will be sure to— to be there," he ended rather lamely.

"I shouldn't care to meet any of your model friends there," said Hastings, smiling. "You know— my ideas are rather straitlaced,— I suppose you would say, Puritanical. I shouldn't enjoy it and wouldn't know how to behave."

"Oh, I understand," said Clifford, but added with great cordiality,— "I'm sure we'll be friends although you may not approve of me and my set, but you will like Severn and Selby because— because, well, they are like yourself, old chap."

After a moment he continued, "There is something I want to speak about. You see, when I introduced you, last week, in the Luxembourg, to Valentine— "

"Not a word!" cried Hastings, smiling; "you must not tell me a word of her!"

"Why— "

"No— not a word!" he said gaily. "I insist,— promise me upon your honour you will not speak of her until I give you permission; promise!"

"I promise," said Clifford, amazed.

"She is a charming girl,— we had such a delightful chat after you left, and I thank you for presenting me, but not another word about her until I give you permission."

"Oh," murmured Clifford.

"Remember your promise," he smiled, as he turned into his gateway.

Clifford strolled across the street and, traversing the ivy-covered alley, entered his garden.

He felt for his studio key, muttering, "I wonder— I wonder,— but of course he doesn't!"

He entered the hallway, and fitting the key into the door, stood staring at the two cards tacked over the panels.

FOXHALL CLIFFORD

RICHARD OSBORNE
ELLIOTT

"Why the devil doesn't he want me to speak of her?"

He opened the door, and, discouraging the caresses of two brindle bull-dogs, sank down on the sofa.

Elliott sat smoking and sketching with a piece of charcoal by the window.

"Hello," he said without looking around.

Clifford gazed absently at the back of his head, murmuring, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid that man is too innocent. I say, Elliott," he said, at last, "Hastings,— you know the chap that old Tabby Byram came around here to tell us about— the day you had to hide Colette in the armoire— "

"Yes, what's up?"

"Oh, nothing. He's a brick."

"Yes," said Elliott, without enthusiasm.

"Don't you think so?" demanded Clifford.

"Why yes, but he is going to have a tough time when some of his illusions are dispelled."

"More shame to those who dispel 'em!"

"Yes,— wait until he comes to pay his call on us, unexpectedly, of course—"

Clifford looked virtuous and lighted a cigar.

"I was just going to say," he observed, "that I have asked him not to come without letting us know, so I can postpone any orgie you may have intended—"

"Ah!" cried Elliott indignantly, "I suppose you put it to him in that way."

"Not exactly," grinned Clifford. Then more seriously, "I don't want anything to occur here to bother him. He's a brick, and it's a pity we can't be more like him."

"I am," observed Elliott complacently, "only living with you— "

"Listen!" cried the other. "I have managed to put my foot in it in great style. Do you know what I've done? Well— the first time I met him in the street,— or rather, it was in the Luxembourg, I introduced him to Valentine!"

"Did he object?"

"Believe me," said Clifford, solemnly, "this rustic Hastings has no more idea that Valentine is— is— in fact is Valentine, than he has that he himself is a beautiful example of moral decency in a Quarter where morals are as rare as elephants. I heard enough in a conversation between that blackguard Loffat and the little immoral eruption, Bowles, to open my eyes. I tell you Hastings is a trump! He's a healthy, clean-minded young fellow, bred in a small country village, brought up with the idea that saloons are way-stations to hell— and as for women— "

"Well?" demanded Elliott.

"Well," said Clifford, "his idea of the dangerous woman is probably a painted Jezebel."

"Probably," replied the other.

"He's a trump!" said Clifford, "and if he swears the world is as good and pure as his own heart, I'll swear he's right."

Elliott rubbed his charcoal on his file to get a point and turned to his sketch saying, "He will never hear any pessimism from Richard Osborne E."

"He's a lesson to me," said Clifford. Then he unfolded a small perfumed note, written on rose-coloured paper, which had been lying on the table before him.

He read it, smiled, whistled a bar or two from "Miss Helyett," and sat down to answer it on his best cream-laid note-paper. When it was written and sealed, he picked up his stick and marched up and down the studio two or three times, whistling.

"Going out?" inquired the other, without turning.

"Yes," he said, but lingered a moment over Elliott's shoulder, watching him pick out the lights in his sketch with a bit of bread.

"To-morrow is Sunday," he observed after a moment's silence.

"Well?" inquired Elliott.

"Have you seen Colette?"

"No, I will to-night. She and Rowden and Jacqueline are coming to Boulant's. I suppose you and Cécile will be there?"

"Well, no," replied Clifford. "Cécile dines at home to-night, and I— I had an idea of going to Mignon's."

Elliott looked at him with disapproval.

"You can make all the arrangements for La Roche without me," he continued, avoiding Elliott's eyes.

"What are you up to now?"

"Nothing," protested Clifford.

"Don't tell me," replied his chum, with scorn; "fellows don't rush off to Mignon's when the set dine at Boulant's. Who is it now?— but no, I won't ask that,— what's the use!" Then he lifted up his voice in complaint and beat upon the table with his pipe. "What's the use of ever trying to keep track of you? What will Cécile say,— oh, yes, what will she say? It's a pity you can't be constant two months, yes, by Jove! and the Quarter is indulgent, but you abuse its good nature and mine too!"

Presently he arose, and jamming his hat on his head, marched to the door.

"Heaven alone knows why any one puts up with your antics, but they all do and so do I. If I were Cécile or any of the other pretty fools after whom you have toddled and will, in all human probabilities, continue to toddle, I say, if I were Cécile I'd spank you! Now I'm going to Boulant's, and as usual I shall make excuses for you and arrange the affair, and I don't care a continental where you are going, but, by the skull of the studio skeleton! if you don't turn up to-morrow with your sketching-kit under one arm and Cécile under the other,— if you don't turn up in good shape, I'm done with you, and the rest can think what they please. Good-night."

Clifford said good-night with as pleasant a smile as he could muster, and then sat down with his eyes on the door. He took out his watch and gave Elliott ten minutes to vanish, then rang the concierge's call, murmuring, "Oh dear, oh dear, why the devil do I do it?"

"Alfred," he said, as that gimlet-eyed person answered the call, "make yourself clean and proper, Alfred, and replace your sabots with a pair of shoes. Then put on your best hat and take this letter to the big white house in the Rue de Dragon. There is no answer, *mon petit* Alfred."

The concierge departed with a snort in which unwillingness for the errand and affection for M. Clifford were blended. Then with great care the young fellow arrayed himself in all the beauties of his and Elliott's wardrobe. He took his time about it, and occasionally interrupted his toilet to play his banjo or make pleasing diversion for the bull-dogs by gambling about on all fours. "I've got two hours before me," he thought, and borrowed a pair of Elliott's silken foot-gear, with which he and the dogs played ball until he decided to put them

on. Then he lighted a cigarette and inspected his dress-coat. When he had emptied it of four handkerchiefs, a fan, and a pair of crumpled gloves as long as his arm, he decided it was not suited to add *éclat* to his charms and cast about in his mind for a substitute. Elliott was too thin, and, anyway, his coats were now under lock and key. Rowden probably was as badly off as himself. Hastings! Hastings was the man! But when he threw on a smoking-jacket and sauntered over to Hastings' house, he was informed that he had been gone over an hour.

"Now, where in the name of all that's reasonable could he have gone!" muttered Clifford, looking down the street.

The maid didn't know, so he bestowed upon her a fascinating smile and lounged back to the studio.

Hastings was not far away. The Luxembourg is within five minutes' walk of the rue Notre Dame des Champs, and there he sat under the shadow of a winged god, and there he had sat for an hour, poking holes in the dust and watching the steps which lead from the northern terrace to the fountain. The sun hung, a purple globe, above the misty hills of Meudon. Long streamers of clouds touched with rose swept low on the western sky, and the dome of the distant Invalides burned like an opal through the haze. Behind the Palace the smoke from a high chimney mounted straight into the air, purple until it crossed the sun, where it changed to a bar of smouldering fire. High above the darkening foliage of the chestnuts the twin towers of St. Sulpice rose, an ever-deepening silhouette.

A sleepy blackbird was carolling in some near thicket, and pigeons passed and repassed with the whisper of soft winds in their wings. The light on the Palace windows had died away, and the dome of the Pantheon swam aglow above the northern terrace, a fiery Valhalla in the sky; while below in grim array, along the terrace ranged, the marble ranks of queens looked out into the west.

From the end of the long walk by the northern façade of the Palace came the noise of omnibuses and the cries of the street. Hastings looked at the Palace clock. Six, and as his own watch agreed with it, he fell to poking holes in the gravel again. A constant stream of people passed between the Odéon and the fountain. Priests in black, with silver-buckled shoes; line soldiers, slouchy and rakish; neat girls without hats bearing milliners' boxes, students with black portfolios and high hats, students with bérets and big canes, nervous, quick-stepping officers, symphonies in turquoise and silver; ponderous jangling cavalrymen all over dust, pastry cooks' boys skipping along with utter disregard for the safety of the basket balanced on the impish head, and then the lean outcast, the shambling Paris tramp, slouching with shoulders bent and little eye furtively scanning the ground for smokers' refuse;— all these moved in a steady stream across the fountain circle and out into the city by the Odeon, whose long arcades were now beginning to flicker with gas-jets. The melancholy bells of St

Sulpice struck the hour and the clock-tower of the Palace lighted up. Then hurried steps sounded across the gravel and Hastings raised his head.

"How late you are," he said, but his voice was hoarse and only his flushed face told how long had seemed the waiting.

She said, "I was kept— indeed, I was so much annoyed— and— and I may only stay a moment."

She sat down beside him, casting a furtive glance over her shoulder at the god upon his pedestal.

"What a nuisance, that intruding cupid still there?"

"Wings and arrows too," said Hastings, unheeding her motion to be seated.

"Wings," she murmured, "oh, yes— to fly away with when he's tired of his play. Of course it was a man who conceived the idea of wings, otherwise Cupid would have been insupportable."

"Do you think so?"

"*Ma foi*, it's what men think."

"And women?"

"Oh," she said, with a toss of her small head, "I really forget what we were speaking of."

"We were speaking of love," said Hastings.

"*I* was not," said the girl. Then looking up at the marble god, "I don't care for this one at all. I don't believe he knows how to shoot his arrows— no, indeed, he is a coward;— he creeps up like an assassin in the twilight. I don't approve of cowardice," she announced, and turned her back on the statue.

"I think," said Hastings quietly, "that he does shoot fairly— yes, and even gives one warning."

"Is it your experience, Monsieur Hastings?"

He looked straight into her eyes and said, "He is warning me."

"Heed the warning then," she cried, with a nervous laugh. As she spoke she stripped off her gloves, and then carefully proceeded to draw them on again. When this was accomplished she glanced at the Palace clock, saying, "Oh dear, how late it is!" furled her umbrella, then unfurled it, and finally looked at him.

"No," he said, "I shall not heed his warning."

"Oh dear," she sighed again, "still talking about that tiresome statue!" Then stealing a glance at his face, "I suppose— I suppose you are in love."

"I don't know," he muttered, "I suppose I am."

She raised her head with a quick gesture. "You seem delighted at the idea," she said, but bit her lip and trembled as his eyes met hers. Then sudden fear came over her and she sprang up, staring into the gathering shadows.

"Are you cold?" he said.

But she only answered, "Oh dear, oh dear, it is late— so late! I must go— good-night."

She gave him her gloved hand a moment and then withdrew it with a start.

"What is it?" he insisted. "Are you frightened?"

She looked at him strangely.

"No— no— not frightened,— you are very good to me— "

"By Jove!" he burst out, "what do you mean by saying I'm good to you? That's at least the third time, and I don't understand!"

The sound of a drum from the guard-house at the palace cut him short. "Listen," she whispered, "they are going to close. It's late, oh, so late!"

The rolling of the drum came nearer and nearer, and then the silhouette of the drummer cut the sky above the eastern terrace. The fading light lingered a moment on his belt and bayonet, then he passed into the shadows, drumming the echoes awake. The roll became fainter along the eastern terrace, then grew and grew and rattled with increasing sharpness when he passed the avenue by the bronze lion and turned down the western terrace walk. Louder and louder the drum sounded, and the echoes struck back the notes from the grey palace wall; and now the drummer loomed up before them— his red trousers a dull spot in the gathering gloom, the brass of his drum and bayonet touched with a pale spark, his epaulettes tossing on his shoulders. He passed leaving the crash of the drum in their ears, and far into the alley of trees they saw his little tin cup shining on his haversack. Then the sentinels began the monotonous cry: "*On ferme*! *on ferme*!" and the bugle blew from the barracks in the rue de Tournon.

"On ferme! on ferme!"

"Good-night," she whispered, "I must return alone to-night."

He watched her until she reached the northern terrace, and then sat down on the marble seat until a hand on his shoulder and a glimmer of bayonets warned him away.

She passed on through the grove, and turning into the rue de Medici, traversed it to the Boulevard. At the corner she bought a bunch of violets and walked on along the Boulevard to the rue des Écoles. A cab was drawn up before Boulant's, and a pretty girl aided by Elliott jumped out.

"Valentine!" cried the girl, "come with us!"

"I can't," she said, stopping a moment— "I have a rendezvous at Mignon's."

"Not Victor?" cried the girl, laughing, but she passed with a little shiver, nodding good-night, then turning into the Boulevard St. Germain, she walked a tittle faster to escape a gay party sitting before the Café Cluny who called to her to join them. At the door of the Restaurant Mignon stood a coal-black negro in buttons. He took off his peaked cap as she mounted the carpeted stairs.

"Send Eugene to me," she said at the office, and passing through the hallway to the right of the dining-room stopped before a row of panelled doors. A waiter passed and she repeated her demand for Eugene, who presently appeared, noiselessly skipping, and bowed murmuring, "Madame."

"Who is here?"

"No one in the cabinets, madame; in the half Madame Madelon and Monsieur Gay, Monsieur de Clamart, Monsieur Clisson, Madame Marie and their set." Then he looked around and bowing again murmured, "Monsieur awaits madame since half an hour," and he knocked at one of the panelled doors bearing the number six.

Clifford opened the door and the girl entered.

The *garçon* bowed her in, and whispering, "Will Monsieur have the goodness to ring?" vanished.

He helped her off with her jacket and took her hat and umbrella. When she was seated at the little table with Clifford opposite she smiled and leaned forward on both elbows looking him in the face.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Waiting," he replied, in accents of adoration.

For an instant she turned and examined herself in the glass. The wide blue eyes, the curling hair, the straight nose and short curled lip flashed in the mirror an instant only, and then its depths reflected her pretty neck and back. "Thus do I turn my back on vanity," she said, and then leaning forward again, "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you," repeated Clifford, slightly troubled.

"And Cécile."

"Now don't, Valentine— "

"Do you know," she said calmly, "I dislike your conduct?"

He was a little disconcerted, and rang for Eugene to cover his confusion.

The soup was bisque, and the wine Pommery, and the courses followed each other with the usual regularity until Eugene brought coffee, and there was nothing left on the table but a small silver lamp.

"Valentine," said Clifford, after having obtained permission to smoke, "is it the Vaudeville or the Eldorado— or both, or the Nouveau Cirque, or—"

"It is here," said Valentine.

"Well," he said, greatly flattered, "I'm afraid I couldn't amuse you—"

"Oh, yes, you are funnier than the Eldorado."

"Now see here, don't guy me, Valentine. You always do, and, and,— you know what they say,— a good laugh kills—"

"What?"

"Er— er— love and all that."

She laughed until her eyes were moist with tears. "*Tiens*," she cried, "he is dead, then!"

Clifford eyed her with growing alarm.

"Do you know why I came?" she said.

"No," he replied uneasily, "I don't."

"How long have you made love to me?"

"Well," he admitted, somewhat startled,— "I should say,— for about a year."

"It is a year, I think. Are you not tired?"

He did not answer.

"Don't you know that I like you too well to— to ever fall in love with you?" she said. "Don't you know that we are too good comrades,— too old friends for that? And were we not,— do you think that I do not know your history, Monsieur Clifford?"

"Don't be— don't be so sarcastic," he urged; "don't be unkind, Valentine."

"I'm not. I'm kind. I'm very kind,— to you and to Cécile."

"Cécile is tired of me."

"I hope she is," said the girl, "for she deserves a better fate. Tiens, do you know your reputation in the Quarter? Of the inconstant, the most inconstant,— utterly incorrigible and no more serious than a gnat on a summer night. Poor Cécile!"

Clifford looked so uncomfortable that she spoke more kindly.

"I like you. You know that. Everybody does. You are a spoiled child here. Everything is permitted you and every one makes allowance, but every one cannot be a victim to caprice."

"Caprice!" he cried. "By Jove, if the girls of the Latin Quarter are not capricious—"

"Never mind,— never mind about that! You must not sit in judgment— you of all men. Why are you here to-night? Oh," she cried, "I will tell you why! Monsieur receives a little note; he sends a little answer; he dresses in his conquering raiment—"

"I don't," said Clifford, very red.

"You do, and it becomes you," she retorted with a faint smile. Then again, very quietly, "I am in your power, but I know I am in the power of a friend. I have come to acknowledge it to you here,— and it is because of that that I am here to beg of you— a— a favour."

Clifford opened his eyes, but said nothing.

"I am in— great distress of mind. It is Monsieur Hastings."

"Well?" said Clifford, in some astonishment.

"I want to ask you," she continued in a low voice, "I want to ask you to— to— in case you should speak of me before him,— not to say,— not to say,—"

"I shall not speak of you to him," he said quietly.

"Can— can you prevent others?"

"I might if I was present. May I ask why?"

"That is not fair," she murmured; "you know how— how he considers me,— as he considers every woman. You know how different he is from you and the rest. I have never seen a man,— such a man as Monsieur Hastings."

He let his cigarette go out unnoticed.

"I am almost afraid of him— afraid he should know— what we all are in the Quarter. Oh, I do not wish him to know! I do not wish him to— to turn from me— to cease from speaking to me as he does! You— you and the rest cannot know what it has been to me. I could not believe him,— I could not believe he was so good and— and noble. I do not wish him to know— so soon. He will find out— sooner or later, he will find out for himself, and then he will turn away from me. Why!" she cried passionately, "why should he turn from me and not from *you*?"

Clifford, much embarrassed, eyed his cigarette.

The girl rose, very white. "He is your friend— you have a right to warn him."

"He is my friend," he said at length.

They looked at each other in silence.

Then she cried, "By all that I hold to me most sacred, you need not warn him!"

"I shall trust your word," he said pleasantly.

v

THE MONTH passed quickly for Hastings, and left few definite impressions after it. It did leave some, however. One was a painful impression of meeting Mr. Bladen on the Boulevard des Capucines in company with a very pronounced young person whose laugh dismayed him, and when at last he escaped from the café where Mr. Bladen had hauled him to join them in a *bock* he felt as if the whole boulevard was looking at him, and judging him by his company. Later, an instinctive conviction regarding the young person with Mr. Bladen sent the hot blood into his cheek, and he returned to the pension in such a miserable state of mind that Miss Byng was alarmed and advised him to conquer his homesickness at once.

Another impression was equally vivid. One Saturday morning, feeling lonely, his wanderings about the city brought him to the Gare St. Lazare. It was early for breakfast, but he entered the Hôtel Terminus and took a table near the window. As he wheeled about to give his order, a man passing rapidly along the aisle collided with his head, and looking up to receive the expected apology, he was met instead by a slap on the shoulder and a hearty, "What the deuce are you doing here, old chap?" It was Rowden, who seized him and told him to come along. So, mildly protesting, he was ushered into a private dining-room where Clifford, rather red, jumped up from the table and welcomed him with a startled

air which was softened by the unaffected glee of Rowden and the extreme courtesy of Elliott. The latter presented him to three bewitching girls who welcomed him so charmingly and seconded Rowden in his demand that Hastings should make one of the party, that he consented at once. While Elliott briefly outlined the projected excursion to La Roche, Hastings delightedly ate his omelet, and returned the smiles of encouragement from Cécile and Colette and Jacqueline. Meantime Clifford in a bland whisper was telling Rowden what an ass he was. Poor Rowden looked miserable until Elliott, divining how affairs were turning, frowned on Clifford and found a moment to let Rowden know that they were all going to make the best of it.

"You shut up," he observed to Clifford, "it's fate, and that settles it."

"It's Rowden, and that settles it," murmured Clifford, concealing a grin. For after all he was not Hastings' wet nurse. So it came about that the train which left the Gare St. Lazare at 9.15 a.m. stopped a moment in its career towards Havre and deposited at the red-roofed station of La Roche a merry party, armed with sunshades, trout-rods, and one cane, carried by the non-combatant, Hastings. Then, when they had established their camp in a grove of sycamores which bordered the little river Ept, Clifford, the acknowledged master of all that pertained to sportsmanship, took command.

"You, Rowden," he said, "divide your flies with Elliott and keep an eye on him or else he'll be trying to put on a float and sinker. Prevent him by force from grubbing about for worms."

Elliott protested, but was forced to smile in the general laugh.

"You make me ill," he asserted; "do you think this is my first trout?"

"I shall be delighted to see your first trout," said Clifford, and dodging a fly hook, hurled with intent to hit, proceeded to sort and equip three slender rods destined to bring joy and fish to Cécile, Colette, and Jacqueline. With perfect gravity he ornamented each line with four split shot, a small hook, and a brilliant quill float.

"*I* shall never touch the worms," announced Cécile with a shudder.

Jacqueline and Colette hastened to sustain her, and Hastings pleasantly offered to act in the capacity of general baiter and taker-off of fish. But Cécile, doubtless fascinated by the gaudy flies in Clifford's book, decided to accept lessons from him in the true art, and presently disappeared up the Ept with Clifford in tow.

Elliott looked doubtfully at Colette.

"I prefer gudgeons," said that damsel with decision, "and you and Monsieur Rowden may go away when you please; may they not, Jacqueline?"

"Certainly," responded Jacqueline.

Elliott, undecided, examined his rod and reel.

"You've got your reel on wrong side up," observed Rowden.

Elliott wavered, and stole a glance at Colette.

"I— I— have almost decided to— er— not to flip the flies about just now," he began. "There's the pole that Cécile left—"

"Don't call it a pole," corrected Rowden.

"*Rod*, then," continued Elliott, and started off in the wake of the two girls, but was promptly collared by Rowden.

"No, you don't! Fancy a man fishing with a float and sinker when he has a fly rod in his hand! You come along!"

Where the placid little Ept flows down between its thickets to the Seine, a grassy bank shadows the haunt of the gudgeon, and on this bank sat Colette and Jacqueline and chattered and laughed and watched the swerving of the scarlet quills, while Hastings, his hat over his eyes, his head on a bank of moss, listened to their soft voices and gallantly unhooked the small and indignant gudgeon when a flash of a rod and a half-suppressed scream announced a catch. The sunlight filtered through the leafy thickets awaking to song the forest birds. Magpies in spotless black and white flirted past, alighting near by with a hop and bound and twitch of the tail. Blue and white jays with rosy breasts shrieked through the trees, and a low-sailing hawk wheeled among the fields of ripening wheat, putting to flight flocks of twittering hedge birds.

Across the Seine a gull dropped on the water like a plume. The air was pure and still. Scarcely a leaf moved. Sounds from a distant farm came faintly, the shrill cock-crow and dull baying. Now and then a steam-tug with big raking smoke-pipe, bearing the name "Guêpe 27," ploughed up the river dragging its interminable train of barges, or a sailboat dropped down with the current toward sleepy Rouen.

A faint fresh odour of earth and water hung in the air, and through the sunlight, orange-tipped butterflies danced above the marsh grass, soft velvety butterflies flapped through the mossy woods.

Hastings was thinking of Valentine. It was two o'clock when Elliott strolled back, and frankly admitting that he had eluded Rowden, sat down beside Colette and prepared to doze with satisfaction.

"Where are your trout?" said Colette severely.

"They still live," murmured Elliott, and went fast asleep.

Rowden returned shortly after, and casting a scornful glance at the slumbering one, displayed three crimson-flecked trout.

"And that," smiled Hastings lazily, "that is the holy end to which the faithful plod,— the slaughter of these small fish with a bit of silk and feather."

Rowden disdained to answer him. Colette caught another gudgeon and awoke Elliott, who protested and gazed about for the lunch baskets, as Clifford and Cécile came up demanding instant refreshment. Cécile's skirts were soaked,

and her gloves torn, but she was happy, and Clifford, dragging out a two-pound trout, stood still to receive the applause of the company.

"Where the deuce did you get that?" demanded Elliott.

Cécile, wet and enthusiastic, recounted the battle, and then Clifford eulogized her powers with the fly, and, in proof, produced from his creel a defunct chub, which, he observed, just missed being a trout.

They were all very happy at luncheon, and Hastings was voted "charming." He enjoyed it immensely,— only it seemed to him at moments that flirtation went further in France than in Millbrook, Connecticut, and he thought that Cécile might be a little less enthusiastic about Clifford, that perhaps it would be quite as well if Jacqueline sat further away from Rowden, and that possibly Colette could have, for a moment at least, taken her eyes from Elliott's face. Still he enjoyed it— except when his thoughts drifted to Valentine, and then he felt that he was very far away from her. La Roche is at least an hour and a half from Paris. It is also true that he felt a happiness, a quick heart-beat when, at eight o'clock that night the train which bore them from La Roche rolled into the Gare St. Lazare and he was once more in the city of Valentine.

"Good-night," they said, pressing around him. "You must come with us next time!"

He promised, and watched them, two by two, drift into the darkening city, and stood so long that, when again he raised his eyes, the vast Boulevard was twinkling with gas-jets through which the electric lights stared like moons.

vi

IT WAS with another quick heart-beat that he awoke next morning, for his first thought was of Valentine.

The sun already gilded the towers of Notre Dame, the clatter of workmen's sabots awoke sharp echoes in the street below, and across the way a blackbird in a pink almond tree was going into an ecstasy of trills.

He determined to awake Clifford for a brisk walk in the country, hoping later to beguile that gentleman into the American church for his soul's sake. He found Alfred the gimlet-eyed washing the asphalt walk which led to the studio.

"Monsieur Elliott?" he replied to the perfunctory inquiry, "*je ne sais pas*."

"And Monsieur Clifford," began Hastings, somewhat astonished.

"Monsieur Clifford," said the concierge with fine irony, "will be pleased to see you, as he retired early; in fact he has just come in."

Hastings hesitated while the concierge pronounced a fine eulogy on people who never stayed out all night and then came battering at the lodge gate during hours which even a gendarme held sacred to sleep. He also discoursed

eloquently upon the beauties of temperance, and took an ostentatious draught from the fountain in the court.

"I do not think I will come in," said Hastings.

"Pardon, monsieur," growled the concierge, "perhaps it would be well to see Monsieur Clifford. He possibly needs aid. Me he drives forth with hair-brushes and boots. It is a mercy if he has not set fire to something with his candle."

Hastings hesitated for an instant, but swallowing his dislike of such a mission, walked slowly through the ivy-covered alley and across the inner garden to the studio. He knocked. Perfect silence. Then he knocked again, and this time something struck the door from within with a crash.

"That," said the concierge, "was a boot." He fitted his duplicate key into the lock and ushered Hastings in. Clifford, in disordered evening dress, sat on the rug in the middle of the room. He held in his hand a shoe, and did not appear astonished to see Hastings.

"Good-morning, do you use Pears' soap?" he inquired with a vague wave of his hand and a vaguer smile.

Hastings' heart sank. "For Heaven's sake," he said, "Clifford, go to bed."

"Not while that— that Alfred pokes his shaggy head in here an' I have a shoe left."

Hastings blew out the candle, picked up Clifford's hat and cane, and said, with an emotion he could not conceal, "This is terrible, Clifford,— I— never knew you did this sort of thing."

"Well, I do," said Clifford.

"Where is Elliott?"

"Ole chap," returned Clifford, becoming maudlin, "Providence which feeds— feeds— er— sparrows an' that sort of thing watcheth over the intemperate wanderer—"

"Where is Elliott?"

But Clifford only wagged his head and waved his arm about. "He's out there,— somewhere about." Then suddenly feeling a desire to see his missing chum, lifted up his voice and howled for him.

Hastings, thoroughly shocked, sat down on the lounge without a word. Presently, after shedding several scalding tears, Clifford brightened up and rose with great precaution.

"Ole chap," he observed, "do you want to see er— er miracle? Well, here goes. I'm goin' to begin."

He paused, beaming at vacancy.

"Er miracle," he repeated.

Hastings supposed he was alluding to the miracle of his keeping his balance, and said nothing.

"I'm goin' to bed," he announced, "poor ole Clifford's goin' to bed, an' that's er miracle!"

And he did with a nice calculation of distance and equilibrium which would have rung enthusiastic yells of applause from Elliott had he been there to assist *en connaisseur*. But he was not. He had not yet reached the studio. He was on his way, however, and smiled with magnificent condescension on Hastings, who, half an hour later, found him reclining upon a bench in the Luxembourg. He permitted himself to be aroused, dusted and escorted to the gate. Here, however, he refused all further assistance, and bestowing a patronizing bow upon Hastings, steered a tolerably true course for the rue Vavin.

Hastings watched him out of sight, and then slowly retraced his steps toward the fountain. At first he felt gloomy and depressed, but gradually the clear air of the morning lifted the pressure from his heart, and he sat down on the marble seat under the shadow of the winged god.

The air was fresh and sweet with perfume from the orange flowers. Everywhere pigeons were bathing, dashing the water over their iris-hued breasts, flashing in and out of the spray or nestling almost to the neck along the polished basin. The sparrows, too, were abroad in force, soaking their dust-coloured feathers in the limpid pool and chirping with might and main. Under the sycamores which surrounded the duck-pond opposite the fountain of Marie de Medici, the water-fowl cropped the herbage, or waddled in rows down the bank to embark on some solemn aimless cruise.

Butterflies, somewhat lame from a chilly night's repose under the lilac leaves, crawled over and over the white phlox, or took a rheumatic flight toward some sun-warmed shrub. The bees were already busy among the heliotrope, and one or two grey flies with brick-coloured eyes sat in a spot of sunlight beside the marble seat, or chased each other about, only to return again to the spot of sunshine and rub their fore-legs, exulting.

The sentries paced briskly before the painted boxes, pausing at times to look toward the guard-house for their relief.

They came at last, with a shuffle of feet and click of bayonets, the word was passed, the relief fell out, and away they went, crunch, crunch, across the gravel.

A mellow chime floated from the clock-tower of the palace, the deep bell of St. Sulpice echoed the stroke. Hastings sat dreaming in the shadow of the god, and while he mused somebody came and sat down beside him. At first he did not raise his head. It was only when she spoke that he sprang up.

"You! At this hour?"

"I was restless, I could not sleep." Then in a low, happy voice— "And *you!* at this hour?"

"I— I slept, but the sun awoke me."

"*I* could not sleep," she said, and her eyes seemed, for a moment, touched with an indefinable shadow. Then, smiling, "I am so glad— I seemed to know you were coming. Don't laugh, I believe in dreams."

"Did you really dream of,— of my being here?"

"I think I was awake when I dreamed it," she admitted. Then for a time they were mute, acknowledging by silence the happiness of being together. And after all their silence was eloquent, for faint smiles, and glances born of their thoughts, crossed and recrossed, until lips moved and words were formed, which seemed almost superfluous. What they said was not very profound. Perhaps the most valuable jewel that fell from Hastings' lips bore direct reference to breakfast.

"I have not yet had my chocolate," she confessed, "but what a material man you are."

"Valentine," he said impulsively, "I wish,— I do wish that you would,— just for this once,— give me the whole day,— just for this once."

"Oh dear," she smiled, "not only material, but selfish!"

"Not selfish, hungry," he said, looking at her.

"A cannibal too; oh dear!"

"Will you, Valentine?"

"But my chocolate—"

"Take it with me."

"But *déjeuner*—"

"Together, at St. Cloud."

"But I can't—"

"Together,— all day,— all day long; will you, Valentine?"

She was silent.

"Only for this once."

Again that indefinable shadow fell across her eyes, and when it was gone she sighed. "Yes,— together, only for this once."

"All day?" he said, doubting his happiness.

"All day," she smiled; "and oh, I am so hungry!"

He laughed, enchanted.

"What a material young lady it is."

On the Boulevard St. Michel there is a Crémerie painted white and blue outside, and neat and clean as a whistle inside. The auburn-haired young woman who speaks French like a native, and rejoices in the name of Murphy, smiled at them as they entered, and tossing a fresh napkin over the zinc *tête-à-tête* table, whisked before them two cups of chocolate and a basket full of crisp, fresh croissons.

The primrose-coloured pats of butter, each stamped with a shamrock in relief, seemed saturated with the fragrance of Normandy pastures.

"How delicious!" they said in the same breath, and then laughed at the coincidence.

"With but a single thought," he began.

"How absurd!" she cried with cheeks all rosy. "I'm thinking I'd like a croisson."

"So am I," he replied triumphant, "that proves it."

Then they had a quarrel; she accusing him of behaviour unworthy of a child in arms, and he denying it, and bringing counter charges, until Mademoiselle Murphy laughed in sympathy, and the last croisson was eaten under a flag of truce. Then they rose, and she took his arm with a bright nod to Mile. Murphy, who cried them a merry: "*Bonjour, madame! bonjour, monsieur*!" and watched them hail a passing cab and drive away. "*Dieu! qu'il est beau*," she sighed, adding after a moment, "Do they be married, I dunno,— *ma foi ils ont bien l'air*."

The cab swung around the rue de Medici, turned into the rue de Vaugirard, followed it to where it crosses the rue de Rennes, and taking that noisy thoroughfare, drew up before the Gare Montparnasse. They were just in time for a train and scampered up the stairway and out to the cars as the last note from the starting-gong rang through the arched station. The guard slammed the door of their compartment, a whistle sounded, answered by a screech from the locomotive, and the long train glided from the station, faster, faster, and sped out into the morning sunshine. The summer wind blew in their faces from the open window, and sent the soft hair dancing on the girl's forehead.

"We have the compartment to ourselves," said Hastings.

She leaned against the cushioned window-seat, her eyes bright and wide open, her lips parted. The wind lifted her hat, and fluttered the ribbons under her chin. With a quick movement she untied them, and, drawing a long hat-pin from her hat, laid it down on the seat beside her. The train was flying.

The colour surged in her cheeks, and, with each quick-drawn breath, her breath rose and fell under the cluster of lilies at her throat. Trees, houses, ponds, danced past, cut by a mist of telegraph poles.

"Faster! faster!" she cried.

His eyes never left her, but hers, wide open, and blue as the summer sky, seemed fixed on something far ahead,— something which came no nearer, but fled before them as they fled.

Was it the horizon, cut now by the grim fortress on the hill, now by the cross of a country chapel? Was it the summer moon, ghost-like, slipping through the vaguer blue above?

"Faster! faster!" she cried.

Her parted lips burned scarlet.

The car shook and shivered, and the fields streamed by like an emerald torrent. He caught the excitement, and his faced glowed.

"Oh," she cried, and with an unconscious movement caught his hand, drawing him to the window beside her. "Look! lean out with me!"

He only saw her lips move; her voice was drowned in the roar of a trestle, but his hand closed in hers and he clung to the sill. The wind whistled in their ears. "Not so far out, Valentine, take care!" he gasped.

Below, through the ties of the trestle, a broad river flashed into view and out again, as the train thundered along a tunnel, and away once more through the freshest of green fields. The wind roared about them. The girl was leaning far out from the window, and he caught her by the waist, crying, "Not too far!" but she only murmured, "Faster! faster! away out of the city, out of the land, faster, faster! away out of the world!"

"What are you saying all to yourself?" he said, but his voice was broken, and the wind whirled it back into his throat.

She heard him, and, turning from the window looked down at his arm about her. Then she raised her eyes to his. The car shook and the windows rattled. They were dashing through a forest now, and the sun swept the dewy branches with running flashes of fire. He looked into her troubled eyes; he drew her to him and kissed the half-parted lips, and she cried out, a bitter, hopeless cry, "Not that— not that!"

But he held her close and strong, whispering words of honest love and passion, and when she sobbed— "Not that— not that— I have promised! You must— you must know— I am— not— worthy—" In the purity of his own heart her words were, to him, meaningless then, meaningless for ever after. Presently her voice ceased, and her head rested on his breast. He leaned against the window, his ears swept by the furious wind, his heart in a joyous tumult. The forest was passed, and the sun slipped from behind the trees, flooding the earth again with brightness. She raised her eyes and looked out into the world from the window. Then she began to speak, but her voice was faint, and he bent his head close to hers and listened. "I cannot turn from you; I am too weak. You were long ago my master— master of my heart and soul. I have broken my word to one who trusted me, but I have told you all;— what matters the rest?" He smiled at her innocence and she worshipped his. She spoke again: "Take me or cast me away;— what matters it? Now with a word you can kill me, and it might be easier to die than to look upon happiness as great as mine."

He took her in his arms, "Hush, what are you saying? Look,— look out at the sunlight, the meadows and the streams. We shall be very happy in so bright a world."

She turned to the sunlight. From the window, the world below seemed very fair to her.

Trembling with happiness, she sighed: "Is this the world? Then I have never known it."

"Nor have I, God forgive me," he murmured.
Perhaps it was our gentle Lady of the Fields who forgave them both.

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10: The Black Laugh

William J. Makin

1894-1944

Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror, Jan 1932

I AWOKE with a start. There was blackness all around except for the dull red glow of the camp fire, now almost smothered in white ash. The awful stillness of the veld and that impenetrable darkness told me that it was the hour before dawn. A dreadful hour, and one that always finds me unprepared.

What had awakened me? I lifted my head from my sleeping bag and saw the vague, shadowy forms of my companions stretched in a deathlike stupor in a circle about the smoldering fire. Above was an empty blackness that had extinguished the stars.

And, about me, that awful stillness that emphasized the miles of wilderness.

Then, tearing the stillness, came that rumbling laugh, a laugh that began in the depths and cackled to hysterical heights. A black laugh. It was that which had awakened me.

Again that laugh rose in its crescendo. I twisted my head in the direction of the camp fire round which were grouped our native "boys." A shadow moved. One of the natives was cackling horribly.

"For God's sake, stop that laughing!"

Maxwell, his fair hair all tousled, had leaped from his sleeping bag and was shrieking his command into the night.

"Stop it, I say! Stop it!"

Dead silence followed. The laugh was lost in the stillness. One of the sleeping forms grunted uneasily. That was all.

But I was astounded at the appearance of Maxwell. Standing there in shirt and shorts, he was trembling like a man with a bad attack of malaria. He shook his fist into that empty blackness, and cursed. I half rose from my sleeping bag.

"What's the matter?"

His eyes glinted at me, savagely. He did not speak, but walked to the camp fire, kicked some of the ash away, flung some logs into the embers, and then returned to his sleeping bag to sit upon it. He was still shaking as he sat there, all hunched up, as though expecting some terror would launch itself out of the darkness like a leaping leopard.

"That laugh!" he muttered. "You heard it?"

"Yes. One of the Kaffirs, damn him. Something funny came into his queer black mind, I suppose. I wish it hadn't. There'll be no more sleep for me."

"Nor for me," groaned Maxwell.

"Man, you're shivering."

"I know. That laugh comes to me like a curse. A black laugh. Ugh!"

AS one of the logs in the fire began to crackle and blaze I could see the tense look in the face of Maxwell.

"Well, if you're going to be upset by a laughing Kaffir," I began jocularly, "the sooner you get out of Africa the better. These Kaffirs are always laughing. They're happy, even though they are carrying the white man's burden."

But Maxwell refused to come out of his serious mood. He stared into the fitful blaze.

"Ever trekked in the Drakensberg district?" he asked suddenly.

I shook my head.

"I know it only vaguely," I replied. "Somewhere on the borders of Natal, eh?"

"That's it," said Maxwell eagerly. He obviously wanted to talk. Men do become communicative round a camp fire, and this hour before the dawn invited confidences.

"I used to know the country round there very well five years ago. Five years ago! I've never been back there since."

There was such intensity in the tone of his voice that I looked up quickly from the filling of my pipe. "Why?" I asked. "A girl?"

He shook his head, slowly.

"No. It was a laugh, a black laugh, that drove me out of the Drakensberg."

I think I must have chuckled. "Really, Maxwell," I said, "are you serious?"

"Deadly serious."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I can't imagine—" I began.

"Have you ever seen that peculiar kind of kopje that slopes up like a gentle hill for about five hundred feet and then shoots up a straight wall of rock for another five hundred feet?"

"Of course," I nodded. "It's not really peculiar, that kind of kopje. You will find it in different parts of the veld. But I know the kind you mean— rather like a giant sarcophagus on a huge mound, eh?"

"A sarcophagus!" muttered Maxwell. "Yes, at sunset this looked like an enormous coffin. Horrible!"

"Had it a name?"

He turned his eyes towards me. They were lit up by the flicker of a flame.

"It was called— Spook Kopje."

THERE was silence for a moment. The breathing of our companions in their sleeping bags sounded regular and sonorous.

"I was staying in a Boer homestead, not half a mile from that kopje," went on Maxwell, hesitantly. "I was doing nothing in particular— not even

prospecting. I rather enjoyed the quietness, the humdrum life of the farm, the unbounded hospitality of the Boer family with whom I stayed. A real rest."

I nodded.

"A colored girl from the Cape, Olivia, looked after me. Brought the morning tea, prepared my meals, mended my socks, and so on. A good girl, and quite attractive as far as colored girls go. Something of a beauty for the neighborhood, and courted by all the black farm boys in the vicinity. But she looked down upon them. 'Dis black trash not good enough for me,' she said decisively. And having said this she would go back to her pots and pans, humming an old missionary tune.

"She certainly seemed in no hurry to get herself a sweetheart. And a good thing, too, for the Boer, Oom Jannie, and his family. They depended more and more on Olivia. She was undoubtedly a household treasure. But when Johannes came into the district, she changed. Johannes was not the sort of man to let himself go unnoticed."

"And who was Johannes?" I asked, puffing away at my pipe, determined now that Maxwell had launched upon his story, that I would hear all the details.

"Johannes was a young buck, a colored man, also from the Cape," explained Maxwell. "He arrived in the Drakensberg district in a checked suit, a red beret, and a monocle stuck in his eye. He lived in Cape Town where he owned three hansom cabs that did a flourishing business after midnight. And he knew how to talk about himself and his hansom cabs, too. He had drifted to these parts for a holiday, apparently.

"HE HAD not been in the district three hours before he discovered Olivia. And he began to court her. Needless to say, Olivia fell blindly for the red beret, the monocle, and the three hansom cabs. At the end of the second day she possessed the red beret. It seemed certain that before another week had passed she would possess the three hansom cabs as well. The black farm boys of the district hated this successful interloper."

I smiled at Maxwell, but his face still had that serious, intent expression.

"But although Olivia was practically conquered from the beginning, she still had a lurking feminine desire to see her cavalier of the red beret perform some doughty deed. Three hansom cabs were worth having, but Olivia also wanted a man. In her days at the Cape she had regularly visited the cinema, and her hero of the screen was Douglas Fairbanks."

"I should think it would be Valentino," I murmured.

"Not with Olivia. She adored the leaping antics of her hero, she thrilled when he flung himself to the top of a wall and crashed down again upon his pursuers. This was a man, and the sort of man that Olivia had decided to marry. Johannes was hardly that. Probably he had never climbed higher than the driver's seat of

one of his own hansom cabs. But his talk was dizzying enough, and Olivia's mention of her hero encouraged his boastfulness. 'I can jump, I can swim, I can climb,' he announced to her. 'Why, each Sunday on Table Mountain I have climbed where even der Europeans will not go. *Allemagtig*, I—'

" 'Could you climb that?' asked Olivia carelessly. They were out on the veld, walking within a hundred yards of that sinister-looking kopje, Spook Kopje.

"Johannes gave it one glance, and laughed. 'Why, dat is nothing,' he said. 'I could climb dat in half an hour. Now, on Table Mountain, I once climbed and—'

" 'You certain dat you could climb dat kopje?' persisted Olivia.

"AGAIN Johannes laughed. He was so certain that he did not even turn his head to look at the kopje again. Instead, he gazed boldly into the soft brown eyes of Olivia.

" 'In half an hour,' he repeated.

"Olivia looked at him. 'No one has ever climbed dat kopje,' she said quietly. 'No one.'

" 'No?' Johannes was not disturbed. 'When I take you back to Cape Town, I—'

" 'Will you climb dat kopje for me?' asked Olivia, excitedly.

"Johannes looked at her, and then decided he had better look at this kopje again. He turned his head and regarded it. In the stark sunlight it looked forbidding enough—the gentle slope, and then the granite cliffs climbing straight for the blue silk of the sky.

" 'Of course I will,' he said, carelessly. But he didn't mean it. Olivia did, however. She saw Johannes in a blaze of glory. She was quite right in her assertion that no one had ever climbed that kopje. In the memory of all in the district there had been only three attempts to climb Spook

Kopje, and all had failed. One man had killed himself. Sheep had strayed up the slopes and failed to find their way back again. They had perished miserably from hunger. Since the last fatal attempt, Spook Kopje had been left severely alone.

" 'Climb dat kopje, and when you come down I marry you,' said Olivia. And she meant it.

"Again Johannes regarded the kopje. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable about the affair. But somewhere deep down in him, beneath that boastfulness, there was a strain in his mixed blood that urged him to live up to the hero-worship of his sweetheart.

" 'All right, I do it," he said.

" 'When?' persisted Olivia.

" 'When you like.'

" 'To-morrow morning, at ten?'

" 'Yes.'

"AND so it was settled. Olivia told me the gist of this conversation, excitedly, as she served me my supper. Here was a hero worthy of the films— and of Olivia. 'My man is some man,' she told me definitely. Oom Jannie shook his head over this folly. 'Aach! Vhy do you want him to climb a kopje?" he asked testily. Olivia did not reply, but brought him his huge Bible that he read regularly each evening by candle-light."

Maxwell stopped talking. The night was still dark and soundless. He walked over to the fire and kicked another log into the blaze. Then he came back and sat on his sleeping bag again.

"Did Johannes climb the kopje?" I asked at last.

Maxwell nodded.

"Yes, he did. Incredible. But it took him more than half an hour. Five hours, in fact. One has to admire the achievement. The Lord knows how he did it. But there, in the late afternoon, we could see him on the top of that granite wall wav-ing the red beret which Olivia had given him as a talisman. We grouped ourselves to watch him— Oom Jannie and his family, two neighboring farmers, three black farm hands, and myself. And among us strutted Olivia, proud of her hero, proud of his achievement, and not a little proud of herself. We waved back to the hero with the red beret."

Again silence.

"Well? Did they live happily ever after?" I asked.

Maxwell turned his brooding gaze upon me.

"Johannes never came back," he said briefly.

"But if he climbed to the top," I said, "surely he could—"

"He never came back," repeated Maxwell, monotonously. "Olivia waited for him, we all waited for him to give him the welcome he deserved. But he did not come."

"But you could see him," I persisted.

Maxwell nodded.

"We watched that red blob of a beret trying to find a way down those granite cliffs for the rest of the afternoon. We watched until a saffron glow in the sky silhouetted Spook Kopje and made it once again a long black coffin. The glow changed swiftly into night, and still Johannes had not returned. Obviously he had not found it as easy to descend as to climb. He may have missed his way or, what is more likely, lost his nerve. But he did not return that night although Olivia sat whimpering with a lighted candle, waiting for him until the dawn.

"IN the early morning we watched the mist smoking away from the kopje. Again the granite cliffs were lit up by the stark sunlight. We searched anxiously.

It was Oom Jannie, old as he was, who saw him first. He pointed a gnarled forefinger at the kopje.

" '*Daar is hij*!' he muttered.

"We followed his pointed finger. At last I saw him. The red blob of a beret. Johannes had clung to that throughout the night. He was still on the heights, still on the sinister summit of that kopje. But he had traversed the top from one end to the other. He was still seeking a route to descend.

"At this glimpse of him we shouted and waved. Olivia shrilled and screamed. 'My man, my hero!' she yelled. But the figure with the red beret took no notice. Not at first. But, as the sun climbed higher he saw us. He waved in reply; waved the red beret. But it was a tired gesture; the last panache. He was dispirited and anxious. For the rest of the time he held the red beret limply in his hand.

"Olivia completely abandoned her pots and pans. She stood in the doorway of the farmhouse, staring into the sunshine at that restless red blob on the kopje. We tried to comfort her with assurances. 'He'll be down for dinner, the young fool,' grunted Oom Jannie in her hearing. It helped her a little, that remark. But she refused to leave her post in the doorway.

"All through the afternoon, with my field glasses, I watched Johannes trailing desperately about the kopje. Yes, I could see he had become desperate. The owner of the three hansom cabs at the Cape had to get down or he would die of hunger and exposure. At first, I let Olivia watch him through the field glasses, but as the man became more and more desperate in his efforts to find a way down to earth I kept them to myself. Olivia began to weep. But she was not weeping, she was crooning those missionary hymns to herself. 'Lord, bring him back to me,' I heard her saying, over and over again. There was no use trying to comfort her, and, disheartened, I went inside.

"LATE that afternoon, I went myself up the slopes of that cursed kopje in the hope that I might help Johannes in some way. I toiled with two farm boys to the foot of those granite cliffs that went sheer into the sky. I marveled that the colored youth from the Cape had found a foothold of any kind. I traversed those cliffs from end to end, on each side of the kopje, but retired baffled again and again to the slopes. I tried three crevices, but each led to more sheer rock. I nearly broke my neck twice on that expedition. I returned in the darkness to the farmhouse and the weeping Olivia."

A log fell noisily into the fire. Sparks shot upwards to the black sky.

"How long did this last?" I asked.

Maxwell shivered again.

"I think it must have been the third night that Johannes went crazy. I was awakened in the silence of the night by a horrible yelling laugh that resounded again and again across the empty veld. I never heard such a blood-curdling

laugh, coming from the depths and ending in a scream. A black laugh! The laugh that wakened me half an hour ago. Ghastly!"

Maxwell covered his face with his hands. It was some moments before he could continue.

"When I first heard that mad laugh I rushed out of the house onto the veld. Instinctively I looked towards Spook Kopje. Moonlight bathed it, so that the granite cliffs looked black and slimy. But there, on the top, was a prancing figure, a figure that laughed and yelled, and danced. It was Johannes. He was mad, and half naked, but still clinging to the red beret. I heard a stifled scream at my side. It was Olivia. She also had heard that black laugh, and realized at once the full horror of it all.

" 'My man! Johannes! I so sorry,' she whimpered, and then crumpled into a faint at my feet.

"Oom Jannie, too, looking like a stern ghost in his old nightshirt, had wandered out of the house.

" 'This is terrible... terrible!' he muttered. He stared at the kopje in the moonlight. 'Something must be done,' he muttered again.

"THE next day five of us, all white men, made a desperate assault on the kopje. We tried again and again to scale those damnable cliffs, and again and again we failed. Baffled and dispirited we returned to the plains in the evening. And the mad, naked figure on the kopje kept up its yelling and screaming and dancing throughout. We all hoped that, mercifully, in this mad state Johannes would pitch down the cliffs and kill himself. But the man seemed to be possessed of an amazing amount of endurance. He lived, and kept up his black laughter throughout the night.

"Of course, every farm in the vicinity was terrorized by that horrible laugh at night. It kept us all awake, and the women folk were hysterical. Olivia had not slept since Johannes climbed the kopje. We were all waiting for the poor devil to die, and he refused to die. The madness seemed to have given him a new lease of life.

"At last, Oom Jannie called the other farmers to a conference in the eetkamer of his farmhouse. I will not weary you with the discussion that took place there. But a terrible decision was made. We all emerged from the eetkamer with rifles under our arms. All except Oom Jannie. He carried a Prayer Book. Outside the door of the eetkamer crouched Olivia. She gazed at us dumbly. Her sad dark eyes traveled from our faces to the guns under our arms. At once she understood the terrible thing we were about to do. With a shriek she flung herself at the feet of Oom Jannie. He gazed down at her with a stern face, but tears were in his rheumy eyes. 'God's will be done,' he muttered, and gently thrust her aside.

"We all proceeded to the foot of that kopje with its mad, naked figure in a red beret still shrieking defiance of death and dancing hysterically on the edge of those granite cliffs. Slowly and deliberately we toiled up the slope, and at last we came to the sheer granite. Oom Jannie sat himself on a boulder. The others took up their positions. I sprawled on the ground and rested my cheek against the stock of my rifle.

" 'Sight. Three hundred yards!' I muttered mechanically to myself.

"The mad, prancing figure of Johannes was an easy mark. The red beret which still covered his head helped. I groped for cartridges in my pocket. I heard the 'click-click' as the others slipped the cartridges into the magazines of the rifles which were being trained on the mad, laughing man.

"QUITTING on the boulder, Oom Jannie deliberately opened his Prayer Book. We had to wait while he adjusted his spectacles. He could never read without his spectacles. Then in a firm and reverent voice he began slowly to read the burial service in Dutch.

" '*Daar het de almachtige God, de Heer van leven en dood, behaagd heeft de geest van onze ontslapen broeder te doen weder keren tot God*...'

"You know how it goes in English: 'As it has pleased the almighty God, the Lord of living and dead, to let the spirit of our deceased brother return to God....'

"'Crack!' The first rifle had spoken.

" '...*die hem gegeven heeft, en die gesproken heeft*...' continued Oom Jannie deliberately.

" 'Crack! Crack!' Two more rifles spoke almost simultaneously.

"The naked figure in the red beret continued to dance and shriek madly.

" 'Allemagtig! My hand shakes,' cursed one Boer.

"I sighted on the red beret. Crack! I had missed.

" '... *stoft zyt gy, en tot zult gy wederken*....'

"'Crack! Crack!'

"And so it continued in the stark sunlight. We must each have fired five rounds before the end came. We saw the figure in the red beret stagger, and then pitch down.

" '... *bevonded moogt worden in vrede*,' concluded Oom Jannie, softly, and closed the Prayer Book.

"Half an hour later we were back in the homestead."

A long silence followed. The campfire blazed merrily. The sky was paling. Dawn had come. Maxwell sat hunched on his sleeping bag. Neither of us spoke for some time.

"And you never went back there again?" I asked.

Maxwell shook his head.

"Never. I left the next day."

"And Olivia?"

"I heard she went back to her pots and pans. She is now a silent, moody woman. She will never marry. Each evening she walks to that kopje and stares at the heights where lie the bones of the man she loved. And they do say," added Maxwell, "that a mad laugh is often heard coming from those strange heights of Spook Kopje. And that laugh portends evil."

I heard a deep chuckle behind me. Startled, I turned. The black face of my Kaffir servant grinned at me.

"Good morning, baas!" he said. "Coffee!"

The sleepers began to awake.

11: The Unnamable

H. P. Lovecraft

1890-1937

Weird Tales, July 1925

WE were sitting on a dilapidated seventeenth-century tomb in the late afternoon of an autumn day at the old burying ground in Arkham, and speculating about the unnamable. Looking toward the giant willow in the cemetery, whose trunk had nearly engulfed an ancient, illegible slab, I had made a fantastic remark about the spectral and unmentionable nourishment which the colossal roots must be sucking from that hoary, charnel earth; when my friend chided me for such nonsense and told me that since no interments had occurred there for over a century, nothing could possibly exist to nourish the tree in other than an ordinary manner. Besides, he added, my constant talk about "unnamable" and "unmentionable" things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author. I was too fond of ending my stories with sights or sounds which paralyzed my heroes' faculties and left them without courage, words, or associations to tell what they had experienced. We know things, he said, only through our five senses or our intuitions; wherefore it is quite impossible to refer to any object or spectacle which cannot be clearly depicted by the solid definitions of fact or the correct doctrines of theology—preferably those of the Congregationalist, with whatever modifications tradition and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may supply.

With this friend, Joel Manton, I had often languidly disputed. He was principal of the East High School, born and bred in Boston and sharing New England's self-satisfied deafness to the delicate overtones of life. It was his view that only our normal, objective experiences possess any esthetic significance, and that it is the province of the artist not so much to rouse strong emotion by action, ecstasy, and astonishment, as to maintain a placid interest and appreciation by accurate, detailed transcripts of everyday affairs. Especially did he object to my preoccupation with the mystical and the unexplained; for although believing in the supernatural much more fully than I, he would not admit that it is sufficiently commonplace for literary treatment. That a mind can find its greatest pleasure in escapes from the daily treadmill, and in original and dramatic recombinations of images usually thrown by habit and fatigue into the hackneyed patterns of actual existence, was something virtually incredible to his clear, practical, and logical intellect. With him all things and feelings had fixed dimensions, properties, causes, and effects; and although he vaguely knew that the mind sometimes holds visions and sensations of far less geometrical, classifiable, and workable nature, he believed himself justified in drawing an arbitrary line and ruling out of court all that cannot be experienced and

understood by the average citizen. Besides, he was almost sure that nothing can be really "unnamable." It didn't sound sensible to him.

Though I well realized the futility of imaginative and metaphysical arguments against the complacency of an orthodox sun-dweller, something in the scene of this afternoon colloquy moved me to more than usual contentiousness. The crumbling slate slabs, the patriarchal trees, and the centuried gambrel roofs of the witch-haunted old town that stretched around, all combined to rouse my spirit in defense of my work; and I was soon carrying my thrusts into the enemy's own country. It was not, indeed, difficult to begin a counter-attack, for I knew that Joel Manton actually half clung to many old-wives' superstitions which sophisticated people had long outgrown; beliefs in the appearance of dying persons at distant places, and in the impressions left by old faces on the windows through which they had gazed all their lives. To credit these whisperings of rural grandmothers, I now insisted, argued a faith in the existence of spectral substances on the earth apart from and subsequent to their material counterparts. It argued a capability of believing in phenomena beyond all normal notions; for if a dead man can transmit his visible or tangible image half across the world, or down the stretch of the centuries, how can it be absurd to suppose that deserted houses are full of queer sentient things, or that old graveyards teem with the terrible, unbodied intelligence of generations? And since spirit, in order to cause all the manifestations attributed to it, cannot be limited by any of the laws of matter, why is it extravagant to imagine psychically living dead things in shapes— or absences of shapes— which must for human spectators be utterly and appallingly "unnamable"?

"Common sense" in reflecting on these subjects, I assured my friend with some warmth, is merely a stupid absence of imagination and mental flexibility.

Twilight had now approached, but neither of us felt any wish to cease speaking. Manton seemed unimpressed by my arguments, and eager to refute them, having that confidence in his own opinions which had doubtless caused his success as a teacher; whilst I was too sure of my ground to fear defeat. The dusk fell, and lights faintly gleamed in some of the distant windows, but we did not move. Our seat on the tomb was very comfortable, and I knew that my prosaic friend would not mind the cavernous rift in the ancient, root-disturbed brickwork close behind us, or the utter blackness of the spot brought by the intervention of a tottering, deserted seventeenth—century house between us and the nearest lighted road. There in the dark, upon that riven tomb by the deserted house, we talked on about the "unnamable" and after my friend had finished his scoffing I told him of the awful evidence behind the story at which he had scoffed the most.

My tale had been called "The Attic Window," and appeared in the January, 1922, issue of *Whispers*. In a good many places, especially the South and the

Pacific coast, they took the magazines off the stands at the complaints of silly milk-sops; but New England didn't get the thrill and merely shrugged its shoulders at my extravagance. The thing, it was averred, was biologically impossible to start with; merely another of those crazy country mutterings which Cotton Mather had been gullible enough to dump into his chaotic *Magnalia Christi Americana*, and so poorly authenticated that even he had not ventured to name the locality where the horror occurred. And as to the way I amplified the bare jotting of the old mystic— that was quite impossible, and characteristic of a flighty and notional scribbler! Mather had indeed told of the thing as being born, but nobody but a cheap sensationalist would think of having it grow up, look into people's windows at night, and be hidden in the attic of a house, in flesh and in spirit, till someone saw it at the window centuries later and couldn't describe what it was that turned his hair gray. All this was flagrant trashiness, and my friend Manton was not slow to insist on that fact. Then I told him what I had found in an old diary kept between 1706 and 1723, unearthed among family papers not a mile from where we were sitting; that, and the certain reality of the scars on my ancestor's chest and back which the diary described. I told him, too, of the fears of others in that region, and how they were whispered down for generations; and how no mythical madness came to the boy who in 1793 entered an abandoned house to examine certain traces suspected to be there.

It had been an eldritch thing— no wonder sensitive students shudder at the Puritan age in Massachusetts. So little is known of what went on beneath the surface— so little, yet such a ghastly festering as it bubbles up putrescently in occasional ghoulish glimpses. The witchcraft terror is a horrible ray of light on what was stewing in men's crushed brains, but even that is a trifle. There was no beauty; no freedom— we can see that from the architectural and household remains, and the poisonous sermons of the cramped divines. And inside that rusted iron straitjacket lurked gibbering hideousness, perversion, and diabolism. Here, truly, was the apotheosis of The Unnamable.

Cotton Mather, in that demoniac sixth book which no one should read after dark, minced no words as he flung forth his anathema. Stern as a Jewish prophet, and laconically unamazed as none since his day could be, he told of the beast that had brought forth what was more than beast but less than man — the thing with the blemished eye— and of the screaming drunken wretch that hanged for having such an eye. This much he baldly told, yet without a hint of what came after. Perhaps he did not know, or perhaps he knew and did not dare to tell. Others knew, but did not dare to tell— there is no public hint of why they whispered about the lock on the door to the attic stairs in the house of a childless, broken, embittered old man who had put up a blank slate slab by an

avoided grave, although one may trace enough evasive legends to curdle the thinnest blood.

It is all in that ancestral diary I found; all the hushed innuendoes and furtive tales of things with a blemished eye seen at windows in the night or in deserted meadows near the woods. Something had caught my ancestor on a dark valley road, leaving him with marks of horns on his chest and of apelike claws on his back; and when they looked for prints in the trampled dust they found the mixed marks of split hooves and vaguely anthropoid paws. Once a post-rider said he saw an old man chasing and calling to a frightful loping, nameless thing on Meadow Hill in the thinly moonlit hours before dawn, and many believed him. Certainly, there was strange talk one night in 1710 when the childless, broken old man was buried in the crypt behind his own house in sight of the blank slate slab. They never unlocked that attic door, but left the whole house as it was, dreaded and deserted. When noises came from it, they whispered and shivered; and hoped that the lock on that attic door was strong. Then they stopped hoping when the horror occurred at the parsonage, leaving not a soul alive or in one piece. With the years the legends take on a spectral character— I suppose the thing, if it was a living thing, must have died. The memory had lingered hideously— all the more hideous because it was so secret.

During this narration my friend Manton had become very silent, and I saw that my words had impressed him. He did not laugh as I paused, but asked quite seriously about the boy who went mad in 1793, and who had presumably been the hero of my fiction. I told him why the boy had gone to that shunned, deserted house, and remarked that he ought to be interested, since he believed that windows retained latent images of those who had sat at them. The boy had gone to look at the windows of that horrible attic, because of tales of things seen behind them, and had come back screaming maniacally.

Manton remained thoughtful as I said this, but gradually reverted to his analytical mood. He granted for the sake of argument that some unnatural monster had really existed, but reminded me that even the most morbid perversion of nature need not be unnamable or scientifically indescribable. I admired his clearness and persistence, and added some further revelations I had collected among the old people. Those later spectral legends, I made plain, related to monstrous apparitions more frightful than anything organic could be; apparitions of gigantic bestial forms sometimes visible and sometimes only tangible, which floated about on moonless nights and haunted the old house, the crypt behind it, and the grave where a sapling had sprouted beside an illegible slab. Whether or not such apparitions had ever gored or smothered people to death, as told in uncorroborated traditions, they had produced a strong and consistent impression; and were yet darkly feared by very aged natives, though largely forgotten by the last two generations— perhaps dying

for lack of being thought about. Moreover, so far as esthetic theory was involved, if the psychic emanations of human creatures be grotesque distortions, what coherent representation could express or portray so gibbous and infamous a nebulosity as the specter of a malign, chaotic perversion, itself a morbid blasphemy against nature? Molded by the dead brain of a hybrid nightmare, would not such a vaporous terror constitute in all loathsome truth the exquisitely, the shriekingly unnamable?

The hour must now have grown very late. A singularly noiseless bat brushed by me, and I believe it touched Manton also, for although I could not see him I felt him raise his arm. Presently he spoke.

"But is that house with the attic window still standing and deserted?"

"Yes," I answered, "I have seen it."

"And did you find anything there— in the attic or anywhere else?"

"There were some bones up under the eaves. They may have been what that boy saw— if he was sensitive he wouldn't have needed anything in the window-glass to unhinge him. If they all came from the same object it must have been an hysterical, delirious monstrosity. It would have been blasphemous to leave such bones in the world, so I went back with a sack and took them to the tomb behind the house. There was an opening where I could dump them in. Don't think I was a fool— you ought to have seen that skull. It had four-inch horns, but a face and jaw something like yours and mine."

At last I could feel a real shiver run through Manton, who had moved very near. But his curiosity was undeterred.

"And what about the window-panes?"

"They were all gone. One window had lost its entire frame, and in all the others there was not a trace of glass in the little diamond apertures. They were that kind— the old lattice windows that went out of use before 1700. I don't believe they've had any glass for a hundred years or more— maybe the boy broke 'em if he got that far; the legend doesn't say."

Manton was reflecting again.

"I'd like to see that house, Carter. Where is it? Glass or no glass, I must explore it a little. And the tomb where you put those bones, and the other grave without an inscription— the whole thing must be a bit terrible."

"You did see it— until it got dark."

My friend was more wrought upon than I had suspected, for at this touch of harmless theatricalism he started neurotically away from me and actually cried out with a sort of gulping gasp which released a strain of previous repression. It was an odd cry, and all the more terrible because it was answered. For as it was still echoing, I heard a creaking sound through the pitchy blackness, and knew that a lattice window was opening in that accursed old house beside us. And

because all the other frames were long since fallen, I knew that it was the grisly glassless frame of that demoniac attic window.

Then came a noxious rush of noisome, frigid air from that same dreaded direction, followed by a piercing shriek just beside me on that shocking rifted tomb of man and monster. In another instant I was knocked from my gruesome bench by the devilish threshing of some unseen entity of titanic size but undetermined nature; knocked sprawling on the root-clutched mold of that abhorrent graveyard, while from the tomb came such a stifled uproar of gasping and whirring that my fancy peopled the rayless gloom with Miltonic legions of the misshapen damned. There was a vortex of withering, ice-cold wind, and then the rattle of loose bricks and plaster; but I had mercifully fainted before I could learn what it meant.

Manton, though smaller than I, is more resilient; for we opened our eyes at almost the same instant, despite his greater injuries. Our couches were side by side, and we knew in a few seconds that we were in St. Mary's Hospital. Attendants were grouped about in tense curiosity, eager to aid our memory by telling us how we came there, and we soon heard of the farmer who had found us at noon in a lonely field beyond Meadow Hill, a mile from the old burying ground, on a spot where an ancient slaughterhouse is reputed to have stood. Manton had two malignant wounds in the chest, and some less severe cuts or gougings in the back. I was not so seriously hurt, but was covered with welts and contusions of the most bewildering character, including the print of a split hoof. It was plain that Manton knew more than I, but he told nothing to the puzzled and interested physicians till he had learned what our injuries were. Then he said we were the victims of a vicious bull— though the animal was a difficult thing to place and account for.

After the doctors and nurses had left, I whispered an awestruck question:

"Good God, Manton, but what was it? Those scars— was it like that?"

And I was too dazed to exult when he whispered back a thing I had half expected—

"No— it wasn't that way at all. It was everywhere— a gelatin— a slime yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes— and a blemish. It was the pit— the maelstrom— the ultimate abomination. Carter, it was the unnamable!"

12: To Meet the Sun

Max Brand

1892-1944

Sun (Sydney) 21 Jan 1940

THE Halcyon Club is ten minutes' walk from Piccadilly and usually, when he was in London, Lippincott went the distance on foot to save cab fare. On this trip he was comparatively flush, but he wanted the walk in order to steady himself a little, for he knew that when he reached the club he was to see Major von Steyr, that famous "Major Nicolai" who had shot down so many Allied aviators during the war and then had given Lippincott his own first claim to fame.

They had met twice in the air in 1918. The first dog-fight ended with Lippincott on the ground— French ground, by the grace of God; the second terminated with the Major's Fokker, painted in green and white sworls, down, in its turn, and also on French ground; that was why he had ended the war in a prison camp; and that was why Lippincott had remained in aviation as "the man who brought down Nicolai von Steyr."

It made him step a bit more quickly and brace his shoulders when he thought of facing those inhuman grey eyes and that fierce moustache. He tried to reassure himself because he had been no move than an eighteen-year-old novice when he first encountered the great Major Nicolai, whereas each of them was now a veteran of twenty years in the air.

Perhaps it was that trace of savagery in the face and in the character of Nicolai von Steyr that had kept the regents of the club during all these years from adding him to the list of members; one by one they had listed most of the great airmen of all countries.

It was not true that Lord Dunsbury had left secret instructions that never more than fifty men should be members; but the spirit of the club demanded that a man should be, not only great in the air, but clean-souled also. The rich old Englishman had felt that chivalry appeared for the last time on earth among the birdmen; he had endowed the club with wealth as a sort of secret order of knighthood which would draw all the nations of the world together around one table in London.

Some of the rules were odd. A member was cared for when he was ill, a decent pension went to widows and dependents; there was no charge for food, drink, or room when a member happened to be in London, and anyone who wished to sit again at the huge, oval table received his travelling expenses from any part of the world. No woman, no guest, could enter the place. Sometimes there were not six members in London, but an international kitchen was maintained throughout the year, with a Turk, a Chinaman, a Russian, and a Frenchman as the chefs. The library contained, in twenty sections, the

masterpieces, which had been printed in twenty languages. With all this equipment it remained the most exclusive club in the world. No order of knighthood or peerage in the gift of any king compared with the honor of being chosen for the Halcyon Club, but it was also the most secret, for, though no rule prohibits publicity, the Halcyon brotherhood keep their membership as secret and as sacred as conscience.

Perhaps there are not fifty men in London to-day who know what the old Dunsbury mansion houses. The very servants, taking on the atmosphere of their place like true Englishmen, walk through life with sealed lips. It is a society where no man can be insulted, because there is no pride among the brothers, and the bond between Halcyon members is nearer and dearer than any bonds of blood.

NEVERTHELESS, when Lippincott reached the house he paused a moment and looked at its face, with the soot of two London centuries rubbed under its skin, very much as a soldier looks at the scene of an approaching battle. He could imagine Major Nicolai as anything in the world, but he could not imagine him as a Halcyon.

He went up to his room and changed to a dinner jacket. There were several notes and announcements to glance over as he jammed himself hastily into his clothes. That grinning young Oriental, Chian Yan, was held up in Constantinople for a week, but begged Lippincott not to leave London before he arrived. Archie Lament wanted him to come up to Scotland. The directors begged that the two old war planes now kept as honorable memorials of the air in the hangars of the Halcyon's private field, should be flown only by veterans of the war, and the note pointed out that to acquire and condition the S.E.5 and the Junker had cost the Halcyon funds over two thousand five hundred pounds.

Another note from the directors pointed out that Persia had a place near the top of its air service for a man who was a real veteran of aviation.

This wordage about "experience" and "veterans" made the thirty-seven years of William Lippincott hang heavily on his shoulders as he went down to the bar.

There he found Boris Medrenko, that young Russian air-devil, who had taken the five starving explorers off the winter ice of the Arctic Ocean some years before, and Francois Ledouc, of the great Sahara adventure, sitting with Nicolai von Steyr. The latter's grey hair was sleeked back so that the top of his head looked somewhat too small and old for the bigness of his jaw and the youthful sheen of those fierce black moustaches. He stood up to salute Lippincott from a distance, a taut and military figure on which the dinner jacket sat like a clumsy disguise. Across that big chest the eyes of Lippincott pinned the ghosts of many famous medals.

Von Steyr came half a dozen steps to meet the American, and said in a low voice:— "For nineteen years my pride would not forgive you; but now I thank God that I am holding your hand." It was a set speech, but Lippincott knew the cost of spirit that had gone into its preparation, and tears came Into his eyes. He was ashamed of them, and tried to rally his manliness, for he accused himself constantly of a certain effeminate softness of heart; even at the movies a tragic denouement often left him with a wet face. In the old days he had been able to steel himself, but, as the years went on, pride was more and more a stranger to him.

He cursed himself when he saw that Ledouc and Medrenko had noticed the moisture in his eyes; their sympathetic smiles hardly mattered, after that.

A hasty round of cocktails followed, and then young Medrenko helped Lippincott by suggesting that they all go in to dinner.

So they passed into the big dining-room. That neat little Japanese perfectionist, Yamura Ohee, came hurrying upon them to grasp Lippincott's hand and say: "Zee ol' Beell! Zee ol' Beell! How am I pleased! How honor I am to see zee ol' Beell!"

Lippincott patted his shoulder and went on, giving his first look, as always, to the portrait of glorious old Dunsbury with his red face and his lion's frown, and under the picture the words he had chosen for his tomb: "Peace in the air."

The huge oaken table, the "Round Table" of Dunsbury's knights of the air, was girded about by the comfort, of deep armchairs, beside a certain number drawn back against the wall, and flowers were heaped on one of these.

Lippincott said anxiously: "Who is it, Boris?" and the Russian answered gently: "A friend that was close to you, Bill. Poor Antonio Mora."

"Ah, God, is Tony gone, too?" said Lippincott, and went on to the table in a dream from which he did not completely rouse until he saw the wine glasses raised toward him and walling; then he lifted his own toward the chair of Antonio Mora, and they drank the silent toast together.

He discovered then that they were talking about Nicolai von Steyr's approaching marriage.

"It should have been In 1918," said. Major Nicolai, "but Bill Lippincott grounded me, and a French devil at the prison camp wouldn't let my mail go through... pardon, François... and my poor girl married the wrong man. The days were long for us in 1918, you know, and despair came quickly. Five years ago she was free; but still I had to drudge in the air because I could not marry without a bit of capital. You understand? She is not strong and needs care; but at last I have taken three thousand pounds sterling out of the clouds; we have picked out the house and land; and every day when I wake up in the morning I laugh at the world. She no longer is beautiful except in the eyes of God and old Nicolai von Steyr, and his dear friends who will drink with me to Anna."

It seemed to Lippincott as he considered the words which the German had spoken so freely that the spirit of the Halcyon Club never had worked so quickly on a new member.

"Nicolai," said Lippincott, "from my heart I'm sorry for that day."

"Sorry?" answered the German. "It was your day of glory, Bill. You took a handful of blue right out of heaven that day; and men have no regrets when they are beaten by their peers."

"Nonsense, Nicolai!" said Lippincott. "It was simply that luck turns against the best men, now and then. And I had a better machine. That old S.E.5 took me into the sun like a hawk."

"A better machine?" answered von Steyr. "You forget that I was in a Fokker D.7. It was the queen of the air, Bill!"

"A good ship," agreed Lippincott, "but nothing was better then than the Hispano-Suiza and her hundred and eighty horse-power motor. She had plenty of climb in her."

"CLIMB?" said von Steyr. He threw back his head and laughed at the ceiling. "Climb?" Then he shrugged his shoulders and said ho more, but, by a strange electric tingling in the spinal marrow of Lippincott, he knew that the subject was not closed. It was not till they were alone over brandy and soda after dinner that von Steyr said: "You know they have on the club's field the exact types of ship we've been talking about... a Fokker D.7 and an S.E.5. Suppose we take them up early to-morrow morning, in the still of the day, and meet In the sun? And which ever of us can stay sixty seconds on the tail of the other fellow will win the honor?"

"Honor?" said Lippincott.

"Well," said the German, "it's been one apiece; and this will be like the flip of a coin to decide—"

When Lippincott thought it over, afterwards, he felt that he could understand. He kept telling himself that the whole business was entirely within the spirit of the Halcyon Club, yet he could not help being vaguely troubled. But when he motored out to the club's field with von Steyr in the early morning, the German would talk of nothing but golf. Then the smooth green of the field extended before them— and the hard runways.

He had a glimpse of the little Fokker and seemed once more to see those devilish little blots of green and white between him and the sun. Then he went over to the S.E.5.

She had been rebuilt throughout. A glimpse of the Halcyon card which he carried set the attendants amiably to work to fill her with gas and oil, and he looked her over in detail in the interim. She seemed sound all over. The preparations had been so exact that even the Vickers gun which shot through

the propeller and the Lewis that fired over the top wing had been oiled and loaded, and when he settled into the cockpit it seemed to him that he was sinking back into a certain morning in 1918 when he had taken off to keep a vague appointment in the sky with the terrible Major Nicolai.

They were to take off one behind the other and meet in half an hour "in the sun." As he snugged down his helmet and then taxied down the field, he saw Nicolai's Fokker already rocking along over the ground; von Steyr turned and waved a last greeting; a moment later he was in the air; Lippincott gave the S.E.5 the gun and leaped after him. Like von Steyr, he had been constantly in one air service or another since the war, but even the newest model sky-racer did not give him quite the thrill of this old single-seater, designed with such grim purposefulness for air-combat. The motor took hold well, and, as the ground echoes fell away beneath him, he felt once more the old sword of ice that had not gone through him for almost twenty years.

TAKING a wide spiral, he watched a red-brick village shrink, give off a final, flash of eastern sunshine from all its windows, and then contract to a handful. The hills flattened; the forests turned into shadows; on a thumb-nail he could pick up castle and hedged fields of a great estate: then he gave all his thoughts to the sun, driving toward it in a constant spiral.

Out of nothingness he saw a bird; no, it was a Fokker, with the slope of its tail pointing toward the western horizon as it shot for the sun. At a distance they passed each other, circling; but the S.E.5 definitely had outclimbed the German. He looked at his wrist-watch, saw that the half-hour had been completed, and tipped the old plane aslant at von Steyr.

The German slid into a sharp left turn; Lippincott from above followed suit, banking at such an angle that the elevator was the rudder and the rudder the elevator— a lot of right rudder to keep her nose up. The priceless margin out of which victory must come was always superior altitude, and that devil of a von Steyr would make him abandon the advantage if tricks could serve.

He was still giving a lot of stick when von Steyr levelled off and tried his speed on a dead level, without trying to climb. Without losing an inch of his superior height, Lippincott gradually overtook the Fokker; and with all his heart blessed that smoothly, deeply-roaring Hispano-Suiza engine. Once and again he got the Fokker squarely in his sights and felt the old instinct in his hand to reach for the button and let loose a burst. He was on the tail of the Fokker, thirty seconds, a full minute; the test was over!

No, von Steyr, giving up the battle of speed, began to manoeuvre in the air like a trout fighting hook and line in thin blue water. Then something went by the ear of Lippincott like a wasp incredibly winged with speed; and a long, straight, pencil stroke of grey ran out before him and disappeared.

A tracer bullet! Von Steyr had gone mad, then? He heard the rapid pounding of bullets into the S.E.5; or was it only the changed vibration that he felt?

The motor stalled; the propeller stood still before him, holding out two helpless arms as though in a signal of surrender. Instinctively he put down the nose of the machine to glide, and, looking over the side, saw von Steyr beneath and to the side, with one arm thrown up across his face, flying blind. The hills rushed up toward Lippincott. All hills, no level ground anywhere, and he had taken no parachute with him!

A shadow crossed him. That was the Fokker, above him at last. Something streaked down. He knew by instinct that it was a parachute from the hand of the German, and he swerved to get under it. It missed him by two yards only.

Then the green of the ground, almost the smell of the English turf, was in Lippincott's nostrils. He aimed at the nearest lie could find to a level field, half-ploughed. If he could miss the plough-land, pancake, and pray, he might have the plane stopped before it reached the stone wall. So he aimed as well as he could, but it was hard to aim well, with the plane dropping so fast. He hoped to skim just over the last furrow. Instead, the ploughed ground reached up and caught his wheel with a black hand and flipped the plane over on its back; Lippincott hung like a fly in one strand of a spider's web, suspended by the safety-belt.

Smoke rose stifling about him. He remembered the one bad feature of the S.E.5 design— the gas-tank between pilot and motor. And this tank was leaking, now. All the words that rose into his mind were: "... A rat in a trap! A rat in a trap! A rat in a trap!"

He heard the roar of the descending plane of von Steyr. Good fellow to try a landing in that devilish, crowded, uneven countryside. The motor cut off. Then a loud crash announced that von Steyr had landed, indeed; never to rise again, perhaps? Then a great voice shouted:

"Bill! Bill! Steady, man. I'm here!"

The knife in von Steyr's hand must have cut the webbing at one stroke, and Lippincott landed flat on his face in the grass and the slick of the foul gasoline. When he scrambled out into the open, he saw von Steyr staggering, with a red face, A scalp wound was bleeding in torrents. But there was something more than scars of the flesh to think about. The investigators of the accident must never find the bullet marks in the S.E.5. Lippincott knotted his handkerchief, lighted it, and threw it back into the grass beneath the plane. Instantly the flames went up with a roar; and, turning, he saw the Fokker crushed like an old apple box against the stone wall.

In three short days Lippincott was out of bed with a few bandages and a few bruises. Sir Arthur Tenbay, director of the club, sat on the edge of the bath-tub and watched him shave.

"And old Nicolai?" asked Lippincott. "I haven't managed to get a word out of him."

"He's gone," said Sir Arthur.

"Gone? Dead?" cried Lippincott.

"No; gone back to Germany," said Tenbay. "He left his cheque for three thousand pounds to replace the lost machines."

"He can't do that!" cried Lippincott. "It's all he has. It's his marriage; his happiness..."

"What happened in the sky, Bill?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Nothing. My motor stalled," said Lippincott. "Had to come down in a ploughed field, and Nicolai crashed the Fokker trying to get to me..."

"What really happened in the sky, old fellow?" asked Tenbay.

Lippincott stared at him.

"In addition to the cheque," said Sir Arthur, "von Steyr sent in his resignation from the club. Very odd letter. The board of directors thought I'd better ask you about it before we accept it, or the money."

"But a man can't resign from the Halcyon," protested Lippincott, "any more than a brother can resign from his family."

"We'll return the letter and the cheque, then," said Tenbay, "if you've nothing more to say."

"Never a word," said Lippincott.

"I'll be running along, then," said Tenbay. But he paused at the door to add: "I suppose old Dunsbury is a happy ghost to-day."

13: Smoky Treasure

Anthony M. Rud

1893-1942

Short Stories, 25 June 1925

ROULETTE was not the game for Toi-Yabe Tolman; but for that matter, neither was liquor. In the Squeejaw saloon, Hartnett's chief hangout for sons of the desert who came that way, a man had to choose— unless he passed through the swinging wicker doors that gave upon the honkytonk dance floor. Toi-Yabe disliked dancing. Therefore he turned, his second glass of whisky barely tasted, and hitched a pair of bony elbows upon the cherry bar, while the heel of one hobnailed boot planked itself upon the dented brass.

Upon a big packing case bolted to the floor and draped in green felt, the wheel was placed. The numbered boards extending to each side were not more than two feet from the floor. Some of the prospectors who bet occasionally and in hectic spurts when the inspiration became insupportable, waddled about on their knees in the damp sawdust. Others crouched down on creaking camp chairs with canvas seats.

"The great old giveaway game— a burro can play it as well as a man— thirty-two wins and the house loses again—" So droned the flat, parrotlike voice of the pale skinned, deft croupier.

Because of his height and the squat position of the layout, Toi-Yabe could watch the circling of the little ball, and the success of the several players. All but one of the latter were surely prospectors or miners, following the lure of gold in its minted form just as they toiled and sweated for it in the raw.

The one exception was a tall, slender young fellow, not more than twenty at the most, possessor of flushed, almost girlish features and a high voice. He talked much, breathed little at a time and fast— and coughed shallowly now and then. ToiYabe's wide, uncompromising mouth turned upward at one corner, though not with a grin. His taciturn, hawklike countenance rarely harbored a smile or any recognizable relative thereof.

This youth alone among the gamblers seemed to be really plunging. Toi-Yabe saw him bet twenty dollars and lose, three rolls in a row. Now and then the honkytonk waiter— without receiving an order, apparently— brought the youth two small glasses containing fiquids of reddish brown hue. One of these he would toss down in a strangling gulp; the ginger ale chaser went more slowly and was followed by a deep breath of relief. Each time that happened he changed positions, sometimes kneeling, sometimes bending low and snapping his fingers over the spinning wheel almost with the gesture of a craps player. He laughed nervously, bought more chips.

Toi-Yabe grunted contemptuously. It was all so plain. Why not profit? Within his trousers' band, depending from his belt crossing, were two small buckskin pokes of gold. One of these he removed, and silently tossed it to the chip seller to weigh. The latter, a heavy set, sour looking man of cold, unfriendly mien, dumped out all the dust and small nuggets, glancing sharply at its unaccustomed redness of hue. Metal from the mines about Hartnett, barring placers, was mingled and alloyed with silver. Its color was pale and dull.

"That gold ain't from this region," the banker rasped nasally, darting up a look at Toi-Yahbe which held curiosity, cupidity and suspicion in equal measure.

"It's ninety-six pure; that's all yuh want to know," said Toi-Yabe curtly. "And make the addition for Troy weight at seventeen-ten." He had noted the sordid detail that these scales registered weight avoirdupois!

"Sixteen's all we allow."

"All right; make it sixteen, cheapskate!"

The banker stiffened. His hand moved the fraction of an inch toward the loaded six-gun there on the table at his hand, but something— possibly the unflinching glare from the narrowed black eyes of his tall, desert cured customer— changed his mind. He growled, weighed the gold, made a quick calculation, and flip-flapped out three stacks of pasteboard chips in four colors. "Yellows a hundred. Blues twenty. Reds five, Whites a half," he snapped. "On'y two doubles, onless the boss says different." He jerked a thumb at a big, suave, flat faced man in beaded sombrero, and fancy vest above his loud striped silk shirt.

Toi-Yabe took his stacks without comment. He would not try to bother the owner by limit bets, for his plan was something vastly different. From that moment he kept close tab upon the flushed, half drunken tenderfoot with the cough, the one who seemed to possess so much money he was anxious to lose. Paper money, mostly, at that! Toi-Yabe stared at one fifty dollar bill carelessly let fall in the tenderfoot's haste not to miss a revolution of the wheel, and still buy more chips. It was the first script of this denomination Toi-Yabe ever had seen.

The desert man's cynicism was amply confirmed. Whenever the tenderfoot placed a bet, whether it was on a number, a color, odd or even, Toi-Yabe coppered, bet a smaller sum elsewhere and always on the opposite color. This was not the most speedily gainful occupation imaginable, yet in fifty minutes of staking sums ranging from five dollars to fifteen he lost just once— on the double-O.

Then unobtrusively the big man of flat, oily countenance, designated as Durkee Jenkins, the owner of the Squeejaw, made his way to the rear of Toi-Yabe. He rested one hand on the outlaw's left shoulder. "Kin I talk to yuh jes' a

second, hombre?" he queried, the miner's pronunciation falling queerly from his thick lips.

"Can't be bothered. I'm ahead," said Toi-Yabe not turning. He had foreseen just this, however, read it in the venomous glances shot his way as soon as his cynical system had become apparent— a sure system on a crooked wheel where a customer is plunging.

Something hard pressed into the small of his back. "That's a two-barrel .45 derringer," whispered a voice suddenly silky with menace. "Yuh better cash in, hombre."

"Guess I will,' decided Toi-Yabe, without ado.

He straightened, stuffed his chips in his pockets by handfuls, and then turned, apparently ignoring the other. His winnings, not totalled as yet, would exceed eight hundred dollars.

"This way, my friend," murmured the oily one, as Toi-Yabe would have stopped to get his money. "I'll do the cashing!" The derringer, a terrible weapon at short range, was leveled at his stomach. The man behind it was smiling, but with a sneer upon his lips.

"A'right," agreed Toi-Yabe with deceptive meekness. He trudged toward a far, unoccupied table, the one indicated.

Midway on the sawdust floor something happened. Toi-Yabe seemed to slip. From a hasty glance backward he knew that the owner of the Squeejaw followed him closely, but with his hands thrust in the pockets of his gala vest. When Toi-Yabe slipped he seemed to stagger. Then suddenly one of his booted heels struck backward!

The kick no more than brought a sudden exhalation of breath from the gambling house proprietor, yet it served. A heavy shot barked, as the derringer in Durkee's right hand spat fire. The shot missed its mark by half a yard, as Toi-Yabe had thrown himself sidewise even as he kicked, swinging up the short barreled Colt he wore for quick action. A tenth-second af his left shoulder struck the sawdust, he fired.

Durkee shrieked in sudden pain. The heavy slug caromed from the barrel of the derringer, and split longitudinally through his knuckles and the back of his hand. The suave proprietor would shoot lefthanded, if he shot at all, for months to come.

Toi-Yabe was lucky. Many a killing wished by Durkee in times past had been delegated to the three gunmen who slouched in the corners. This particular piece of business had been Durkee's individual idea, however. He had not figured it especially serious, as a matter of fact. Now, as the hired killers snapped to sudden attention, reaching for their guns, Toi-Yabe rose with two threatening Colt revolvers, and covered them. "Nobody better draw!" he grated.

Nobody did. For the time being Durkee could not issue commands. Warily Toi-Yabe secured his money, backed to the door, and ducked through. Then for half a minute he stood grimly waiting at the door sill, The first outcomer would have got hot lead without mercy; but no one came. Through a side window a barkeep caught a glimpse, and yelled the news that the gunman was waiting for his kill. For that reason no one stirred until long after Toi-Yabe had conceded his own escape, gone to the hitch rack, and deliberately selected the stanchest appearing of the three horses tethered there.

Toi-Yabe of the mining country knew little of mounts save riding mules and burros, and would be in a mild degree of torture during most of the time he spent in the saddle; yet he made a good selection. This was the spirited, indefatigable paint pony which had been ridden to the Squeejaw by the very tenderfoot who had been trimmed at the crooked wheel, Rance Belden.

GOING out of Hartnett at a smart trot, Toi-Yabe found himself a very busy man. He bounced from horn to cantle, clinging to the former, lost his stirrups, and felt himself wracked by a jolting which seemed to threaten the integrity of his spine itself. "Whoa, yuh damn' critter !"' he yelled, and stiffened his pull on the bridle. The pace of the pinto increased instanter to a gallop; though ToiYabe had the fact to ascertain through painful experience, this was an animal trained to take a trailing rein as a signal to stop and forage or drink, a loose bit as the wish of the rider to dawdle at a fair-to-middling walk— and a stiff tension as the command to go faster through the gaits of canter, singlefoot, trot and gallop.

Fortunately Toi-Yabe was not pursued, for he went to the alkali in a header that raised a cloud of the soft white dust. He clutched the bridle for an instant, then let go. The paint, finding the reins trailing, looked backward, perhaps in obscure contempt, then stopped and fell to foraging the scant tufts of bunch grass.

Toi-Yabe rose with a muffled curse. In the moonlight he could see that the horse was not running away. He dusted himself, then stalked the beast— and the horse paid no attention whatever to his clumsy mounting,

"A'right then, giddap, but don't go so fast," pleaded Toi-Yabe Tolman aloud. He was shaken, but determined. He wound the reins about the horn of the big Texas saddle— fortunately for him, loosely. "A'right, giddap!" he repeated. And the pinto looked around curiously, then snuffed audibly, There was no need for these kicking, spurless heels, but evidently this rider was a tenderfoot. The pinto joggled into a walk, unguided yet going vaguely northward. That way suited ToiYabe, who eventually meant to return to the green clad Nevada mountains from which he had got his nickname. It suited the pony as well; for much nearer than the far Toi-Yabe Range lay a valley which held two nestling cattle ranches. And here the fancy saddler had oats and a stall.

Another horse came at a mad run, and without more than a moment's warning. Toi-Yabe and his stalking steed just had turned the jutting corner of a miniature butte when the thunder of hoofs and a swiftly approaching dust cloud, half seen in the moonlight, caused the wise pinto to swerve.

Toi-Yabe stared, his hand falling to the butt of one ready six-gun. "What the hell?" he ejaculated aloud.

No explanation was vouchsafed. With a cluffety-cluff of racing hoofs on the soft footing a snorting saddle mount went by, was gone; the following cloud obscured the flying heels within a second after passing.

Toi-Yabe shrugged. He had seen that this horse, an animal several hands higher than the pony he himself had commandeered, also was saddled. Possibly here in this part of Nevada it was not considered so much out of order to be thrown from a horse as he had supposed Then he heard the call for help, which came faintly to his ears after the thrumming of hastening hoofs faded to nothing. Far away, almost imperceptible it was; yet the words came unmistakably. "*He-e-lp! Come he-e-ere! He-e-e-lp*!' No louder than a high sibilant whisper, but clear.

"Slow up, Dynamite; whoa-a!" growled Toi-Yabe. "Damn yuh, don't yuh know enough to *stop*?"

Dynamite apparently didn't; yet fortunately he was headed along the very trail from which the call for assistance had come. In the white sheen of moonlight Toi-Yabe followed the cry, and saw, some distance ahead along this vestigial trail a dark huddle against the grayish ground.

"Damn yuh!" gritted Toi-Yabe, sawing at the plain bar bit while the mount inexplicably went faster. "Well, yuh showed me one way to do it!"

And with that, freeing his toes from the wooden stirrups he jounced to the cantle, again to the pony's rump, and finally, after a scaring instant of fall, to the soft alkali with a spine jarring jolt. The pinto, released from the stimulus of a stiff rein, immediately slowed to a canter, a walk; but it did not seem to notice the fact that its rider had deserted in abrupt fashion. The bridle still exerted a slight check; and that was enough to keep the animal going toward home, which lay dead ahead. Not the curses or persuasions of Toi-Yabe could halt the righteous, justified— and scornful— animal.

"I'm glad— you came!" said a small, rather shaky voice. Toi-Yabe jerked about, leaped to his feet. From the concussion of the fall he had forgotten completely the object of his quixotic tumble to the alkali. Now he saw an elbow-raised figure no more than five yards distant.

A woman!

"I'm so glad you stopped!" she said. "I— I tried to ride a mare Rance calls an outlaw— and she threw me. I'm afraid my ankle is broken. It hurts— oooh!" A quiver in her voice betrayed what it had cost her to restrain the tears.

From close range Toi-Yabe saw she was not the dance hall kind. She was tall, blonde, and with a face more decided of feature than purely pretty. It was pretty, though. Toi-Yabe almost backed away. His reluctance to mingle with honkytonk sirens was as nothing to the shyness and dread which came upon him in the presence of girls of a better caste. On the few occasions since early 'youth Toi-Yabe had been forced into the company of such young women, he had made himself such a spectacle of tongue-tied awkwardness that rarely were the stories concerning his reputation in the mining country taken as more than amusing whoppers told to pass the time.

And now, with more than a possibility of dangerous pursuit to face, without a horse, probably miles from anywhere and at night, a young woman undeniably handsome and who thought that her ankle was broken, put herself confidingly in his hands!

"I— ma'am," he stammered; then no words would come from a throat suddenly gone dry. Involuntarily he stepped backward.

"Oh, w-won't you help me?" she cried suddenly, sensing the peculiar fact that this big, stern appearing man was en the point of turning and leaving her just where she was. "I unlaced— it, but I c-couldn't get it off. It hurts j-just dreadfully!" With that she drew up her riding skirt disclosing a small boot the foot of which was twisted ominously.

"Where'd you come from, ma'am?" Toi-Yabe managed to ask. "Mebbe I could get there and bring a buckboard— and yore man— or somebody ce

A wan smile of suffering came to her lips that trembled. "Oh please!" she said with almost a sob. "Help me n-now! There's nobody at our place unless my brother R-Rance has returned— and the Circle-X is three miles farther. We haven't any buckboard. We—" And at that moment her voice trailed and ended. The courage to stand it all reached the limit of its powers. With an odd, tired sound as if of relief she lapsed sidewise and was still.

HAD she retained consciousness, ToiYabe never could have gone through with the task that confronted him. More than the smoke of snapping six-guns in the hands of a determined adversary, that necessary nearness to a woman appalled him, even as it sent a rush of color flooding beneath the layers of tan upon his cheeks. His hands— those same long fingered, capable members of sinew and steel which could wrap themselves about a Colt revolver and hold that weapon unwavering upon any target— trembled strangely. The line of his mouth came taut. He forced himself to bend to his task and think only of it.

A quick examination revealed the impossibility of removing the girl's riding boot in ordinary fashion, Toi-Yabe drew his bowie knife, the same razor edged steel with which as a precaution and disguise he had removed his black spade

beard before venturing into the town of Hartnett, and cut the soft leather. As he lifted away the boot, opened to its toe cap, the girl moved slightly and moaned.

Toi-Yabe stiffened. Thereafter he worked swiftly, and with a return of sureness and mechanical dexterity. She was hurt badly indeed; and used to all forms of rough surgery through his desert experience, the man realized that she had been right in wanting immediate help. From the silken stocking which he cut away, a fragment of splintered bone protruded. He shook his head gravely. He could do his part, yet only a surgeon could ever bring back to that injured member a tithe of the shapeliness it had owned.

His fingers did not tremble now. With the girl lying flat upon her back, he scooped a hollow for her heel and laid across this his polka dot bandanna before lowering her foot gently. Then, gathering twigs of mesquite, he built a fire near at hand for greater light, and proceeded to draw out and straighten the grating fragments of bone.

Material for really stiff splints was lacking. He thought of the boot and its fellow. They would have to suffice. Using the keen blade again, he cut away both leather soles.

With the soles, their high heels sliced away, he made two fair splints. Then, stripping the sixteen inch lengths of leather procurable from their sides, he bound these around the stiffer soles, and reinforced the makeshift with his own leather belt tightly wound around and around the ankle. Two rawhide shoelaces from the boots furnished additional rigidity.

Toi-Yabe looked at the completed job, and nodded. "Best I can do with what's here," he said aloud. He unstoppered his canteen and was about to attempt the girl's resuscitation, but a thought halted him. "Mebbe better for a while she stays asleep," he muttered. So, taking a brief swallow of the tepid water himself, he bent and lifted her in his arms. The position of the injured ankle caused some cogitation; but finally, realizing that he could not carry her any distance and support it at the horizontal, he lifted the limp, surprisingly light figure so that the girl's face was cushioned upon his left shoulder, while her legs hung vertical from the knees, at his right hip. And then he strode forth in the moonlight, following the almost imperceptible trail over which his stolen pony had disappeared.

During ensuing minutes, the half of an hour during which even the unbending elastic strength of Toi-Yabe was compelled to acknowledge fatigue, a surge of discomforts and angers entirely strange swept through the last fiber of his being. He stalked along, stiffer of spine than was usual, his eyes almost unblinking, and slitted in a killer's mask upon the silvered landscape.

He cursed the chance which had brought him along this road, and his own weakness in yielding to sympathy for a hurt fellow creature. He hated and distrusted softness of any sort more than death or the ugliest sin. As a killer he

was known, a fugitive— the only surviving member of the infamous Silver Peak gang. What to him could be a girl of this sort, or sympathy— or love?

But she came awake. A sigh, a shiver of pain, and her eyes opened to blink and then steady in quick recollection. "Thank you," she said, quietly then. "It's only a little way now, there to the right beyond the next rise. Only a cabin—"

Toi-Yabe had been about to stop for rest, but now he stiffened and strode forward more quickly. His shoulders and back muscles ached fiercely, and cramps in his thighs threatened from the exertion. Yet he made the rise. If only she could have remained unconscious another ten minutes !

She was talking in a steady, clear tone now as they came in sight of the little place. "Mr. Hendrix, who owns the Circle-X, the nearest of the two ranches in this valley, was an old friend of my father. He let Rance and myself homestead this place. We're not really doing much of anything. though, because Rance isn't strong enough. He had an attack of pleurisy two years ago, and since then the doctors have been afraid of more serious lung trouble. I— I don't know exactly where Rance is now. He left here yesterday."

Into the mind of Toi-Yabe flashed a startling hunch, one which caught at least a shadowy corroboration from the features of this girl. He turned to look again at the face within a few inches of his own, then straightened quickly with eyes to the front.

"Yore brother—" he managed to growl. "Does he look something— a bit like yuh?"

"Why yes, in a way. My, you must have done up my ankle splendidly; it scarcely hurts at all now! Why do you ask about Rance?" It was a characteristic of the girl that she could follow two divergent ideas quite as if they impinged upon the same focal point of discussion.

"Nemmind. I was just wonderin' some. Mebbe I'd seen him." In the man's mind now had come a clear certainty that he *had* viewed Rance Whatever- His-Name- Might-Be, and under distinctly unfavorable circumstances. The youth who had been spending a roll there in the Squeejaw saloon, bucking a crooked wheel!

"*Have* you! Where? When was it? You see, Rance is the reason I gave up my place in St. Paul. I love him— oh, so much! But he's just a boy, and I'm fearfully afraid he's— he's drinking, and that won't help him any. I— but you don't care about our troubles."

"Mebbe I do— for some reasons you couldn't guess, ma'am," said Toi-Yabe cryptically. He was thinking solely of the wad of money he had gleaned by coppering the wagers of that fool tenderfoot back in Hartnett. From the looks of this homestead cabin ahead, Rance and his sister didn't have any thick roll of twenty buck bets to sling around loose.

Gray-blue eyes scrutinized him from beneath long lashes, however. For just a moment Marjorie Belden had doubts. Then a smile crept into her eyes. Figure this aloof, iron hard man as anything less than a true friend after this night?

"I don't care about your reasons if you don't want to tell them," she said softly. "We're here. If you'll just put me down, and pull the rawhide latch— And then, there's Cochise over there waiting at the corral. He's our best pony. That means Rance is here somewhere."

But Toi-Yabe, as he managed an entrance to the unlighted cabin without setting down his burden, knew the pony's presence at the corral gate with the girl's saddled mount did not mean her brother's return. This first was the selfsame pinto he had stolen from the hitch rack at the Squeejaw!

LEAVING the girl on her own snowy bed, Toi-Yabe retreated in quick confusion. He found a kerosene lamp and a candle, lighted them, then brought a snack of cold food and a full canteen of water to the girl's room— after knocking.

Her eyes shone as he came in, palpably nervous, but she said nothing. From her father she had known of the West and its men; yet the city had done much to dull her belief. Suddenly she had felt very much alone.

"This'll hold yuh, ma'am— just in case I— I don't get back— if something happens. I'm ridin' to the Circle-X, but then there's no tellin'. Yore brother'll be back tomorrow, anyway." He backed awkwardly to the door, bethought himself, and swept off his sombrero for the first time. Red color swept up to his cheeks. He frowned fiercely, in a rage at himself.

"Wait, big man!" The girl's voice was calm but authoritative. Well she suspected just what command over this desert man she could exercise if she would, and she called upon all of it now. Toi-Yabe halted as if stricken. He clutched the door frame as if he feared to fall.

"My name is Marjorie Belden. Please put down the lamp, won't you? And come here. I can't thank you enough, of course. If you'll ride to the Circle-X and tell them about me they'll do the rest. But I want to know your name. You'll come back, of course; but while you're gone I want to know who it was found me."

"Tolman, ma'am— Steve Tolman. Call me Toi-Yabe if yuh feel like it. I— er— But if anybody comes, mebbe yuh better not. There's reasons."

"Thanks, Toi-Yabe," she nodded, frowning with a fugitive regret as she understood his meaning. "Please come back, though, if you can. And thank you!"

Toi-Yabe found Stan Hendrix and his wife more than willing to arise and come back to the homestead. While the woman was dressing and getting ready with a basket of medicines and edibles, a puncher was awakened to ride to

Hartnett for the doctor. Stan, a burly, brusque rancher of a sort Toi-Yabe liked instinctively, hitched the buckskin pair to the light wagon. Stan tried to sound out Toi-Yabe, but got little satisfaction. The desert wanderer had performed his mission. He rode back with the wagon party, saw that affairs were all right, and then waved a brief good-by to Stan Hendrix when the latter came out to bear a certain request of the injured girl, a wish that was not to be fulfilled soon.

"*Hi*!" called Stan in a stentorian voice. "Come back, hombre!''

"I'll send back— the horse!" came the reply from the dawn grayed desert. ToiYabe turned the better to stick to the saddle, and rode back toward the town he had quitted.

"Well I'll be damned!" stated Stan Hendrix slowly and with conviction. "Of all the rinky-dinkled tough lookin' hombres— and he didn't even want a thank-yuh from Marj!"

The Squeejaw, and indeed all of Hartnett, had gone dark. This hour of dawn with its succeeding period of sodden, stale tasting sunrise, were the only inactive hours. Time had been, during the gold and silver strike years immediately succeeding the Goldfield marvel, when the Squeejaw and six competitors boomed twenty-four hours of each day. Now the Squeejaw alone remained. It did a fair business, fading slowly year by year. The silver ore here could not be mined profitably as yet. The gold pockets which once promised so much were found seldom now. Hartnett was sinking to unimportance— fated again to boom, yet for a totally different reason.

A sodden halfbreed asleep in a leaning, obtuse angle of the decrepit gallery of the Squeejaw, awoke in startling fashion. Gripping hands clutched him by the trousers and the neck. They hurtled him to the vast immensity of the muddy Rio Grande, brought him forth, sloshed him to the depths again. He cried out choking protests and struggled ineffectively. "*Poder de— gugg! Señor*!"

"Shut up!' came the curt command. Suddenly, as the halfbreed was tilted to his limp legs the giant changed into a vengeful, fearsomely strong gringo— and the Rio Grande River shrank absurdly to the dimensions of the Squeejaw's horse trough!

"Answer me some questions, hombre, an' yuh kin go back to sleep. Where's young Rance Belden, the kid who was being crooked out of his roll here last night? Where'd he go?"

The sleep dulled brain of the other could not function quickly enough to answer that question immediately, even with the spur of mounting terror. Francisco had recognized, in the half light of reddening dawn, the gringo gunman who yester-eve had shot his way to safety from the Squeejaw!

Toi-Yabe knew how to handle this sort, however. Inside five minutes, without actually harming the halfbreed, he had the man cringing— anxious to tell as much as he knew, or even more.

"He comes so often, señor. Always it is with a beeg check. He cash it, then he dreenk mooch, an' lose. Then he sleep upstair'."

"So he comes— *often*!" Somehow ToiYabe couldn't get that in proportion. His brief glance at the interior of the Belden homestead cabin had gleaned no signs of wealth. And Marjorie had said that she had given up a job in St. Paul to come out here with her sick brother; that the lad was not making the most of his opportunities for health!

"Si, señor! Once, twice a month, sometime."

"A'right, go back to sleep." Toi-Yabe flipped a silver dollar to his informant. "An' don't yuh say yuh seen me, hombre, or I'll come back an' git that buck— plus eight bits' worth of skin off the soles of yore feet!"

He made away into the moonlight, harkening not to the scared man's protestations of interminable silence. Francisco even would refrain from spending that silver cartwheel a whole morning, fearing that a liquor loosened tongue might lead him into serious trouble.

THE sun was wide above the horizon before Toi-Yabe's vigil came to an end. The man of the desert called upon the outlaw tricks— leaning upon a crooked arm in which the prickles of pain would become intense after a few minutes of dozing, standing upright against a plane surface from which the fall of deep slumber would be the awakening. And he succeeded in fighting off the drowsiness of fatigue.

At ten minutes past nine in the morning a woebegone, haggard faced youngster staggered out of the newly unlocked Squeejaw. It was Rance Belden, a miserable, repentant Rance who was thinking all too strongly just then of the peace and presumed freedom from remorse offered by a well aimed slug from his own revolver. Of all the treacherous ones, idiots and sneak thieves who ever had been born, he took the cake! He hated himself. Back at the cabin loyal Marj would he ready to put him to bed, to minister to his wants and lecture him sorrowfully. Oh, he hated to face her; but it really was becoming something of an o]d story. Since his first big loss here at roulette, he had hoped for an evening when the far, mocking gods and the percentages all were his; when he could recoup. once and for all— and give a real stake to Marjorie.

With hangdog mien, flat broke again, he made his way to the stable. A mount— not his own— was ready, saddled. This fact in itself should have given him a thought or two of suspicion concerning the owner of the gambling emporium; yet he blamed himself, Drink and drink only seemed the cause of his losses. Curse it! The stuff undermined his bettering health, threw him back— and made him a confounded fool about tossing around money which would have gone far in the hands of his sister. And he really loved Marjorie, too.

He mounted, and jogged out along the desert trail. His head drooped. He coughed, grimacing wryly. Fool!

A mile back of him, by Rance unseen, came another driver. This one rode somewhat better than he had the day earlier, yet he, too, drooped and jounced awkwardly in the saddle. Though the black eyes of Toi-Yabe rarely left their dust cloud ahead, the man's frame was aching with a fatigue only many hours in a blanket could alleviate.

Almost halfway to the homestead cabin, Rance Belden looked around without especial interest. Hoofbeats told him that another rider approached. He hoped it was not Marjorie, out on a hunt for him. It was not. Through cogitation more than training, Toi-Yabe had figured out a few of the idiosyncrasies of his paint pony. He managed a stop within yards of his quarry. And then he dismounted.

"Hands up!" he commanded tersely, leveling a six-gun as a precautionary measure.

Rance chuckled bitterly. "I know you, old chap. Saw you yesterday," he said. "You've got the wrong man, though. I haven't a dollar in my jeans." Yet he held aloft his hands. Toi-Yabe relieved him of one revolver.

"Now get down."

Rance obeyed wearily, uttering protestations which made absolutely no impression whatever upon Toi-Yabe. Without comment the latter unhitched his own belts and holsters, and placed them with the boy's gun at a distance of thirty feet.

"Yuh don't tote a knife, do yuh?"

"Why— no." Rance was frankly puzzled.,

"A'right." Toi-Yabe's keen edged weapon silvered through the sunlight to stick, hilt upward, within a yard of the hand-guns. "Then I'm goin' to give yuh just what yuh need!' And Toi-Yabe, ignoring the frantic, futile struggles of the tenderfoot, up-ended the latter and administered a thorough lacing upon the indicated anatomical part.

"I'll— kill you!" coughed Rance hysterically, when swept by humiliation and white wrath he was chucked aside like a discarded glove.

"No yuh won't, boy. Cause why? First, yuh can't; I kin shoot three holes in yuh while yo're going for yore gun square an' open. Second yuh had it comin'. Didn't yuh? Haven't yuh been a lowdown skunk to the finest gal in the State of Nevada— yore sis?"

Rance's mouth gaped. Who was this preposterous man? He could not answer, for the simple reason that his whole con. science of a sudden got behind the righteousness of his punishment. He hated— and yet "Yuh did," stated Toi-Yabe calmly.

"Yore sister has broke her leg; an' I know all about this— 'most all. What I'm aimin' to have yuh tell me right now is, where did yuh get that money yuh was throwin' so wide an' loose? I ain't aimin' to monkey around none. Speak up!"

"I'll be damned if I will!" Rance shouted furiously, and flung himself forward, his fists beating a puny tattoo, robbed by rage of the slight effectiveness they might have had under other circumstances.

Toi-Yabe did not bother to sidestep or retaliate. "Stop it!' he commanded harshly, and with a sweep of one hand gathered in both the slim, flailing wrists. Without difficulty he quelled the futile struggles.

Beyond the limits of self control, the boy, snarling like a trapped coyote, bent to sink his teeth in the copper skin of ToiYabe's right hand. Quick as a flash, not releasing the two wrists, Toi-Yabe jerked a four-inch blow which met the retracted lips and bared teeth with the heel of his fist.

An odd gurgle came from Rance. He staggered, coughed and would have fallen had not the grasp sustained him.

"No more of that," cautioned Toi-Yabe coldly. "I don't aim to torture yuh, or even give yuh all I think is comin' yore way; but yo're goin' to answer that question. I give yuh just one minute!"

Rance had the spirit if not the physique of a fighter. Without reply he suddenly aimed a vicious kick, one which reached its mark agonizingly upon Toi-Yabe's left shin.

Beyond a quick convulsion of his muscles, a constriction which nearly snapped Rance's two wrists, he gave no acknowledgement of the pain. "The next time yuh try that yuh quit walking for quite a space," he observed. "Fifteen seconds up." A peculiar light of calculation and hate suddenly flared in the youth's blue eyes. He shook his head once, feigning surrender. "All right; you win, you damned bandit!" he rasped, then coughed again. "Come on; I'll show you. Then see how much of it you get!" He moved toward his horse. Toi-Yabe, after a second of hesitation, picked up the discarded belts and weapons, and followed without comment.

In the saddle Rance rode speedily, and never looked back. In some respects it was well for Toi-Yabe's self respect that he did not, since the latter, most of the time the animals were galloping, was holding on for dear life to the saddle horn, and hoping for all he was worth that the pace would moderate. Dynamite seemed to take a certain devilish pride in keeping just three yards behind the rump of Rance's animal. The other horse was decidedly inferior, though, and Dynamite had no difficulty. Had the urge come— as it fortunately did not— fifty jumps of the pinto's superior speed would have left the stable roan hopelessly behind.

Between his speculations concerning this revelation about to be made by Rance, ToiYabe rather hectically— between bounces and slips— wondered why

Rance had not asked for his own steed. Cynically ToiYabe said to himself that the lad still had too much of a lift from his night of dissipation. Actually Rance had thought himself in the grasp of a desperate outlaw, one with some queer notions closely approximating the burning castigations of his own conscience, yet an outlaw and a killer. Only in regard to Toi-Yabe's purpose on this forenoon ride did Rance Belden go far wrong in his suppositions, at that.

"There it is! Help yourself and get rich quick!" Rance's voice was sneering, yet it held a certain triumph.

Both had dismounted. Toi-Yabe looked at an irregular hole in the alkali surface which closely bounded the fertile valley and cattle range beyond.

"Hum. There's no gold there." ToiYabe spoke with the finality of a seasoned prospector. The mine, if one could dignify it by that title, looked like nothing valuable to him; and for the sake of that girl with gray-blue eyes he had held hopes. More than hopes; real expectations. The lad had got money *somehow*!

"Gold?" jeered Rance. "That's cheap stuff! Look here!" And he scurried forward to his knees, burrowed for a minute like a dog under a fence, and then. suddenly came to a moister, grayish clay totally unlike the white surface alkali. There was precious water here, Toi-Yabe observed subconsciously. Also there was something else

Rance shuffled a handful of the sticky gray stuff through his fingers, threw it away. Another. Then suddenly he coughed. "H-here!'" he gasped after a second or two. He rubbed something against his sleeve, then held forth the small object between thumb and forefinger. "There's one," he said, and immediately got after more of the sticky alkaline clay.

Toi-Yabe said nothing. He was examining the small, smoky bit which Rance had handed over. It looked like nothing valuable which Toi-Yabe knew. Still, there was the certainty that somewhere, somehow this youth had secured sums of money totally disproportionate to his apparent means—

"That's a *diamond*!" said Rance curtly. "Here are two more small ones, and a bigger one. You can dig them out with your hands, as you see. I've been selling a few lots. That's the whole secret. Now may I go?" His lips twisted in a sneer which was as much self hatred as it was animosity for this man who had forced the confession, Rance thought his chance forfeited; his chance and that of Marjorie. He was a rotter, and no mistake. Almost he felt grateful to this bandit man for bringing home the point so surcly!

The wonder of seeing uncut diamonds brought from the clay of a virgin soil startled Toi-Yabe, used as the latter was to finds of gold and silver, copper, and even gold-and-platinum together. He stared some time without speech. Then he demanded the tale, and oddly got the entire truth. Rance still hungered for vengeance, would have it if he died, yet his forming plan did not deny the actual conditions to this bandit.

"I can't sell all I want to sell," said Rance frankly, albeit a gleam of hatred lurked. "You can see that ten men could sift out nearly a bushel of uncut smoky diamonds a day, as long as the surface yield lasted— and we haven't touched it yet. I have a customer— five hundred carats a week irrespective of flaws— with a Chicago phonograph company; points, you know. I'm trying for a contract with the American Drill Company. They have been using Brazilian stones. And then of course I've heard there is a very occasional pure white diamond in the lot of mine run smokies— and even one black diamond to every ten thousand or so of the others. Of course the whites are worth much, and the real blacks are worth two thousand dollars a carat if they are flawless—"

Toi-Yabe was awed. Yet he did not lose his head. "Is this your land?" he asked gruffly.

Rance started. "Huh?" he demanded loudly, palpably sparring for time.

"This land belongs to the ranch, doesn't it?" asked Toi-Yabe cynically. "To the Circle-X ?"

"Yes, damn it!" blurted Rance, losing his assurance all at once. This was the club he intended to hold over the head of this bandit!

"Thought so," said Toi-Yabe succinctly. "Well, I guess us two can't do anything unless we want to steal a few stones— and for me I'm a prospector for gold, copper and silver. Suppose yuh go home, an' beg yore sister's pardon. I ain't going to take this mess. It just ain't my game."

"Oh the devil!" gritted Rance in sincere disgust. "Won't diamonds tempt you? I thought maybe you'd hang up on that bait, outlaw! Well, I'll get you somewhere else, you devil!" He mounted and rode, in ever increasing dejection, back toward the homestead.

He would have marveled had he seen the haste with which the apparently unmoved Toi-Yabe sifted out an even dozen more of the irregular stones, cleaned them, performed four other queer rites about the diamond find, and then turned for the road to the county seat. And took the only sleep he had enjoyed for thirty hours, right then as a cat-nap in the saddle.

In town Toi-Yabe paid three claim filing fees, received his documents, and then, nearly blind from fatigue, stabled the pinto and repaired to a hotel. He slept the clock around, bathed, shaved and started the unaccustomed task of replenishing his outfit without regard to expense. He dawdled over this recreation, dropping in occasionally at bars, watching like a hawk the faces of all who came and went. Perhaps he had distanced pursuit. He hoped so.

AN INDIGNATION meeting of two adjourned from the alkali flat where Toi-Yabe Tolman had erected his monuments. Rance was miserable indeed.

He had come contritely to Hendrix, the cattle man, and told of his supposed thievery and wastage of money.

Hendrix, owner of the Circle-X, put him right in a hurry. He did not mince matters. Rance was a half baked fool. "If it wasn't for yore sis, who is Molly Landrigan all over again, I'd give yuh jes' what yuh deserve— a damn' good trimmin'!"

"He did!" said Rance in a subdued wail. He coughed. Right at that moment Rance Belden would have welcomed a six-gun showdown with the redoubtable Toi-Yabe, and the death which that encounter must mean.

"Eh?" snapped Hendrix.

Rance told the story in a low, mournful voice. To him the entire universe was shattered. He had confessed two days previously to Marjorie, and her scorn still hurt him to the depths of his soul.

"So!" commented Hendrix. "Well, he had a good holt on things. A mighty damn' good holt. Y'see, I don't own this land; I jes' *lease* the grazing privileges from Uncle Sam. Now does it git through yore thick head? This hyar Tolman has gone down to Lamar, an' filed on the mineral rights— which allus have fust claim! He owns the di'mond mine now— an' we can't even squeak!"

"I can!" stated Rance through set teeth. "Not only has he done this, but he must have made love to my sister! She's crazy about him! Told me today that if I'd been half the man he is I'd— but wait! He's bound to come back! I'll kill him! I'll— oh, everything is done for me, Uncle Stan! I can't even pay that damned doctor who's taking care of Marj."

"You don't have to; that's my job. If—" He changed the subject, scowling. "Yuh can't do any fool thing like that, boy. Fust place he'd beat yuh to the draw; and—"

"I'm not going to try an even break with him. I want to kill him!" cried Rance fiercely, digging his rowels into his suddenly startled mount. "After that I'll kill myself! I hate that man!"

"As bad as that?" queried a cool, sardonic voice. "Don't try to draw; I've got yuh both covered." And in front of the horsemen, Toi-Yabe Tolman stepped into the sunlight from his screen of chaparral. The loop of bridle lay beneath his chin; and his saddled horse followed with plodding patience.

"Damn!" exploded Hendrix, and then stared in wide eyed recognition. One of that Esmeralda County gang whose faces were posted in the deputy sheriff's office! Hendrix had thought up a scheme of his own for circumventing this wily claim thief, but this sudden appearance frustrated it.

"Don't swear— and don't yuh look so peevish, young fellah. I got a lot to talk about, mebbe. S'pose we go to yore cabin? I reckon you men ain't going to hate me quite so much when yuh hear the whole of it. What say? Do we go peaceable, with yuh both promising to behave?"

There was a pause of silence. Then Hendrix breathed once audibly, and exhaled. "I ain't figgered yuh, hombre," he admitted. "I'll give yuh my word to be peaceable till we shake or break. How's 'at?" But there was hidden excitement in his eyes. This man was worse than an ordinary claim jumper, far worse!

"Enough! And yuh, Rance?"

"*No!*"

With that, the boy slapped down his hand, tugged at a gun which would not fly out on time.

"Don't!" bade Toi-Yabe, his voice cold and emotionless. "I'll—"

He was forced. Out of himself, Rance Belden jerked again, drew his revolver—

Crack! Toi-Yabe's right hand-gun spoke. There was a simultaneous click of metal and an answering scream from the overwrought boy. The hammer of a Colt revolver and a quarter inch of the tip of an upright thumb were snapped off and into the alkali— gone! The revolver fell muzzle down, stuck a moment like a knife, then gently fell sidewise.

"Didn't want to do it," said Toi-Yabe quietly, "but I ain't fooling— ever! Now will yuh two behave?"

"Yes. I'll answer for him, too," said Hendrix, a tinge of admiration and fear in his rasping voice.

"Right! said Toi-Yabe briefly. Wheeling about, he lifted the bridle reins from his neck, mounted, and rode toward the Belden homestead, leading them! And just there the unwilling Hendrix was moved to swear below his breath in wonder at the gunman's cold nerve.

"YUH see, Miss Belden," said Toi-Yabe stammeringly, not even looking at the puzzled Hendrix or the pale, done-up brother of the invalid girl who lay now with weights attached to her foot, "I filed three claims. Yore brother and Hendrix don't cotton to me, but they won't be bothered— much. This is all I'm goin' to say. I knew right off that prob'ly that land where the diamonds are, was fileable. It was. Hendrix on'y had leased the grazing. Well, I took out three claims. One's in yore name, one's in Hendrix's— him having a sort of right, mebbe— an' one's in the name of Smith, which I'm usin' for the time bein'."

"Hi, hold on!" he said brusquely, as Hendrix started to speak in remonstrance. "Don't think I'm butting in, because I ain't going to— if Rance here shows some sense. Yuh see, I had another paper drawn up. Here 'tis." He drew out a stiff Manila envelope from the breast of his flannel shirt, thumbed, and slid out one of the official appearing papers therein, tossing it to the coverlet. Marjorie was watching with wide eyes of gray-blue; eyes that questioned, and yet trusted. Toi-Yabe avoided them.

"That there paper," he continued in a grim monotone, "is a signing off of my interest, my claim, in favor of Rance here, I don't owe him nothing at all; but I got reasons. Nemmind them. That there is yours— it's all done up legal— Rance, if yuh make me an' yore sis one hell-for-leather promise!"

The boy was startled. He stared, first at the paper and then at the man he hated. He could not speak.

"Yuh will say after me, 'I solemnly promise as a gent— a gentleman— not to take a drink for one full year from today.' Yuh see," explained Toi-Yabe, "if yuh don't drink yuh'll have better sense than throw away money on that crooked wheel at the Squeejaw. And likewise, yuh'll get well and make some real money for Missy Belden and yoreself."

Hendrix stared. Slowly he turned to the speechless boy. "Let's hear from yuh, Rance!" he rasped. And his eyes were shining, though they held a threat.

Rance was gazing, as if hypnotized, at the man he had wanted to kill. Suddenly he snatched up the paper from the table, read it feverishly. "What? You aren't taking— anything?"

"I've had my share out of this. Just that there paint pony'll make us all square."

"Well— I— I— yes! I— what was that? I solemnly promise on my honor as a gentleman, not to take another drink for ten years! And I mean it! I'll—"

"Then thassall, I reckon, folks," said Toi-Yabe, the stern lines of his mouth relaxing in a grim smile. "Will yuh shake with me, younker?"

"Y-yes. *Yes*!" Rance, his face now flushed, leaped to slap his wounded hand into the broad, steady clasp.

"An' you, Hendrix? Mebbe I didn't do this *yore* way, but—"

Hendrix said nothing. His hand came out. The grip he tendered forced Toi-Yabe suddenly to utilize an equalizing strength.

Toi-Yabe was backing toward the door, looking everywhere save toward the bed where Marjorie lay.

"Mr. Smith!" came her imperative command. "Come here! Where were you going? Do you think I'll let you go this way? You are going to stay with us, and take half of my share and half of my brother's. We admire you for what you did, but I think that just what Rance has promised is worth more than all the smoky diamonds in Nevada!"

A spasm of regret twitched his countenance. He did not even notice the fact that suddenly Hendrix seized the arm of Rance, and led him to the door.

"Miss Belden," said Toi-Yabe, clasping her hand briefly, "I can't. I'm a wanted man, I've been a bandit for three years. Hendrix'll tell yuh. Him an' me met once before— professional-like. Good-by!" And he faced about and was gone, his face stony.

At the doorway two men split apart and turned to stare at him through a long silence. Toi-Yabe did not seem to see them.

"Well I'll be damned!" swore Hendrix. "There went a bandit— but just the same he's what I call a man!"

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14: They Found My Grave

Marjorie Bowen (as by Joseph Shearing)

1885-1952

In: *Orange Blossoms*, 1938

ADA TRIMBLE was bored with the sittings. She had been persuaded to attend against her better judgement, and the large dingy Bloomsbury house depressed and disgusted her; the atmosphere did not seem to her in the least spiritual and was always tainted with the smell of stale frying.

The medium named herself Astra Destiny. She was a big, loose woman with a massive face expressing power and cunning. Her garments were made of upholstery material and round her cropped yellowish curls she wore a tinsel belt. Her fat feet bulged through the straps of cheap gilt shoes.

She had written a large number of books on subjects she termed "esoteric" and talked more nonsense in half an hour than Ada Trimble had heard in a lifetime. Yet madame gave an impression of shrewd sense and considerable experience; a formidable and implacable spirit looked through her small grey eyes and defied anyone to pierce the cloud of humbug in which she chose to wrap herself.

"I think she is detestable," said Ada Trimble; but Helen Trent, the woman who had introduced her to the big Bloomsbury Temple insisted that, odious as the setting was, odd things did happen at the sittings.

"It sounds like hens," said Miss Trimble, "but *séances* are worse."

"Well, it is easy to make jokes. And I know it is pretty repulsive. But there are *unexplained* things. They puzzle me. I should like your opinion on them."

"I haven't seen anything yet I can't explain, the woman is a charlatan, making money out of fools. She suspects us and might get unpleasant, I think."

But Helen Trent insisted: "Well, if you'd been going as often as I have, and noticing carefully, like I've been noticing…"

"Helen— why *have* you been interested in this nonsense?"

The younger woman answered seriously: "Because I *do* think there is something in it."

Ada Trimble respected her friend's judgement; they were both intelligent, middle-aged, cheerful and independent in the sense that they had unearned incomes. Miss Trimble enjoyed every moment of her life and therefore grudged those spent in going from her Knightsbridge flat to the grubby Bloomsbury Temple. Not even Helen's persistency could induce Ada to continue the private sittings that wasted money as well as time. Besides, Miss Trimble really disliked being shut up in the stuffy, ugly room while Madame Destiny sat in a trance and the control, a Red Indian called Purple Stream babbled in her voice and in pidgin English about the New Atlantis, the brotherhood of man and a few catch

phrases that could have been taken from any cheap handbook on philosophy or the religions of the world.

But Helen persuaded her to join in some experiments in what were termed typtology and lucidity that were being conducted by Madame Destiny and a circle of choice friends. These experiments proved to be what Ada Trimble had called in her youth "table turning". Five people were present, besides Ada and Madame Destiny. The table moved, gave raps, and conversations with various spirits followed. A code was used, the raps corresponding in number to the letters of the alphabet, one for "a" and so on to twenty-six for "z". The method was tedious and nothing, Miss Trimble thought, could have been more dull. All manner of unlikely spirits appeared, a Fleming of the twelfth century, a President of a South American Republic, late nineteenth century, an Englishman who had been clerk to residency at Tonkin, and who had been killed by a tiger a few years before, a young schoolmaster who had thrown himself in front of a train in Devonshire, a murderer who announced in classic phrase that he had "perished on the scaffold", a factory hand who had died of drink in Manchester, and a retired schoolmistress recently "passed over".

The spirit of a postman and that of a young girl "badly brought up, who had learnt to swear", said the medium, also spoke through the rap code. These people gave short accounts of themselves and of their deaths and some vague generalizations about their present state. "I am happy." "I am unhappy." "It is wonderful here." "God does not die." "I remain a Christian." "When I first died it was as if I was stunned. Now I am used to it—" and so on.

They were never asked about the future, who would win the Derby, the results of the next election or anything of that kind. "It wouldn't be fair," smiled Madame Destiny. "Besides, they probably don't know."

The more important spirits were quickly identified by references to the *National Dictionary of Biography* for the English celebrities and *Larousse* for the foreign. The Temple provided potted editions of each work. These reliable tomes confirmed all that the spirits said as to their careers and ends. The obscure spirits if they gave dates and place names were traced by enquiries of Town Clerks and Registrars. This method always worked out, too.

Madame Destiny sometimes showed the letters that proved that the spirits had once had, as she hideously quoted "a local habitation and a name".

"I can't think why you are interested," said Ada Trimble to Helen Trent as they drove home together. "It is such an easy fraud. Clever, of course, but she has only to keep all the stuff in her head."

"You mean that she looks up the references first?"

"Of course." Ada Trimble was a little surprised that Helen should ask so simple a question. "And those postmen and servant girls could be got up, too, quite easily."

"It would be expensive. And she doesn't charge much."

"She makes a living out of it," said Ada Trimble sharply. "Between the lectures, the healings, the services, the sittings, the lending library and those ninepenny teas, I think the Temple of Eastern Psycho-Physiological Studies does pretty well…." She looked quickly at her companion and in a changed voice asked: "You're not getting— drawn in— are you, Helen?"

"Oh no! At least I don't think so, but last year, when you were in France, I was rather impressed— it was the direct voice. I wish it would happen again, I should like your opinion—" Helen Trent's voice faltered and stopped; it was a cold night, she drew her collar and scarf up more closely round her delicate face. The smart comfortable little car was passing over the bridge. The two women looked out at the street and ink-blue pattern of the Serpentine, the bare trees on the banks, the piled buildings beyond, stuck with vermilion and orange lights. The November wind struck icy across Ada Trimble's face.

"I don't know why I forgot the window," she said, rapidly closing it. "I suggest that we leave Madame Destiny alone, Helen. I don't believe that sort of thing is any good, it might easily get on one's nerves."

"Well," said Helen irrelevantly, "what are dreams, anyway?"

Ada remembered how little she knew of the early life of her cultured, elegant friend and how much she had forgotten of her own youthful experiences that had once seemed so warm, so important, so terrible.

"Come next Tuesday, at least," pleaded Helen as she left the car for the wet pavement. "She has promised the direct voice."

"I ought to go, because of Helen," thought Ada Trimble. "She is beginning to be affected by this nonsense. Those rogues know that she has money."

So on the Tuesday the two charming women in their rich, quiet clothes, with their tasteful veils, handbags, furs and posies of violets and gardenias were seated in the upper room in the Bloomsbury Temple with the queer shoddy folk who made up Madame Destiny's audience.

Ada Trimble settled into her chair; it was comfortable like all the chairs in the Temple and she amused herself by looking round the room. The Victorian wallpaper had been covered by dark serge, clumsily pinned up; dusty crimson chenille curtains concealed the tall windows. Worn linoleum was on the floor, the table stood in the centre of the room and on it was a small, old-fashioned gramophone with a horn. By it was a small red lamp; this, and the light from the cheerful gas fire, was the only illumination in the room.

A joss stick smouldered in a brass vase on the mantelpiece but this sickly perfume could not disguise the eternal smell of stew and onions that hung about the Temple.

"I suppose they live on a permanent hot-pot," thought Ada Trimble vaguely as she looked round on the gathered company.

The medium lay sprawled in the largest chair; she appeared to be already in a trance; her head was sunk on her broad breast and her snorting breath disturbed the feather edging on her brocade robe. The cheap belt round her head, the cheap gilt shoes, exasperated Ada Trimble once more. "For a woman of *sense*—", she thought.

Near the medium was a husband, who called himself Lemoine. He was a turnip-coloured nondescript man, wearing a dirty collar and slippers; his manner hesitated between the shamefaced and the insolent. He was not very often seen, but Ada sometimes suspected him of being the leader of the whole concern.

She speculated with a shudder, and not for the first time, on the private lives of this repulsive couple. What were they like when they were alone together? What did they say when they dropped the gibberish and the posing? Were they ever quite sincere or quite clean? She had heard they lived in a "flat" at the top of the house and had turned a bleak Victorian bathroom into a kitchen and that they had "difficulties with servants".

Beside Mr Lemoine was Essie Clark, a stringy, cheerful woman who was Madame Destiny's secretary, and as Ada Trimble supposed, maid-of-all-work, too. She had been "caught" sweeping the stairs and Ada thought that she mixed the permanent stew.

Essie's taste had stopped, dead as a smashed clock, in childhood and she wore straight gowns of faded green that fifty years before had been termed "artistic" by frustrated suburban spinsters, and bunches of little toys and posies made of nuts and leather.

The circle was completed by the people well known to Ada: a common overdressed little woman who called spiritualism her "hobby" and who was on intimate terms with the spirit of her late husband, and a damp, depressed man, Mr Maple, who had very little to say for himself beyond an occasional admission that he was "investigating and couldn't be sure".

The little woman, Mrs Penfleet, said cheerfully: "I am certain dear Arthur will come today. I dreamt of him last night," and she eyed the trumpet coyly.

"We don't know who will come, if anyone," objected Mr Maple gloomily. "We've got to keep open minds."

Mr Lemoine begged for silence and Miss Clark put on a disc that played "Rock of Ages".

Ada Trimble's mind flashed to the consumptive Calvinist who had written that hymn; she felt slightly sick and glanced at Helen, dreamy, elegant, sunk in her black velvet collar.

Ada looked at the trumpet, at the medium, and whispered "Ventriloquism" as she bent to drop and pick up her handkerchief, but Helen whispered back: "*Wait*."

Essie Clark took off the record and returned to her chair with a smile of pleased expectancy. It was all in the day's work for her, like cheapening the food off the barrows in the Portobello Road. Ada Trimble kept her glance from the fire and the lamp, lest, comfortable and drowsy as she was, she should be hypnotised with delusions— "Though I don't think it likely here," she said to herself, "in these sordid surroundings."

There was a pause; the obviously dramatic prelude to the drama. Madame Destiny appeared to be unconscious. Ada thought: "There ought to be a doctor here to make sure." A humming sound came from the painted horn that had curled-back petals like a metallic flower. "Arthur!" came from Mrs Penfleet and "Hush!" from Mr Maple. Ada felt dull, a party to a cheap, ignoble fraud. "How dare they!" she thought indignantly, "fool with such things— supposing one of the dead *did* return." The gramophone was making incoherent noises, hummings and sighings.

"The psychic force is manifest," whispered Mr Lemoine reverently in familiar phrase.

There was another pause; Ada Trimble's attention wandered to obtrusive details, the pattern of the braid encircling Madame Destiny's bent head, a dull yellow in the lamp's red glow, and the firmness with which her podgy fingers gripped the pad and pencil, even though she was supposed to be in a state of trance.

Suddenly a deep masculine voice said:

"*Beautus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem*."

Ada was utterly startled; she felt as if another personality was in the room, she sat forward and looked around; she felt Helen's cold fingers clutch hers; she had not more than half understood the Latin; nor, it seemed, had anyone else. Only Mr Lemoine remained cool, almost indifferent. Leaning forward he addressed the gramophone:

"That is a proverb or quotation?"

The deep voice replied:

"It is my epitaph."

"It is, perhaps, on your tomb?" asked Mr Lemoine gently.

"Yes."

"Where is your tomb?"

"I do not choose to disclose." The voice was speaking with a marked accent. It now added in French: "Is there no one here that speaks my language?"

"Yes," said Ada Trimble, almost without her own volition. French was very familiar to her and she could not disregard the direct appeal.

"*Eh, bien*!" the voice which had always an arrogant, scornful tone, seemed gratified and ran on at once in French. "I have a very fine tomb— a monument, I

should say, shaded with chestnut trees. Every year, on my anniversary, it is covered with wreaths."

"Who are you?" asked Ada Trimble faintly, but Mr Lemoine gently interposed:

"As the other members of our circle don't speak French," he told the gramophone, "will you talk in English?"

"Any language is easy to me," boasted the voice in English, "but I prefer my own tongue."

"Thank you," said Mr Lemoine. "The lady asked you who you were— will you tell us?"

"Gabriel Letourneau."

"Would you translate your epitaph?"

"Blessed is he who understands the poor and has pity on the unfortunate."

"What were you?"

"Many things."

"When did you die?"

"A hundred years ago. May 12th, 1837."

"Will you tell us something more about yourself?"

The voice was harsh and scornful.

"It would take a long time to relate my exploits. I was a professor, a peer, a philosopher, a man of action. I have left my many works behind me."

"Please give the titles." Mr Lemoine, who had always been so effaced and who looked so incompetent was proving himself cool and skilful at this question and answer with the voice.

"There are too many."

"You had pupils?"

"Many famous men."

"Will you give the names?"

"You continually ask me to break your rules," scolded the voice.

"What rules?"

"The rules spirits have to obey."

"You are a Christian?"

"I have never been ashamed to call myself so."

"Where— in the Gospels— is the rule of which you speak?" asked Mr Lemoine sharply. "There are special rules for spirits?"

"Yes."

So the dialogue went on, more or less on orthodox lines, but Ada Trimble was held and fascinated by the quality and accent of the voice. It was rough, harsh, intensely masculine, with a definite foreign accent. The tone was boastful and arrogant to an insufferable extent. Ada Trimble detested this pompous, insistent personality; she felt odd, a little dazed, a little confused; the orange

glow of the gas fire, the red glow of the lamp, the metallic gleams on the horn fused into a fiery pattern before her eyes. She felt as if she were being drawn into a void in which nothing existed but the voice.

Even Mr Lemoine's thin tones, faintly questioning, seemed a long way off, a thread of sound compared to the deep boom of the voice. The conversation was like a ball being deftly thrown to and fro. Mr Lemoine asked: "What do you understand by faith?" And the voice, steadily rising to a roar, replied: "The Faith as taught by the Gospel."

"Does not the Gospel contain moral precepts rather than dogma?"

"Why that remark?"

"Because narrow or puerile practices have been built on this basis."

"A clear conscience sees further than practices."

"I see that you are a believer," said Mr Lemoine placidly. "What is your present situation?"

"Explain!" shouted the voice.

"Are you in Heaven, Hell or purgatory?" rapped out Mr Lemoine.

"I am in Heaven!"

"How is it that you are in Heaven and here at the same time?"

"You are a fool," said the voice stridently. "Visit my grave and you will understand more about me."

"Once more, where is your grave?"

The horn gave a groan of derision and was silent; Mr Lemoine repeated his question, there was no answer; he then wiped his forehead and turned to his wife who was heaving back to consciousness.

"That is all for today," he smiled round the little circle; no one save Ada and Helen seemed affected by the experience; Mr Maple made some gloomy sceptical remarks; Mrs Penfleet complained because Arthur had not spoken and Essie Clark indifferently and efficiently put away the gramophone and the records.

When the red lamp was extinguished and the light switched on, Ada looked at Madame Destiny who was rubbing her eyes and smiling with an exasperating shrewd blandness.

"It was Gabriel Letourneau," her husband told her mildly. "You remember I told you he came some months ago?" He glanced at Ada. "The medium never knows what spirit speaks."

Ada glanced at Helen who sat quiet and downcast, then mechanically gathered up her gloves and handbag.

"Did you find this person in Larousse?" she asked.

"No. We tried other sources too, but never could discover anything. Very likely he is a liar, quite a number of them are, you know. I always ask him the same questions, but as you heard, there is no satisfaction to be got."

"He always boasts so," complained Mr Maple, "and particularly about his grave."

"Oh," smiled Mr Lemoine rising to indicate that the sitting was at an end. "He is a common type, a snob. When he was alive he boasted about his distinctions, visits to court and so on; now he is dead he boasts of having seen God, being in Heaven and the marvels of his grave."

When they were out in the wind-swept evening Helen clasped Ada's arm.

"Now, what do you make of *that*? Ventriloquism? It is a personality."

"It is odd, certainly. I was watching the woman. Her lips didn't move— save just for snorting or groaning now and then."

"Oh, I dare say it could be done," said Helen impatiently. "But I don't think it is a trick. I can't feel that it is. Can you? That is what I wanted you to hear. There have been other queer things, but this is the queerest. What do you think?"

"Oh, Helen, dear, I don't know!" Ada was slightly trembling. "I never thought that I could be moved by anything like this."

"That is it, isn't it?" interrupted Helen, clinging to her as they passed along the cold street. "*Moved*— and what by?"

"Intense dislike— the man is loathsome!"

"There! You said *man*. It was a voice only!"

"Oh, Helen!"

They walked in silence to the waiting car and when inside began to talk again in low tones, pressed together. No, there was no explanation possible, any attempt at one landed you in a bog of difficulties.

"He spoke to me," sighed Ada Trimble, "and, you know I quite forgot that he wasn't *there*— I wish that I could have gone on talking to him, I feel that I should have been sufficiently insistent—"

"To— what, Ada?"

"To make him say something definite about himself—"

"It's crazy, Ada! It lets loose all kinds of dreadful thoughts. He might be here now, riding with us."

"Well, he can't talk without the trumpet." Then both women laughed uneasily.

"My dear, we are getting foolish!" said Helen, and Ada answered: "Yes. Foolish either way— to talk of it all if we think it was a fraud— and not to be more serious if we don't think it a fraud."

But as people usually will when in this kind of dilemma, they compromised; they discussed the thing and decided to put it to the test once again.

They became frequent visitors to the Bloomsbury Temple and began to pay to have private sittings with the direct voice.

Busy as they were, Madame Destiny and Mr Lemoine "fitted in" a good number of these and the harsh voice that called itself Gabriel Letourneau usually

spoke, though there were annoying occasions when Persian sages, Polish revolutionaries and feebleminded girls of unknown nationality, insisted on expounding colourless views.

By the spring the personality of Gabriel Letourneau was complete to Ada and Helen. They had been able to build him up, partly from details he had supplied himself and partly out of their own uneasy imaginations. He had been— or was now, but they dare not speculate upon his present shape— a tall, dark, gaunt Frenchman, with side whiskers and a blue chin, the kind of brown eyes known as "piercing" and a fanatical, grim expression.

Ada had often spoken to him in French but she could never penetrate his identity. A professor, a peer in the reign of Louis Philippe? It was impossible for her to attempt to trace so elusive a person. At first she did not try; she told herself that she had other things to do and she tried to keep the thing out of her mind, or at least to keep it reduced to proper proportions. But this soon proved impossible and sensible, charming, broad-minded Ada Trimble at length found herself in the grip of an obsession.

The voice and her hatred of the voice. It was useless for her to tell herself, as she frequently did, that the voice was only that of the woman who called herself Astra Destiny and not a personality at all. This was hopeless, she believed in Gabriel Letourneau. He had, she was sure, a bad effect on her character and on that of Helen. But opposite effects. Whereas Helen became limp, distracted, nervous and talked vaguely of being "Haunted", Ada felt as if active evil was clouding her soul.

Why should she hate the voice? She had always been afraid of hatred. She knew that the person who hates, not the person who is hated, is the one who is destroyed. When she disliked a person or a thing she had always avoided it, making exceptions only in the cases of cruelty and fanaticism. There she had allowed hate to impel her to exertions foreign to her reserved nature. And now there was hatred of Gabriel Letourneau possessing her like a poison. He hated her, too. When she spoke to him he told her in his rapid French that Helen could not follow, his scornful opinion of her; he called her an "ageing woman"; he said she was pretension, facile, a silly little atheist while "I am in Heaven."

He made acid comments on her carefully chosen clothes, on her charmingly arranged hair, her little armoury of wit and culture, on her delicate illusions and vague, romantic hopes. She felt stripped and defaced after one of these dialogues in which she could not hold her own. Sometimes she tried to shake herself out of "this nonsense". She would look sharply at the entranced medium; Ada had never made the mistake of undervaluing the intelligence of Astra Destiny and surely the conversation of Gabriel Letourneau was flavoured with feminine malice?

Out in the street with Helen she would say: "We really are fools! It is only an out-of-date gramophone."

"Is it?" asked Helen bleakly. "And ventriloquism?" Then she added: "Where does she— that awful woman— get that fluent French?"

"Oh, when you begin asking questions!" cried Ada.

She examined the subject from all angles, she went to people who, she thought, "ought to know", but she could get no satisfaction; it was a matter on which the wisest said the least.

"If only he wouldn't keep boasting!" she complained to Helen. "His grave— that now— he says it is a marvellous monument and that people keep putting wreaths on it, that they make pilgrimages to it— and Helen, why should I mind? I ought to be pleased that he has that satisfaction or— at least, be indifferent— but I'm not."

"He's been hateful to you, to us," said Helen simply. "I loathe him, too— let us try to get away from him."

"I can't."

Helen went; she drifted out of Ada's life with a shivering reluctance to leave her, but with a definite inability to face the situation created by Gabriel Letourneau. She wrote from Cairo and presently did not write at all. Ada, left alone with her obsession, no longer struggled against it; she pitted herself deliberately against the voice. Sometimes, as she came and went in the Bloomsbury Temple, she would catch a glint in the dull eyes of Mr Lemoine or the flinty eyes of Madame Destiny that made her reflect how many guineas she had paid them. But even these flashes of conviction that she was being the worst type of fool did not save her; she had reached the point when she had to give rein to her fortune.

In September she went to France; countless friends helped her to search archives; there was no member of the Chamber of Peers under Louis Philippe named Letourneau. She wrote to the keepers of the famous cemeteries, she visited these repulsive places herself; there were Letourneaus, not a few, but none with pre-name Gabriel, or with the inscription quoted by the voice. Nor was there anywhere an imposing monument, covered with wreaths and visited by pilgrims, to a professor peer who had died in 1837.

"Fraud," she kept telling herself, "that wretched couple just practised a very clever fraud on me. But why? What an odd personality for people like that to invent! And the deep masculine voice and the idiomatic French— clever is hardly the word. I suppose they got the data from Larousse." The courteous friends helped her to make enquiries at the Sorbonne. No professors of that name there, or at any of the other big universities.

Ada Trimble believed that she was relieved from her burden of credulity and hate; perhaps if she kept away from the Bloomsbury Temple the thing would

pass out of her mind. She was in this mood when she received an answer to a letter she had written to the keeper of the cemetery at Sceaux. She had written to so many officials and it had been so long since she had written to Sceaux and she had such little expectation of any result from her enquiries that she scarcely took much interest in opening the letter.

It read thus:

Madame, In reply to your letter of November 30th, I have the honour to inform you that I have made a search for the Letourneau tomb which fortunately I found and I have copied the epitaph cut on the tomb.

Gabriel Letourneau
Man of Letters
Died at Sceaux June 10th 1858.
Beatus qui intelligit
Super egenum et pauperem.

This neglected grave was in a miserable condition covered by weeds; in order to send you the above information it was necessary to undertake cleaning that occupied an hour, and this merely on the portion that bears the inscription. According to the registry this Letourneau was a poor tutor; his eccentric habits are still remembered in the quarter where he lived. He has become a legend— and "he boasts like a Gabriel Letourneau" is often said of a braggart. He has left no descendants and no one has visited his grave. He left a small sum of money to pay for the epitaph.

(signed)
Robert, Keeper of the Cemetery at Sceaux.
231 Rue Louis le Grand,
Sceaux (Seine).

Ada Trimble went at once to Sceaux. She arrived there on a day of chill, small rain, similar to that on which she had first heard the voice in the Bloomsbury Temple. There was a large, black cemetery, a row of bare chestnut-trees overlooking the walls, an ornate gate. The conscientious keeper, M. Robert, conducted her to the abandoned grave in the comer of the large graveyard; the rotting, dank rubbish of last year's weeds had been cut away above the inscription that Ada had first heard in the Bloomsbury Temple a year ago.

She gazed and went away, full of strange terror. What was the solution of the miserable problem? There were many ways in which the Lemoine couple might have chanced to hear of the poor tutor of Sceaux, but how had they come to know of the epitaph for years concealed behind ivy, bramble and moss? M. Robert, who was so evidently honest, declared that he never remembered anyone making enquiries about the Letourneau grave and he had been years in

this post. He doubted, he said, whether even the people to whom the name of the eccentric was a proverb knew of the existence of his grave. Then, the shuffling of the dates, 1858 instead of 1837, the lies about the state of the grave and the position that Letourneau had held while in life.

Ada had a sickly qualm when she reflected how this fitted in with the character she had been given of a slightly unhinged braggart with ego mania. A peerage, the Sorbonne, the monument— all lies?

Ada returned to England and asked Madame Destiny to arrange another sitting for her with the direct voice. She also asked for as large a circle as possible to be invited, all the people who had ever heard Gabriel Letourneau.

"Oh, that will be a large number," said Madame Destiny quickly, "he is one of the spirits who visits us most frequently."

"Never mind, the large room, please, and I will pay all expenses. I think I have found out something about that gentleman."

"How interesting," said Madame Destiny, with civil blankness.

"Can she possibly know where I have been?" thought Ada Trimble, but it seemed absurd to suppose that this hard-up couple, existing by shifts, should have the means to employ spies and detectives. The meeting was arranged and as all the seats were free, the room was full.

The gramophone was on a raised platform; it was placed on a table beside which sat Madame Destiny to the right and her husband to the left. The red lamp was in place. A dark curtain, badly pinned up, formed the back cloth. Save for the gas fire, the room— a large Victorian salon— was in darkness. Ada Trimble sat on one of the Bentwood chairs in the front row. "He won't come," she thought. "I shall never hear the voice again. And the whole absurdity will be over."

But the medium was no sooner twitching in a trance than the voice came rushing from the tin horn. It spoke directly to Ada Trimble and she felt her heart heave with horror as she heard the cringing tone.

"Good evening, madame, and how charming you are tonight! Your travels have improved you— you recall my little jokes, my quips? Only to test your wit, dear lady, I have always admired you so much—"

Ada could not reply, the one thought beat in her mind, half paralysing her, "He knows what I found out— he is trying to flatter me so that I don't give him away."

The voice's opening remarks had been in French and for this Mr Lemoine called him to order; the usual verbal duel followed, Lemoine pressing the spirit to give proof of his identity, the spirit arrogantly defending his secrets. The audience that had heard this parrying between Lemoine and Letourneau before so often was not interested and Ada Trimble did not hear anything, she was fiercely concerned with her own terror and bewilderment. Then the voice,

impatiently breaking off the bitter sparring, addressed her directly in oily, flattering accents.

"What a pleasure that we meet again, how charming to see you here! The time has been very long since I saw you last."

Ada roused herself; she began to speak in a thick voice that she could scarcely have recognised as her own.

"Yes, one is drawn to what one dislikes as surely as towards what one hates. I have been too much concerned with you, I hope now that I shall be free."

"Miss Trimble," protested Mr Lemoine, "there are others present, pray speak in English. I think you said that you had been able to identify this spirit quite precisely."

In French the gramophone harshly whispered: "Take care."

"Well," said Mr Lemoine briskly, "this lady says she found your grave, what have you to say to that?"

"I beg the lady not to talk of my private affairs"; voice and accent were alike thick, with agitation, perhaps despair.

"But you have often spoken of your tomb, the wreaths, the pilgrimages, you have talked of your peerage, your professorship, your pupils. As you would never give us corroborative details, this lady took the trouble to find them out."

"Let her give them," said the voice, "when we are alone— she and I."

"What would be the sense of that?" demanded Mr Lemoine. "All these people know you well, they are interested— now Miss Trimble."

"I found the grave in Sceaux cemetery," began Ada.

The voice interrupted her furiously: "You are doing a very foolish thing!"

"I see," said Mr Lemoine coolly, "you are still an earthbound spirit. You are afraid that something hurtful to your vanity is about to be revealed…."

"You should be free from this material delusion. We," added the turnip-faced man pompously, "are neither noble nor learned. We shall not think the less of you if it is true you have boasted."

"I am not a boaster!" stormed the voice.

"Your grave is in the cemetery at Sceaux," said Ada Trimble rapidly. "You died in 1858, not 1837; you were neither peer nor professor— no one visits your grave. It is miserable, neglected, covered with weeds. It took the keeper an hour's work even to cut away the rubbish sufficiently to see your epitaph."

"Now we know that," said Mr Lemoine smoothly, "we can help you to shake off these earthly chains."

"These are lies." The voice rose to a hum like the sound of a spinning top. "Lies—"

"No," cried Ada. "You have lied, you have never seen God, either."

"You may," suggested Mr Lemoine, "have seen a fluid personage in a bright illumination, but how could you have been sure it was God?"

The humming sound grew louder, then the horn flew over, as if wrenched off and toppled on to the table, then on to the floor. Mr Lemoine crossed the platform and switched on the light.

"An evil spirit," he said in his routine voice, "now that he has been exposed I don't suppose that he will trouble us again." And he congratulated Ada on her shrewd and careful investigations, though the stare he gave her through his glasses seemed to express a mild wonder as to why she had taken so much trouble. The meeting broke up; there was coffee for a few chosen guests upstairs in the room lined with books on the "occult"; no one seemed impressed by the meeting; they talked of other things, only Ada Trimble was profoundly moved.

This was the first time she had come to these banal coffee-drinkings. Hardly knowing what she did she had come upstairs with these queer, self-possessed people who seemed to own something she had not got. They were neither obsessed nor afraid. Was she afraid? Had not Gabriel Letourneau vanished forever? Had he not broken the means of communication between them? Undoubtedly she had exorcized him, she would be free now of this miserable, humiliating and expensive obsession. She tried to feel triumphant, released, but her spirit would not soar. In the back of her mind surged self-contempt. "Why did I do it? There was no need. His lies hurt no one. To impress these people was his one pleasure— perhaps he is in hell, and that was his one freedom from torment— but I must think sanely."

This was not easy to do; she seemed to have lost all will-power, all judgement. "I wish Helen had not escaped," she used the last word unconsciously; her fingers were cold round the thick cup, her face in the dingy mirror above the fireplace looked blurred and odd. She tried to steady herself by staring at the complacent features of Astra Destiny, who was being distantly gracious to a circle of admirers, and then by talking to commonplace Mr Lemoine whose indifference was certainly soothing. "Oh, yes," he said politely, "we get a good deal of that sort of thing. Malicious spirits— evil influences—"

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Ada faintly.

"Afraid?" asked Mr Lemoine as if he did not know what the word meant. "Oh, dear no, we are quite safe—" he added, then said: "Of course, if one was afraid, if one didn't quite believe, there might be danger. Any weakness on one's own part always gives the spirits a certain power over one."

All this was, Ada knew, merely "patter"; she had heard it, and similar talk, often enough and never paid much attention to it; now it seemed to trickle through her inner consciousness like a flow of icy water. She was afraid, she didn't quite believe; yet how could she even but think that? Now she must believe. Astra Destiny could not have "faked" Gabriel Letourneau. Well, then, he

was a real person— a real spirit? Ada Trimble's mind that once had been so cool and composed, so neat and tidy, now throbbed in confusion.

"Where do they go?" she asked childishly. "These evil spirits? I mean— today— will he come again?"

"I don't suppose so, not here. He will try to do all he can elsewhere. Perhaps he will try to impose on other people. I'm afraid he has wasted a good deal of our time."

"How can you say 'wasted!'" whispered Ada Trimble bleakly. "He proves that the dead return."

"We don't need such proof," said Mr Lemoine, meekly confident and palely smiling.

"I had better go home now," said Ada; she longed to escape and yet dreaded to leave the warmth, the light, the company; perhaps these people were protected and so were safe from the loathed, prowling, outcast spirit. She said goodbye to Madame Destiny who was pleasant, as usual, without being effusive, and then to the others. She could not resist saying to Essie Clark: "Do you think that I did right?"

"Right?" the overworked woman smiled mechanically, the chipped green coffee-pot suspended in her hand.

"In exposing— the voice— the spirit?"

"Oh, *that*! Of course. You couldn't have done anything else, could you?" And Miss Clark poured her coffee and handed the cup, with a tired pleasantry, to a tall Indian who was the only elegant looking person present. Ada Trimble went out on to the landing; the smell of frying, of stew, filled the gaunt stairway; evidently one of the transient servants was in residence; through the half-open door behind her, Ada could hear the babble of voices, then another voice, deep, harsh, that whispered in her ear:

"*Canaille!*"

She started forward, missed her foothold and fell.

Mr Lemoine, always efficient, was the first to reach the foot of the stairs. Ada Trimble had broken her neck.

"A pure accident," said Astra Destiny, pale, but mistress of the situation. "Everyone is witness that she was quite alone at the time. She has been very nervous lately and those high heels…"

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15: One Woman in Ten Thousand

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book, Sep 1933

CREWE awoke in the enormous darkness, quite alone. Outside, a woodcutter bird was busy at its night-long task, chopping imaginary logs; a boobook owl complained; some distance off, the snarling roar of a crocodile cut the air.

Crewe, lying uncovered in his hot bed, reflected, with a thrill, that these creatures were his nearest neighbors, by at least forty miles, (unless you counted the native laborers in their huts, which of course no one did); that he owned a hundred acres of magnificent savanna and forest, for which he had paid thirty shillings; that he was king of his castle, lord of his domain, had no neighbors, no duties, and could do any damned thing he liked... .

Four months ago this day he had paused on the threshold of his lecture room, as the students were scrambling out, and said to himself: "Done." Nobody knew. That was the salt of it!

For the last time he had called on Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones to state the main differences between the Shakespearean and the Restoration drama. The bell would never swear at him again: "Jang, jang, curse you; jang, jang, come in!" The class-room odor that had been his native air— books, dust and damp tweed clothes, and the faint reek of tealeaves used in sweeping— was in his nostrils for the last, last time.

He wasn't treating "them" badly. "They" could find another English literature professor by putting their heads out of the window and shouting into the street— if one could imagine the little btass gods of a provincial university doing atiything so simple and natutal— as soon as they knew that Professor Emerson E. Crewe was not cotning back again after the long vacation. He had told no one, and meant to tell no one until he was gone. Charlotte Bronté had said — very wisely— that to tell an intention was to have it discussed, and to have it discussed was to have it opposed.... Must look up the exact words when he got home; it wouldn't do for an English literature professor—

Emerson E. Crewe, on the steps of the "Lit." building, realized with an agreeable shock that he didn't need to know ever again just what any one of those accursed Brontés had or hadn't said or done. That he could say to himself— and did: "Drown Emily, burn Charlotte, spiflicate Branwell and Anne!" That, from this moment, he was not any more "Professor Emmy"— hated nickname!— but simply Mr. Edward Crewe.

He wore black clothing, to express the grief he had not felt for his mother's death. His garb looked professorial. He would order a gray suit in London— no, a navy blue. He was only thirty-seven, after all.

In the tram he thought about these things. Impossible to grieve— much— for the loss of a parent who had been childish and paralyzed, in charge of an attendant, for years, whose necessities had kept him chained— oh, willingly, of course— ever since he was twenty-five, grinding out English literature, as instilled into him by Oxford, for the stupid youth of a provincial university.

Grinding himself, like corn in a mill. His brains, his energy, pouring continually out of the hoppers, in one monotonous stream of standard sttiff— bolted, purified, guaranteed, and not a vitamine in a truck-load of it. "They" would have objected to vitamines.

Edward Crewe ran up the steps of his house, let himself in, and locked his study door behind him. The maids would think he was at work. Well, he was. He had to go through a pile of literature provided by the benevolent Cook, to ascertain, as nearly as possible, where, on this overcrowded earth, in these hard times, a man might hope to get a landed estate for nothing.

Canada? No. It had been called "Our Lady of Snows"— and you had to do your own plowing.... West Australia? N-no. Too like the cowboy novels; and he hated cattle. Elsewhere, you had to pay.... Was there no place where one could get land free, find labor to do the heavy work?

New Guinea beckoned. In Papua, you could take up land with rich soil and rivers, for nothing, practically; and you could keep it, not forever, but for ninety-nine years.

"When I'm a hundred and thirty-six, the Government may have it back and welcome," thought Crewe, He slapped a hand on Papua, and went out to dispose of his life-insurance. Why keep it up now? It would pay his way and give him a start.

Six weeks later, as he steamed down the Channel, he could almost hear, behind him, "the tumult and the shouting die." Let them say anything they pleased— let them do anything they jolly well liked! He was free.

WITH the first peep of light into the clearing, the giant gauras began to ring gold bells, the butcher-birds to play Pan-pipes, merry and clear, the birds of paradise (who were, like *Trilby*, beautitiful but tone-deaf) to squawk. Crewe, in that magic hour of dawn, was no less vocal than the birds. He was "calling over."

Twenty-one times in three weeks he had done this, and every time, the thrill was the same. Fifteen Papuans answered his call, attended medical parade, carried their rations away. His fifteen men! The slave-owning instinct reared its head and laughed. These men were indentured; they could not leave him till their years were served. That tasted good to him. There was something in his life as primitive, as zestful, as the flavor of wild fruits gathered in the bush — as the heady scent of fallen trees, the smoke-incense of a "burn-off," stealing through the night. Essential things, Stone-age things! They were good.

"Professor Emmy!" said Crewe, and like *Mrs. Primrose*, "fell into a great fit of laughter."

He recovered, to find himself looking at a strange white man. "This," he thought, "must be Chanter." He had heard that Chanter, an old settler of the country, and an eccentric, lived two days' walk distant.

Chanter was of some indefinite age above fifty. He was short-legged, heavy bodied, hairy-handed. He had a beard, and the open breast of his shirt showed amazing mats of hair. The yellow of malaria, mingling with the red of whisky, had turned his face dull orange. He had brown eyes as sharp as pins, but his mouth was slack and huge. Crewe couldn't quite place him; they didn't have such types in university towns. "Stevenson would have made a character out of him," he thought; and then, indignantly: "There I go— literature again!"

Chanter, who had no more shyness than an alligator, introduced himself.

"I'm y'r nearest neighbor. Ha-ha! Come for a yarn. You got not a bad little house. My oath! Boys build it? Cost you nothing— ha-ha!" He was walking through the two rooms, round the four verandas, staring at the golden-brown thatched roof, at the walls of gleaming sago-stem. "I'll camp here tonight," he proclaimed. "Got any *kai-kai*?"

"Glad to see you. Yes, parrot soup, wallaby steak, sweet potatoes, sago jelly," recited Crewe, wondering whether he wanted the visitor or not.

Chanter was in no doubt about that matter. He found the best of Crewe's canvas chairs, dropped into it, helped himself from the tobacco-box on the table, and began to talk....

Hours later, he was still talking. Talking as he smoked, as he drank, as he ate, almost as he slept— monologuing without a pause for a reply. Crewe, half drowned in the Mississippi flood of Chanter's "yarn," listened, dozed, listened again. He realized that on the bosom of the flood were floating valuable things. Chanter told him all about growing and marketing copra, all about rubber; gave him the biographies of most of Papua's planters, with an occasional lurid P. S.; criticized the Government; asked him what the hell he meant by growing vanilla— nobody had made a success of that; therefore nobody would... only two years to wait? There must be a catch in it, then; whenever a thing looked too darn' simple, there was bound to be a catch. Nothing for nothing— nowhere!

"The catch," explained Crewe precisely (after all, the University library had helped out), "lies in the fact that the product has to be prepared by the planter in person. Delicate work. Not hard, but difficult. Very paying."

"I told you," boomed Chanter. "Catch in it. Always is." He horrified Crewe — who had heard a thing or two about island drugs— by rolling himself a chew of betel-nut, and sticking it in one cheek.

"I suppose I must stand him," thought Crewe. "He may be useful." The long habit of judging, estimating other people's mental abilities, warned him that Chanter was not the sodden fool he looked.

"What do you grow?" he asked, trying not to mind the dirtiness of Chanter's shirt.

"I don't grow anything. Trade. Buy copra from the natives, sell it to B. P.'s. Lot of betel-nut palm on my place; I sell that— a shilling for thirty nuts in Port Moresby. Bit of a trading store. Up the river. Transport not so bad."

"Are you a married man?"

Chanter winked. "What d'ya think?" he said. '"That's one of her, outside."

Crewe had hardly noticed the native girl sitting half under the veranda. He eaned forward and looked at her now. Pure savage, dressed in a kilt of grass, tattooed and painted, chewing betel-nut, like Chanter, and like him, spitting red upon the ground. ... Crewe was revolted.

"But they aren't all like him," he thought. And he recalled the names of planters, living with white wives, down the coast.

AS if he had read the thought, Chanter said: "Y'see, I'm me own master; I don't work for wages, for no man. I do as I like. And mind ya, the white girls want a man with a job. All them plantations. Salary blokes! Chucked out at a month's notice any day. Do as they're told. You don't like my missus; she's one of the best, but you wouldn't understand. Two more at home, as good as her. They don't want no trips to Sydney. They don't want a car and a road for it, to be goin' tea-drinkin' with the other plantations. They don't get sick and want op'rations that costs as much as a whaleboat; all white women is always wanting op'rations— I don't know why the Lord didn't make them right to start with, but that's the crimson truth. Their kids don't have to be sent to school in Melbun, and the mother go too, and set up an 'ouse for herself, and asking men to dinner, and you working the insides out of yourself to pay for it "

He paused for a moment, shot a crimson stream over the veranda rail, turned his betel-nut quid, and went on:

"You better let me find you a nice gil out of Baia's village; it won't cost you too much, maybe thirty or forty in trade, and I'll let you have discount for cash."

Crewe found that he needed all his practiced art of speech, to refuse without hurting the feelings of Chanter.

Chanter went home next day, and it was as if a clattering train Had suddenly pulled out of sight and sound, leaving behind it unimaginable peace....

Followed again the red-gold mornings, the smell of night rains on the rich soil, the marvelous upspringing of scarcely tended plants and seeds, that shot themselves inches toward the burning sky in a single morning, yards in a single week. The dynamic power of the vegetation held Crewe in delighted awe.

Everything, when you looked at it, seemed to be moved by furious desire for the still more furious sun; the palms were fountains, shot toward heaven; the flowers, red, white and golden, cast themselves upward on the ends of their long stems like jets of water from a hose. If you listened long enough, you could actually hear things grow. As for the vanilla cuttings, trained from rail to rail among the timber, they ran like snakes, like snakes were their thick shiny stems, like fleshy hands the leaves with which they clung. Life, in the forest, was fierce. When the native laborers danced at hight, singing and drumming, it seetned as if every last ounce of energy in their wild bodies was being called upon, as if the fury of their delight must cast them lifeless on the ground. Strange birds that shouted at night made your blood run cold; nothing, you thought, that screamed like that could live to scream again. All existence ran like a rapid above a fall.

"And that fall," thought Crewe, "is death." In this country, people were near to death; you heard it in their talk: "Smith— good fellow— he died on the Mambaré. Jones— that was the chap who shot himself in 'twenty-eight. No, Waters wasn't taken by the natives; he winked out with blackwater, on the woodlarks. It was Floyd they got; the hung his bones in a tree beside the track— all that was left of them, that is— "

And so forth, and so forth.

Was that the "catch?"

Crewe was becoming curious. Something about his plantation— the golden soil of it; the rivers that furrowed it, running fathom-deep in the longest of dry seasons; the costly timbers scattered here and there— red cedar, kassi-kassi hard as steel, a stand or two of sandalwood; even the house, weatherproof, beautiful, cool in any weather, and made by his own boys out of the stuff on his own place, without a nail or a tool, save clearing-knives— all this, for nothing; or for thirty shillings down and the chance of a few pence an acre, to pay, in ten years' time— was too much! Things didn't go like that, in a post-war world. You didn't get, as he got, good food without paying for it,— game, fruit, vegetables, everything almost, save flour and tea; lordship of a hundred acres, and as much more as he wanted, for almost nothing again; service of a score of men at less than office-boy's wages— all this, without what Chanter had called "a catch in it," somewhere.

Otherwise, the whole world would be rushing to the tropics. And the whole world didn't. Even Australia, next door, was not enthusiastic. The gold-and-silver of this Tom Tiddler's ground was not picked up. The stretch of country in which he lived, hundreds of thousands of acres near the sea, had actually been overlooked for a generation or so; natives didn't trouble about it, white men had not taken it up— until Chanter came along, and after him, Crewe.

"What," said Crewe to himself, still keeping his literary phrasing, "what does that connote?"

"*Taubada*," interpolated the boss-boy, appearing suddenly from under the piles of the house, "me wantum medsin."

"What for?"

The native showed a swollen leg. "Me think," he confidentially remarked, "God bitem last night."

You were always being interrupted in your train of thought. It was like having a family of fifteen children.

Crewe went for iodine, and did not ask himself the eternal question again, for at least three weeks. ...

There came a morning of the kind that only the tropics know. A day when "sold, raw gold," had been spilled so freely from the cloudless zenith, that the whole landscape seemed to be over-filled, dripping with glory. You could almost see it fall from the laden leaves, where it clung like drops of yellow wine. You could watch it gather in thick pools on the forest pathway, under the breaks of the trees. When you stood beneath it, you could feel the driving force of the world run through your body, as the power of the wind that moves great ships goes through a steersman's hands. You might have been whirled away from the planet by the "send" of that strength, and felt no amazement. This day, earth was ten times, a thousand times, more alive than yesterday— for an hour.

In the night, all green things had pushed and budded; the growing palm trees were higher, the almost human hands of the vanilla had stretched themselves over more and more of their supporting rails. Crewe, standing on his wide veranda, looked about, saw that everything was good, and very beautiful ; and like the first man in the Garden, knew himself alone. Alone, and naked to the searing thought of it, as he had not been till now.

"Hau!" he shouted to the head boy.

"Get the swags, get the tent. Come to the storehouse. I am going to town."

In the hotel, with the gingerbread front and broken balconies, it was dinnertime. The heat was frightful, far worse than on Crewe's plantation; the mosquitoes were almost as many, and the bedrooms— roofless cubicles of sheet-iron, dark, hot, hardly furnished— made him think with regret of his large cool room at home, in the house that had cost nothing, where banana leaves waved green hands before the window, and outside, among ripening guavas, sunbirds sang. There was singing in the hotel, but of another kind. Chanter had "come in" also, and was at the moment making a charade of his own name down in the bar. Into the dining-room flowed the roar of his huge bass voice, protesting furiously his willingness, "for Annie Laurie, to lay me down and die."

"God, why don't he?" wearily asked Crewe's table-companion. "You just in? I've not had a wink of sleep for two nights with him."

"Why don't they turn him out ?" asked Crewe, unashamedly smelling his plate of hash. You had to.

"Turn you or me out, more likely! He and his sort keep the hotel going; he comes in every three or four months, just for a spree. Sober as a judge on his own place, as I suppose you know. Brainy chap, making money hand over fist. Trouble is, he can't spend it."

"Why not?"

THE other man— a young Government official— became cautious. "Oh, you know, I reckon. Can't leave the country. All tied up.... Better try the roast; I'm like the fellow in the novel, who never ate 'ashes away from 'ome."

Crewe went past the open door of the bar on his way upstairs. He saw Chanter inside. He was struck, almost violently, by the expression of utter happiness on the planter's face. Chanter, a little more sober now, was laughing, telling stories, spreading himself over the cushioned bench, like a starfish. It came to Crewe that the fellow looked as if he had sold himself to the devil, and was riotously enjoying the proceeds. He recalled the uniform joyousness of Chanter, his utter unconsciousness of anything unworthy, anything degraded in his life. And for one moment Crewe was overwhelmed by envy. Nothing, he knew, could ever give him, Crewe, that amazing complacency.

He remembered others. The ex-Government official Griswold, whom he had seen at home, miles down the coast, sitting by lamplight at a table covered with papers and books; reading, writing, meticulously clad and toileted; a gentleman every inch. About him on the floor, passing round among them the rank New Guinea pipe, sat Griswold's wife, sons and daughters, black to brown, almost naked. They looked up to Griswold as to a god. He was gracious with them, spoke to them now and then, gave them little scraps of the world's news. They listened uncomprehendingly, and passed the "baubau" on.

Griswold had taken up free land long ago, when white women didn't come to the country. He had a fine holding; but there was a catch in it.

Crewe went into his room, lit the lamp, and hung it above the meager mirror. Gravely he scanned himself. He was changed in these few months. He'd always been tall, very thin; he was filling out now, had a finer carriage, a healthy tan too, that made his eyes look blue instead of gray. Those University Extension girls, who used to "schwarm" over him, so tediously— well, they'd have rather more to "schwarm" over now, if they were here. He could pretend to something good in the way of a wife. For that was his object in coming up to town. He knew that Port Moresby, nowadays, owned quite a number of decent little girls; not suitable matches, perhaps, from a social point of view, for an ex-university professor, but well worth thinking about all the same. He had even picked upon one: Miss Daisy Barraclough, stenographer. He remembered her, from the time

of his first arrival; he had seen her in Clarke's Non-comformist Church, of a Sunday evening, and had been favorably impressed. Nice eyes, long eyelashes, pretty mouth, not without character. An attractive simple frock, made, he supposed, by herself. Nice way of speaking, when a mutual acquaintance had introduced them, just outside the church. And it was to her credit that she was a churchgoer. Crewe, who in his Professor Emmy incarnation, had had a few abortive love-affairs, and rather despised love in general, considered he might do worse than look up Miss Daisy again, and see if she wouldn't do.

He loved his estate, his independence, as much as ever, but the first rapture of delight had died down into comfortable affection. One could now, like a bridegroom past the honeymoon, condescend to think of other things. Of Daisies, for example. And it was not at all because of Chanter, with his joyous degradation, of Griswold, icily determined to remain what he was not and could not be. He wasn't a bit frightened by them. He just was being sensible.

CERTAINLY it was luck that Miss Barraclough at present was taking her meals at the hotel. He could see her twice a day if he wanted, make up his mind without hurry. Crewe, accustomed to the easy and undesired conquest of University Extension girls— girls for the most part ill-dressed, lacking in what the gods of Hollywood define as "it"— had little doubt of being accepted. What did these stenographers come up to Port Moresby for? The day of the "gold-digger" female, following up the male gold-diggers, had passed with Port Moresby's primitive times. Decent little girls came now, shop assistants and secretaries, with visions of wedding-rings in their eyes. And they all wanted planters, of whom Crewe was one.

IT was a pity that he could not have heard Miss Barraclough, a few days later, talking to her "girl friend" at the pictures.

"Believe me, dear, he's mine for the taking. Just wild about me, if you know what I mean. What would you do if you were me?"

To her the girl friend, chewing chocolates: "I'd go easy, dear, till you see if you can't do better. Bury yourself in the bush, I don't think! And no salary to fall back upon. You go slow, Day. The *Kaivili*'s in from the east. Jimson's aboard. His wife died six months ago; he must be ready for another. And he's got a real iron house, and a small lorry, and you can go to tea at six different plantations."

"Jimson's fifty!"

"What if he is? The Company will keep him on for years yet. And you needn't stop on the plantation longer than a few months. Then you can get a doctor's order to go and live in Sydney, and Jimson can pay. Don't you go tying yourself up to a chap that's not got a job. The job's the thing."

"I tell you what I think's the thing," Daisy said. "I think a bird in the hand's the thing— when you're not far off thirty."

The friend knew her to be thirty-one. "As you like, dear," she answered disappointedly. She may have had her own small hopes; she was Daisy's senior, and she had looked at Crewe's blue eyes with wistful desire. But clearly, there was nothing more to be said. She changed the subject.

"Didja see the Princess?" she said.

"What Princess?"

"The one who came on the boat two days ago. She's a real princess. Austrian. Ruined by the war. Awfully tragic story. The Prince was coming up here incognito-like— got a job from a friend to run a rubber plantation,— and he went and died at the last port, and she landed here without a thing but her frocks and panties."

"Go on!'

"True as I'm sitting here. Princess Pamela is her name."

"Why— "

"Yes. English; she was born in England, and married him when she was sixteen.... They say the Gover'ment will have to pay her way back."

"Where to?"

"I don't know. *Ssh*, there she is!"

"What, that tall thing with the permanent-waved red hair? She looks as proud as Lucifer. I bet she knows black becomes her."

"Well, it does. They say she didn't care a rag about the Prince. They say she didn't even cry when they buried him at Cairns,"

"She might've cried, if she'd thought what she was coming to. Government rations and Government ticket away!"

"I wonder does she know that? Two shillings for the pictures is two shillings."

"Oh, look, she's going to play! She must have got in free!"

Into the darkened hall crept the first few notes of a dreamy melody, sweet as falling waters. "She can play," breathed Daisy with good-natured envy. "I bet we'll enjoy the pictures tonight, even if my bloke didn't bring me."

"Why didn't he?"

"I reckon he hasn't made up his mind to pop yet. Yes, I'll take him when he does. You can try for Jimson yourself."

Not many rows behind, a minute later, Daisy's "bloke" slipped quietly into the hall. He had no taste for cinemas, but that exquisite melody, heard from his iron cubicle, had irresistibly drawn him down to the picture show. Who, in this frontier town, was playing like an angel, or like Chopin come to life? There was no hint of jazz in that delicate music, no rhythm of the wearisome, inescapable

foxtrot that had followed him through twelve thousand miles of travel. It was true melody, magically played.

E turned in his seat to look at the layer. Light from the piano candles fell on her hazy red-gold hair, her ivory face. One could not see her eyes. One could see that she was very tall, and almost excessively slender; but that might be due to the dead blackness of her dress. Out of it, her arms and her neck showed regally shaped and white as white roses.

Crewe also had heard of the Princess, thus unchancily cast on an alien shore. He caught his breath, and took one more look, before he settled down to ignore the idiocies on the screen, while enjoying fully this gift of noble music.

"She wears an invisible crown," he thought. Inevitably the appropriate reference came tagging after:

"And the shadow of a monarch's crown is darkened in her hair."

But for once, he welcomed it. It expressed something essential. This woman did wear a crown. Here, in rawly civilized, remote Port Moresby, among the kindly ordinary folk in Ryan's picture show— here, playing for her bread!

YEARS afterward, he remembered the names and notes of almost everything she played through that long evening; but he was not able to recall, next day, the title or the plot of the picture. He managed to follow close behind her as she left. She stumbled a little on the rough slope going out, and in an instant his hand was at her elbow, ready to help. She looked at him in almost a friendly way, as she thanked him. Her eyes were not blue, as he had expected; they were deep brown, with lights of gold, and the eyebrows, untouched by pencil, delicately thin, were ink-black. They gave a curious flavor to her face— pride, he thought, steadfastness; he could not say. She wore a long-trained dress, the first that had been seen in that town. The tail of it was flung over her arm. It made him think of courts— presentations. He had never seen a court, but of course one knew all about those things. What glamour they held!

Half the night, lying awake in his hot iron cell, he thought of her, wondered about her. Like everyone else, he knew that she was destitute, almost dramatically so. What was to become of her? She could not go on playing at the picture show for her board; that wasn't a living. How else could those exquisite long hands employ themselves? It was most unlikely that she could type, sell tapes and tinned goods over a counter, manage a boarding-house.

The answer was clear enough. Government rations, Government fare away from the country. Other derelicts had met with the same fate, kindly but firmly dealt to them. The frontier town could not afford to feed idle mouths.

This English-Austrian princess, Pamela— he thought he knew from what family she had come; it was equal in birth to almost any European royalty, but it had been as utterly ruined by the war as Austria herself. Even if she had the

money to get back to Europe, her people would be in no position to help. What about the friends who had given her husband a job, for which he could not have been fitted, a job that evidently deserved its name, in two senses? They were men, no doubt. Easy to guess how they, or he, would help.

Music? But with phonographs, radios and talking-pictures everywhere (save in Port Moresby) even the most accomplished concert artists were finding it hard to make a living. Did any of them play more exquisitely, he wondered, turning about on his knobby mattress, as the night wore on. How those melodies ran in his head! How he had missed music, without knowing it!

Maybe that was the "catch"— loss of the arts, and all they meant. But— one could have a phonograph; one could put up radio, even in the wilds. One had already arranged to have all the new books sent from Sydney. One had bought illustrated picture-show catalogues; tried to follow names and subjects, at least.

No. That wasn't it.

Crewe turned again and beat his pillow. It felt like new-baked bread. How was she sleeping, a few yards away, this new-made widow who had nothing, not even the remembrance of past love, and who was forced now, empty-handed, to face a cruel world?

Crewe was not devoid of common sense. He put the Princess determined} out of his mind. "She's not my business," he thought, picturing her the while as one on a snowy height above him. "And Daisy has to be remembered; I've gone too far there not to go the whole way. She's sure to look for me after church tomorrow."

DAISY was looking for him after church. She was prettily dressed; she was engaging ; she smiled at him, and held out a little hand that had not yet been splayed out of shape by typing. Crewe suddenly saw her on his estate, in his beautiful house that had cost nothing; jingling the keys of the store, laying out and mending his clothes, waiting for him with a ready kiss, when evening came, and he was late back from the newest clearing.... It is to be feared that the outmoded pattern of Esther in "*Bleak House*" possessed Crewe's mind.

If this was so, a rough awakening awaited him. Not three sentences had been exchanged, before Daisy and he were interrupted by Chanter, who had also been to church— it seemed that this was one of his Port Moresby habits, like getting drunk and singing "Annie Laurie" to unappreciative ears. Dickens' Esther would certainly have bridled— whatever that may have meant— and clung to her lover's arm. Daisy, only too well pleased at the chance of a double flirtation, smiled agreeably on Chanter, and asked him he ever took a walk down Ela Beach.

The copra-buyer responded as an electric bell responds to pressure. His oath, he did take walks down Ela Beach. His word, he would take one now, if he hadn't to go alone; he was scared of going alone— with a huge laugh.

Crewe, not so much piqued as Daisy, for his good, intended him to be, raised his hat in polite farewell, and said he hoped to see Miss Barraclough on the tennis-ground tomorrow. "I'll propose to her there," he thought, remembering a sheltered corner near the beach. "It's time the thing was settled; and when it is, I hope I can teach her better taste."

He was coming quickly, as he left the grounds of the church, and directed his walk toward the quietest place in town at that hour— the end of the B. P. wharf. There one could find coolness unattainable elsewhere. One could sit on an empty truck, and look out across the darkening harbor undisturbed. One could think, and plan, and dream, quite alone.

Could one? Rounding the corner of the baggage shed, he came upon the Princess.

Clearly, she too had thought the jetty secluded ground. She was sitting, with her profile toward him, on an unused truck, as graceful as something out of a Botticelli picture, as black and slim as a bird. Only her pearl-pale face showed light, in the growing dusk of sundown. And although he could not see her expression, he knew she had been crying.

At this, something unknown and unsuspected in his breast gave way. It was as if a lump of ice (Hans Andersen, he thought; story of Gerda and Kay— oh, damn; let him forget the books for once!) had melted. It was like— he didn't know what, and didn't care. But it made him walk up to the Princess as if he had been her brother, sit down on the edge of the truck, and breathlessly say— but not as a brother would have said it: "I had the honor of helping you last night. I— is there anything I can do now? My name's Edward Crewe."

Astonishingly she said: "I think I know. You were at Hampden University. My sister gave the prizes at the sports, once, and I was in the stand. You got a prize for something. I knew I had seen you somewhere."

"I was lecturer there," he answered. "Yes, I went in for and won the long jump.... But you must have been only a child, then."

"I married Prince Emil the same year," she told him.

There was silence for a moment; in the distance the bell of the Anglican Church began to ring; a native, fishing underneath the pier, burst into nasal Papuan song. Out over Fisherman Island a great star was beginning to rise.

"What is the matter?" he asked her, with a note in his voice that Daisy had never heard.

"The whole town knows what the matter is!" was her bitter reply.

Crewe lit a cigarette, handed his case on to Pamela. This was a question which must be handled with deliberation.

"Your own people— " he began.

"They," she said, with an uncertain little laugh, "they are keeping boarding houses, mostly, or chauffing other people's cars— since the war."

"Your husband's people?"

"Emil," she told him, choosing her words carefully, "was not popular with them— even when they had anything. He was not— popular— with many people."

Crewe remembered the ship gossip that had filtered into town, about the Austrian prince and his drunkenness, his arrogant treatment of every soul on board. How he had died of pneumonia brought on by a chill, the chill being due to a night spent in the gutters of Cairns.... What was one to say?

Princess Pamela did not seem to expect him to say anything. She went on: "I'd thought the plantation life might be good for him— if not for me."

"Clearly," Crewe said, "you would have been the loser. In such a country—

"But to live as paid servants," she hurried on, "to be dismissed at a month's notice, if anything went wrong! To spend oneself on somebody else's land— when the land-owning instinct's in one's very bones— Well, I'm not sorry that is out of the question. But it leaves nothing in its place." An enormous idea was beginning to dawn on Crewe.

"May I ask you," he said gravely, "to honor me with a visit, bringing any lady you can find to accompany you?"

The star was up now, and the moon was climbing after it. One could see clearly. One could see that Princess Pamela's face was paler than ever, that her deep eyes seemed to burn. But she answered with polite formality: "It would be very agreeable."

ON the day after they were married— the day Mrs. Marks, the chaperon, was just reaching Port, and home,— Princess Pamela came out onto the veranda of the beautiful costless house, and looked down over the clearing: gold and green, with the sun upon it.

"How can one believe in all this?" she said, drawing a long breath. "Rivers and mountains and forests, all one's own, and for nothing. I feel as if I had wings. I could fly for joy!"

"You don't get anything for nothing, on this earth," modified Crewe, not at all deterred in his phrase-making by the fact that he had both arms around her.

"What do you pay here?"

"All the world," he said gravely. "It's very dear land, in reality— unless you can get the price back again. And I think," he said, holding her a little more closely, "that I've managed to do that."

There was one thing only that he dreaded— a visit from Chanter, who would have too much to say, as usual, He would say things best left unsaid. He would

even sneer, perhaps, at Crewe and Crewe's romance, Bring his black girl with him, and tell Crewe how much better it was for a man—

Thought broke off. Chanter himself was coming through the edge of the clearing. And there was no black girl with him. There was a white girl. Crewe was almost certain that he knew her, but he could not at first believe his eyes.

Not till the pair were introduced, refreshed and comfortably placed on the cool side of the house, did Crewe ask:

"What made you change your mind, Chanter? Last time I saw you, you were all against marrying."

"She changed it," was Chanter's cheerful reply. "We hit it off first go. Just after you left for your place, with your visitors. Three months ago. We been down to Sydney for a holiday, and now we're going to settle on my land for good."

"Glad to hear it," answered Crewe cheerfully. But he had seen what Chanter did not see— Daisy's sudden, scornful grimace.

"What I say is," she declared, fanning herself with an air of exhaustion, "that the bush is no place for a lady."

And suddenly, Edward Crewe knew that she spoke the truth...

As stupid women so often do, Daisy had blundered on a significant fact, and held to it, as a limpet sticks to its rock.

The bush— for white men, for brown women; and for the rare, splendid white woman who could give up everything that women loved and valued, casting it without regret at the feet of her man, a noble wedding-gift. There were such women; Edward Crewe bowed his head before the thought.

That did not alter the main fact. Civilization had climbed to its present peak over the bodies of sacrificed women: savage women worked to death child-bearing, burden-bearing, doing all labor, while the men alternately fought and idled; peasant women hardly more happy, toiling in the fields, yoked with oxen and asses— women old before thirty. The long trek upward to the thrones on which modern man had set his women, throne of the Twentieth Century; of labor-saving houses, of cheap, accessible amusements; of easy transport, of frequent happy commune with one's fellows; of sure help in sickness, for a woman and her child; of little pleasures, so little, so great; shopping, party-giving, gossiping— all that made up a woman's delight in life. Civilized? They were ten times as civilized as men; men were always looking backward, down the long climb; men didn't really care for half the things they had accomplished and acquired, spurred on by their women. They were ready to jump back at any time— as he had done. To be gloriously happy, tasting primitive things— as he was, he, late Professor of English Literature in Hampden.

But this step back was taken as the steps forward had been taken— over the bodies of women. It might be good for a man, even a nation, to go back

occasionally to primitive things. Yet it could only be done by sacrificing, in one way or another, a nation's wives and children.

THAT was the "catch in it." Chanter had escaped for a while; so had he himself. But both of them were in it now.

Daisy was no meek victim; very soon to use her own vernacular, she woul show Chanter "where he got off." Pamela never would "show" Crewe; but—

His princess was watching him. She had seen the shadow on his face. Into his arm slipped her arm, warm, eloquent, pressing. Pamela had heard Daisy. Whether or no she agreed with Daisy in her heart, was never to be known. Only she said— "I love you!" and turned her face, that was level with his own tall head, for a kiss.

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16: The Five White Mice

Stephen Crane

1871-1900

In: *The Open Boat and Other Stories*, 1898

Author of The Red Badge of Courage*,* The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*, etc*

FREDDIE was mixing a cocktail. His hand with the long spoon was whirling swiftly, and the ice in the glass hummed and rattled like a cheap watch. Over by the window, a gambler, a millionaire, a railway conductor, and the agent of a vast American syndicate were playing seven-up. Freddie surveyed them with the ironical glance of a man who is mixing a cocktail.

From time to time a swarthy Mexican waiter came with his tray from the rooms at the rear, and called his orders across the bar. The sounds of the indolent stir of the city, awakening from its siesta, floated over the screens which barred the sun and the inquisitive eye. From the far-away kitchen could be heard the roar of the old French *chef*, driving, herding, and abusing his Mexican helpers.

A string of men came suddenly in from the street. They stormed up to the bar. There were impatient shouts. "Come now, Freddie, don't stand there like a portrait of yourself. Wiggle!" Drinks of many kinds and colours, amber, green, mahogany, strong and mild, began to swarm upon the bar with all the attendants of lemon, sugar, mint and ice. Freddie, with Mexican support, worked like a sailor in the provision of them, sometimes talking with that scorn for drink and admiration for those who drink which is the attribute of a good bar-keeper.

At last a man was afflicted with a stroke of dice-shaking. A herculean discussion was waging, and he was deeply engaged in it, but at the same time he lazily flirted the dice. Occasionally he made great combinations. "Look at that, would you?" he cried proudly. The others paid little heed. Then violently the craving took them. It went along the line like an epidemic, and involved them all. In a moment they had arranged a carnival of dice-shaking with money penalties and liquid prizes. They clamorously made it a point of honour with Freddie that he should play and take his chance of sometimes providing this large group with free refreshment. With bended heads like football players, they surged over the tinkling dice, jostling, cheering, and bitterly arguing. One of the quiet company playing seven-up at the corner table said profanely that the row reminded him of a bowling contest at a picnic.

After the regular shower, many carriages rolled over the smooth calle, and sent a musical thunder through the Casa Verde. The shop-windows became aglow with light, and the walks were crowded with youths, callow and ogling,

dressed vainly according to superstitious fashions. The policemen had muffled themselves in their gnome-like cloaks, and placed their lanterns as obstacles for the carriages in the middle of the street. The city of Mexico gave forth the deep organ-mellow tones of its evening resurrection.

But still the group at the bar of the Casa Verde were shaking dice. They had passed beyond shaking for drinks for the crowd, for Mexican dollars, for dinners, for the wine at dinner. They had even gone to the trouble of separating the cigars and cigarettes from the dinner's bill, and causing a distinct man to be responsible for them. Finally they were aghast. Nothing remained in sight of their minds which even remotely suggested further gambling. There was a pause for deep consideration.

"Well—"

"Well—"

A man called out in the exuberance of creation. "I know! Let's shake for a box to-night at the circus! A box at the circus!" The group was profoundly edified. "That's it! That's it! Come on now! Box at the circus!" A dominating voice cried— "Three dashes— high man out!" An American, tall, and with a face of copper red from the rays that flash among the Sierra Madres and burn on the cactus deserts, took the little leathern cup and spun the dice out upon the polished wood. A fascinated assemblage hung upon the bar-rail. Three kings turned their pink faces upward. The tall man flourished the cup, burlesquing, and flung the two other dice. From them he ultimately extracted one more pink king. "There," he said. "Now, let's see! Four kings!" He began to swagger in a sort of provisional way.

The next man took the cup, and blew softly in the top of it. Poising it in his hand, he then surveyed the company with a stony eye and paused. They knew perfectly well that he was applying the magic of deliberation and ostentatious indifference, but they could not wait in tranquillity during the performance of all these rites. They began to call out impatiently. "Come now— hurry up." At last the man, with a gesture that was singularly impressive, threw the dice. The others set up a howl of joy. "Not a pair!" There was another solemn pause. The men moved restlessly. "Come, now, go ahead!" In the end, the man, induced and abused, achieved something that was nothing in the presence of four kings. The tall man climbed on the foot-rail and leaned hazardously forward. "Four kings! My four kings are good to go out," he bellowed into the middle of the mob, and although in a moment he did pass into the radiant region of exemption, he continued to bawl advice and scorn.

The mirrors and oiled woods of the Casa Verde were now dancing with blue flashes from a great buzzing electric lamp. A host of quiet members of the Anglo-Saxon colony had come in for their pre-dinner cock-tails. An amiable person was exhibiting to some tourists this popular American saloon. It was a

very sober and respectable time of day. Freddie reproved courageously the dice-shaking brawlers, and, in return, he received the choicest advice in a tumult of seven combined vocabularies. He laughed; he had been compelled to retire from the game, but he was keeping an interested, if furtive, eye upon it.

Down at the end of the line there was a youth at whom everybody railed for his flaming ill-luck. At each disaster, Freddie swore from behind the bar in a sort of affectionate contempt. "Why, this kid has had no luck for two days. Did you ever see such throwin'?"

The contest narrowed eventually to the New York kid and an individual who swung about placidly on legs that moved in nefarious circles. He had a grin that resembled a bit of carving. He was obliged to lean down and blink rapidly to ascertain the facts of his venture, but fate presented him with five queens. His smile did not change, but he puffed gently like a man who has been running.

The others, having emerged unscathed from this part of the conflict, waxed hilarious with the kid. They smote him on either shoulders. "We've got you stuck for it, kid! You can't beat that game! Five queens!"

Up to this time the kid had displayed only the temper of the gambler, but the cheerful hoots of the players, supplemented now by a ring of guying non-combatants, caused him to feel profoundly that it would be fine to beat the five queens. He addressed a gambler's slogan to the interior of the cup.

"Oh, five white mice of chance,
Shirts of wool and corduroy pants,
Gold and wine, women and sin,
All for you if you let me come in—
Into the house of chance."

Flashing the dice sardonically out upon the bar, he displayed three aces. From two dice in the next throw he achieved one more ace. For his last throw, he rattled the single dice for a long time. He already had four aces; if he accomplished another one, the five queens were vanquished and the box at the circus came from the drunken man's pocket. All the kid's movements were slow and elaborate. For the last throw he planted the cup bottom-down on the bar with the one dice hidden under it. Then he turned and faced the crowd with the air of a conjuror or a cheat.

"Oh, maybe it's an ace," he said in boastful calm. "Maybe it's an ace."

Instantly he was presiding over a little drama in which every man was absorbed. The kid leaned with his back against the bar-rail and with his elbows upon it.

"Maybe it's an ace," he repeated.

A jeering voice in the background said— "Yes, maybe it is, kid!"

The kid's eyes searched for a moment among the men. "I'll bet fifty dollars it is an ace," he said.

Another voice asked— "American money?"

"Yes," answered the kid.

"Oh!" There was a genial laugh at this discomfiture. However, no one came forward at the kid's challenge, and presently he turned to the cup. "Now, I'll show you." With the manner of a mayor unveiling a statue, he lifted the cup. There was revealed naught but a ten-spot. In the roar which arose could be heard each man ridiculing the cowardice of his neighbour, and above all the din rang the voice of Freddie berating every one. "Why, there isn't one liver to every five men in the outfit. That was the greatest cold bluff I ever saw worked. He wouldn't know how to cheat with dice if he wanted to. Don't know the first thing about it. I could hardly keep from laughin' when I seen him drillin' you around. Why, I tell you, I had that fifty dollars right in my pocket if I wanted to be a chump. You're an easy lot—"

Nevertheless the group who had won in the theatre-box game did not relinquish their triumph. They burst like a storm about the head of the kid, swinging at him with their fists. " 'Five white mice'!" they quoted, choking. " 'Five white mice'!"

"Oh, they are not so bad," said the kid.

Afterward it often occurred that a man would jeer a finger at the kid and derisively say— " 'Five white mice.'"

On the route from the dinner to the circus, others of the party often asked the kid if he had really intended to make his appeal to mice. They suggested other animals— rabbits, dogs, hedgehogs, snakes, opossums. To this banter the kid replied with a serious expression of his belief in the fidelity and wisdom of the five white mice. He presented a most eloquent case, decorated with fine language and insults, in which he proved that if one was going to believe in anything at all, one might as well choose the five white mice. His companions, however, at once and unanimously pointed out to him that his recent exploit did not place him in the light of a convincing advocate.

The kid discerned two figures in the street. They were making imperious signs at him. He waited for them to approach, for he recognized one as the other kid— the Frisco kid: there were two kids. With the Frisco kid was Benson. They arrived almost breathless. "Where you been?" cried the Frisco kid. It was an arrangement that upon a meeting the one that could first ask this question was entitled to use a tone of limitless injury. "What you been doing? Where you going? Come on with us. Benson and I have got a little scheme."

The New York kid pulled his arm from the grapple of the other. "I can't. I've got to take these sutlers to the circus. They stuck me for it shaking dice at Freddie's. I can't, I tell you."

The two did not at first attend to his remarks. "Come on! We've got a little scheme."

"I can't. They stuck me. I've got to take'm to the circus."

At this time it did not suit the men with the scheme to recognize these objections as important. "Oh, take'm some other time. Well, can't you take'm some other time? Let 'em go. Damn the circus. Get cold feet. What did you get stuck for? Get cold feet."

But despite their fighting, the New York kid broke away from them. "I can't, I tell you. They stuck me." As he left them, they yelled with rage. "Well, meet us, now, do you hear? In the Casa Verde as soon as the circus quits! Hear?" They threw maledictions after him.

In the city of Mexico, a man goes to the circus without descending in any way to infant amusements, because the Circo Teatro Orrin is one of the best in the world, and too easily surpasses anything of the kind in the United States, where it is merely a matter of a number of rings, if possible, and a great professional agreement to lie to the public. Moreover, the American clown, who in the Mexican arena prances and gabbles, is the clown to whom writers refer as the delight of their childhood, and lament that he is dead. At this circus the kid was not debased by the sight of mournful prisoner elephants and caged animals forlorn and sickly. He sat in his box until late, and laughed and swore when past laughing at the comic foolish-wise clown.

When he returned to the Casa Verde there was no display of the Frisco kid and Benson. Freddie was leaning on the bar listening to four men terribly discuss a question that was not plain. There was a card-game in the corner, of course. Sounds of revelry pealed from the rear rooms.

When the kid asked Freddie if he had seen his friend and Benson, Freddie looked bored. "Oh, yes, they were in here just a minute ago, but I don't know where they went. They've got their skates on. Where've they been? Came in here rolling across the floor like two little gilt gods. They wobbled around for a time, and then Frisco wanted me to send six bottles of wine around to Benson's rooms, but I didn't have anybody to send this time of night, and so they got mad and went out. Where did they get their loads?"

In the first deep gloom of the street the kid paused a moment debating. But presently he heard quavering voices. "Oh, kid! kid! Com'ere!" Peering, he recognized two vague figures against the opposite wall. He crossed the street, and they said— "Hello kid."

"Say, where did you get it?" he demanded sternly. "You Indians better go home. What did you want to get scragged for?" His face was luminous with virtue.

As they swung to and fro, they made angry denials. "We ain' load'! We ain' load'. Big chump. Comonangetadrink."

The sober youth turned then to his friend. "Hadn't you better go home, kid? Come on, it's late. You'd better break away."

The Frisco kid wagged his head decisively. "Got take Benson home first. He'll be wallowing around in a minute. Don't mind me. I'm all right."

"Cerly, he's all right," said Benson, arousing from deep thought. "He's all right. But better take'm home, though. That's ri— right. He's load'. But he's all right. No need go home any more'n you. But better take'm home. He's load'." He looked at his companion with compassion. "Kid, you're load'."

The sober kid spoke abruptly to his friend from San Francisco. "Kid, pull yourself together, now. Don't fool. We've got to brace this ass of a Benson all the way home. Get hold of his other arm."

The Frisco kid immediately obeyed his comrade without a word or a glower. He seized Benson and came to attention like a soldier. Later, indeed, he meekly ventured— "Can't we take cab?" But when the New York kid snapped out that there were no convenient cabs he subsided to an impassive silence. He seemed to be reflecting upon his state, without astonishment, dismay, or any particular emotion. He submitted himself woodenly to the direction of his friend.

Benson had protested when they had grasped his arms. "Washa doing?" he said in a new and guttural voice. "Washa doing? I ain' load'. Comonangetadrink. I—"

"Oh, come along, you idiot," said the New York kid. The Frisco kid merely presented the mien of a stoic to the appeal of Benson, and in silence dragged away at one of his arms. Benson's feet came from that particular spot on the pavement with the reluctance of roots and also with the ultimate suddenness of roots. The three of them lurched out into the street in the abandon of tumbling chimneys. Benson was meanwhile noisily challenging the others to produce any reasons for his being taken home. His toes clashed into the kerb when they reached the other side of the calle, and for a moment the kids hauled him along with the points of his shoes scraping musically on the pavement. He balked formidably as they were about to pass the Casa Verde. "No! No! Leshavanothdrink! Anothdrink! Onemore!"

But the Frisco kid obeyed the voice of his partner in a manner that was blind but absolute, and they scummed Benson on past the door. Locked together the three swung into a dark street. The sober kid's flank was continually careering ahead of the other wing. He harshly admonished the Frisco child, and the latter promptly improved in the same manner of unthinking complete obedience. Benson began to recite the tale of a love affair, a tale that didn't even have a middle. Occasionally the New York kid swore. They toppled on their way like three comedians playing at it on the stage.

At midnight a little Mexican street burrowing among the walls of the city is as dark as a whale's throat at deep sea. Upon this occasion heavy clouds hung

over the capital and the sky was a pall. The projecting balconies could make no shadows.

"Shay," said Benson, breaking away from his escort suddenly, "what want gome for? I ain't load'. You got reg'lar spool-fact'ry in your head— you N' York kid there. Thish oth' kid, he's mos' proper shober, mos' proper shober. He's drunk, but—but he's shober."

"Ah, shup up, Benson," said the New York kid. "Come along now. We can't stay here all night." Benson refused to be corralled, but spread his legs and twirled like a dervish, meanwhile under the evident impression that he was conducting himself most handsomely. It was not long before he gained the opinion that he was laughing at the others. "Eight purple dogsh— dogs! Eight purple dogs. Thas what kid'll see in the morn'. Look ou' for 'em. They—"

As Benson, describing the canine phenomena, swung wildly across the sidewalk, it chanced that three other pedestrians were passing in shadowy rank. Benson's shoulder jostled one of them.

A Mexican wheeled upon the instant. His hand flashed to his hip. There was a moment of silence, during which Benson's voice was not heard raised in apology. Then an indescribable comment, one burning word, came from between the Mexican's teeth.

Benson, rolling about in a semi-detached manner, stared vacantly at the Mexican, who thrust his lean face forward while his fingers played nervously at his hip. The New York kid could not follow Spanish well, but he understood when the Mexican breathed softly: "Does the señor want to fight?"

Benson simply gazed in gentle surprise. The woman next to him at dinner had said something inventive. His tailor had presented his bill. Something had occurred which was mildly out of the ordinary, and his surcharged brain refused to cope with it. He displayed only the agitation of a smoker temporarily without a light.

The New York kid had almost instantly grasped Benson's arm, and was about to jerk him away, when the other kid, who up to this time had been an automaton, suddenly projected himself forward, thrust the rubber Benson aside, and said— "Yes."

There was no sound nor light in the world. The wall at the left happened to be of the common prison-like construction— no door, no window, no opening at all. Humanity was enclosed and asleep. Into the mouth of the sober kid came a wretched bitter taste as if it had filled with blood. He was transfixed as if he was already seeing the lightning ripples on the knife-blade.

But the Mexican's hand did not move at that time. His face went still further forward and he whispered— "So?" The sober kid saw this face as if he and it were alone in space— a yellow mask smiling in eager cruelty, in satisfaction, and above all it was lit with sinister decision. As for the features, they were

reminiscent of an unplaced, a forgotten type, which really resembled with precision those of a man who had shaved him three times in Boston in 1888. But the expression burned his mind as sealing-wax burns the palm, and fascinated, stupefied, he actually watched the progress of the man's thought toward the point where a knife would be wrenched from its sheath. The emotion, a sort of mechanical fury, a breeze made by electric fans, a rage made by vanity, smote the dark countenance in wave after wave.

Then the New York kid took a sudden step forward. His hand was at his hip. He was gripping there a revolver of robust size. He recalled that upon its black handle was stamped a hunting scene in which a sportsman in fine leggings and a peaked cap was taking aim at a stag less than one-eighth of an inch away.

His pace forward caused instant movement of the Mexicans. One immediately took two steps to face him squarely. There was a general adjustment, pair and pair. This opponent of the New York kid was a tall man and quite stout. His sombrero was drawn low over his eyes. His serape was flung on his left shoulder. His back was bended in the supposed manner of a Spanish grandee. This concave gentleman cut a fine and terrible figure. The lad, moved by the spirits of his modest and perpendicular ancestors, had time to feel his blood roar at sight of the pose.

He was aware that the third Mexican was over on the left fronting Benson, and he was aware that Benson was leaning against the wall sleepily and peacefully eying the convention. So it happened that these six men stood, side fronting side, five of them with their right hands at their hips and with their bodies lifted nervously, while the central pair exchanged a crescendo of provocations. The meaning of their words rose and rose. They were travelling in a straight line toward collision.

The New York kid contemplated his Spanish grandee. He drew his revolver upward until the hammer was surely free of the holster. He waited immovable and watchful while the garrulous Frisco kid expended two and a half lexicons on the middle Mexican.

The eastern lad suddenly decided that he was going to be killed. His mind leaped forward and studied the aftermath. The story would be a marvel of brevity when first it reached the far New York home, written in a careful hand on a bit of cheap paper, topped and footed and backed by the printed fortifications of the cable company. But they are often as stones flung into mirrors, these bits of paper upon which are laconically written all the most terrible chronicles of the times. He witnessed the uprising of his mother and sister, and the invincible calm of his hard-mouthed old father, who would probably shut himself in his library and smoke alone. Then his father would come, and they would bring him here and say— "This is the place." Then, very likely, each would remove his hat. They would stand quietly with their hats in

their hands for a decent minute. He pitied his old financing father, unyielding and millioned, a man who commonly spoke twenty-two words a year to his beloved son. The kid understood it at this time. If his fate was not impregnable, he might have turned out to be a man and have been liked by his father.

The other kid would mourn his death. He would be preternaturally correct for some weeks, and recite the tale without swearing. But it would not bore him. For the sake of his dead comrade he would be glad to be preternaturally correct, and to recite the tale without swearing.

These views were perfectly stereopticon, flashing in and away from his thought with an inconceivable rapidity until after all they were simply one quick dismal impression. And now here is the unreal real: into this kid's nostrils, at the expectant moment of slaughter, had come the scent of new-mown hay, a fragrance from a field of prostrate grass, a fragrance which contained the sunshine, the bees, the peace of meadows, and the wonder of a distant crooning stream. It had no right to be supreme, but it was supreme, and he breathed it as he waited for pain and a sight of the unknown.

But in the same instant, it may be, his thought flew to the Frisco kid, and it came upon him like a flicker of lightning that the Frisco kid was not going to be there to perform, for instance, the extraordinary office of respectable mourner. The other kid's head was muddled, his hand was unsteady, his agility was gone. This other kid was facing the determined and most ferocious gentleman of the enemy. The New York kid became convinced that his friend was lost. There was going to be a screaming murder. He was so certain of it that he wanted to shield his eyes from sight of the leaping arm and the knife. It was sickening, utterly sickening. The New York kid might have been taking his first sea-voyage. A combination of honourable manhood and inability prevented him from running away.

He suddenly knew that it was possible to draw his own revolver, and by a swift manoeuvre face down all three Mexicans. If he was quick enough he would probably be victor. If any hitch occurred in the draw he would undoubtedly be dead with his friends. It was a new game; he had never been obliged to face a situation of this kind in the Beacon Club in New York. In this test, the lungs of the kid still continued to perform their duty.

"Oh, five white mice of chance,
Shirts of wool and corduroy pants,
Gold and wine, women and sin,
All for you if you let me come in—
Into the house of chance."

He thought of the weight and size of his revolver, and dismay pierced him. He feared that in his hands it would be as unwieldy as a sewing-machine for this quick work. He imagined, too, that some singular providence might cause him to lose his grip as he raised his weapon. Or it might get fatally entangled in the tails of his coat. Some of the eels of despair lay wet and cold against his back.

But at the supreme moment the revolver came forth as if it were greased and it arose like a feather. This somnolent machine, after months of repose, was finally looking at the breasts of men.

Perhaps in this one series of movements, the kid had unconsciously used nervous force sufficient to raise a bale of hay. Before he comprehended it he was standing behind his revolver glaring over the barrel at the Mexicans, menacing first one and then another. His finger was tremoring on the trigger. The revolver gleamed in the darkness with a fine silver light.

The fulsome grandee sprang backward with a low cry. The man who had been facing the Frisco kid took a quick step away. The beautiful array of Mexicans was suddenly disorganized.

The cry and the backward steps revealed something of great importance to the New York kid. He had never dreamed that he did not have a complete monopoly of all possible trepidations. The cry of the grandee was that of a man who suddenly sees a poisonous snake. Thus the kid was able to understand swiftly that they were all human beings. They were unanimous in not wishing for too bloody combat. There was a sudden expression of the equality. He had vaguely believed that they were not going to evince much consideration for his dramatic development as an active factor. They even might be exasperated into an onslaught by it. Instead, they had respected his movement with a respect as great even as an ejaculation of fear and backward steps. Upon the instant he pounced forward and began to swear, unreeling great English oaths as thick as ropes, and lashing the faces of the Mexicans with them. He was bursting with rage, because these men had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable. The whole thing had been an absurd imposition. He had been seduced into respectful alarm by the concave attitude of the grandee. And after all there had been an equality of emotion, an equality: he was furious. He wanted to take the serape of the grandee and swaddle him in it.

The Mexicans slunk back, their eyes burning wistfully. The kid took aim first at one and then at another. After they had achieved a certain distance they paused and drew up in a rank. They then resumed some of their old splendour of manner. A voice hailed him in a tone of cynical bravado as if it had come from between lips of smiling mockery. "Well, señor, it is finished?"

The kid scowled into the darkness, his revolver drooping at his side. After a moment he answered— "I am willing." He found it strange that he should be able to speak after this silence of years.

"Good-night, señor."

"Good-night."

When he turned to look at the Frisco kid he found him in his original position, his hand upon his hip. He was blinking in perplexity at the point from whence the Mexicans had vanished.

"Well," said the sober kid crossly, "are you ready to go home now?"

The Frisco kid said— "Where they gone?" His voice was undisturbed but inquisitive.

Benson suddenly propelled himself from his dreamful position against the wall. "Frishco kid's all right. He's drunk's fool and he's all right. But you New York kid, you're shober." He passed into a state of profound investigation. "Kid shober 'cause didn't go with us. Didn't go with us 'cause went to damn circus. Went to damn circus 'cause lose shakin' dice. Lose shakin' dice 'cause— what make lose shakin' dice, kid?"

The New York kid eyed the senile youth. "I don't know. The five white mice, maybe."

Benson puzzled so over this reply that he had to be held erect by his friends. Finally the Frisco kid said— "Let's go home."

Nothing had happened.

———————

17: The Romance of Ginger Mick

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 5 Aug 1915

In the working class vernacular of early 1900s Sydney

"I KNOWS a bloke who knows a bloke," was the commencement of one of Ginger Mick's anecdotes to me. I didn't understand at first what he meant, but discovered that the reference was to a confidence man the man who knows of a man with a job, or of an uncle with rich possessions in Fiji. Owing to the prevalence of idiom of the sort conversation with Ginger Mick was at first difficult; but his history, when he condescended to make his language plainer, was interesting.

"The police never give a man a chance, complained Mick. "Once you get up agin them you can't get away from their feelers. Six years of my last ten I've spent in gaol.

"An', first of all, I was a 'ard working young feller, an' I didn't want any truck with the law at all; but one night, when I 'ad a few in, a couple of Johns got on to a cobber of mine, an' I stuck fer 'im and stoushed one of the cops. Never you stoush a cop, young feller."

I hastily assured him I wouldn t.

"No, don't," he said; "because if you do, the Johns have a derry on yer ever after. When I come out they landed me m again quick-en-lively. They charged me with stealin'; but they knew I 'ad nothin to do with it. I did know who done it— he was a mate of mine ; and what they wanted was to get my evidence ag'in' him. Of course, when I wouldn't give them the straight chat I went up with the other chap as a cobber of his, though he swore I had nothing to do with it.

"Out at quod their idea is to keep the numbers apart, so as they won't contaminate each other. But there's heaps of chanst for one bloke to chat another; an' before you come out you've fixed it up to work some job with fellers who are in with you. The system gives you over a dozen hours each night in yer cell with nothin' to think of but planning what yer going ter do when yer out. I used to read er lot one time, but the time I spent inside got me outer the habit.

"I'm out a couple of days, an back I goes again. The police don t give a man a show. I was coming out of a Dago joint picking me teeth, when Big Thompson comes erlong an' says, 'Yer doing it well,' says he. 'Well,' says I, 'a man must feed is face sometimes.' Then 'e says: 'What yer doing it on?' The cow knew I wasn't workin'. So I goes erlong. An' I didn't steal the money at all; all I 'ad was ten bob

that Steel Chiller 'ad parsed me, but I wasn't goin' to put Chiller away by mentioning it.

"I was only keeping nit on the corner," he added, explaining things.

"That's 'ow I got into the habit, pursued Ginger Mick, "and they got to know me so well in quod that if I wasn I there fer a month or so they'd tell me they was thinkin' I must be dead. Mostly, I was never caught fer ther things I did, but went up fer the things other blokes did. You know what ther police do? They nab a bloke they think knows all erbout a job, and try an' get him to*squeal. If he won't, they'll put the job'on him if they can. A man won't squeal, not often. He's liable fer stoush it he does.

"Last, I met a bosker little cliner, who made me hate gaol. I met her old 'un in quod, and we was going into some jobs together; but after I'd seen the tart a few days I fergot the jobs, and hunted up hard graft an' settled down to it. We'd have rybuck chats on the verandah while the old 'un and his missus threw plates in the kitchen.

"She was the squarest little tart ever, and a neat piece, too; but Gawd knows where she got her squareness from. 'E spent 'alf 'is life in clinky, an' th' other 'alf fightin' 'er; an' sometimes 'e would say ther girl wasn't 'is; an' other times the old bird would tell him the same was a fact— the girl *wasn't* 'is. Yet this muslin was as nice a bit of goods as you could fancy.

"She worked as a waitress, and kept 'erself well. I think she must 'ave got to 'ate the life 'er mother lived, and that idea kep' me straight; fer it was a fixed thing that she should be my mutton.

"One of the chaps as useter hang round was Bill Wilson, but he had no chanst with the diner, although he got thick with the old man. One day the old bloke suggests a job for the three of us; but, of course, I turns it down. Next night I was working late, which meant that, after I had changed me clobber, it was after eight before I got along to May's. On me way I pars Bill Wilson scooting along quick, lookin' disturbed. 'Oh,' I says to myself, 'they've done ther job.'

"Then I met Snowy Peterson— not a bad chap fer a John 'Op—and he passes the day, pleasant, and remarks that I seem to be keeping out well.

" 'Never, no more inside fer me, I says. 'I'm workin', living square, and goin' to get married,' says I.

" 'Good luck to you !' says 'e, and passes on.

"While I'm chatting May on the verandah Sergeant Robertson passes, words us for a minute, and then goes on.

"You see how it happens, sometimes. A robbery takes place within a hundred yards from the spot where I meets Snowy a few minutes later; and after that Robbo sees me at the 'ouse where the goods are found. May's old 'un told 'em I wasn't in the business ; but, of course, he didn't say who was, an' I

don't blame 'im. An' Bill Wilson kep' dark. An', of course, I didn't blow the gaff on 'im— a man can't do that. So I goes up as an example of 'ow a criminal can't nohow get the criminal impulse outer him.

"But I comes out at last.

"You know how bashful er bloke gets erbout er tart'e's square shook on? I goes to May's place an' starts gaffing to the old 'un erbout things, an' never mentioning May, 'oping she'll look in. But she doesn't. So at larst I arsks, casual: 'Where's the cliner?'

" 'Oh. she's hitched it with Bill Wilson, seys the old 'un.

"I can tell yer that druv me fair balmy, an' I don't know 'ow I left the place or 'ow I gotter know the place where they was livin'. All I know is I sails up to their bloomin' roost, and there's May, a sight fer sore eyes, sewin' clobber on the verandah. But my eyes 'ad somethin' wrong erbout 'em that day, an' I seemed to 'ate 'er.

" 'Oh, Mick!' she says, in greetin'.

"But I goes right up to 'er an' don't take any kind o' notice of 'er 'and.

" 'I thort you wus my fair dinkum tart, an' ther chanst o' ther other pebble wus Buckley's,' says I. 'You made me think so. says I, 'an' I always thort you a square piece. I've a good mind ter wollop you.'

" 'That's no way fer a gentleman ter speak ter a lady,' says May, on 'er dig. at once.

" 'Did yer treat me like a lady?' says I bitterly. 'And did Bill?'

" 'Mick,' she says, 'it was yer own fault.

I cried me eyes out when I 'eard of what yer'd done, but I wasn't takin' any risks on that kinder life. I wants a man who keeps away from gaol an' the things what plants 'im there. So when Bill arsks me, I marries 'im.'

"That fair knocks me.

"'Bill!' I says; an' I wus goin' to say as 'ow it was Bill's fault that 'ad landed me in quod, but I thinks ter rneself that's not the game. 'Bill! I'll deal Bill all the stoush that's coming to 'im,' I says.

" 'Mick,' she answers, an' there's a sort of pleadin' in 'er voice, 'you're a bigger man than Bill, an' you was always plucky. You ain't goin' ter be a coward, Mick,' says she, ' 'itting a smaller man then yerself? Besides, what's ther use? I couldn't 'ave never married you.'

"Of course, she didn't know about things.

" 'You're fond of 'im, are yer?' I says. 'An' only six months ergo you said you was fond of me!'

" 'Promise me you won't touch Bill.' She says. I don't know whether she done it purposely or by accident, but just then she 'olds up the clothes she's been rnakin' —an' I tumbles.

"So I promises 'er erbout Bill, an' I promises 'er never to arsk 'im to 'ave any drinks, which made me think, when she arsks me, that there's trouble a'ready in the caboose. An' I sits waitin' fer Bill, watchin' 'er as she's sewing; an' although I'm feelin' lonely an' miserable, there's a sort of soft feelin' all over me.

"When Bill comes in 'e looks as if he knows what's due to 'im ; but when all goes along smooth 'e gets over that, and we 'ave tea together. Bli'me, it made me sick to see May handing out the fodder and to think it wasn't my table but Bill's! .Afterwards, when Bill suggests beer, I says I've chucked it, an' I goes out and gets soft tack.

"It seemed to me, all the evenin', that Bill had something on his mind— something quite different from the frightenness he showed when 'e first saw me. When I was going 'e says 'e'll walk down the street with me. 'E says nothin' fer a while, but, suddenly, 'e pulls up.

" 'Look 'ere,' 'e says. "There, in 'e's 'and, was some rings an' other hangings of a flash cliner. Good stuff it was. too!

"'What d'yer been up to?' I says; an' I was feeling madder'n a mad bull.

" 'Arf's yours if you'll pass 'em for me,' he says.

" 'What yer been doing?' I repeats.

"'I was forced to this,' he says. 'I mortgaged me week's money playin' two-up, an' when I found the chanst of takin' these, I grabbed 'em. I want to give the missus 'er quids, and you can 'ave orl the balance if yer like.'

"Fer a moment I was full to me 'ead with rage. I wanted ter tell 'im that I didn't want to 'ave anything to do with any more thieves' business, that 'e 'ad got my cliner by a fraud, an' lots of things. But orl of a sudden I don't see 'im an' 'e's 'andful of joolry any more, but a woman sitting down sewing baby clothes, an' 'umming an' 'appy, an' thinkin' that 'er 'usband was a sight different from a chap who'd 'ad the gaol-sacks on 'im. So I takes the joolry from 'im, an' goes off without a word.

"Next day I passes the goods, and meets Bill near where 'e works to give 'im the spondulix. I puts my hand on 'is shoulder.

" 'Bill,' says I, 'I've stood er lot from you; but this ends it. I don't want none o' ther money— keep it fer the kid when it comes erlong. I've done gaol for you, and, likely, I'll do it again; an' you've got my cliner because she thinks you a saint. But she's my cliner still, in a way. You've got to cut this business and ther two-ups and ther beer, and settle down to look after 'er. She's a square, good tart, an' deserves it. By the rules of the game, I ought to stoush yer now, good an' 'ard, fer ther ways you've played on me, but the stoush won't be any ther less fer waiting, if I find you haven't played the game to her!'

"Then I left 'im. Fat O'Reilly, when he nabbed me, knew well enough I 'adn't stole the things, but I'd pawned 'em; and, as I wouldnt blow the gaff, of course I went up. When I comes out I goes erlong to see May and Bill ergain."

"How were they getting on?" I asked.

"Tip-top. A brand-new baby, and everything running smooth, and Bill a member of a Rechabite lodge. But I was sort of froze out. May thinks, you see, that I'm not a fit cobber for Bill!'

18: The Hollywood Way

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Collected in: *The Moon Over Broadway*, 1931

ONCE upon a time a young author came to Hollywood. He was quite a famous young writer and the concern for whom he came to write pictures, was paying him a very fancy salary. After sitting around for five weeks, the writer was finally called into an executive's office and told to write a story about a certain star.

Accordingly, the writer went to his home and locked himself in. He wanted this first picture to be a knockout and he worked like the very devil toward that end. After three weeks of writing, rewriting and rewriting, his story was finished.

He read it over several times and nodded his head in satisfaction. He had done a good job, he felt, a very good job. So he trotted around to the executive's office and turned in the script.

"It's a good story, I think," were his words of comment. "Read it over. I think you'll like it."

And he left. ...

THE EXECUTIVE took the story home with him that night. He read it, and even though he formerly sold clothing and didn't know an O. Henry story from a Shakespearean drama, he felt called upon to make some changes.

He left the script in the room and went to another man's house for a conference. His wife picked it up, read it and made some changes of her own accord. The next morning, before the executive left for his office, his ten-year-old daughter glanced through the script, grabbed a pen and rewrote a number of the speeches to suit herself.

When the executive reached his office, he called in his best continuity man and handed him the script.

"Here," he said, "is a story by F——, that young writer I brought out here. It was a pretty fair story, and the changes I've put in make it a great story. Write it into continuity form."

The continuity man went to his own office and read the photoplay.

"Humph," he muttered, "I can see right now that this thing will have to be changed a great deal more than it is. As long as it's going to be changed, I might as well make the changes myself. I think I'll do it while I'm writing the continuity."

When he had finished, the story bore only a slight resemblance to the original script. The executive was too busy to read the continuity.

So the chosen director was called in and the continuity turned over to him.

THE director read the continuity and got together with his star.

"The author of this story," said the director, "is a young fellow. I'm afraid he doesn't know any too much. If you don't mind, I think I'll try my best to make this a better story."

The star nodded agreeably. He was brainless, even for Hollywood.

"By all means," he asserted. "And when you're finished, give me a look at it. I think that I'll have an idea or two that we can put in there. I have a great knowledge of story values, you know."

About two weeks later the production got under way.

In six weeks the picture was finished. The writer was called in to see some of the rushes. He looked at several portions of the film and listened to the dialogue. In the middle of it he went over to the director.

"Pardon me, sir," he asked. "But aren't you showing me the wrong film? This isn't mine, is it?"

"Of course it is," was the director's answer. "Naturally there have been certain changes made but they are all for the better. Sit down and let's watch the rest of those scenes."

The young writer sank into his seat and closed his eyes in despair.

THE PICTURE went into the hands of the cutter. The cutter had heard that the author was a young fellow. He cut the picture. And how he cut! If ever a picture was handled brutally, this one was it.

Shortly after, there was to be a preview. The author was notified. He went around and invited several of his friends.

"Be at the theatre at eight o'clock sharp tonight," he said. "I want you to see this thing. But remember nothing about the picture is mine. The only thing they have used that I turned in is my name."

That night, promptly at eight, the author was in his seat at the theatre. He was curious to see exactly how they had murdered the story.

"Well," he murmured to himself, "I have one consolation, anyhow. My name is on the film. Maybe I'll have better luck next time."

The picture was flashed on the screen. The young writer gave vent to one long howl and passed out. His name had been spelled wrong! ....

19: The Story of the Spaniards, Hammersmith

E. and H. Heron

1851-1935 and 1876-1922

Pearsons, May 1899

Kate and Hesketh Prichard, writing as "E. and H. Heron", wrote a dozen stories featuring psychic investigator Flaxman Low. This is the first story.

LIEUTENANT RODERICK HOUSTON, of H.M.S. *Sphinx*, had practically nothing beyond his pay, and he was beginning to be very tired of the West African station, when he received the pleasant intelligence that a relative had left him a legacy. This consisted of a satisfactory sum in ready money and a house in Hammersmith, which was rated at over £200 a year, and was said in addition to be comfortably furnished. Houston, therefore, counted on its rental to bring his income up to a fairly desirable figure. Further information from home, however, showed him that he had been rather premature in his expectations, whereupon, being a man of action, he applied for two months' leave, and came home to look after his affairs himself.

When he had been a week in London he arrived at the conclusion that he could not possibly hope single-handed to tackle the difficulties which presented themselves. He accordingly wrote the following letter to his friend, Flaxman Low:

The Spaniards, Hammersmith,
23-3-1892.
DEAR LOW,

Since we parted some three years ago, I have heard very little of you. It was only yesterday that I met our mutual friend, Sammy Smith ('Silkworm' of our schooldays) who told me that your studies have developed in a new direction, and that you are now a good deal interested in psychical subjects. If this be so, I hope to induce you to come and stay with me here for a few days by promising to introduce you to a problem in your own line. I am just now living at 'The Spaniards,' a house that has lately been left to me, and which in the first instance was built by an old fellow named Van Nuysen, who married a great-aunt of mine. It is a good house, but there is said to be 'something wrong' with it. It lets easily, but unluckily the tenants cannot be persuaded to remain above a week or two. They complain that the place is haunted by something— presumably a ghost— because its vagaries bear just that brand of inconsequence which stamps the common run of manifestations.

It occurs to me that you may care to investigate the matter with me. If so, send me a wire when to expect you.

Yours ever.
RODERICK HOUSTON.

Houston waited in some anxiety for an answer. Low was the sort of man one could rely on in almost any emergency. Sammy Smith had told him a

characteristic anecdote of Low's career at Oxford, where, although his intellectual triumphs may be forgotten, he will always be remembered by the story that when Sands, of Queen's, fell ill on the day before the 'Varsity sports, a telegram was sent to Low's rooms: "Sands ill. You must do the hammer for us." Low's reply was pithy: "I'll be there." Thereupon he finished the treatise upon which he was engaged, and next day his strong, lean figure was to be seen swinging the hammer amidst vociferous cheering, for that was the occasion on which he not only won the event, but beat the record.

On the fifth day Low's answer came from Vienna. As he read it, Houston recalled the high forehead, long neck— with its accompanying low collar— and thin moustache of his scholarly, athletic friend, and smiled. There was so much more in Flaxman Low than anyone gave him credit for.

MY DEAR HOUSTON,

Very glad to hear of you again. In response to your kind invitation, I thank you for the opportunity of meeting the ghost, and still more for the pleasure of your companionship. I came here to inquire into a somewhat similar affair. I hope, however, to be able to leave to-morrow, and will be with you some time on Friday evening.

Very sincerely yours.

FLAXMAN LOW.

P.S.— By the way, will it be convenient to give your servants a holiday during the term of my visit, as, if my investigations are to be of any value, not a grain of dust must be disturbed in your house, excepting by ourselves?— F.L.

"The Spaniards" was within some fifteen minutes' walk of Hammersmith Bridge. Set in the midst of a fairly respectable neighbourhood, it presented an odd contrast to the commonplace dullness of the narrow streets crowded about it. As Flaxman Low drove up in the evening light, he reflected that the house might have come from the back of beyond— it gave an impression of something old-world and something exotic.

It was surrounded by a ten-foot wall, above which the upper storey was visible, and Low decided that this intensely English house still gave some curious suggestion of the tropics. The interior of the house carried out the same idea, with its sense of space and air, cool tints and wide, matted passages.

"So you have seen something yourself since you came?" Low said, as they sat at dinner, for Houston had arranged that meals should be sent in for them from an hotel.

"I've heard tapping up and down the passage upstairs. It is an uncarpeted landing which runs the whole length of the house. One night, when I was quicker than usual, I saw what looked like a bladder disappear into one of the bedrooms— your room it is to be, by the way— and the door closed behind it," replied Houston discontentedly. "The usual meaningless antics of a ghost."

"What had the tenants who lived here to say about it?" went on Low.

"Most of the people saw and heard just what I have told you, and promptly went away. The only one who stood out for a little while was old Filderg— you know the man? Twenty years ago he made an effort to cross the Australian deserts— he stopped for eight weeks. When he left he saw the house-agent, and said he was afraid he had done a little shooting practice in the upper passage, and he hoped it wouldn't count against him in the bill, as it was done in defence of his life. He said something had jumped on to the bed and tried to strangle him. He described it as cold and glutinous, and he pursued it down the passage, firing at it. He advised the owner to have the house pulled down; but, of course, my cousin did nothing of the kind. It's a very good house, and he did not see the sense of spoiling his property."

"That's very true," replied Flaxman Low, looking round. "Mr. Van Nuysen had been in the West Indies, and kept his liking for spacious rooms."

"Where did you hear anything about him?" asked Houston in surprise.

"I have heard nothing beyond what you told me in your letter; but I see a couple of bottles of Gulf weed and a lace-plant ornament, such as people used to bring from the West Indies in former days."

"Perhaps I should tell you the history of the old man," said Houston doubtfully; "but we aren't proud of it!"

Flaxman Low considered a moment.

"When was the ghost seen for the first time?"

"When the first tenant took the house. It was let after old Van Nuysen's time."

"Then it may clear the way if you will tell me something of him."

"He owned sugar plantations in Trinidad, where he passed the greater part of his life, while his wife mostly remained in England— incompatibility of temper it was said. When he came home for good and built this house they still lived apart, my aunt declaring that nothing on earth would persuade her to return to him. In course of time he became a confirmed invalid, and he then insisted on my aunt joining him. She lived here for perhaps a year, when she was found dead in bed one morning— in your room."

"What caused her death?"

"She had been in the habit of taking narcotics, and it was supposed that she smothered herself while under their influence."

"That doesn't sound very satisfactory," remarked Flaxman Low.

"Her husband was satisfied with it anyhow, and it was no one else's business. The family were only too glad to have the affair hushed up."

"And what became of Mr. Van Nuysen?"

"That I can't tell you. He disappeared a short time after. Search was made for him in the usual way, but nobody knows to this day what became of him."

"Ah, that was strange, as he was such an invalid," said Low, and straightway fell into a long fit of abstraction, from which he was roused by hearing Houston curse the incurable foolishness and imbecility of ghostly behaviour. Flaxman woke up at this. He broke a walnut thoughtfully and began in a gentle voice:

"My dear fellow, we are apt to be hasty in our condemnation of the general behaviour of ghosts. It may appear incalculably foolish in our eyes, and I admit there often seems to be a total absence of any apparent object or intelligent action. But remember that what appears to us to be foolishness may be wisdom in the spirit world, since our unready senses can only catch broken glimpses of what is, I have not the slightest doubt, a coherent whole, if we could trace the connection."

"There may be something in that," replied Houston indifferently. "People naturally say that this ghost is the ghost of old Van Nuysen. But what connection can possibly exist between what I have told you of him and the manifestations—a tapping up and down the passage and the drawing about of a bladder like a child at play? It sounds idiotic!"

"Certainly. Yet it need not necessarily be so. There are isolated facts, we must look for the links which lie between. Suppose a saddle and a horse-shoe were to be shown to a man who had never seen a horse, I doubt whether he, however intelligent, could evolve the connecting idea! The ways of spirits are strange to us simply because we need further data to help us to interpret them."

"It's a new point of view," returned Houston, "but upon my word, you know, Low, I think you're wasting your time!"

Flaxman Low smiled slowly; his grave, melancholy face brightened.

"I have," said he, "gone somewhat deeply into the subject. In other sciences one reasons by analogy. Psychology is unfortunately a science with a future but without a past, or more probably it is a lost science of the ancients. However that may be, we stand to-day on the frontier of an unknown world, and progress is the result of individual effort; each solution of difficult phenomena forms a step towards the solution of the next problem. In this case, for example, the bladder-like object may be the key to the mystery."

Houston yawned.

"It all seems pretty senseless, but perhaps you may be able to read reason into it. If it were anything tangible, anything a man could meet with his fists, it would be easier."

"I entirely agree with you. But suppose we deal with this affair as it stands, on similar lines, I mean on prosaic, rational lines, as we should deal with a purely human mystery."

"My dear fellow," returned Houston, pushing his chair back from the table wearily, "you shall do just as you like, only get rid of the ghost!"

For some time after Low's arrival nothing very special happened. The tappings continued, and more than once Low had been in time to see the bladder disappear into the closing door of his bedroom, though, unluckily, he never chanced to be inside the room on these occasions, and however quickly he followed the bladder, he never succeeded in seeing anything further. He made a thorough examination of the house, and left no space unaccounted for in his careful measurement. There were no cellars, and the foundation of the house consisted of a thick layer of concrete.

At length, on the sixth night, an event took place, which, as Flaxman Low remarked, came very near to putting an end to the investigations as far as he was concerned. For the preceding two nights he and Houston had kept watch in the hope of getting a glimpse of the person or thing which tapped so persistently up and down the passage. But they were disappointed, for there were no manifestations. On the third evening, therefore, Low went off to his room a little earlier than usual, and fell asleep almost immediately.

He says he was awakened by feeling a heavy weight upon his feet, something that seemed inert and motionless. He recollected that he had left the gas burning, but the room was now in darkness.

Next he was aware that the thing on the bed had slowly shifted, and was gradually travelling up towards his chest. How it came on the bed he had no idea. Had it leaped or climbed? The sensation he experienced as it moved was of some ponderous, pulpy body, not crawling or creeping, but spreading! It was horrible! He tried to move his lower limbs, but could not because of the deadening weight. A feeling of drowsiness began to overpower him, and a deadly cold, such as he said he had before felt at sea when in the neighbourhood of icebergs, chilled upon the air.

With a violent struggle he managed to free his arms, but the thing grew more irresistible as it spread upwards. Then he became conscious of a pair of glassy eyes, with livid, everted lids, looking into his own. Whether they were human eyes or beast eyes, he could not tell, but they were watery, like the eyes of a dead fish, and gleamed with a pale, internal lustre.

Then he owns he grew afraid. But he was still cool enough to notice one peculiarity about this ghastly visitant— although the head was within a few inches of his own, he could detect no breathing. It dawned on him that he was about to be suffocated, for, by the same method of extension, the thing was now coming over his face! It felt cold and clammy, like a mass of mucilage or a monstrous snail. And every instant the weight became greater. He is a powerful man, and he struck with his fists again and again at the head. Some substance yielded under the blows with a sickening sensation of bruised flesh.

With a lucky twist he raised himself in the bed and battered away with all the force he was capable of in his cramped position. The only effect was an

occasional shudder or quake that ran through the mass as his half-arm blows rained upon it. At last, by chance, his hand knocked against the candle beside him. In a moment he recollected the matches. He seized the box, and struck a light.

As he did so, the lump slid to the floor. He sprang out of bed, and lit the candle. He felt a cold touch upon his leg, but when he looked down there was nothing to be seen. The door, which he had locked overnight, was now open, and he rushed out into the passage. All was still and silent with the throbbing vacancy of night time.

After searching round, he returned to his room. The bed still gave ample proof of the struggle that had taken place, and by his watch he saw the hour to be between two and three.

As there seemed nothing more to be done, he put on his dressing-gown, lit his pipe, and sat down to write an account of the experience he had just passed through for the Psychical Research Society— from which paper the above is an abstract.

He is a man of strong nerves, but he could not disguise from himself that he had been at handgrips with some grotesque form of death. What might be the nature of his assailant he could not determine, but his experience was supported by the attack which had been made on Filderg, and also— it was impossible to avoid the conclusion— by the manner of Mrs. Van Nuysen's death.

He thought the whole situation over carefully in connection with the tapping and the disappearing bladder, but, turn these events how he would, he could make nothing of them. They were entirely incongruous. A little later he went and made a shakedown in Houston's room.

"What was the thing?" asked Houston, when Low had ended his story of the encounter.

Low shrugged his shoulders.

"At least it proves that Filderg did not dream," he said.

"But this is monstrous! We are more in the dark than ever. There's nothing for it but to have the house pulled down. Let us leave to-day."

"Don't be in a hurry, my dear fellow. You would rob me of a very great pleasure; besides, we may be on the verge of some valuable discovery. This series of manifestations is even more interesting than the Vienna mystery I was telling you of."

"Discovery or not," replied the other, "I don't like it."

The first thing next morning Low went out for a quarter of an hour. Before breakfast a man with a barrowful of sand came into the garden. Low looked up from his paper, leant out of the window, and gave some order.

When Houston came down a few minutes later he saw the yellowish heap on the lawn with some surprise.

"Hullo! What's this?" he asked.

"I ordered it," replied Low.

"All right. What's it for?"

"To help us in our investigations. Our visitor is capable of being felt, and he or it left a very distinct impression on the bed. Hence I gather it can also leave an impression on sand. It would be an immense advance if we could arrive at any correct notion of what sort of feet the ghost walks on. I propose to spread a layer of this sand in the upper passage, and the result should be footmarks if the tapping comes to-night."

That evening the two men made a fire in Houston's bedroom, and sat there smoking and talking, to leave the ghost "a free run for once," as Houston phrased it. The tapping was heard at the usual hour, and presently the accustomed pause at the other end of the passage and the quiet closing of the door.

Low heaved a long sigh of satisfaction as he listened.

"That's my bedroom door," he said; "I know the sound of it perfectly. In the morning, and with the help of daylight, we shall see what we shall see."

As soon as there was light enough for the purpose of examining the footprints, Low roused Houston.

Houston was full of excitement as a boy, but his spirits fell by the time he had passed from end to end of the passage.

"There are marks," he said, "but they are as perplexing as everything else about this haunting brute, whatever it is. I suppose you think this is the print left by the thing which attacked you the night before last?"

"I fancy it is," said Low, who was still bending over the floor eagerly. "What do you make of it, Houston?"

"The brute has only one leg, to start with," replied Houston, "and that leaves the mark of a large, clawless pad! It's some animal— some ghoulish monster!"

"On the contrary," said Low, "I think we have now every reason to conclude that it is a man."

"A man? What man ever left footmarks like these?"

"Look at these hollows and streaks at the sides; they are the traces of the sticks we have heard tapping."

"You don't convince me," returned Hodgson doggedly.

"Let us wait another twenty-four hours, and to-morrow night, if nothing further occurs, I will give you my conclusions. Think it over. The tapping, the bladder, and the fact that Mr. Van Nuysen had lived in Trinidad. Add to these things this single pad-like print. Does nothing strike you by way of a solution?"

Houston shook his head.

"Nothing. And I fail to connect any of these things with what happened both to you and Filderg."

"Ah! now," said Flaxman Low, his face clouding a little, "I confess you lead me into a somewhat different region, though to me the connection is perfect."

Houston raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"If you can unravel this tangle of hints and events and diagnose the ghost, I shall be extremely astonished," he said. "What can you make of the footless impression?"

"Something, I hope. In fact, that mark may be a clue— an outrageous one, perhaps, but still a clue."

That evening the weather broke, and by night the storm had risen to a gale, accompanied by sharp bursts of rain.

"It's a noisy night," remarked Houston; "I don't suppose we'll hear the ghost, supposing it does turn up."

This was after dinner, as they were about to go into the smoking-room. Houston, finding the gas low in the hall, stopped to run it higher; at the same time asking Low to see if the jet on the upper landing was also alight.

Flaxman Low glanced up and uttered a slight exclamation, which brought Houston to his side.

Looking down at them from over the banisters was a face— a blotched, yellowish face, flanked by two swollen, protruding ears, the whole aspect being strangely leonine. It was but a glimpse, a clash of meeting glances, as it were, a glare of defiance, and the face was quickly withdrawn as the two men literally leapt up the stairs.

"There's nothing here," exclaimed Houston, after a search had been carried out through every room above.

"I didn't suppose we'd find anything," returned Low.

"This fairly knots up the thread," said Houston. "You can't pretend to unravel it now."

"Come down," said Low briefly; "I'm ready to give you my opinion, such as it is."

Once in the smoking-room, Houston busied himself in turning on all the light he could procure, then he saw to securing the windows, and piled up an immense fire, while Flaxman Low, who, as usual, had a cigarette in his mouth, sat on the edge of the table and watched him with some amusement.

"You saw that abominable face?" cried Houston, as he threw himself into a chair. "It was as material as yours or mine. But where did he go to? He must be somewhere about."

"We saw him clearly. That is sufficient for our purpose."

"You are very good at enumerating points, Low. Now just listen to my list. The difficulties grow with every fresh discovery. We're at a deadlock now, I take it? The sticks and the tapping point to an old man, the playing with a bladder to a child; the footmark might be the pad of a tiger minus claws, yet the thing that

attacked you at night was cold and pulpy. And, lastly, by way of a wind-up, we see a lion-like, human face! If you can make all these items square with each other, I'll be happy to hear what you have got to say."

"You must first allow me to ask you a question. I understood you to say that no blood relationship existed between you and old Mr. Van Nuysen?"

"Certainly not. He was quite an outsider," answered Houston brusquely.

"In that case you are welcome to my conclusions. All the things you have mentioned point to one explanation. This house is haunted by the ghost of Mr. Van Nuysen, and he was a leper."

Houston stood up and stared at his companion.

"What a horrible notion! I must say I fail to see how you have arrived at such a conclusion."

"Take the chain of evidence in rather different order," said Low. "Why should a man tap with a stick?"

"Generally because he's blind."

"In cases of blindness, one stick is used for guidance. Here we have two for support."

"A man who has lost the use of his feet."

"Exactly; a man who has from some cause partially lost the use of his feet."

"But the bladder and the lion-like face?" went on Houston.

"The bladder, or what seemed to us to resemble a bladder, was one of his feet, contorted by the disease and probably swathed in linen, which foot he dragged rather than used; consequently, in passing through a door, for example, he would in the habit of drawing it in after him. Now, as regards the single footmark we saw. In one form of leprosy, the smaller bones of the extremities frequently fall away. The pad-like impression was, as I believe, the mark of the other foot— a toeless foot which he used, because in a more advanced stage of the disease the maimed hand or foot heals and becomes callous."

"Go on," said Houston; "it sounds as if it might be true. And the lion-like face I can account for myself. I have been in China, and have seen it before in lepers."

"Mr. Van Nuysen had been in Trinidad for many years, as we know, and while there he probably contracted the disease."

"I suppose so. After his return," added Houston, "he shut himself up almost entirely, and gave out that he was a martyr to rheumatic gout, this awful thing being the true explanation."

"It also accounts for Mrs. Van Nuysen's determination not to return to her husband."

Houston appeared much disturbed.

"We can't drop it here, Low," he said, in a constrained voice. "There is a good deal more to be cleared up yet. Can you tell me more?"

"From this point I find myself on less certain ground," replied Low unwillingly. "I merely offer a suggestion, remember— I don't ask you to accept it. I believe Mrs. Van Nuysen was murdered!"

"What?" exclaimed Houston. "By her husband?"

"Indications tend that way."

"But, my good fellow—"

"He suffocated her and then made away with himself. It is a pity that his body was not recovered. The condition of the remains would be the only really satisfactory test of my theory. If the skeleton could even now be found, the fact that he was a leper would be finally settled."

There was a prolonged pause until Houston put another question.

"Wait a minute, Low," he said. "Ghosts are admittedly immaterial. In this instance our spook has an extremely palpable body. Surely this is rather unusual? You have made everything else more or less plain. Can you tell me why this dead leper should have tried to murder you and old Filderg? And also how he came to have the actual physical power to do so?"

Low removed his cigarette to look thoughtfully at the end of it. "Now I lapse into the purely theoretical," he answered. "Cases have been known where the assumption of diabolical agency is apparently justifiable."

"Diabolical agency?— I don't follow you."

"I will try to make myself clear, though the subject is still in a stage of vagueness and immaturity. Van Nuysen committed a murder of exceptional atrocity, and afterwards killed himself. Now, bodies of suicides are known to be peculiarly susceptible to spiritual influences, even to the point of arrested corruption. Add to this our knowledge that the highest aim of an evil spirit is to gain possession of a material body. If I carried out my theory to its logical conclusion, I should say that Van Nuysen's body is hidden somewhere on these premises— that this body is intermittently animated by some spirit, which at certain points is forced to re-enact the gruesome tragedy of the Van Nuysens. Should any living person chance to occupy the position of the first victim, so much the worse for him!"

For some minutes Houston made no remark on this singular expression of opinion.

"But have you ever met with anything of the sort before?" he said at last.

"I can recall," replied Flaxman Low thoughtfully, "quite a number of cases which would seem to bear out this hypothesis. Among them a curious problem of haunting exhaustively examined by Busner in the early part of 1888, at which I was myself lucky enough to assist. Indeed, I may add that the affair which I have recently engaged upon in Vienna offers some rather similar features. There, however, we had to stop short of excavation, by which alone any specific results might have been attained."

"Then you are of the opinion," said Houston, "that pulling the house to pieces might cast some further light upon this affair?"

"I cannot see any better course," said Mr. Low.

Then Houston closed the discussion by a very definite declaration.

"This house shall come down!"

So "The Spaniards" was pulled down.

SUCH is the story of "The Spaniards," Hammersmith, and it has been given the first place in this series because, although it may not be of so strange a nature as some that will follow it, yet it seems to us to embody in a high degree the peculiar methods by which Mr. Flaxman Low is wont to approach these cases.

The work of demolition, begun at the earliest possible moment, did not occupy very long, and during its early stages, under the boarding at an angle of the landing was found a skeleton. Several of the phalanges were missing, and other indications also established beyond a doubt the fact that the remains were the remains of a leper.

The skeleton is now in the museum of one of our city hospitals. It bears a scientific ticket, and is the only evidence extant of the correctness of Mr. Flaxman Low's methods and the possible truth of his extraordinary theories.
