PAST MASTERS 231

Rudyard Kipling
H de Vere Stacpoole
Charlotte Bronte
"Saki"
Ring Lardner
A. E. W. Mason
Algernon Blackwood
Mark Hellinger
Robert Louis Stevenson

and more

PAST MASTERS 231

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

5 Aug 2025

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1: Sixteen Years Without a Birthday

Brander Matthews

1852-1929

Harper's New Monthly Magazine Feb 1895

WHILE THE JOURNALIST deftly dealt with the lobster *à la* Newburg, as it bubbled in the chafing-dish before him, the deep-toned bell of the church at the corner began to strike twelve.

"Give me your plates, quick," he said, "and we'll drink Jack's health before it's to-morrow."

The artist and the soldier and the professor of mathematics did as they were told; and then they filled their glasses.

The journalist, still standing, looked the soldier in the eye, and said: "Jack, this is the first time The Quartet has met since the old school-days, ten years ago and more. That this reunion should take place on your birthday doubles the pleasure of the occasion. We wish you many happy returns of the day!"

Then the artist and the mathematician rose also, and they looked at the soldier, and repeated together, "Many happy returns of the day!"

Whereupon they emptied their glasses and sat down, and the soldier rose to his feet.

"Thank you, boys," he began, "but I think you have already made me enjoy this one birthday three times over. It was yesterday that I was twenty-six, and—"

"But I didn't meet you till last night," interrupted the journalist; "and yesterday was Sunday; and I couldn't get a box for the theatre and find the other half of The Quartet all on Sunday, could I?"

"I'm not complaining because yesterday was my real birthday," the soldier returned, "even if you have now protracted the celebration on to the third day— it's just struck midnight, you know. All I have to say is, that since you have given me a triplicate birthday this time, any future anniversary will have to spread itself over four days if it wants to beat the record, that's all." And he took his seat again.

"Well," said the artist, who had recently returned from Paris, "that won't happen till we see 'the week of the four Thursdays,' as the French say."

"And we sha'n't see that for a month of Sundays, I guess," the journalist rejoined.

There was a moment of silence, and then the mathematician spoke for the first time.

"A quadruplex birthday will be odd enough, I grant you," he began, "but I don't think it quite as remarkable as the case of the lady who had no birthday for sixteen years after she was born."

The soldier and the artist and the journalist all looked at the professor of mathematics, and they all smiled; but his face remained perfectly grave.

"What's that you say?" asked the journalist. "Sixteen years without a birthday? Isn't that a very large order?"

"Did you know the lady herself?" inquired the soldier.

"She was my grandmother," the mathematician answered. "She had no birthday for the first sixteen years of her life."

"You mean that she did not celebrate her birthdays, I suppose," the artist remarked. "That's nothing. I know lots of families where they don't keep any anniversaries at all."

"No," persisted the mathematician. "I meant what I said, and precisely what I said. My grandmother did not keep her first fifteen birthdays because she couldn't. She didn't have them to keep. They didn't happen. The first time she had a chance to celebrate her birthday was when she completed her sixteenth year— and I need not tell you that the family made the most of the event."

"This a real grandmother you are talking about," asked the journalist, "and not a fairy godmother?"

"I could understand her going without a birthday till she was four years old," the soldier suggested, "if she was born on the 29th of February."

"That accounts for four years," the mathematician admitted, "since my grandmother *was* born on the 29th of February."

"In what year?" the soldier pursued. "In 1796?"

The professor of mathematics nodded.

"Then that accounts for eight years," said the soldier.

"I don't see that at all," exclaimed the artist.

"It's easy enough," the soldier explained. "The year 1800 isn't a leap-year, you know. We have a leap-year every four years, except the final year of a century— 1700, 1800, 1900."

"I didn't know that," said the artist.

"I'd forgotten it," remarked the journalist. "But that gets us over only half of the difficulty. He says his grandmother didn't have a birthday till she was sixteen. We can all see now how it was she went without this annual luxury for the first eight years. But who robbed her of the birthdays she was entitled to when she was eight and twelve. That's what I want to know."

"Born February 29, 1796, the Gregorian calendar deprives her of a birthday in 1800," the soldier said. "But she ought to have had her first chance February 29, 1804. I don't see how—" and he paused in doubt. "Oh!" he cried, suddenly; "where was she living in 1804?"

"Most of the time in Russia," the mathematician answered. "Although the family went to England for a few days early in the year."

"What was the date when they left Russia?" asked the soldier, eagerly.

"They sailed from St. Petersburg in a Russian bark on the 10th of February," answered the professor of mathematics, "and owing to head-winds they did not reach England for a fortnight."

"Exactly," cried the soldier. "That's what I thought. That accounts for it."

"I don't see how," the artist declared; "that is, unless you mean to suggest that the Czar confiscated the little American girl's birthday and sent it to Siberia."

"It's plain enough," the soldier returned. "We have the reformed calendar, the Gregorian calendar, you know, and the Russians haven't. They keep the old Julian calendar, and it's now ten days behind ours. They celebrate Christmas three days after we have begun the new year. So if the little girl left St. Petersburg in a Russian ship on February 10, 1804, by the old reckoning, and was on the water two weeks, she would land in England after March 1st by the new calendar."

"That is to say," the artist inquired, "the little girl came into an English port thinking she was going to have her birthday the next week, and when she set foot on shore she found out that her birthday was passed the week before. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," answered the soldier; and the mathematician nodded also.

"Then all I have to say," the artist continued, "is that it was a mean trick to play on a child that had been looking forward to her first birthday for eight years— to knock her into the middle of next week in that fashion!"

"And she had to go four years more for her next chance," said the journalist. "Then she would be twelve. But you said she hadn't a birthday till she was sixteen. How did she lose the one she was entitled to in 1808? She wasn't on a Russian ship again, was she?"

"No," the mathematician replied; "she was on an American ship that time."

"On the North Sea?" asked the artist.

"No," was the calm answer; "on the Pacific."

"Sailing east or west?" cried the soldier.

"Sailing east," answered the professor of mathematics, smiling again.

"Then I see how it might happen," the soldier declared.

"Well, I don't," confessed the artist.

The journalist said nothing, as it seemed unprofessional to admit ignorance of anything.

"It is simple enough," the soldier explained. "You see, the world is revolving about the sun steadily, and it is always high noon somewhere on the globe. The day rolls round unceasing, and it is not cut off into twenty-four hours. We happen to have taken the day of Greenwich or Paris as the day of civilization, and we say that it begins earlier in China and later in California; but it is all the same day, we say. Therefore there has to be some place out in the middle of the

Pacific Ocean where we lose or gain a day— if we are going east, we gain it; if we are going west, we lose it. Now I suppose this little girl of twelve was on her way from some Asiatic port to some American port, and they stopped on their voyage at Honolulu. Perhaps they dropped anchor there just before midnight on their February 28, 1808, thinking that the morrow would be the 29th; but when they were hailed from the shore, just after midnight, they found out that it was already March 1st."

As the soldier finished, he looked at the mathematician for confirmation of his explanation.

Thus appealed to, the professor of mathematics smiled and nodded, and said: "You have hit it. That's just how it was that my grandmother lost the birthday she ought to have had when she was twelve, and had to go four years more without one."

"And so she really didn't have a birthday till she was sixteen!" the artist observed. "Well, all I can say is, your great-grandfather took too many chances. I don't think he gave the child a fair show. I hope he made it up to her when she was sixteen— that's all!"

An hour later The Quartet separated. The soldier and the artist walked away together, but the journalist delayed the mathematician.

"I say," he began, "that yarn about your grandmother was very interesting. It is an extraordinary combination of coincidences. I can see it in the Sunday paper with a scare-head— 'SIXTEEN YEARS WITHOUT A BIRTHDAY!' Do you mind my using it?"

"But it isn't true," said the professor.

"Not true?" echoed the journalist.

"No," replied the mathematician. "I made it up. I hadn't done my share of the talking, and I didn't want you to think I had nothing to say for myself."

"Not a single word of truth in it?" the journalist returned.

"Not a single word," was the mathematician's answer.

"Well, what of that?" the journalist declared. "I don't want to file it in an affidavit— I want to print it in a newspaper."

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2: The Moth and the Star

Gilbert Frankau

1884-1953

Everybody's Magazine July 1921

THE PRINCIPAL CURSE of all artistic endeavor to secure financial success is that the successful artist requires not only an artistic but a business sense. More especially does this principle apply to the least of all the arts— acting. Because, from that welter of thwarted ambition, diseased vanities, and personal jealousy which is the British stage, only the hardest-headed, hardest-hearted ever emerge to London prominence. And, once emerged, your prominent actor or actress must needs devote at least two-thirds of his or her time to the suppression of other hard-headed, hard-hearted mummers— all eager for West-end applause and West-end money.

The law of our stage, therefore, is the law of the primeval jungle, the law of "big business," the law of all competitive communities: death (otherwise an ill-paid provincial engagement) to the weak, the poor, and such-as-have-no-influence. Which may or may not be the reason for the decay of British acting in the West-end of London.

This fight-to-a-finish struggle, however, is not carried on in the open. Openly, the fighters compliment one another, stroke one another, purr over one another. An illusion of good manners, peculiar to the profession, an illusion of hearty good-will, peculiar to the professional, cloaks the snarling, backbiting tussle from all save the astutest eye.

Nevertheless, even in this dark jungle of hatred and jealousy, Love— as a white flower in black swamp-lands— comes occasionally to bloom. Hear now the love-story of Sheila Tremayne: and if the flower be a little less white than your own imaginings, a little stained of petal and calyx, be lenient in your appraisement, remembering the soil wherefrom it grew.

MARCIA Meredith was a good wife, a mediocre actress, a magnificent business-woman, and— above all things— a West-end "star." The gaining of that stardom had cost her forty-five years of struggle and most of her soul. To the public she remained a ripe thirty, soulful and temperamental, the shimmering, passionate Marcia Meredith of "Love's Victim," "Mrs. Deerson's Marriage," and other dramatic entertainments too trivial for the chronicling; to the sophisticated eyes of "the profession" she stood for the ultimate jungle-product— a tigress ready with tongue and tooth and claw to defend her theatrical lair against any who might seek to invade it.

Vague hints of this tigerishness, which lurked, always ready to pounce, behind the dark-lashed, dark-green eyes of the leading lady, had reached Sheila

Tremayne before she accepted the small part of Doris Gray in Marcia's new production. But Sheila had only laughed at her informant. The part was a good one, well within her powers; it gave her access for the first time to the "West-end." Nothing else— not even tigresses— mattered.

And yet, even at the first reading of the play to the company, Sheila had sensed a vague antagonism. Whenever the producer read out a line of Doris Gray's it seemed to Sheila, watching the actor-manageress, as though a frown creased Miss Meredith's broad, over-whitened forehead, as though the ugly hands twitched, the black hair under the gaudy and over-feathered hat tossed impatiently.

In after years Sheila Tremayne would have *known* the thoughts behind that over-whitened forehead; would have almost heard the thin lips mutter to themselves, "I oughtn't to have engaged this girl. She's too attractive. She'll make the part too prominent. *I* shall suffer."

For Sheila Tremayne, by instinct, was also of the jungle! She, also, had it in her to become the star. A psychologist— and Marcia Meredith had needed psychology in *her* fight for stardom— would have told this from Sheila's face, from her hands, from the very artificiality with which she spoke.

A girl's face was Sheila's. Almost ideal for the footlights. A face essentially virgin, and one that would preserve its illusion of virginity. Stage-virginity, be it understood: dark-blue eyed, high foreheaded under a nimbus of real gold hair, straight-nosed, round-cheeked, small-eared. A face almost devoid of character, except for the full lips and the prominent, resolute chin. It was that chin which first affrighted Marcia Meredith; that, and the long-fingered, broad-palmed hands which betokened the needful minimum of art backed by the needful maximum of business drive.

So for a full week Miss Meredith called Miss Tremayne "her dear child"— and instructed author and producer (meek men both, their self-determination rotted by many years of the footlights) to cut as many of Doris Gray's lines as might be possible. And at the end of that week, Chance (who plays his part behind the wings) decreed that Lucien Winthrop, the leading boy, should break an arm while mumming for the movies, and brought Basil Harrington in his stead.

Everything that was best in Sheila Tremayne, all the tenderness which could just redeem her acting of "girl" parts from the mediocre, fell crazily to loving Basil Harrington, from the first moment her dark-blue eyes visioned him shaking hands with Marcia Meredith. He was the ideal stage-lover, well over six foot, with light-brown crinkly hair, nice eyes, the hands and feet of a gentleman, and that rarity among stage-folk— a voice. Immediately she adored him, and he— in so far as modern young men are capable of adoration— reciprocated. That is to say, he was sufficiently aware of her to turn his head, ever so slightly, from the

shake-hands with Marcia towards the slim, tall girl in the russet tailor-made who had just repeated her line:

"But I love him, Mrs. Masterson, I love him. Won't you let him come to me?"

THAT LINE of Doris Gray's is spoken in the third act of Paul Derrick's "great romantic comedy, *Devotion*"; of which comedy it is necessary for your understanding to give at least an outline.

Understand, then, that the play, having been written specially to the order of Marcia Meredith, contains only one real part— Mrs. Masterson. The entire comedy is a vehicle for the exploitation, re-exploitation, and super-exploitation of Mrs. Masterson's (Marcia Meredith's) moods, clothes, figure, voice, gestures, arms, eyebrows, jewellery, and "temperament." Around these, and not around any specific dramatic idea, revolve— as pale moonlets around a star— the minor characters.

But in the third and last act of "Devotion" there occurs (doubtless by an oversight of the author's) one real dramatic moment. The scene is Mrs. Masterson's boudoir. She, by a super-effort of clothes, voice, gestures, eyebrows and temperament, has succeeded in luring Cyprian Olphert (Basil Harrington) from his *fiancée*, Doris Gray. Doris Gray, therefore— who, by a stage coincidence, is staying with her rival— arraying herself in her most becoming garment, follows Cyprian to the boudoir, pleads with Mrs. Masterson and finally triumphs over the entanglement. Thereafter Mrs. Masterson makes things up with her own legitimate husband; and the curtain falls and is raised many times to display Marcia Meredith bowing her thanks to a delighted audience.

By the twelfth day of rehearsals, when the last act had begun to shape itself, it became apparent to Marcia Meredith— as it is doubtless apparent to the reader— that a really fine performance of Doris Gray by Sheila Tremayne might conceivably involve a considerable amount of publicity, to say nothing of insistent curtain-calls, for that young actress. By the fourteenth day, when it became necessary to consider the dresses for the minor characters (Marcia's clothes needless to say, had been designed weeks since by Monsieur Lepine of Paris, London, and New York), the leading lady's cooed "My dear child," had been replaced by "Miss Tremayne," a "Miss Tremayne" so perfectly, so frigidly polite as to be absolutely tigrine.

"AND HOW is the frock for the last act, Miss Tremayne?" asked Basil Harrington.

"Oh, not bad," smiled the girl.

They were lunching together, not for the first time, at Gustave's in Soho— a dark little, intimate little restaurant of cheap prices and flamboyant omelettes, not two hundred yards away from the theatre.

"Really nice?" went on the boy in his thrilling voice. "Or only so-so?"

"You'll see at the dress rehearsal."

"Can't you describe it to me?" He leaned forward artlessly, and his brown eyes darted admiration at Sheila.

"It's black silk," she admitted. "Quite simple, of course. They can't afford to spend any money on *my* clothes."

"Black!" His intuition caught at the disappointment she was trying to hide from him. "But surely that isn't right for the character? Miss Meredith might wear black. You ought to be in something girlish. Pale pink? Pale blue? And besides"— he hesitated, aware of disloyalty to his employer— "isn't Doris Gray supposed to be a millionaire's daughter?"

"She is," snapped Sheila, "but she'll look like— like a charity orphan."

"But why—" began Basil; and in that moment Sheila *knew*.

She had not known before, only surmised— vaguely through long, lonely evenings in her tiny flat— the influence at work against her. Young to the jungle of stageland, it had needed the mating fervour to sharpen her instincts of self-protection. But now both mating fervour and defensive instinct were fully aroused.

"Does it matter?" she said.

"*I* think it matters frightfully," retorted the boy, "not only to the play, but to you. You see, the public nowadays are funny. They insist on our being well-dressed. You've no idea what *my* tailor's bill is."

"Men have such an advantage, paying for their own clothes."

"I can't see that— we don't get any bigger salaries for dressing ourselves."

"But you can wear more or less what you like," said Sheila.

Somehow or other— every successful artist knows that there is such a moment— realization of her dual personality was being born in the girl. Self-knowledge added itself to the knowledge of Marcia Meredith. She grew furiously conscious of two Sheilas: the one tender and girlish, who could play Doris Gray to the life, who could surrender herself, would surrender herself, without question to the adorable boy with the crinkly hair and the clean-shaven lips; the other a hard-headed, hard-hearted unwomanly little person who meant to do battle with tooth and claw for success.

Curiously enough, even the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila loved Basil Harrington. "He," she said to herself, "doesn't realize that we are in the jungle. He's too *nice*. I must fight for us both."

"Time we were getting back to rehearsal," suggested the boy, paying his bill. She powdered her nose, pulled down her veil, and followed him into the sunshine.

All the two hundred yards down Shaftesbury Avenue Sheila's new instinct was at work. She said to herself, "It's in my own hands. It's always in our hands

once we're 'on.' The producer can't interfere with me. Miss Meredith can't interfere. Once the curtain goes up on the first night, the issue rests between me and the public. Do the public really care for clothes as much as Basil thinks?"

ENTERING the stage-door, looking in the glass cage to see if there were any letters for either of them, scurrying along the whitewashed passage, down the stone steps on to the half-lit stage, Sheila's instinct still functioned. Instinct urged, "This is enemy territory. Tread softly. Speak softly. Veil your voice. Veil the purpose in your eyes. Pretend! Pretend! Pretend!"

"Beginners for Act Three!" called the stage-manager, and the "beginners," Mrs. Masterson's husband and Mrs. Masterson's maid, took up their positions; started in to stumble through their lines.

Sheila found herself a packing-case in the wings, sat down, and began to study her part. But her mind was not on the typewritten words; her mind was hovering about the auditorium, empty save for Mr. Peaston, the producer, and the cleaners, sweeping carpets against the evening performance. In ten days— thought Sheila— those stalls, those boxes, that pit, gallery, and dress-circle will be full of eyes. And every eye will see Doris Gray looking like a charity orphan.

She forced herself to study. "But I love him, Mrs. Masterson. Won't you let him come to me?" And quite suddenly Sheila Tremayne wished that the stage issue between herself and Marcia Meredith had been the real issue. "That," she thought, "would be a fight worth fighting." (For this is yet another curse of the acting art, that anyone with a due sense of values— and that sense, too, was being born in Sheila— must realize its utter futility.)

A shadow blurred the typescript; and, lifting her head, she saw her antagonist.

"Hard at work, Miss Tremayne?" purred Marcia Meredith, regal if a trifle middle-aged in ospreys and sables.

"I'm afraid I'm a terribly slow 'study,' " prevaricated Sheila.

"Then I've good news for you," went on the elder woman. "You know that last speech of yours, the one that begins 'But I love him.' Well, Mr. Peaston and myself have been talking it over, and we both think it too long. It holds up the action. Don't you think so?"

A protest rose to Sheila's lips, was forced down. The speech in question was the climax of her part. To cut it would make Doris Gray a colourless nonentity.

"The author agrees with us. So, if *you* don't mind," (as if she'd *dare* mind, thought Marcia), "we're going to take out a few lines of it. If you'll give me your part, I'll show you just where the cuts come."

The actor-manageress took the typescript Sheila proffered: took a gold pencil from her gold bag, and carefully excised all but the first two and last three lines of the speech.

"*My* cue," she said, "is not altered."

"No, of course not," murmured the girl, and then, remembering her new self, she smiled. "I think it's a great improvement, Miss Meredith."

"I'm glad you don't mind," said a disarmed Marcia. "Some people are so silly about cuts. As if anything or any of us matter except the play."

She stood chatting amicably for a moment. She could afford to be amicable now. Sheila Tremayne, in Doris Gray's black silk frock, speaking Doris Gray's attenuated lines, could hardly cast the shadow of an eclipse on the stardom of Mrs. Masterson.

"Oh, and I do hope you didn't think the dress we chose for the last act *too* simple. Miss Tremayne," said the actor-manageress.

"I think it simply adorable, Miss Meredith," cooed the girl who was learning her jungle laws.

A moment later, with a rustle of charmeuse and a jingle of golden accoutrements, Marcia tripped away towards the "prompt" side— there, with Basil Harrington, to await her cue. But all that dreary rehearsal afternoon, and all the dreary rehearsal afternoons which followed, Sheila Tremayne— the tender, girlish Sheila— cried those bitter tears which never rise to the eye; and all that dreary home evening, and all the dreary home evenings which followed, Sheila Tremayne, the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila, worked on the full speech as it was before it had been cut to colourlessness, and totted up her tiny balance in the Postal Office Savings Bank.

"MONSIEUR, there is a young lady to see you."

"What young lady?" Monsieur Lepine, of Paris, London, and New York, lifted a brilliantly brilliantined head and stared, black-eyed, across the ormolu desk of his lavishly-furnished private office at the pert secretary who had interrupted his sartorial musings.

"A young lady from the Piccadilly Theatre."

"Her name?"

"Miss Tremayne. Miss Sheila Tremayne."

"I do not know a Miss Tremayne of the Piccadilly Theatre. Of the Piccadilly Theatre, I only know Miss Meredith. And of her I know too much. If the Tremayne want to buy any clothes, let Miss Jameson attend to her."

The secretary hesitated.

"The young lady won't see anyone but yourself, Monsieur. She says it is about a frock for to-morrow's performance of *Devotion*."

"*Devotion*! *Devotion*! I am tired of *Devotion*. I am tired of stage people." The dressmaker twirled a black moustache. "The Meredith woman has bothered me enough already."

Nevertheless, after further protest, he consented to leave his office, and strode into the showrooms below.

There is nothing shoppy about Lepine's London showrooms. The effect, artfully contrived to discourage the economically minded, is midway between that of a drawing-room and a picture gallery; wall-colour a pale yellow; chairs upholstered in orange brocade; ceiling black; floor parquet; mannequins' stage— which occupies the entire south wall— velvet-curtained and mysterious as a palmist's cave.

Sheila, rising nervously from one of the brocaded chairs, was aware of a tallish foreigner in black cut-away coat, flower at button hole, whose eyes seemed to cheapen the inexpensive tailor-made, the inexpensive hat she wore by at least five guineas.

"Mademoiselle Tremayne?" Monsieur Lepine queried.

"Of the Piccadilly Theatre," smiled Sheila. "I want your help, Monsieur Lepine. I want your advice."

"*Tiens!*" retorted the Frenchman. "So you want my advice. That is more than most English actresses want. They are fools, your English actresses. They think they know everything. In Paris it is different. There, they realize that I, too, am an artist." He altered his tone. "You want some frocks, eh?"

"I only want one frock," stammered Sheila. "And I— I don't know whether I can afford it."

"For the stage?"

"Yes, for to-morrow night. It"— the girl's voice dropped— "it's rather a secret, Monsieur Lepine."

"A secret!" The man's eyes twinkled. "I do not make secret frocks." He swished away the secretary, who had been listening intently, and went on: "What part do you take in the play, Mademoiselle? The young lady, eh? I thought so. I remember you, once, at rehearsal, when I came to see Miss Meredith. Why did the management not send you to me at once? Now, we must find a model. There is no time to make. And models are not cheap, these days."

SHEILA'S dark-blue eyes veiled themselves under long lashes. "Supposing the management knew nothing about my coming to you, Monsieur, would that make a difference?"

Said the Frenchman, after a perceptible pause: "Mademoiselle, I, too, am an artist. You spoke of a secret. To me it is no secret. Let me tell you. Miss Meredith is jealous of you; therefore she send you to a cheap dressmaker. Is it not so?"

"Well—" began the girl.

"Do not interrupt. I have not been in this business twenty years for nothing. I know these— how do you call them?— stars. One day, you also will be a star.

Then you will do precisely as Miss Meredith." He altered his tone. "This dress— you pay for it yourself?"

"If I can," said Sheila, a little taken aback by the rapidity of the Frenchman's intuition.

"And Miss Meredith, when she find out, what happen to you? What happen to me, Lepine? I tell you— you get the sack— and I— I make no more clothes for Miss Meredith."

"But she needn't know *you* made the dress. I would promise not to tell a soul."

"Foolishness." The dressmaker's hands plunged to trouser pockets. "Foolishness. A Lepine dress is a Lepine dress. All the world recognizes it at sight. I do not need to plaster my name on programmes."

"Then you refuse?"

"I have not said so. This dress, for which act is it? The last? Miss Meredith wears purple in the last act. And you?"

"I'm supposed to wear black." Sheila's heart was beating furiously. She felt, somehow, that her whole career hung on the next sentence.

"And you do not want to wear black. No? Then you are a little fool. All English actresses are fools. What do you want to wear? Pink? Blue? Foolishness. Wait. I, Lepine, show you the black you should wear." He called across the room. "*Clotilde, Clotilde, faites montrer la robe noire que nous avons fait pour*"— he hesitated— "*pour la petite Henriette*."

Some twenty minutes later, Sheila Tremayne— not the hard-hearted, hard-headed Sheila who had bearded the great dressmaker at half-past ten of an autumn morning, but a tender, girlish creature frightened almost out of her wits at the risk she ran— faced the lens of a camera in Monsieur Lepine's private studio. Monsieur Lepine was bawling at her. "Name of a name!" he bawled. "Those hands! Do not clench them. Let the fingers lie loose. So. That is better. And the lips. Half open. So. Yes. Take her now, Jacques!"

The shutter clicked, clicked again.

"And that will be enough," said Monsieur Lepine. He handed Sheila down from the black velvet steps on which she had been posing, and said:—

"Now remember. Not a word. You take it off. We put it in a box. It goes home with you. The shoes and the stockings you fetch this evening."

"But the price, Monsieur? The price?" stammered Sheila.

The dressmaker bowed. "When you wear it, Mademoiselle, the frock is priceless. And remember, for two years we have the exclusivity of your photograph. Also, when you are a star," he smiled, looking at his handiwork, "but, indeed, you are a star already— it is I, Lepine, who will dress your plays."

And he added, to himself: "Perhaps, also, I teach the Meredith woman that it does not pay to bother the great Lepine."

TO THE audience, a West-end "first night," especially a Marcia Meredith first night, is little more than a Society function. The audience well knows its Marcia, knows the type of play she is sure to have selected. The audience is prepared to applaud, more or less vociferously, for three hours— and read about itself in the papers next morning.

But behind the scenes all first nights are electric with tension. From the author, pallid in the wings, to the least important stage-hand runs a current of nervous anticipation— of sheer longing for the moment when the final curtain-call shall signal "Success."

Sheila Tremayne, darting— second act over— to the dressing-room she shared with Mrs. Masterson's maid, was hardly conscious of Basil Harrington's—

"Going well, Miss Tremayne. And you're simply splendid." She knew only that now, *now*, *NOW*, was the moment. For this moment she had borne with Marcia Meredith through four long weeks; for this moment she had faced Lepine; for this, through an interminable dress rehearsal, she had suffered Mr. Peaston, the producer, suffered the agony of that "simple black frock," of that cut and colourless speech.

She said to herself, as she closed the dressing-room door and began to unfasten the "simple" day-dress she had been wearing: "She'll have to wait— she'll have to wait for her cue. I mustn't fluff— or she'll chip in. I *must* be calm. I *must* be calm."

The tiny dressing-room spun round her. Round and round. She was aware, dimly, of Mrs. Masterson's maid, of the dresser tying the black apron round Mrs. Masterson's maid's black silk dress. And she thought, "Black silk! The maid wears black silk. I, too, was to wear black silk. So that was Marcia Meredith's idea. The maid and the millionaire's daughter. Both colourless. Both nonentities."

"And that finishes *you*, Miss Arkwright," interrupted the dresser's voice. "Now for Miss Tremayne."

"I think I'll be off, dear," said Miss Arkwright. "The curtain'll be up in five minutes." She nodded excitedly, went out.

By now Sheila was ready for her stockings.

"Bought these yourself, I expect," said the dresser, admiringly. "Must have cost a pretty penny. Pity the dress doesn't come up to them."

Sheila's whitened right hand felt in her corsage, and came away clutching a piece of paper.

"I'm not going to wear *that* dress, Mrs. Fell. There's a box under my table. You might get it out." Her right hand passed the paper. "And this is for you."

Mrs. Fell took the paper, uncrinkled it— and laughed. "Bradburys is scarce these days," said Mrs. Fell. "Funny their changing your dress at the last moment: and me knowing nothing about it."

"Nobody knows," murmured Sheila.

The fat, red-faced woman looked up from her dragging out of the box.

"Nobody? Bless my soul!"

"Nobody— except you. And you're to keep quiet till I'm on. Do you understand?"

Mrs. Fell cut the string of the box, and laughed again. " 'Tain't none of my business," said Mrs. Fell, "but the theatre's the theatre. There's rules, and there's regulations. There's contracts." She fumbled with the tissue-paper. "I shouldn't do anything to upset folk if I was you, my dear. Not that I won't keep quiet if you wants me to." Then, with a little staccato cry, "Lor', what's this?"

"Oh, that"— to Sheila her own voice sounded like a stranger's— "that's only a black wrap— to wear in the wings. The dress is underneath."

A shrill howl sounded down the corridor— the call-boy's howl.

"Curtain's up. You've got ten minutes yet," said Mrs. Fell.

SHEILA'S BRAIN still spun as she waited, in the wings, for her cue. She tried to hear the words being spoken on the stage, but her ears dithered, refused to carry sound. She tried to think of her own words— but the words wouldn't come. Almost it seemed to her as though the cue itself would fail her memory. "And as for Miss Doris Gray— as for Miss Doris Gray"— that above all things she must not miss. Would she hear it? She did not even dare peep sideways through the wings on to the stage.

And then, quite suddenly, her brain ceased spinning; froze to chill unemotional intellect. This was her one chance of success— and of Basil. She must not, dared not, could not fail.

"Cold, Miss Tremayne?" whispered a voice, Miss Arkwright's.

"No." Sheila drew the black wrap which had provoked the whisper closer about her figure. Miss Arkwright tiptoed away.

Now the girl in the black wrap could hear, quite distinctly, every word of the scene on the stage. In three minutes, less than three minutes, she would have to discard the wrap to make her entrance. And Basil, Basil would be "off." She would be alone with the audience, that audience all eyes and shirt-fronts, with the audience and Marcia.

She peeped through the wings, saw Basil, heard his voice. He was making love, stage-love, to Mrs. Masterson. Beyond his bent head, she guessed the audience. The audience were silent; all eyes; tier upon tier of eyes.

"Cyprian!"— Marcia's voice— "dear, dear boy."

"Marcia, don't. It isn't fair. It isn't fair to Doris."

The fatuous words stung Sheila to quick rage. "That old woman," she thought, "that old woman and my Basil."

Then Sheila Tremayne disappeared from Sheila Tremayne's mind— and "Doris Gray" took her place. Doris Gray tiptoed, still shrouded, to the door through which she must make her entrance; Doris Gray listened— real for the moment— to her rival, Mrs. Masterson. Doris Gray flung aside the wrap that hid Lepine's masterpiece; heard the gasp of a staggered stage-manager behind her, heard the opposite door click to Basil's exit, heard her cue, and trod from gloom to glare without a tremor.

She stood in a blaze of light. She had forgotten the audience, forgotten the scenery, forgotten Sheila Tremayne. She was Doris Gray— facing Mrs. Masterson. And Mrs. Masterson loathed her. That she could see in Mrs. Masterson's dark-green eyes. In those eyes, too, she could see herself— the millionaire's daughter, a tiny shimmering vision of black and silver, gold hair high on white nape.

But Marcia Meredith— who was always Marcia Meredith and never the character she played— saw more than a tiny vision. Into her mind— even as she mouthed her part— came one clear thought "Lepine! Only Lepine could have designed that black velvet, slashed it to show the silver underskirt." And the audience— Marcia never forgot the presence of her audience— the audience was "eating" both the girl and the frock. Marcia could see, out of the tail of her mental eye, women's glasses focused, women's mouths wide in wonder.

Rage took her by the breasts. How dared this girl, this Tremayne girl, play such a trick! To-morrow— no, not to-morrow, to-night— she should leave the theatre, leave it for good. Yet the scene must be played out to the end. Thank goodness, she had had the foresight to cut that last speech— would they never come to that last speech? Must she, Marcia Meredith, stand there for ever, mouthing her foolish lines, knowing herself outwitted, outshone before her own first-night public, in her own theatre?

And now Doris Gray, too, grew conscious of her audience— as of a great friendly dog, faithful-eyed and adoring— a great dog that would leap to protect her against all enmity. She knew she could whistle that dog at will; could feel it thrilling at her voice, at her very gesture.

And so those two— painted women between painted walls— played out their comedy.

"But I love him, Mrs. Masterson, I love him." Marcia knew, even from the first inflection of the girl's voice, that the speech would be spoken to its finale; and Sheila, watching those green eyes, knew victory. How those green eyes, those thin lips, could hate! And yet, and yet the thin lips were powerless. They dared not speak. She— Sheila Tremayne who was Doris Gray— she, Doris Gray

who was Sheila Tremayne— held that great dog in leash. If those thin lips dared but interrupt, the dog would growl.

"And you won't, you won't keep him away from me any longer, Mrs. Masterson? You wouldn't do anything, anything beastly?"

Now— she thought— now, open those thin lips! The game's played out between us.

And the thin painted lips opened. "Miss Gray, you have taught me a great lesson to-night. Have no fear. Cyprian is yours— and yours alone. Go to him."

SHE HAD made her exit. Behind her, as the "built-in" door clicked, she had heard for the first time that rattle of handclaps which signifies an audience carried away. The rattle still sounded in her ears; her heart still beat to the triumph of it. And abruptly came reaction, silence in her ears, a coldness at the heart of her. She knew only that now, *now*— so soon as the curtain fell— she must pay for the thing she had done.

Marcia Meredith, that Marcia whose voice carried shrill through the painted canvas, would never forgive. She, Sheila Tremayne, had broken the unwritten customs of the theatre; next night, and all the nights to follow, the theatre would cast her out. Standing there, in the semi-gloom of the wings, Lepine's masterpiece draping her in shimmers of black and silver, she knew herself disgraced. They were all there, the whole company, twelve of them, waiting for the final curtain-call. But none of them dared speak to her, to Sheila Tremayne. Not even Basil! Basil was whispering to Miss Arkwright. Basil was afraid. She could see the fear in Basil's paint-reddened eyes; she could not see that his fear was all for her. Supposing that her very temerity had lost Basil for ever.

"Curtain!" said a voice. "First call." And almost before she realized it, Sheila was on stage again. They were all on stage in the full glare of the footlights. In front of them, over banked flowers, the house rocked and rang. They could see the applauding hands.

Three times the curtain had risen and fallen— four times— five times. Now Marcia Meredith and her flowers must have the stage to themselves. Sheila, rushing off, found Basil next to her. His hand caught her arm. "*You* did it," he stammered, "you saved the play. That isn't her call. Hark at them!"

"It doesn't matter," said Sheila. "Nothing matters. Let me get away. I want to get away. I don't want her to see me in this frock."

Another hand caught her arm— Mr. Peaston's. Mr. Peaston was screaming in her left ear: "Miss Tremayne! Miss Tremayne! For God's sake, go on! Can't you hear them?"

"Hear what?" said Sheila; but even as she asked, she heard them, the audience, her audience. And the audience was chanting, with monotonous reiteration:—

"Doris Gray! Doris Gray! *We* want Doris Gray! *We* want to see Doris Gray!"

"I daren't," stammered Sheila. "I daren't. Miss Meredith!"

But it was Marcia Meredith herself— Marcia, clutching a great bouquet of the management's flowers— Marcia, with a stage-smile on her thin painted lips— Marcia, astutest of business women— who ultimately handed her rival on stage, flung out two whitened arms, and *kissed* her before the whole house.

For this is the one consolation of all artistic endeavour for financial success: that the public, the great, honest, child-hearted public, is the final judge thereof, the judge whose verdict not even the most powerful dares gainsay.

Which is the only reason why Marcia Meredith has offered her house in Park Lane for the forthcoming marriage of "Miss Sheila Tremayne, whose performance of Doris Gray in *Devotion* has revealed a new delight for London playgoers, and that rising young actor, Mr. Basil Harrington."

3: The Jester

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

Collected in: *Love on the Adriatic*, 1932

THE BLAZE of the new-risen sun lay upon the Place Bertin, the Rue Victor Hugo, the terraced streets, and the palms and angelins of the gardens crowning St. Pierre.

The sun was just working free of the sea-line, to take possession of the cloudless sky; the land wind had ceased for a moment to blow, and the coloured city lay in a crystal silence, broken only by the murmur of the Gouyave water coursing through the runnels of the streets.

Then, like the report of a pistol, came the sound of a green shutter flung back in the Rue Victor Hugo, answered by another from the Rue du Morne Mirail.

Shutter after shutter— and now voices, mule bells, and amongst the earliest sounds, the cries of the creole street sellers; sellers of mangoes, crabs, hot rolls— and everywhere now on the tepid wind coming in from the sea, the fragrant smell of coffee.

Down in the great market square the stalls were opening, the fruit stalls first, laden with oranges, bananas, palm-top heads, sapadillos; vegetables of all forms and colours, fresh in from the country.

Then the fish stalls— and what fish! Rose-coloured souris, sardines, bright as new-minted silver, speckled moringues, tunny; and by the first fish stall on the right as you entered the market place was standing this morning Fernand.

Fernand Pelliser— but only known as Fernand. Lots of people had forgotten his surname, for he was a character— the sort of character that lends itself to familiarity, if not respect.

Always jesting; thirty; stout, square; brown as a hickory nut; with rings in his ears, white teeth and a flashing smile, he was reckoned the best salesman in the market— and the greatest cheat.

He was also reckoned a man of property; a reputation based on a very small foundation. A wealthy man is sometimes sneered at, and a mean man is always derided, but a man both wealthy and mean is generally respected— at least by the crowd.

You see his meanness is a sort of guarantee that he will not be parted easily from his wealth. Fernand, without the wealth, had earned this respect.

He refused to be robbed by the tradesmen of the Rue Voltaire, he refused to lend to the cadgers of the Place Bertin, he turned a franc over twice before spending it— yet he owned a fishing boat as well as a market stall— and here came the boat, being dragged up on rollers right into the market square.

In the West Indies, and especially at Martinique, you have to eat fish directly it is caught, and so in the market of St. Pierre you would see boats being carried up from the sea edge on men's shoulders, or dragged up on rollers.

People, as a rule, liked to buy right out of the boats, and the contents of Fernand's great double-ended scow, brought to rest now by the stall, attracted an immediate crowd. Full-blooded negresses, quarteronnes, griffes, chabines, hawkers came to fill their baskets, servants came to buy for their mistresses, all in the bright costume colours of Martinique; all laughing, chattering, bargaining, with Fernand keeping his end up against them all, matching jest with jest, selling, giving change, and never a sou out at the end of the sale.

It only took twenty minutes to empty the boat, leaving nothing in it but a few jelly-fish, a lambi shell and half a dozen sardines. The crowd vanished like a puff of coloured smoke, and the redoubtable Fernand sat down on the boat gunwale to count his money. Then he paid his negro boatmen, and was in the act of pocketing the rest when along came Mayotte— that is to say Spring, Loveliness, everything delicious, in striped foulard.

Eighteen years of age, and walking with the light step of Atalanta— Mayotte was a dream.

She was also a fruit seller, and attended a little stall at the other side of the market. She had crossed over to buy a fish for her breakfast, and incidentally, to torment Fernand.

He was in love with her. Everyone was in love with her, but the love of Fernand was a burning passion, so he said, quite openly and jestingly, and so he had often said to her face, in that laughing way of his which made one never know exactly how to take him.

"Pouff," said Mayotte, glancing into the boat. "A couple of sardines and a lambi shell— where are your fish, Fernand?"

"In my pocket," said Fernand, slapping the francs in his pocket. "Where else?"

"Ai, where else?" laughed Mayotte, "since they say you keep everything there— even your heart."

"Maybe," said the other, "but not the fish I kept for you— see!"

He lifted a piece of sailcloth and disclosed a souri, still alive and flapping.

"For me?" cried Mayotte.

"Yes," said the liar, who had kept the fish for himself, but was unable to resist the temptation of turning the tables on her. "For you— who else?"

Somehow she wasn't deceived.

She laughed and opened her purse— that is to say, her palm— and disclosed a franc.

"How much?"

"Six sous."

"Six sous! Bon Die— why yesterday I bought one larger than that for five."

"But yesterday isn't to-day— well, take it for nothing, it is a gift."

She reached out her hand for the fish, but he stopped her.

"If you take it for nothing you must take the boat."

"Giving away your boat now!"

"My boat is me."

"Ou ai!" cried Mayotte, "so you want to get rid of yourself— well, I won't cart you away, not even at the price of a souri— come, give me five sous."

She held out her franc, and he gave her change, laughing the while he pocketed the money, then, wrapping the fish in a banana leaf, he offered to carry it home for her.

"No," said she, "but you can carry it to my stall, where I will put it in the shade till I am going."

The Martiniquans breakfast at eleven o'clock. The early fish and fruit market closed at ten, at which hour she would depart for the Rue St. Jean de Dieu, where she lived with her sister, who was a calendeuse; that is to say, her business was the painting of Madras muslin, and folding it into turbans. The sister was almost as pretty as herself, and the souri was big enough for two; and as the two were as pretty as seven, quite a large amount of beauty would be fed by the little rose-coloured fish that was still flapping as she placed it in the shade beneath the stall.

It was not a big stall, but it was a blaze of colour— oranges and lemons, plantains, apple bananas, pommes d'Haiti, a couple of apricots, each as large as a mangold wurzel; and flowers, flowers of the l'oseille bois, the fleur d'Amour, and lilies whose scent was piercing as their brilliancy.

To tell the truth, the stall was not entirely hers. Maman Fally, of the Rue Peycette, was the true proprietor; Mayotte worked on commission only.

As Fernand stood for a moment before going off home, along came Jean Gastin, six feet tall, dark and handsome as the Devil.

Beside him Fernand looked and felt like a monkey— or like a gambler who knows that the man he is playing against is using loaded dice, and Fernand might have felt inclined to put a knife into the other, only he knew that Jean's dice had been loaded by Nature. It wasn't his fault that he was graceful as a greyhound, and possessed those damnable eyes, enough in themselves to turn a girl's heart inside out. Still, it was a bother, and the worst of the bother was that Fernand and Jean had been friends till Mayotte, suddenly blooming in the night, had cast the spell of her beauty on their friendship.

Girls do that— blossom all of a sudden. A year ago she was just a little slip of a thing, rather pretty but unnoticeable; to-day she was Mayotte.

"Bonjour Mayotte," said Jean, his eyes flashing over the girl and her coloured background of fruits, flowers and vegetables, "and how is business going this morning?"

"What do you want to buy?" answered she, turning to serve an old woman who was standing with two sous in her fist and her finger pointing at a pomme d'Haiti that had roused her desires.

"This," said he with a laugh, picking up a fleur d'Amour from amongst its fellows in a bowl, and fixing it in his coat. He threw a franc on the little board where the bowl stood, and was turning to go when she called him back.

"Your change," said she.

"For what?"

"The flower."

"You mean the franc?"

"Yes."

"Oh, ma foi," laughed Jean. "The flower is change enough from your hands, that ought never to handle money."

He took Fernand by the arm to lead him off too, and Mayotte, laughing, threw the franc into her little till. She had no compunction in the matter, she was there to make profit for Maman Fally.

"Now why could not I have done a thing like that," thought Fernand, as he walked along with the other towards the entrance of the market. This infernal Jean was not only better-looking than himself, but also had a way with him. No wonder women were captivated by him. He, Fernand, had sold Mayotte a fish and received change; Jean had bought a flower from her and left the change. The two transactions between them had all the difference between a fish and a flower, and Jean held the flower.

They entered the Rue de la Victoire, which was near the market, a pleasant little street with green shutters and striped sunblinds, and here at a small café they halted and went in.

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IT WAS the Café Anodane, and Jean Gastin was manager and part proprietor. Like Mayotte, he was not rich enough to own a whole business, but, richer than she, he did not work on commission basis; he was partner, and took a share of the net profits, and he let people know it.

His partner was Monsieur Robert, a great invalid, owing to an injury received some years ago, and from which he would never really recover. M. Robert, who also possessed other interests in St. Pierre, lived in the Rue Lafontaine, and left the management entirely to Jean.

They took their seats at a table, and a capresse boy in a white paper cap brought them, at a word from Jean, a bottle of plantation rum, a bowl of sugar and a brown pitcher of water. This is the early morning pick-me-up of Martinique, and when he had taken it, Fernand ordered breakfast. He would have breakfasted at home, only that he had sold the souri to Mayotte.

Jean breakfasted with him.

They talked as they ate, and Jean, all the while, without breaking the thread of the conversation, kept an eye on the doings of the café, the capresse boy, the negress cook in her wasp-coloured turban, who every minute would appear at the hatch leading to the kitchen with a dish in her hand.

There were half-a-dozen other people at breakfast, tradesmen from the Rue Peycette, and the Rue Victor Hugo, bachelors who, to save domestic worries, took their meals in restaurants, and, knowing what was what, came to the Anodane and the miraculous cooking of Yi, the negress in the wasp-coloured turban.

"And how's business?" asked Jean, turning from a discussion about the new buildings near the Fort. "They tell me the sardines have fallen off, though I saw plenty in the market this morning. Leroux seemed to be selling nothing else."

Fernand laughed.

"I'm not bothering about the sardines falling off, it's the profits that are falling off, what with the rise in market dues and costs. Twenty francs I had to pay only the other day for a lick of paint for a boat and a few repairs, that a few years ago wouldn't have cost five francs; and nets— Bon Dieu! A hole in a net makes twice as big a hole in one's purse."

"Well, you get along, anyhow," said Jean. "You don't seem to be losing flesh over the business."

Now if Fernand had a sore point it was on the subject of his "fat." He was not fat, just comfortable, but it was an obsession with him; getting fat meant getting old, and he dreaded both states.

"I'd be getting along better," said he, "if I could find a cook like Yi, and start a café with her."

Now if Jean had a sore point it was Yi. He might pride himself as much as he chose on his own success as a manager, but he knew well in his heart that it was Yi who made the Anodane successful. Her marvellous cooking was the advertisement that drew people, not his wonderful management.

Fernand knew this, and his reason for hitting Jean on his sore point was just— Mayotte. Mayotte had, in fact, been breakfasting with them, unseen, but no less there.

Since Troy the cause of half the fights and troubles between men has been— Mayotte.

"Well, why don't you?" asked Jean with a sneer. "You have only to make love to Yi— if she'd have you."

"Thank you," said Fernand, "but I don't propose to set myself up as a rival to you in her affections. As for me, she's a bit too dark, but tastes differ."

Then the fat was in the fire.

The other breakfasters found their attention drawn to the quarrel.

The two men were now beginning to shout at one another across the table. Then Fernand rose and flung down two francs, to pay for the meal.

Jean rose. "Take up your money," cried he, "I don't want it here. It smells of fish. Take up your money."

But Fernand was striding to the door.

Jean took up the two francs and flung them into the street after the other, who went on supremely unheeding, whilst a nigger child picked up the coins and made off with them.

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FERNAND went on his way, seeing black.

This thing was final, so it seemed to him; he had been friends with Jean more years than he could count on two hands, and now it was all over.

Also it seemed to him that somehow Mayotte had hit him, as well as fate.

He had all along guessed that she was sweet on Jean, and that he— Fernand— had not a chance if Jean reciprocated. He had borne with that idea as a man bears with a slight toothache, but now, this morning, this moment, it was as though the tooth had begun to rage.

Something said to him: "Jean will knock you out with her now whether he is sweet on her or not, just to spite you."

He came along to the Rue Victor Hugo.

The Rue Victor Hugo at this hour was like a street in the Arabian Nights.

The yellow houses, the green shutters and balconies, the blue sky, the blaze of sunshine, all combined to a theatrical effect delightful as a setting for the events of humdrum ordinary life.

One said to oneself, "Can real business be conducted in this unreal-looking but delightful place?" only for the answer to come at once from the lips of hawkers; the itinerant sellers of chickens, rice cakes, fish, bought in the early market, melons, baskets, pottery— heaven knows what.

Fernand lived in this street, occupying half a house just by the steps that led up to the Rue du Morne Mirail. The house belonged to him, and as taxes were negligible, by letting the upper part he lived not only rent free, but at a profit.

A negro woman looked after him, and as she had two children and he had room enough to let them stay with her, also a backyard big enough to let her

keep chickens, he got her services for next to nothing. So you see Fernand was an economist, in the restricted sense of the word.

Not a mean man perhaps, but a careful man, who knew how, not only to make both ends meet, but also to make them lap over a bit.

The room which he used as a sitting-room and a place to have his meals, faced the street, got all the morning sun, was furnished with Martiniquan cane furniture, and had for decoration several ship models.

He had been a sailor in his younger days, and an expert builder of those little ships, on which he had lavished great care, especially on the model of the *Liberté*, his last vessel. A ship that had brought him luck, or so it seemed to him.

However that might be, he always consulted it, half-consciously, when in difficulty, or when put out.

To-day, having turned his money out of his pocket, kept a franc or two for casual expenses, and locked the rest up in a cashbox, he sat down, lit a pipe and fell into thought, his eyes every now and then straying towards his mascot.

He was thinking of Mayotte.

The affair of this morning had somehow brought matters to a head.

He had been after Mayotte for a long time, but owing to that curious nature of his which made him jest in the face of the highest things, and which gave a seeming irresponsibility to his actions and opinions, he had never come really to grips with the matter of Mayotte till now— never realised what it meant to him, never faced the fact that his feeling for the lady had roots away down where his heart and solar plexus resided, and away up in that part of his mind where money is not counted and where money does not count.

That, in fact, she had got a grip of his being by some sort of trick which he couldn't explain, and seemed in a fair way towards twisting the neck of his happiness, his well-being, his comfort in life— his soul, in short. Yes, it was the devil of a business; he had put her off, played with the idea of her, refused to face reality, foozled and temporised on the edge of a crevasse, which had to be jumped if he wanted to land in the country of happiness.

Otherwise he would never be happy. Love told him this. Money would be no use to him, nor food, nor anything else.

He had to jump and do it at once. In other words he had to propose before Jean got a chance.

The bother was to make her take him seriously. With her he had always played the part of the jester, not intentionally, but just because that was the natural face he turned on the world. He was, in fact, a jester by nature. Whatever deeper feelings he had were covered deep by the waters of persiflage. Now that they had risen up like rocks lifted up by a submarine movement, would she recognise them as real or as something pushed up as a joke by a submarine clown— as something false, not true?

Why, even that morning, look at the way he had joked with her, telling her if she took the fish she must take the boat with it, and that the boat meant himself. Recalling that now, he could not recapture the light and irresponsible mood in which the words had been spoken. He remembered the words and her face. She had laughed— but had she laughed with or at him?

That was the question.

Well, he had to make the jump, and do it at once, that day, that minute— at least that hour.

He went to the room where he slept, and opening the red cedar box which was his wardrobe, took out his best suit.

Touched by a great occasion, a marriage, burial or even feast day, the Italian, southern Frenchman, and man of Fernand's type blossoms in black.

He put on his black suit, relieved by a red necktie, looked at himself in the little mirror which he used for shaving, took his black wideawake hat, and left the house.

The Rue St. Jean de Dieu, where Mayotte lived with her sister, was not far from the Rue Victor Hugo. A street of small houses and of humble inhabitants, it was yet, in its way, one of the pleasantest of the streets of St. Pierre.

It belonged to the earliest days of the city, and the little houses had small verandahs and gardens where pepper trees and magnolias grew. Small gardens, and not well tended, but pleasant enough in their way, especially of an evening, when the warm twilight hid all the shortcomings, and the fireflies sprinkled the dusk around the magnolias.

Fernand, reaching the house of the adored, opened the rickety little gate, and coming up the walk found Mayotte and her sister Pauline on the verandah.

They were at work, Pauline at her turban-making business, Mayotte, free now of business care, the market being over, trimming herself a dress.

"Why, 'tis Fernand!" cried Mayotte in astonishment, sticking the needle in the foulard she was working on.

"Why, Fernand, what has happened; are you going to a wedding?"

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"MA FOI, yes— I hope so," replied the jester— betrayed by himself and instantly wishing he had bitten his tongue out. Then, awkwardly, and hat in hand, "but I see you are busy. I had hoped to speak a word in private to you about a small matter, but"— with a glance at Pauline— "perhaps— — "

"Oh, la, la!" said Pauline, rising and picking up the Madras she had been working on, "if I am in the way I am soon out of it." She rose with a laugh, and flounced into the house, guessing that the hour had come.

She had known for a long while that he was after Mayotte, like a host of others, and she preferred him to any of the rest— especially to Jean. Pauline had no illusions about Jean, in fact she was definitely against him, and unfortunately she had voiced her opinion on the matter, thus making the creature more desirable than Nature had already made him.

Pauline considered Jean light, untrustworthy, and a follower after other girls. "Well, anyhow," once had retorted Mayotte, "he doesn't seem to be after you." The only cattish thing she had ever said to her sister, and a forcible piece of evidence of her feelings in the matter.

Pauline gone, the pair found themselves alone. Mayotte resumed her needlework.

"Well," she said, "and what is the small matter you wished to speak to me about?"

"I did not mean that," replied the other. "It is not a small matter to me— to you, perhaps— I do not know, but that is what I have called to find out."

"Well, what is it?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I know," cried Mayotte gaily, "it is the fish— did you not charge enough— or is it that you charged too much?"

Fernand heaved a sigh.

"You laugh," said he, "but it is not a matter of laughing with me. It is yourself. You yourself, yes. I have come to tell you that for me there is one person only— yourself."

"Fernand," said Mayotte, "this is foolishness."

"Perhaps," said Fernand, "but it is not foolishness to me."

"But Fernand, it is impossible."

"Impossible, no, since it is a fact."

"All the same, for me it is impossible."

"Then you cannot care for me?"

"It is not that. I care for you as a friend always cheerful and kind, but I am betrothed to another."

"Ah!" said Fernand, as though a bullet had struck him in the chest. Then: "You love another?"

"Yes."

"You are betrothed to him. Is it Jean?"

"Yes."

"Since when?" cried Fernand.

"Oh," said Mayotte, "a long time."

"But no one knew."

"We agreed to say nothing for a while."

"Jean!" said Fernand, as one speaking in a trance.

"Yes."

"Jean! I quarrelled with him this morning. Jean! Why, he was my friend— and never a word of this!"

Fernand stood for a moment staring at a green lizard that was sunning itself on the verandah bricks. Then like a man half-stunned he turned away, walked slowly down the path to the little gate, opened it, closed it behind him, and disappeared down the road.

Mayotte felt frightened.

She had never seen Fernand moved to exhibit his real feelings before. She had always looked upon him as a sunny, pleasant creature, a bit impudent, but irresponsibly so. That morning he had sold her a fish, offering to give it to her if she would take him with it. That was the sort of man who had turned up just now in the verandah, serious, and taking her refusal of him in that tragic way.

Pauline, coming out, found her in tears.

"How now!" exclaimed Pauline. "Crying— you?"

"'Tis Fernand," sobbed Mayotte, "I never scarcely looked his way, and now he goes on like this."

"How?" asked Pauline.

"Oh, like that— as though I could care for him."

"And why not?"

"Because," said Mayotte boldly, determined to tell her sister all, and have done with it, "because I care for Jean, and have promised to marry him."

"I always felt it would come to that," said Pauline, as one speaking of a jar broken by carelessness, or some such minor domestic catastrophe. The thing was not news to her, at least only news discounted, and it was Mayotte's affair, anyhow.

Then, after a pause, "Why did you keep it hidden from me till now?"

"What?"

"That you were betrothed to him?"

"Because," said Mayotte, "you were always going on about him— but I am thinking of Fernand. He said he quarrelled with Jean this morning, and I fear he may try now to do him an injury."

Pauline laughed.

"Oh," she said, "Jean will be able to look after himself— and he has long legs."

v

IF FERNAND had met his rival on leaving Mayotte, or even that afternoon in the streets, there might have been trouble, but fortunately the other had been

called away to Morne Rouge, and the two men did not come near one another for several days.

When they did come within speaking distance in the market, they ignored one another, Jean because of the quarrel in the café, Fernand because of that and Mayotte.

Meanwhile Mayotte remained the same towards them both. She would even cross over to Fernand's stall in the market, to speak to him on some trifle, and Fernand, who had sunk his feelings had, perhaps out of bravado, returned seemingly to his old, gay and natural self.

So things went on for a month or so, and then one day Jean disappeared.

He did not come to the café in the morning to conduct the business, and the landlady where he lived said he had not slept in his room the night before; Yi, the cook at the café, said the same.

You can fancy the talk and speculation when four more days passed and no Jean.

On the morning of the fifth day a porteuse came into the market and stopped at Fernand's stall. A porteuse is a woman, generally young, a female peddler, who balances her pack on her head, and carries goods from town to village, tramping the roads, heedless of the heat, the sun, the rain, time and distance.

This porteuse was young, straight as a dart, with black flashing eyes, and teeth like pearls. She stopped at Fernand's stall, and said in a voice lowered a tone.

"Jean Gastin bids me tell you that he has need of you. He will be by the great cedar this afternoon at the bend of the National Road a mile from Grande Anse. He is in trouble."

"Need of me!" said the astonished Fernand.

"Yes," said the porteuse.

"But what is it?"

"I don't know," said the porteuse, "but he said if I told you he was in trouble you would come. He asks you not to mention this message to anyone."

Then she passed on, proud and straight, a flame of a woman, to be lost in the crowd.

The porteuse often carried messages as well as goods. There was nothing surprising in her bringing the message; the surprise was in its nature. Jean was in trouble, and was appealing for help, or at least advice, to the man with whom he had quarrelled. That was the strange thing. Also, Jean was his rival.

"I shan't go," said Fernand to himself. "There may be some trick in this—besides, what do I care?"

Then his eye caught sight of Mayotte, like a butterfly against the coloured background of her stall. She evidently knew nothing of Jean being in trouble.

In some curious way, for Fernand, Mayotte became at once part of the Jean problem. Fernand knew quite well that if Mayotte were aware that her lover was in trouble she would fly to him. He could not tell her, owing to what the porteuse had said. Failing that, he would fail Mayotte if he did not go to Jean and find out what the trouble was. That was how the situation suddenly revealed itself to him.

It seemed to this jester that the gods were treating him in the jesting manner which was his towards the world.

He hated Jean, yet would have to serve him— at least, go to him. Mayotte, like a butterfly over there in the sunshine, said this without speaking.

He put on his linen coat, gave the stall over to a friend to look after, and started.

vi

THE NATIONAL ROAD from St. Pierre to Grande Anse lies like a ribbon stretching between the high woods and cane brakes, manioc fields, and the lands of the old plantations. It climbs and falls and climbs and falls, now raising you till you can see a hundred mornes, purple pictures of sea, far glimpses of Pelée, and the roofs of tiny villages, farm buildings and rhumeries; now taking you to valleys where the silence is broken only by the wind in the canes and the voice of the siffleur de Montagne.

The distance is twenty miles, and Fernand, owing to his early start, managed to catch the stage which runs by way of Morne Rouge, past the old Calabasse Road, past Ajoupa Bouillon and the Rivière Falaise, to the point where the great cedar stands, close to the bend, and the by-road to the hamlet of Mirail.

Here Fernand got out, and the stage went on, leaving him alone.

He sat down on the trunk of a fallen palmiste, took off his hat, wiped his brow, and then, hat in hand, sat waiting and thinking. Jean would know that if he came at all he would come by the stage, and knowing the time of the stage's arrival, would be here to meet him. Yet there was no sign of Jean.

A man passed driving a mule laden with wine skins, and a cart carrying rum barrels, and drawn by oxen.

The dust settled, and silence took the road. Nothing— Jean would not come. He felt a bit relieved, though irritated at the journey he had undertaken, and the possibility that the thing might be a hoax, or a device to get him away from St. Pierre, for some reason or another.

Anyhow, after waiting a little he would be free to return, catching the next stage back, and he was saying this to himself when Jean appeared, coming along the path from Mirail.

Yes, he was in trouble right enough. His very walk told that— sick, too— ghastly— why, he was thin as a skeleton.

He came towards Fernand, and then, taking his seat on the fallen tree bole, he motioned the other to sit beside him. There was no hint at all in the attitude of the two men as to the quarrel that had parted them in the café.

"Well," said Fernand, "and what is all this? What makes you look so— Why have you left St. Pierre?"

"Mon Dieu!" cried Jean, the words bursting from him as though he were exhaling air after a dive into some frightful depths. "Why!— — "

He stripped up his sleeve and showed his right arm, which was of a dull dead colour from the elbow to the shoulder.

"Fer de lance," said he, "a fer de lance that bit me."

Fernand drew back.

Now the poison of the fer de lance may kill instantly, or may kill in a month after great suffering; or it may lie in the system and destroy a man slowly, and with terrible disfigurement. It may take a year, two years, three years— the patient may possibly recover, but in that case he is left a living skeleton, the ghost of a man. There is no antidote to prevent these terrible effects.

Jean showed his neck.

There was a small patch there, too.

"But surely— — " cried Fernand.

"It is as I say," replied the other, pulling down his sleeve. "When it did not kill me outright, this came, then I went to a doctor at Fort de France. I did not give him my real name, nor where I had come from, for I did not want people to know this and pity me, and point at me and say, 'Look at that poor devil, he's worse than dead.' I gave a false name, and an address in Fort de France. He said, 'Yes, it is what you think; go home, and I will call upon you later to-day.' I knew what that meant— the hospital.

"So," went on Jean, "I could not go back to St. Pierre. I am hiding with a relation at Mirail. That is why I sent for you."

"Go on," said Fernand.

"I have made my plans," went on the other, "I must hide— be alone— away from all. I will go to Sombrero."

Fernand knew the place. There are two Sombreros, one at the entrance to the Caribbean Sea, the other out beyond Martinique. An islet covered with bay cedar bushes, with a lighthouse to mark its dangerous reef, of which the islet is a part.

No one ever goes to Sombrero except the men from the relief ship that comes once in two months.

"But there is no house there!" said Fernand.

"There is a hut left by the cement workers."

"But food!"

"I will be able to get food from my relation who has a boat, besides I can fish, there are sea gulls' eggs and crabs, sea urchins, bêche-de-mer."

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" said Fernand.

"But I must have money," went on Jean. "I've talked it out with my relation. He will not charge for the use of the boat, but he is not rich enough to pay for the few things I will want, but if I can give him three thousand francs he will undertake to keep me in things I will need."

After a moment's silence he went on:

"That is why I sent for you. My partner M. Robert, will, I am sure, give me this sum. I want you to go to him and ask him for it. We have no contract between us, but now that I must give up he will be able to sell the café, as he has often wanted to do. He is a just man, and he will give you the money for me."

"Must I tell him the reason?"

"No. Tell him that things have occurred making it impossible for me to return to St. Pierre, that is enough."

"I will do it," said Fernand.

Then, after a pause: "Is there no one else to whom you would wish me to speak, saying that you will not be able to return?"

"No," said Jean.

Fernand was thinking of Mayotte.

"No woman?"

"No," said Jean, "women are nothing to me now." He laughed, and fell into a fit of moody abstraction.

Then he said: "You will do this?"

"I have promised," answered the other. "I will go to St. Pierre by the evening stage, which will pass here soon, and return to-morrow at the same time."

"I will be here," said Jean.

Then he rose up, and saying good-bye, took his way back to Mirail.

Fernand sat plunged in thought.

He was astonished, not only by the catastrophe, but also by the callousness of the other, who seemed to care for nothing but his own position. Mayotte, the woman to whom he was betrothed, seemed not the least in his thoughts, or only as one of the women who were nothing to him now.

Also it came to him vaguely as a strange fact that Jean in his terrible position was able to think and plan for his future in that cold sort of manner, caring for nothing but just the chance of escape from the pointing finger, the pity that would be worse to his pride than a blow.

No matter. Fernand had only one thing to do, and that was to carry out his promise, and obtain the three thousand francs.

Half an hour later the stage from Grande Anse to St. Pierre turned the corner of the road, and Fernand, hailing it, got on board.

vii

NEXT MORNING, Fernand, having breakfasted early, went to call on M. Robert.

Unable to attend the market, he had deputed the business of fish-selling to one of his boatmen.

After leaving the house of M. Robert, he was coming down the steps to the Rue Victor Hugo, when whom should he meet but Mayotte. Mayotte had left her stall in the market to run up to Fladrin in the Rue Victor Hugo, to enquire about a consignment of fruit which he had not sent her, and glancing up the steps she saw Fernand coming down.

Mayotte, without showing it, had been troubled about Jean's absence from St. Pierre. People were talking. Rumours had reached her that Jean was in business difficulties, and so forth. She did not believe these rumours, she felt in her heart that were it so he would have told her— but still, where was he? The question was like a living thing, gnawing at her heart. The worst of all was that she could not ask people, or only in a casual way as one might ask about an acquaintance. People did not know that she was betrothed to him.

But Fernand did, and when she saw him coming down the steps, the feeling came to her at once that here was someone to whom she could speak. She pushed aside from her mind all that about his having come to ask her to marry him, and his anger at the news that she cared for Jean. It seemed to her in her trouble that he would forget all that, and with beautiful simplicity, when he reached her, said:

"Fernand, I did not see you in the market. I wished to see you, and ask you have you heard anything about Jean? People are talking, and I do not know what to think."

"No," said Fernand, upset by the sudden question, "I know nothing about him."

He spoke almost brusquely. He was a very bad liar— at least out of business hours— and he knew it intuitively, and instinctively tried to hide his defect behind a show of short temper.

The girl looked at him. She was not in the least satisfied with his reply. It seemed to her that he was hiding something; on the other hand, his short manner might be due to her asking him about Jean at all.

"Well, good day," she said, "I only thought I would ask you," and passed on.

Fernand swore beneath his breath.

A nice position truly this wretched Jean had put him in. Making him go to St. Pierre and fetch him money, making him lie like that to Mayotte.

He would have run after the girl, only he was bound by his promise; also, even if he had not been bound, how could he have told her the truth?

A nice position, truly.

He turned to the left, and entered the offices of M. Bartholome, with whom he had some business to transact, and half an hour later he took the stage for Grande Anse.

viii

HE HAD not long to wait under the cedar tree. Scarcely had the stage disappeared round the corner of the road when Jean appeared from the by-way to Mirail.

"I have got the money," said Fernand, taking a bundle of notes from his pocket, "three thousand francs, you said, and here they are."

Jean thanked him, took the notes, and led the way along the Mirail road, to a bank where they sat down whilst he counted the money. Here they would not be observed, for very few people used this lonely road. Though he had no fear of being seen, still he did not want people at St. Pierre to know that he was in the Grande Anse district. The porteuse he could trust implicitly, also Fernand—he reckoned on people talking about him for a while, and wondering, and then forgetting him, fancying, maybe, that he had left the island for good.

When he had counted the notes he put the bundle in his pocket.

"And to think of that man," said he, "who can scarcely leave his room, to think of him who can take no pleasure in life, alive, and look at me!"

He was talking of M. Robert.

Fernand said nothing, and Jean, brooding for a moment said nothing; the wind in the cane field behind them only spoke, with that curious muttering sigh which is the voice of the cane field when the canes are nearly ripe for cutting.

Jean rose up.

"And now," said he, "it only remains for you to see the end of me— if you will."

"As it pleases you," replied Fernand. "I have done what I can, and I will do what I can; it will never be said of me that I deserted a friend in trouble."

"That," said Jean, "is why I sent for you."

This tremendous compliment, spoken out of the depths of a selfish soul, left Fernand unmoved.

He was not talking to a man, but to one of the Elementals. The same Person who had dwelt with Nessus and dealt with Dezanira.

In a vague way he felt this Presence, and was lifted by it quite out of the ordinary ways of life. It had but to speak, for him to obey.

"If you will go with me to Sombrero, to see the last of me, that is all I ask," said Jean. "It is not far, but a few hours in the boat."

"When do you leave?" asked Fernand.

"Now," replied the other. "It is not yet noon. It is only half an hour's walk from here to the bay, where my cousin, Pierre Le Moan, is waiting for me— will you come?"

"Yes," said Fernand.

They came along the road, passed the little village of Mirail, where the cousin lived, and then by a cliff path found the bay where the boat was waiting, beached on the black sands.

The sands of Grande Anse are black, or nearly black, owing to the iron mixed with them, and on the beach between the Pointe du Rochet and the Pointe de Croche Mort there is, as a rule, a big sea running. But this little bay beyond the Pointe du Rochet is nearly always calm, protected by the bluff, and to-day it was even calmer than usual.

The boat was lying just above the tide mark, and by it was standing Pierre Le Moan, a tall black-haired man with a saturnine face that entirely belied his character, which might be defined in four words: Rigid and Incorruptible Honesty.

In the boat there was a bundle of provisions, another of clothes. Sombrero possessed a well, so they had no need to carry water, and there was also a hut there, left over by the last repairers of the lighthouse.

Sombrero really consists of two islets. The outer one, carrying the lighthouse, is separated from its fellow by a gut of sea, which is impassable, owing to the race of the tides through it.

The inner islet, nearer the land, had been used as a stores base during the rebuilding of the lighthouse in 1891, hence the hut, and a few ruined sheds in which cement and so forth had been stored. The well is near the hut. It holds cold clear water, and its level never falls. Away beyond the cement sheds is another well, whose water, brown and turbid, is boiling hot.

The place is part of the great volcanic ridge of which Pelée is also a part, and some day, perhaps, will sink again to the depths from which it rose.

Jean, having introduced Fernand to Le Moan, took out the bundle of notes and handed them to his cousin, who counted them and placed them in his pocket.

Le Moan, who owned a small plantation near Mirail, was not very well-to-do. All the same, the money in his pocket was safe as in a bank, and to its uttermost centime would go to Jean's upkeep.

Le Moan would charge nothing for visiting Sombrero periodically, and bringing food and supplies; that was a labour of duty which he owed to man and to his cousin.

Le Moan's great grandfather had helped to pull down the Bastille; he was, in fact, a child of the French Revolution, one of the children of its nobility and integrity, as against its cruelty and ferocity.

Even yet in the old colony there still remain a few of this type, practical idealists, who perform that which glib-mouthed Liberty only promises.

The three men got the boat water-borne, Le Moan getting in last and pushing off from the beach with an oar. The wind was favourable, blowing from shore, and now, beyond the shelter of the Pointe du Rochet, they took the deep, far-spreading swell, that moved in meadows of ruffled violet, from the point of brilliant white that was the lighthouse of Sombrero.

Le Moan steered; Jean was crouched forward in the bows, and Fernand sat on the after thwart, facing the steersman.

Running with the wind and current, the only sound was the trickle of the water against the planking, except an occasional creak of the mast, an occasional cry from a passing bird.

Fernand, his face towards the land, saw Martinique, a dazzling vision of amethystine peaks and purple mornes, spreading from the cane fields of Grande Anse to the far lift of Pelée. Hills and valleys, high woods, wide stretching fields of cane, and all sending on the following wind their perfume.

Turning and facing the bow, Fernand could see Sombrero, no longer veiled by distance, but sharp and definite, hard against the blue, from its water-washed rocks to the lighthouse with its bulbous head. The Pharos, that from dusk to dawn dominated land and sea, like a great windmill sweeping arms of light thirty miles long.

ix

THE BOAT ran into the little cove that lies amidst the rocks on this side of the islet.

They beached her on the sands, and having hauled her up a bit began getting out the stores.

Leaving the others to this business, Fernand came towards the hut left by the lighthouse repairers, and beyond which lay the cement sheds. The hut was built of boarding, and roofed with corrugated iron painted white. It was in good repair, though long deserted and given over to wind and weather. The door was not locked, simply on the latch, and Fernand, opening it, went in.

It was a one-roomed hut, with four sleeping bunks, like those on board of a ship, a rough table in the centre, and an old swinging lamp, evidently deemed not worth taking away.

Pasted to the wall were some remains of old pictures cut from French newspapers of five years ago; a cuspidor stood in one corner, and on the table lay an old metal spoon with a broken handle.

There was nothing else in this place but the sunlight that showed the spiders' webs, and a centipede that, frightened from beneath the table, was running along the floor by the wall like a railway train.

The centipede vanished by some slit, as though whisked through by a hand from outside. Fernand stood for a moment looking around him, then he went out, leaving the door open, and came to the cement sheds.

They presented a more desolate picture than the hut. For some reason they were more dilapidated, and their evidence of the activity that had once gone on here was more pronounced. Under the broken roof a few half-empty kegs lay rotting; a wheelbarrow without a wheel lay on its side, and here and there on the spilt white powder that had hardened under the weather, could be seen the footprints of the workers who had once been here.

Fernand went on to the well. It was almost brim-full. He put his finger in; the water was cold as ice.

He had heard of the boiling well, and it was not difficult to locate it, for a faint cap of steam showed a hundred yards away amongst the bay cedar bushes that grew here almost from shore to shore.

He came to it and looked down at the water, turbid, amber-coloured and unstill. There were little eddies, in which insects that had fallen to their death were moving, and the whole surface every now and then seemed to swell upwards ever so slightly, as though in response to the respiration of some life hidden below.

He turned from it, and came back to help in carrying the things from the boat to the hut. Then, when everything was done, it was time to get back to the mainland, as the wind was still blowing from there, and the journey would be slow.

Jean was smoking a cigarette.

He was the only one of the three capable of tobacco just then. He seemed indifferent. It might have been that he had come here for a short holiday. He had counted the stores, had examined the fishing lines, and the hooks, whose bait would be the hermit crabs and the limpets that clung to the rocks; he had indicated to Le Moan some things that he wished brought at Le Moan's next visit— all this indifferently.

Then, as the boat put off, he stood watching them go, lifting a hand, standing for a moment, and then turning and making towards the hut.

"He takes it well," said Fernand.

Le Moan, who was steering, said nothing for a moment, then he broke out, and there was a strange bitterness in his tone.

"Yes, he takes it as he has always taken life. I have known him from a child. For Jean there has always been no one in the world but Jean. For him the hospital had less fear than injury to his pride by men knowing what has happened to him. For that he has laid this burden upon me. How could I refuse? I am of his blood. Besides, he knows me, just as he knows you. He said to me, 'I can depend on Fernand Pelliser'— oh, they are cunning, these selfish ones; being animals they have the cunning of animals, and that is all there is to say about it. But he has made a mistake; the hospital he has chosen for himself will not hold him long; he will get tired of himself; he will learn there to hate himself, and that for a selfish man is death."

"There is a girl in St. Pierre who cares for him," said Fernand.

"There is sure to be," said Le Moan with a laugh. "Jean was never backward with the girls."

Fernand said nothing for a moment. He had been friends with Jean in the ordinary way for years, knew that he was reckoned a spark, and that St. Pierre was not a nunnery. He had never bothered about Jean's morals, considering that they were no worse than anyone else's, but there was something in Le Moan's tone that raised his suspicions.

"As for the matter of that," said Fernand, "the girls are forward enough, and Jean was of the sort that attracts them."

Le Moan laughed again. It was not a pleasant laugh, nor was it sinister: it was the laugh of Justice turned cynic.

"It is not of the forward girls I am thinking, trollops only fit to be used and cast on the midden heap. Rose-Marie was different."

"Rose-Marie?"

"The girl who drowned herself because of Jean."

"Good God!" said Fernand.

"Ay, you may well cry out. She was innocent and a virgin; but that is nothing, for all girls are that to start with; but she was also a pure rose of gold. She lived over here on this side, and no one knew about it in St. Pierre, and few people here."

"Did he betray her?"

"He made her love him. It did not matter that he took advantage of her, for nature is nature, but he made her love him, and then he turned the face of his cold black soul upon her and she died."

"God!"

"Flung herself from the Pointe du Rochet. It was not that he had betrayed her; it was just that he had made her mind to blossom in love, and then destroyed the blossom."

Fernand took a deep breath.

"Had I known this I never would have helped him, nor gone for money for him," said he.

"Oh yes, you would," said Le Moan, "simply because you have done so. You, like myself, are an honest man; you have proved it by taking this trouble for one who is no relation. Had you known this about Jean you still would have helped him, leaving the good God to settle accounts.

"But I am different from you," went on Le Moan, "in that I knew the girl— and loved her."

Fernand sat still. The mast creaked to the wind, and the sound of the bow wash came "splash-splash" as the little waves hit the planking.

Then he leaned forward towards Le Moan.

"I told you," said he, "that in St. Pierre he has left a girl— she is betrothed to him. I cared for her, but he was before me with her."

"Then you are not different from me," said Le Moan, "or only in that the girl you loved is still alive, and perhaps will forget him— whilst Rose-Marie is dead."

"How could you then have done it?" asked Fernand.

"Which?"

"How could you have helped him in his distress? I swear that if he had done to Mayotte what he did to Rose-Marie, I would have put a knife in his heart."

A cold gleam came into the dark face of Le Moan— a light, as though from the back of his soul.

"I helped him because I am a Christian," said he, "and I could not have it on my conscience to say that I had refused help— but what have I helped him to— Look!"

He pointed to Sombrero, desolate in the distance.

Fernand knew, and it came to him in a flash of revelation that behind the Christian in Le Moan stood the pagan spirit of hatred born of wrong done. That, for Le Moan, Jean was as a loathsome reptile trapped in a circle of fire. That every visit of Le Moan to Sombrero bringing stores to the marooned one would also be a visit of inspection, a satisfaction of the dark passion that lies in all men's souls— the craving for revenge.

And who could say that Le Moan was in the wrong— who can say that the passion for revenge against those who injure the innocent is an evil passion?

So argued Fernand in his dim way, and so he argued that night, when, staying in Grande Anse, owing to the fact that the last stage had departed, he stood on the cliffs and watched the great beams of the far lighthouse sweeping

sea and land, seeming to beckon the world to behold the fate of Jean Gastin, destroyer of women.

x

JEAN, left to himself, did not even turn again to look at the boat.

He came up to the hut where the stores had been placed, and the mattress and pillow which Le Moan had provided. A single blanket was more than enough in that climate.

Then he came out.

He knew Sombrero.

He had come here once before, sailing a boat over from Grande Anse single-handed, despite the warnings he had received about the tides and rocks.

It took an experienced man like Le Moan to do this business safely, for Le Moan had assisted in the repairs to the lighthouse, bringing over stores and tools for the workers. All the same, Jean had come here alone some two years ago and spent half a day fishing, returning in safety, and with a knowledge of the place that was useful when it came to the making of plans in his great extremity.

He came out of the hut, and glanced around him.

The boat was far away, the sail showing like the wing of a gull, and beyond the boat the hills of Martinique floated in the late afternoon light like blue and ragged clouds, with here and there a touch of jasper, and high beyond them the rose gold snow of Pelée's cloud cap.

The brown sail of a fishing boat showed in the north, making for Dominica. Elsewhere the sea showed nothing.

He turned his gaze back to the lighthouse.

Now that he was alone on Sombrero, with no boat to take him away, and the knowledge that no boat could ever take him away, Sombrero was a different place to that which he had known.

That day of his visit, nothing had impressed him much, but now everything around had significance. The bay cedar bushes stirred by the wind, the sound of the wind that stirred them, the weak mewing and complaining of the gulls, the shapes of the rocks by the sea edge, and lastly, but not leastly, the smooth white bulk of the lighthouse.

The lighthouse seemed to stand with its back turned to him.

There were human beings there, but owing to the gut of dividing sea they might as well have been in Sirius.

The island of Sombrero,* at the entrance to the Caribbean Sea, has height, but this islet, low-lying, has little relationship with the shape of a hat, except that it is oval in outline, with the lighthouse at the broken end facing west. The

whole length of the place was therefore between it and Jean, also the dividing passage of sea.

* Otherwise known as "Spanish Hat."

In some curious way the smooth stone giant seemed to intensify and focus the desolation, attract to itself the crying of the sea birds and the sound of the wind and the muttering of the waves, and the thoughts of the marooned one.

It had, in fact, a personality.

Huge, bleakly white, silent, lifeless, yet containing life, possibly observant, absolutely indifferent, it was, in fact, a person.

Alone on a desert island one has Nature for a companion, but this terrible bulk, man-made and desolate with the desolation that speaks in arterial roads and reservoirs, pushed Nature aside, and took all friendly significance from her hundred voices.

Jean turned from it, and went to the rocks on the northern side, where he stood looking down on the sea.

Just here the water runs deep, and it was here that he had fished on that day of his visit, little knowing— .

When dark fell that night, and almost before the lighting of the first star, a great white beam of light swept Sombrero. It was the lighthouse beginning to speak in the language of semaphore.

Two short flashes and one long. Sombrero, Sombrero, S-o-m-b-r-e-r-o.

They lit the cement sheds and the hut, and Jean, coming out, watched them sweeping to sea, lighting the bay cedar bushes and the northern rocks. Hypnotic, like the passes of a mesmerist, yet not inducing sleep.

xi

NEXT DAY Fernand returned to St. Pierre.

He was not a very swift thinker, and his mind was of the type that reacts to sentiment more quickly than to the reagency of reason.

It was not till he was well back in St. Pierre, with his journeys accomplished, and the money paid over to Le Moan for Jean, that Reason, a bit disgruntled, got in a word. "Yes," said Reason, "you have taken a tremendous lot of trouble, and involved yourself in expense over this business— why? You pitied the man. Yes, of course you did, but was that your main motive? See here. Did you not say to yourself, not louder than a flea's whisper: 'I am doing this because Mayotte would wish it done?' You cannot answer. Aha! I have got you in a cleft stick. What a position for a man of sense. You helped this scamp because you knew the girl you care for loves him, and would have run barefoot to Grande Anse to bring him help; he cut you out with her, yet you looked after him for her sake.

"Of course the spirit of pity helped, but tell me this, Fernand Pellisser: if Jean had not been suffering as he is suffering, if he had been a simple rotter or defaulter, undeserving of pity, would you have helped him for the sake of Mayotte?

"You would, you fool, and you know it. Truly that is a good joke, and worthy of you whom they call the jester."

Fernand, after a moment's thought, replied:

"If I had known of what he did to Rose-Marie I would not have helped him at all."

"Yes," replied Reason, "and why? Because you would have said to yourself, 'He might have done the same to Mayotte.' You are so tangled up with Mayotte that all your actions come from her. You are like a dancing Pulcinello on the end of a string— which she pulls."

However all that might have been, the fact remained of Fernand's good action, and of its evil effect upon him.

Evil, because, to begin with, he did not attend market on this morning of his return, and the next day news was spreading through the place that he had sold his business and his boat.

Yet he had been doing well, and owed no man anything.

It is true that he had no money much in the bank, simply because up to this he had had a hard fight to make good. But now he was just beginning to bud, as you may say, and look! All at once he was nipped!

It was as though Mayotte had cut the string of the puppet, so that it could dance no more.

He had collapsed as a business man. Some people said that he had been gambling, and others that he had lost heart owing to the fact that Mayotte would have nothing to do with him.

For— and it was a curious fact— though Jean's affair with her had scarcely been noticed, Fernand's sweetness had been a matter of comment.

Days passed, and new rumours began to circulate about Fernand.

People said he was drinking.

This was true enough, as we all must drink as well as eat, but as a hint that he was drinking alcohol to excess, it was false.

He spent a good deal of the day at the Café Ambasse in the Rue Victor Hugo, but he went there chiefly because it was the resort of shipping people. Shipping agents in St. Pierre, ships' chandlers, ships' officers.

It seemed that Fernand, though he had not been to sea for some years, held a mate's certificate, and with it he was now fishing for a job.

He had done with St. Pierre, done with everything, and wished to get away. He had said so in a moment of expansion to Lavelle, the agent of the Gossard Line, and Lavelle had talked, and the gossips followed suit.

"Now what's the matter with Fernand Pellisser? Thrown up his business and thrown up everything. Something on his mind— sits drinking all day at the Ambasse or at Proport's bar. He's trying to get a mate's job. Wonder why? Why? Well, it seems to me that he wants to get away from here in a hurry, but he doesn't owe money, does he? Lord no, he's sold his business they say, and must have lots of money— — "

The porteuse who had brought Fernand the message from Jean came into the town one day, and hearing the gossip began to put two and two together.

She had been away for some time on one of her long journeys, going from Morne Rouge to Calabasse and from Calabasse to St. Jacques, and now it seemed that Jean had not returned to St. Pierre, and that Fernand, who had received a message to meet Jean by the great cedar tree on the road to Grande Anse, was leaving St. Pierre. Had thrown up his business in a hurry, and was seeking a berth on a ship.

All this seemed strange to her, and she spoke about it to her sister in confidence, and the sister told her young man in confidence, and he told his mother and— bang! the whole town had the news that Fernand's strange conduct had something to do with Jean's disappearance.

Mayotte, hearing it, sought out the porteuse, whose name was Marie Ribot.

"I do not know how it has got about," said Marie, "but it is true. I took a message from Jean Gastin to Fernand Pellisser, asking Fernand to meet him by the big cedar near Grande Anse, and he went, for the driver of the stage told me he took him to Grande Anse and that he got off at the big cedar. Fernand has been twice to Grande Anse, and once he stayed the night."

"I met Fernand," said Mayotte, "and asked him did he know anything about Jean, and he told me that he knew nothing."

"Well, then," replied Marie, "he said what was not the truth."

"I thought so," said Mayotte, "he spoke as though he were not telling the truth."

Then she went away and brooded.

She alone, with her sister, knew that the two men had been rivals— at least that Fernand had been a rival of Jean's; she had dreaded that Fernand might do Jean an injury. Pauline had laughed at this, saying Jean could look after himself, as he had long legs.

Well, look!

Jean had disappeared, so that his disappearance was a nine days' wonder, and now Fernand, having lied about not having seen Jean, was leaving St. Pierre in a hurry— had sold his business— was running away.

What should she do— what could she do?

She had no one to consult. Pauline had always been against Jean and she would say: "Leave things alone. You have nothing to go on but what people say,

and Jean is capable of looking after himself." That was what Pauline would say, and Mayotte could hear her saying it. There was no one else to speak to, or only one. The Chief of Police.

A person who had always filled Mayotte's simple mind with awe. M. Patrigent, who had the head of an old Roman Emperor, the harsh manner of a pursuer of criminals, and the heart of a child— and of a father. There weren't really any criminals to pursue in St. Pierre, so that was why perhaps M. Patrigent spent so much of his time in the club, playing dominoes, sometimes playing patience, sometimes just dozing.

But to-day she found him in his office, and when she told her tale, the old gentleman pulled his Imperial, drummed on the table with his fingers, and lit a cigarette with a meditative air.

Then he made her tell it all over again. He was a great reader of Gaboriau and all the writers of that school, and had often fancied himself that great writer's great detective. This was the first case of mystery and importance that had come to him, so you may fancy— —

"Above all, my dear, silence," said M. Patrigent. "Leave everything to me, and come to me again to-morrow morning, with any other information on the matter you may be able to collect."

xii

MEANWHILE, during all these days Le Moan pursued his work on his farm, with what, who knows, going on in his dark soul, so full of rectitude, yet so alive with the power of hatred.

Then one day he determined to visit the man on Sombrero.

It was not yet time for the periodical visit he had promised, yet he would throw this visit in as an extra.

He had little pleasure or interest in life, and to do good is always pleasant— as, for instance, visiting the sick; and as for interest— well, there would be plenty of interest in this business.

He pushed off in his boat, working her single-handed, and the wind was favourable, light and steady, and coming from a sky filled with the promise of fair weather.

Approaching Sombrero, the hut showed now distinctly, and the sheds, but there was no sign of Jean.

Le Moan beached the boat, hauled her up a bit, and then started for the hut. The door was open and he went in. Jean was not there.

He looked round, and came out. The whole islet was within his view, but on it no visible living thing, with the exception of a great gull brooding on a rock.

He went back to the hut.

There was a plate on the table, with some food on it, fairly fresh, as though left only yesterday, and a cup with some water in it. The blanket of the bunk lay on the floor. One of the newspaper pictures on the wall, that had blistered, owing to the heat, moved slightly, with a rustling sound. A centipede crept out from beneath the blister, and dropped on the floor.

Le Moan left the place, and standing at the door, looked around.

Then he heard a far-off voice hailing him, and saw at a window just below the lantern of the lighthouse, a man leaning out and gesticulating with his arm.

It was too far for spoken words to carry, but the man's gestures were clear.

Le Moan raised his hand, came running back to the boat, pushed her off and rowed seaward round the islet, past the gut of sea, and so to the stone landing steps of the lighthouse, leading to the ladder of entrance.

The man was there on the little platform up to which the ladder led. He waited till the boat was right underneath.

"Have you come looking for that fellow that was living in the hut?" he cried. "Gone— heard him shouting yesterday— gone mad. Shaking his fist at us— what you say? Mad, I tell you. Running about, shaking his fist at us. Saw him jump into the sea and swim out and go under. Sharks got him— What you say? Yes— saw it. Who was he?"

"Man from Grande Anse," replied Le Moan.

"Well, he's dead," cried the other. "It was yesterday— got any cigarettes, we're running short."

But Le Moan was a non-smoker.

He held on for a moment, giving whatever news he had about the mainland.

Out here with the green water washing up the stone of the lighthouse front, the great white desolate building dominated and discoloured the sea, hardened the sunlight, and gave a winter touch to the mewing and crying of the gulls.

Nature refused it, and the human mind through whose agency it had been born, rejected it. That it saved men's lives, and directed shipping in a useful way, was a fact, but it had no warmth.

On the mainland it would have been nothing, but set in this desolation of distance, it made the loneliness around it shout.

Le Moan pushed off, and setting the boat's sail, steered back for Martinique.

The stores in the hut he left for decay to deal with; and the soul of Jean to the mercy of his Maker.

The sword of Justice had fallen, and the incident was for ever closed.

Arrived at home, he took the three thousand francs of M. Robert from a drawer, and counted them.

The provisions and bedding, and other things with which he had stocked the hut, had been taken from his own stores.

He had chosen to leave them at Sombrero, so this just man determined not to charge for them.

The money belonged really to no one; not to Fernand, who had only been the messenger who had brought it, nor to M. Robert, who, Fernand said, had paid it for the release of Jean's claims on the café; nor to him, Le Moan, who had only held it in trust for Jean.

Jean, however, might have relations.

Whatever hard things one may say about money, it has at least the power of finding out relations for a man.

Le Moan determined to take the money to M. Robert, and leave it in his charge, so accordingly, next day, early, before the sun had fully laid a finger on Pelée, or the cabri-bois ceased its singing in the woods, Le Moan boarded the early stage and started for St. Pierre.

xiii

THE MARKET that morning was busy with more than business.

Fernand Pellisser had been arrested the day before, on suspicion.

Suspicion of what?

Suspicion of having had a hand (possibly) in the disappearance of Jean Gastin; of having possibly done away with him.

The Chief of Police had moved to the arrest after much weighing of pros and cons, sifting of evidence, cigarette smoking and reflection on the sexual aspect of the matter.

The man was jealous of Jean, Mayotte had made that quite clear. All the rest followed quite naturally on that.

Jean had sent for Fernand by the porteuse for some reason or another, he had gone to meet Jean, and had come back to St. Pierre.

Now attend: Immediately on coming back he had thrown up his business and prepared for flight.

It is all quite simple.

When Fernand had been arrested at the café which he frequented, and had been told the charge, how did he meet it?

He had burst out laughing.

He had laughed and laughed. He had given no explanation, refused to say anything, called M. Patrigent an old goat, and gone to prison with his hands in his pockets.

Jester to the last, that was what he had done. No doubt when they came to cut his head off for his crime he would be laughing still.

St. Pierre was very sore on the matter.

It is bad enough to murder a man, but to laugh over the business is worse.

St. Pierre would have stormed the gaol and lynched its jester, only that it was naturally lazy and given to talk more than action; besides, to kill him now off-hand would have robbed it of possibilities of endless chatter, and the delight of the trial when it came on, and of the execution.

The cake was worth keeping.

Meanwhile it could be talked about, and they were talking about it in the market-place this morning, without in the least interfering with the general work of buying and selling and cheating.

Through the market-place came the dark figure of Le Moan.

He wanted to buy some osier baskets to take back with him to Mirail, and he had no eyes or ears for anything else. He was practically unknown, and had a deep contempt for the townsfolk and their ways.

Having bought his baskets, he made for the house of M. Robert, to hand him over the money, and, having done that, he would return by the stage to his home.

M. Robert was in.

He was an invalid, of the type that cannot attend to business matters if they are of a worrying nature.

The little coloured girl, having made enquiries, said that Missie Robert was in bed, very unwell, but would the gentleman say what he wanted.

"Tell him I have brought him some money," replied Le Moan.

He was instantly, on the delivery of the message, shown into a room where an old gentleman, like a fox without the saving grace of fur and brush, sat in a cane easy chair, smoking a Cuban cigar, and reading the shipping news in the *Patrie*.

"You are Monsieur Robert," said Le Moan.

"That is my name," replied the other.

"Then will you count these," said Le Moan curtly, taking the roll of notes from his pocket.

"Three thousand francs— please verify it."

The fox, mystified, yet complacent, entered upon the delightful task.

"Three thousand," said he at last. "Yes?"

"It is the money you sent to Jean Gastin," said Le Moan.

"Jean Gastin," answered the other, "but I did not send him any money."

"You sent him three thousand francs by Fernand Pellisser."

"No, Monsieur," replied the invalid. "Fernand Pellisser called upon me requesting three thousand francs on account of Jean Gastin, but I had not the money to give him— besides, I suspected him."

Le Moan, who knew nothing of what had been going on in St. Pierre, nor of the arrest of Fernand, passed the last remark by.

He stood astonished.

He did not like M. Robert. He liked very few people, but even if he had not suffered from that limitation he would not have liked M. Robert.

"Then give me those notes back," said he. "If you did not send them they are, of course, not yours."

He took the bundle from the hand of the other, and, putting it in his pocket, turned to leave the room, seek Fernand, and solve the mystery.

"Stop," said M. Robert, "all this seems to me very strange."

"Well," said Le Moan, "as a matter of fact, I cannot understand it. I am going to Fernand to find out— I expect he will be somewhere in the market-place, though I did not see him as I went through it."

"But do you not know that Fernand is in prison?"

"In prison— what for?"

"Why, to be sure, for the suspected murder of Jean Gastin— did you not know?"

"The murder of Jean?"

"Yes."

"But Jean has not been murdered."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"Never mind what has happened to him," said Le Moan, irritated, and now completely out of patience. "That is for me to tell to the fool that has put him in prison. Who is he?"

"M. Patrigent, the Chief of Police," said Robert.

Le Moan turned and left the room, and the little servant, having let him out of the house, hearing a cry, ran to her master's room.

The invalid was seriously ill.

The feel of those precious banknotes between his fingers was still with him. They had been his for a moment, fallen from the sky, in his hand, and— if only he had said nothing and kept them, he could have said that he misunderstood— that he was deaf, that he *had* sent them to Jean. It is true that he had already declared publicly that Fernand had called on him for the money, and that he had refused the sum; all the same he might, if challenged, have said that this was a mistake. He would have had time to think and plan before authority intervened— possibly it never would have intervened. He could have been very ill, and unable to think or do business till Fernand was hanged— and then everything would have been all right.

The whole business was grievous.

Yet it might still be retrieved! The thought was better than the brandy that the little maid fetched him.

But both were good, and having drunk the brandy, he ordered the maid to run and have his goat carriage fetched.

"Swiftly!" said M. Robert, "for I have to go to the Prefecture."

xiv

LE MOAN, in the street, made for the Rue Royale, where the Police Office was.

There he found M. Patrigent, in a temper. Monsieur P. had been called an old goat by Fernand, and somehow he knew that the label would stick to him. It was unpleasant enough being labelled an old goat, but the unpleasantness was accentuated by the fact that the bill-sticker was a murderer.

Monsieur P. wanted Fernand's blood, and wanted it badly, and as soon as possible.

When the creole office clerk came to him and said that a man had called from the Grande Anse district with regard to the disappearance of Jean Gastin, the Chief of Police ordered the visitor to be shown in at once.

Entered Le Moan, carrying his baskets. There were six of them, all squashed together, and tied with a piece of coconut sennit.

"Well?" said the Chief. "What is it?"

"I have come," said Le Moan, "about Fernand Pellisser. You have put him in prison?"

"Yes."

"Then you must let him out."

"Oh ho!" said M. Patrigent. "So I must let him out."

"He did not kill Jean Gastin," went on the other. "Jean Gastin killed himself." He told the story of Jean as we know it— everything, including the fact that Fernand had fetched the three thousand francs from St. Pierre.

"What proof have you of the story of Jean Gastin's death?" asked the Chief, after a moment's mental consultation.

"Proof!" cried Le Moan. "Why, the lighthouse-keepers can give you proof enough if you won't take my word; also my housekeeper at Mirail can prove that Jean stayed with me, and left on the afternoon of the eleventh of last month. Oh, I can give proof enough. The only thing I don't understand is that Fernand said he obtained the three thousand francs for Jean's support from M. Robert, of the Rue Lafontaine. I called upon M. Robert just now to return the money, as it is no longer wanted, and he told me that he had not given it to Fernand."

"Ah, ha!"

"Yes— where, then, did Fernand get the money?"

As if in answer came the bleating of a goat from outside. M. Patrigent got up and looked through the window.

A goat carriage was drawn up at the pavement. It was M. Robert's. In shape it was like a little victoria, with two goats in the traces, led by a coloured boy.

The sight of the goats did not improve M. Patrigent's temper, nor did the sight of their owner, who was shown in.

The goat owner had come to explore, to feel the situation, prepared at any opportunity to say, "Ah, *now* I remember. Yes, it is true that I handed the money to Fernand, but my mind becomes a blank at times," etc.

He was unprepared for the reception that awaited him, prepared for by his goats, also by the fact that M. Patrigent, like Le Moan, did not care for him.

"Ah, you have called," burst out the Chief, as the invalid entered, and the door closed on him. "What is this you say about Fernand Pelliser? Did he call upon you asking for a sum of three thousand francs on behalf of Jean Gastin, and on what date?"

"On the eleventh of last month, Monsieur," replied the other. "It is true he called, but—"

"No 'buts,' please. He called upon you on the eleventh of last month at what time?"

"In the morning, Monsieur."

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes— go on— one might fancy you had something to hide. He called on you and asked you for three thousand francs. Three thousand francs. You have told this man Le Moan that you did not give Fernand Pelliser the three thousand francs he asked for on behalf of Jean Gastin. Now, take care of what you say."

"Monsieur!"

"Don't answer me. Listen to me now. Fernand Pelliser stated to this man that you did give him the money, you say you didn't. Fernand I believe, from evidence just submitted to me, is guiltless of the crime alleged against him— an honest man. Why should he say that he received the money from you if he didn't?"

"Well, he didn't," replied the other, now perplexed and frightened. "I told him I had not the sum, that only by my little economies was it possible for me to live. Then he said, 'Well, I must go to M. Bartholome.'"

"The money-lender in the Rue Victor Hugo?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

M. Patrigent called a clerk.

"Send at once for M. Bartholome, whose office is in the Rue Victor Hugo," said he.

Ten minutes later M. Bartholome, a Jew, with oily curls, was shown in.

"Did you," asked the Chief of Police, "have an interview with the man Fernand Pelliser on the morning of Tuesday, the eleventh day of last month?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"About a money matter?"

"Yes, Monsieur. He required three thousand francs. I could not lend him that sum, but we made an agreement, and I bought his boat and the goodwill of his stall for three thousand francs, which I handed to him. Everyone knew that he sold me his business, owing, no doubt, to his anxiety to leave Martinique, to escape from the consequences of his crime."

M. Patrigent called his clerk, and ordered that Fernand should be brought from the prison at once, for an interview.

Ten minutes later Fernand appeared, unconcerned, and seeming inclined to whistle.

"Fernand Pelliser," said M. Patrigent, "for the sake of a man who was your rival, with whom you had quarrelled, but who was in sore distress, you called on M. Robert to advance or give the sum of three thousand francs. Failing to obtain them from him, you went to M. Bartholome, and sold your business, and so obtained the money for your sick enemy. A noble act. An act that deserves enshrining in literature."

In his enthusiasm the old gentleman had quite forgotten all about goats.

Fernand listened, abashed, for the first time in his life. For the first time in his life ashamed of himself.

Incapable of blushing, he stood in his distress, his eyes wandering about the floor, whilst the Chief, handing him back the bundle of notes, continued his talk, telling him of the death of Jean, and proposing, over his left shoulder, that M. Bartholome should render back Fernand's business for the sum he had paid for it.

Bartholome was willing, but not Fernand.

To live and carry on business in St. Pierre under a new and false character was beyond him. To be honoured as a hero, in an atmosphere of respect, was an impossible idea.

He would stifle.

He was a jester and a light liar and a bit of a cheat, a child of the sun incapable of seriousness; the serious action he had committed that deserved "enshrining in literature" had not been done by him— or at least only done under the influence of Mayotte, as a man might commit an action contrary to his nature under the influence of drink.

He could not live in St. Pierre under its cloud.

In the event he lived at Mirail, going into partnership with Le Moan— and Mayotte; who worshipped him for the action which she herself had inspired, an action which in the end proved the salvation of them both, for Mirail was not touched on that morning when Pelée*, waking from sleep, wiped St. Pierre utterly away; the Rue Victor Hugo and the Place Bertin; the crowds of the market square and the washerwomen by the Rivière Roxelane; the palms of the

Jardin Publique and the Prefect of Police; M. Robert and the goats that drew his carriage.

** Mt Pelée, a volcano on Martinique, erupted violently on 8 May 1902, obliterating the capital, St Pierre, and killing nearly 30,000 people. —Ed.*

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4: The Adventures of Ernest Alembert

Charlotte Brontë
1816-1855
Written 25 May, 1830 (aged 14)
Privately printed 1896, 30 copies (16 pages)

Chapter 1

MANY YEARS AGO there lived in a certain country a youth named Ernest Alembert. He came of an ancient and noble race; but one of his ancestors having been beheaded in consequence of a suspicion of high treason, the family since that time had gradually decayed, until at length the only remaining branch of it was this young man of whom I write.

His abode was a small cottage situated in the midst of a little garden, and overshadowed by the majestic ruins of his ancestral castle. The porch of his hut, adorned by the twisting clematis and jessamine, fronted the rising sun, and here in the cool summer mornings he would often sit and watch its broad orb slowly appearing above the blue distant mountains. The eminence on which his cottage was built formed one side of a wide valley, watered by a stream whose hoarse voice was softened into a gentle murmur ere it reached the summit of a hill. The opposing rocks which guarded the vale on the other side were covered by a wood of young ash and sycamore trees, whose branching foliage, clothing them in a robe of living green, hid their rugged aspect, save where some huge fragment, all grey and moss-grown, jutted far over the valley, affording a fine contrast to the leafy luxuriant branch which perhaps rested on the projection, and imparting an appearance of picturesque wildness and variety to the scene. The valley itself was sprinkled with tall shady elms and poplars, that shaded the soft verdant turf ornamented by cowslips, violets, daisies, golden cups, and a thousand other swect flowers, which shed abroad their perfumes when the morning and evening summer dews, or the rains of spring, descend softly and silently to the earth. On the borders of the stream a few weeping willows stood dipping their long branches into the water, where their graceful forms were clearly reflected. Through an opening in the vale this noisy river was observed gradually expanding and smoothing until at last it became a wide lake, in calm weather a glassy unruffled mirror for all the clouds and stars of heaven to behold themselves in as they sailed through the spangled or dappled firmament. Beyond this lake arose high hills, at noonday almost indistinguishable from the blue sky, but at sunset glowing in the richest purple, like a sapphire barrier to the dim horizon.

One evening in autumn as Ernest sat by his blazing fire and listened to the wind which roared past his dwelling, shaking the little casement till the leaves of

the wild vine which curled around it fell rustling to the earth, he heard suddenly the latchet of his door raised. A man clothed in a dark mantle, with long hair, and a beard of raven blackness, entered. At sight of this singular figure he started up, and the stranger immediately accosted him as follows :

'MY NAME is Rufus Warner. I come from a great distance, and having been overtaken by darkness in the valley I looked about for some roof where I might pass the night. At length I espied a light streaming through this window. I made the best of my way to it, and now I request shelter from you.'

Ernest, after gazing a moment at him, complied with his demand. He closed the door, and they both seated themselves by the fire. They sat thus for some time without interchanging a word, the stranger with his eyes intently fixed on the ascending flame, apparently quite inattentive to any other object; and Ernest as intently viewing him, and revolving in his mind who he might be— the cause of his strange attire— his long beard— his unbroken taciturnity— not unmixed with a feeling of awe allied to fear at the presence of a being of whose nature he was totally ignorant, and who, for aught he knew, might be the harbinger of no good to his humble dwelling. Dim, dreamlike reminiscences passed slowly across his mind concerning tales of spirits who, in various shapes, had appeared to men shortly before their deaths, as if to prepare them for the ghostly society with which they would soon have to mingle.

At length, to relieve himself of these almost insupportable thoughts, he ventured to accost his mysterious guest by inquiring whence he came.

'From a rich and fruitful land,' replied the stranger, 'where the trees bear without ceasing, and earth casts up flowers which sparkle like jewels, the sun shines for ever, and the moon and stars are not quenched even at noonday ; where the rocks lose themselves in the skies, and the tops of the mountains are invisible by reason of the firmament which rests upon them.'

The answer, uttered in a hollow and hoarse voice, convinced Ernest of the truth of his surmises; but a charm seemed to have been cast upon him which prevented him from being overcome by terror, and he replied as follows :

'If what you say is true, I should like exceedingly to follow you into your country instead of remaining here, where I am often chilled by frost and icy winds, and saddened by the absence of the cheering warmth of the sun.'

'If thou wilt go, thou mayst,' replied the stranger; and Ernest, under the influence of a secret fascination, consented.

'To-morrow, by daybreak, we will set out,' said his guest; and then, as the night was far advanced, they both retired to their straw couches, after partaking of a simple supper which Ernest had hastily provided.

Chapter 2

THE RISING DAWN found Ernest and his unknown guide wending their way down the long valley. It was a still, gloomy October morning. The sky was obscured by grey clouds, and the cold wind which whistled among the yellow withered leaves of the wood that covered the rocks blew occasionally some mizzling drops of rain into the faces of the two travellers. The distant prospect of the lake and mountains was hidden by a veil of mist, and when the sun rose above them his presence was only revealed by a whitish light gleaming through the thin watery atmosphere. The only sounds which fell on the ear were the howling of the blast in the eaverned sides of the valley, and the melancholy murmuring of the stream as its waves beat against the rugged stones which obstructed its passage.

They proceeded along in a straight course till they came to the borders of the lake, where the guide stopped, saying: 'We must now cross this water.' Ernest gazed at him a moment, and then said:

'How can we? We have no boat, and I lack the power to swim for so long a time as it would require to cross this lake.'

No sooner had he uttered these words than a light gale arose which ruffled and agitated the quiet surface of the lake. Presently a tiny skiff appeared gliding over the waves, and in a few minutes reached the bank whereon they stood. The stranger quickly sprang into the bark, and Ernest, though filled with terror at the conviction that he was now in the hands of a supernatural being, felt himself compelled by a strong impulse to follow whither he was led. No sooner were they seated than a large white sail unfurled seemingly of its own accord, and in a few moments they found themselves nearing the opposite shore, so lightly and swiftly this fairy vessel had borne them over the lake.

No sooner had they touched the bank with their feet than a huge billow like a mountain swept over the water. Immediately the swelling waves subsided, the rising foam vanished, and a great calm fell on the bosom of the lake. At the same moment Ernest felt his fear pass away, and it was succeeded by a feeling of courage against danger, mingled with a certain curiosity to see what was to come. After they had travelled a great distance they came to a wide moor that stretched to the verge of the horizon, This was perfectly level, save at one spot where tall black rocks were seen raising their heads towards the sky. About evening they reached these rocks, when they stopped and sat down to rest themselves. The scene was now grand and awful in the extreme. Around lay the dark desert heath, unenlivened by a single streak of verdure ; its beautiful pink flowers were withered, and their fragrance had vanished. The mellow hum of the bee was no longer heard about them, for he had gathered his honey and was gone. Above rose the tremendous precipices whose vast shadows

blackened all that portion of the moor, and deepened the frown upon the unpropitious face of nature. At intervals from the summit of the rocks shrill screams, uttered by some bird of prey which had built its nest upon them, swept through the arch of heaven in which wild clouds were careering to and fro as if torn by a horrible tempest. The sun had long since sunk to rest, and the full moon, like a broad shield dyed with blood, now ascended the stormy sky. A mournful halo surrounded her, and through that warning veil she looked from her place in the firmament, her glorious light dimmed and obscured, till the earth only knew by a faint ruddy tint that her white-robed handmaiden beheld her. All the attendant train of stars shone solemnly among the clouds, and by their abated splendour acknowledged the presence of their peerless queen.

After having viewed the scene some time the stranger rose, and beckoned Ernest to follow him. This he did, until he came to a particular part of the rocks where was seen a profound cavern. This the stranger entered, and Ernest felt himself impelled to enter too. The track seemed to incline downwards, and as they went deeper and deeper they soon lost sight of the upper world, and not a ray of light appeared to illumine the thick darkness around them. At length a faint grey dawn became visible, and at the same instant a warm and gentle breeze stole past them which softened the cold raw air of the cave. Anon they began to behold branches of trees waving above them, and saw that they trod upon a smooth and velvety turf. In a short time, by the aid of the increasing light, they perceived that they were in a deep gloomy forest, which, as they advanced, gradually thinned into a pleasant shady wood, becoming more beautiful as they passed on, until at last it assumed the appearance of a delightful grove. From this they soon emerged into an open and graceful country. A wide plain was stretched before them, covered with the most enchanting verdure. Graceful trees sprang out of the earth bearing delicious fruits of a perfect transparency; others rose to a great height, casting down their branches laden with white blossoms, and dark flourishing leaves. Crystal fountains, that fell with a murmuring noise, were seen glittering through bowers of roses and tall lilies. The melody of a thousand birds was heard from groves of myrtle and laurel which bordered a river whose waters glided through the plain. Arching rocks of diamond and amethyst, up which plants of immortal verdure crept, sparkled in the light and lent variety to the lovely prospect. The plain was bounded by hills, some of which rose majestically to the heavens, covered with vines and pomegranates, while others only gently swelled upon the sight, and then sank into calm and peaceful valleys. Over all this scene hung an atmosphere of crystal clearness. Not one fleecy cloud sullied the radiant sky; not one wreath of mist floated over the brows of the distant mountains. The whole land lay in stainless purity, arrayed in a robe of spiritual and unearthly light.

When Ernest emerged from the wood, this view, bursting at once upon his eyes, completely overpowered him. For a long time he stood speechless, gazing intently upon it. His mind seemed to be elevated and enlarged by the resplendency of the vision. All his senses were delighted: his hearing by the combination of sweet sounds which poured upon it, his sight by the harmonious blending of every colour and scene, and his smell by the fragrant perfume of each flower which bloomed in these everlasting fields. At length, in ecstatic admiration, he hastened to thank his conductor for bringing him thither, but when he turned the stranger had gone. The forest through which he came had vanished also, and in its stead was a vast ocean whose extent seemed altogether boundless. Ernest, now more than ever filled with astonishment, remained for a while alternating between fear and wonder; then, rousing himself, he uttered the name of his guide aloud. But his voice was only answered by a faint echo. After this he walked a considerable distance into the country without meeting with one visible being either human or supernatural. In a few hours he had traversed the plain and reached the acclivities which bordered it, and then entered a wide and mountainous land totally different from that which he had left. He wandered among the rocks heedless whither he went until twilight fell, when he longed to return, but was entirely unable to detect the way. No signs appeared of the plain he had quitted, save that on the southern horizon a beautiful light lingered long after sunset, and occasionally, as the wind rose, faint melodious sounds were heard floating fitfully by.

After a while, when the night had closed in, Ernest came to the brow of a lofty precipice. Overcome with fatigue he cast himself upon the ground and began to gaze into the profound depth beneath him. As he lay a deathlike stillness fell upon the earth. No voice was heard in the gloomy region, the air was untracked by any wing. No footstep crushed the desolate sands. Echo whispered not in the caverned rocks, and even the winds seemed to have held their breath. At length he perceived in the tremendous gulf a thick vapour slowly rising. It gradually expanded, until the chasm was filled with a dense cloud swaying to and fro as if moved by an invisible power. Then he heard a dull hollow noise like water roaring in subterraneous caves. By degrees the cloud rose and enlarged, sweeping round him till all things vanished from his sight, and he found himself encircled by its curling mist. Then he heard music, subdued and harmonious, resembling the soft breathings of flutes and dulcimers. This was suddenly broken by a flood of warlike melody rolling from golden trumpets and great harps of silver, which now suddenly gleamed upon him as the curtain of clouds rent and the whole scene was revealed. A pavement of sapphire sparkled, from which flashes of radiant purple light proceeded, mingling with the glory of an emerald dome that proudly arched a palace whose pillars were the purest diamond. Vases of agate and porphyry sent up wreaths

of refined incense formed of the united fragrance of a thousand flowers. Beings of immortal beauty and splendour stood in shining ranks around a throne of ruby guarded by golden lions, and sounds so sweet and enchanting swelled on his ear that Ernest, overwhelmed with the too powerful magnificence, sank senseless on the bright pavement. When he recovered from his swoon he found himself no longer surrounded by the gorgeous splendour of the fairy palace, but reposing in a wood whose branches were just moved by a fresh moaning wind. The first sunbeams penetrating the green umbrage lighted up the dewdrops which glistened on tender blades of grass, or trembled in the cups of the wild flowers which bordered a little woodland well. When Ernest opened his eyes he beheld standing close to him a man whom he presently recognised to be his guide. He started up, and the stranger addressed him as follows:

'I am a fairy. You have been, and still are, in the land of fairies. Some wonders you have seen ; many more you shall see if you choose to follow me still.'

Ernest consented. The fairy immediately stepped into the well, and he felt compelled to do the same. They sank gradually downwards. By degrees the water changed into mists and vapours; the forms of clouds were dimly seen floating around. These increased until at length they were wholly enveloped in their folds. In ashort time they seemed to land, and Ernest felt his feet resting on a solid substance. Suddenly the clouds were dissipated, and he found himself in a lovely and enchanting island encircled by a boundless expanse of water. The trees in the island were beautiful: rose laurels and flowering myrtles, creeping pomegranates, clematis and vines, intermixed with majestic cypresses and groves of young elms and poplars. The fairy led him to a natural bower of lofty trees whose thick branches mingling above formed a shady retreat from the sun, which now glowed in meridian splendour. This bower was on a green bank of the isle, embroidered with every kind of sweet and refreshing flower. The sky was perfectly free from clouds, but a milky haze softened the intense brilliancy of the blue and gave a more unbroken calmness to the air. The lake lay in glassy smoothness. From its depths arose a sound of subdued music, a breath of harmony which just waved the blue water-lilies lying among their dark green leaves upon its surface. While Ernest reposed on the green turf and viewed this delightful prospect, he saw a vision of beauty pass before him. First he heard the melody of a horn, which seemed to come from dim mountains that appeared to the east. It rose again nearer, and a majestic stag of radiant whiteness, with branching and beaming golden horns, bounded suddenly into sight, pursued by a train of fairies mounted upon winged steeds, caparisoned so magnificently that rays of hght shot from them, and the whole air was illumined with their glory. They flew across the lake swifter than wind. The water rose sparkling and foaming about them, agitated and roaring as if by a storm. When they had

disappeared Ernest turned towards the fairy, who still continued with him, and expressed his admiration of the beautiful scene which had just vanished. The fairy replied that it was but a shadow compared with the things infinitely more erand and magnificent which were still reserved for him to behold. Ernest at these words replied that he felt extremely impatient for the time to come when he might see them. His conductor arose, and commanded Alembert to follow. This he did, and they proceeded to enter a dark and thick wood which grew on the banks of the island. They journeyed here for several miles, and at length emerged into an open glade of the forest, where was a rock formed like a small temple, on the summit of which, covered with grass and various kinds of flowers, grew several young poplars.and other trees. This curious edifice the fairy entered alone. After remaining some time he reappeared, and approaching Ernest bade him look up. Alembert instantly complied, and, as he did so, beheld a chariot, which shone as the clouds that the sun glorifies at his setting, descending from the skies. It was drawn by two swans, larger than the fabulous roc, whose magnificent necks, arched like a rainbow, were surrounded by a bright halo reflected from the intense radiancy and whiteness of their plumage. Their expanded wings lightened the earth under them, and, as they drew nearer, their insufferable splendour so dazzled the senses of Ernest that he sank in a state of utter exhaustion to the ground.

His conductor then touched him with a small silver wand, and immediately a strange stupor came over him, which in a few minutes rendered him perfectly insensible. When he awoke from this swoon he found himself in an exceedingly wide and lofty apartment, whose vast walls were formed of black marble. Its huge gloomy dome was illumined by pale lamps that glimmered like stars through a curtain of clouds. Only one window was visible, and that, of an immense size, and arched like those of an ancient Gothic cathedral, was veiled by ample black drapery. In the midst arose a colossal statue, whose lifted hands were clasped in strong supplication, and whose upraised eyes and fixed features betokened excessive anguish. It was rendered distinctly visible by the light of the tapers which burned around. As Ernest gazed on this mysterious room he felt a sensation of extreme awe, such as he had never before experienced. He knew that he was in a world of spirits. The scene before him appeared like a dim dream. Nothing was clear, for a visionary mist hovered over all things, that imparted a. sense of impenetrable obscurity to his mental as well as his bodily eyesight.

After continuing awhile in this state, amidst the most profound silence, he heard the sweet soft tones of an xolian harp stealing through the tall pillared arches. The subdued melody rose and filled the air with mournful music as the wind began to moan around the dome. By degrees these sounds sank to rest, and the deathly stillness returned with a more chilling and oppressive power. It

continued for a long period until its unbroken solemnity became supernatural and insupportable. Ernest struck the ground with his foot, but the blow produced no sound, He strove to speak, but his voice gave forth no utterance, At that instant a crashing peal of thunder burst. The wild air roared round the mighty building, which shook and trembled to its centre, Then, as the wind arose, the music swelled again, mingling its majestic floods of sound with the thunder that now pealed unceasingly. The unearthly tones that rolled along the blast exceeded everything that any mortal had heard before, and Ernest was nigh overwhelmed by the awe which their weird majesty inspired.

Suddenly the fairy who had been his guide appeared, and approaching the window beckoned him to come near. Ernest obeyed, and on looking out his eyes were bewildered by the scene which presented itself to his view. Nothing was visible beneath but billowy clouds, black as midnight, rolling around a tower a thousand feet in height, on whose terrible summit he stood. Long he gazed intently on the wild vapours tossed to and fro like waves inastorm. At times they lay in dense gloom and darkness, then globes or flashes of fire ilumined them with sudden light.

At length the thunder and the wind ceased, the clouds slowly dispersed, and a growing brightness shone upon them. Beyond the horizon, through the dismal piles of mist fast fading away, a fair vision gleamed which filled Alembert with wonder and delight. A beautiful city appeared, whose lovely hues charmed the eye with their mild attractive splendour. Its palaces, arches, pillars, and temples all smiled in their own gentle radiance, and a clear wide stream (transformed by the distance into a silver thread) which circled its crystal walls was spanned by a bright rainbow, through whose arch it flowed into a broad expanse of green hills, woods, and valleys, enamelled by a thousand flowers that sent up their united fragrance so high that even the atmosphere around the summit of the lofty tower was faintly perfumed by it.

'That city,' said the guide, 'is the abode of our fairy king, whose palace you may see rising above those long groves near the southern gates.'

Ernest looked in the direction indicated, but beheld only a star of light, for the palace was formed of certain materials too brilliant for any but the eyes of fairies to behold. He continued some time at the window, until the prospect beneath, as twilight shed her dim influence over it, began to fade. Slowly the stars looked forth one by one from the sky's deepening azure, and the full moon as she ascended the east gradually paled the bright orange-dye which glowed in the western heavens. The murmur of the aerial city died away. Only at intervals was heard the voice of the giant harp breaking the stillness of eventide, and its wild mournful melody as it floated on the balmy breeze served but to enhance the calm, sacred, and mysterious feeling of that peaceful hour.

'We must now depart,' said the fairy, turning suddenly to Alembert, and at the same instant the latter found himself upon the very summit of the tower. His conductor then, without warning, pushed him from the dizzy eminence into the void beneath.

Ernest gave a loud shriek of terror, but his fear was instantly dispelled by a delightful sensation which followed. He seemed to sink gently and slowly downwards, borne on a soft gale which now fanned his cheek, and guided by invisible beings who appeared to check the velocity of his fall, and to moderate his descent into a quiet and easy transition to the regions of the earth.

After a while he alighted in the fairy city, still attended by his conductor. They proceeded along a magnificent street, paved with the rarest gems, gorgeously sparkling in the moonlight, until they arrived at a majestic palace of lapis lazuli whose golden gates rolled back at their approach, and admitted them to a wide hall floored with the purest alabaster, richly carved and figured, and lighted by silver lamps perfumed with the most costly odours.

Ernest was now grown weary, and the fairy led him into another apartment more beautiful than the first. Here was a splendid couch overhung by a canopy adorned with emeralds, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, whose excessive brilliancy illuminated all the room. On this couch Alembert flung himself joyfully down to rest. In a few moments a profound slumber closed his eyelids, and his sleep continued undisturbed until break of day, when he was awakened by the sweet singing of birds. He arose, and on looking forth from his casement beheld an immense garden filled with the sweetest flowers, and with rare plants unknown among mortals. Long rows of lofty trees, bearing fruit that sparkled like precious stones, shaded green walks strewn with fallen blossoms. On their fresh verdant branches sat innumerable birds, clothed in rich and resplendent plumage, who filled the air with delightful and harmonious warbling.

Ernest was astonished at beholding no appearance of the city, but continued for some time listening to the enchanting music of the birds, enjoying the fragrant perfume of the blossoms, and the dark grandeur of the majestic trees that surrounded him. This contemplation was at length interrupted by his conductor, who now appeared in the apartment. Without speaking, his guide led him from the chamber, and when they reached the open air bade him by a sign to look around. Ernest obeyed, and in place of the palace he saw a high bower formed of trees whose flowers were more lovely than the finest roses, and sweeter than lilies or camellias. The prospect then suddenly changed, and a deep glen, embosomed in hills whose sides were wooded and rock-strewn, took the place of the garden. A deep, clear-watered river flowed past them. Into this the fairy plunged, and Ernest, forced by an overmastering spell, followed him. For a long time they sank slowly down and nought was visible save the waters that swallowed them.

At length, leagues beneath, a new realm dawned upon Ernest's astonished sight. Their speed now accelerated, and soon they arrived at the abode of a fairy king. The palace was brilliant as a liquid diamond. A great fountain rushing upwards from the earth parted into a thousand arches and pillars, through whose transparent surfaces appeared a quantity of emeralds, rubies, and other gems which the fountain continually cast up. The palace roof was formed of the frozen spray that proceeded hke a vapour from the living arches ever in motion. This, congealed into round lucid drops, assumed the appearance of a lofty dome, from which descended other pillars of a larger size that seemed to support it. Over the summit of the dome was suspended in the air a sun of insufferable brightness, and from within gleamed a hundred stars sparkling with supernatural splendour.

By reason of the translucent nature of the edifice the interior was perfectly visible, and Ernest saw the fairy king seated on a glittering and revolving throne. He was surrounded by attendants, one of whom held a diamond cup filled with the honeydew of wild flowers. Others played sweetly upon silver harps and lutes, or sang in more melodious tones than the nightingale or skylark.

It would be impossible to relate all the marvellous adventures that befel Alembert whilst he abode in the land of Faery. He saw their midnight revels in many a wild glen, and witnessed how they feasted in the greenwood beneath the solemn moon. He viewed their pleasures and their pageants, and learned the spells by which they drew the lonely traveller into their enchanted circlet. Often he watched their sports by the 'beached margin of the sea,' and saw the rolling billows rest calmly under the magic influence of their incantations. He heard and felt the sweet witchery of their songs chanted at unearthly banquets, and when the sound swelled until it reached the starlit sky the revolving worlds arrested their mighty courses and stood still in the charmed heavens to attend. But this life in time grew wearying and insupportable. He longed once more to dwell among humankind, to hear again the language of mortals, and to tread upon the old green grass-covered turf, under the shade of the earthly trees he loved so well. At length the fairies perceived that the yearning to return was filling the bosom of Alembert, and that his heart was straining with the desire for home. This desire they appreciated, for they knew well that no mortal born of mortals could for long endure the light and fleeting glories of the land of Fays. Thus it was that they determined to relinquish him, and to bestow upon him the crown of his hopes. The following tells the manner in which they gave fulfilment to his wish.

Chapter 3

IT WAS A FAIR and mild evening in the decline of summer, when all the elfin courts assembled within a dell, one of those privileged spots which the pinching frosts and snows of winter are unable to deprive of their everlasting green array. The soft velvet turf served them for seats, and the profusion of sweet flowers with which it was embroidered shed around a refreshing perfume. The lily canopy was raised, and the glittering table was covered with crystal goblets brimming with nectarous dew. The song of a lark now hymning his vespers in the cloudwrapped dome was all their music, and as its tones fell on the silent earth they diffused a holy calm on all. Before the festival began a fairy rose and advanced towards Alembert, who reposed on the ground a little apart. Approaching him, he presented him with a goblet, and bade him drink the contents. Ernest obeyed, and scarcely had he done so when a strange stupor seized him, which slowly overpowered all his senses. In a short time he sank into a profound slumber.

When he recovered from his stupor he found himself at the entrance to a wide green vale, bounded by high hills, whose sides were clothed with pleasant woods, which descended to their feet, and here and there advanced a considerable way into the valley. At intervals enormous rocks were scattered, whose rugged and moss-grown forms added a touch of romance to the delightful scene. Nor were there wanting pleasant groves, whose cool green shades offered welcome shelter to the toiling and travelwearied pilgrim. It was sunset, and not one purple cloud was visible in all the radiant sky. The west swam in an ocean of golden light that bathed the heavens in glory, and poured its reflected splendour over half the world. Eastward a long line of sober red appeared, gradually growing softer and paler towards the point of sunrise. Above, all was a clear bright silvery blue, deepening at the zenith, and faintly tinged with grey as it receded from the gorgeous west. Beneath this sky the earth glowed with tints whose warm and mellow richness could not have been surpassed by the loveliest scenes in Italy. Hills, rocks, and trees shone invested in a lustrous halo of beauty. The vale flowed with light, and a hundred flowers stirred among their leaves as the sun shed its last beams over them. Long Ernest lingered, gazing entranced upon the sight. He knew that this was no delusive vision, and that no mystery hung upon its spell. As he stood a sound stole past him like the music of a harp. He trembled, fearing he was still held in the power of supernatural beings. The sound swelled, and, gathering in volume, swept solemnly down the wild glen, awakening low sweet echoes among the frowning rocks which specked the lovely woods in which it was embosomed.

Soon, however, Ernest's fear was dissipated, for he heard the music accompanied by a human voice. He moved forward a step or two, and then bent

eagerly towards the spot whence the tones issued, striving to catch the burthen of the uttered tones.

This at length he did, and this is the song that fell upon his ears :—

Proudly the sun has sunk to rest
Behind yon dim and distant hill;
The busy noise of day has ceased,
A holy calm the air doth fill.

That softening haze which veils the light
Of sunset in the gorgeous sky,
Is dusk, grey harbinger of night,
Now gliding onward silently.

No sound rings through the solemn vale
Save murmurs of those tall dark trees,
Which raise eternally their wail,
Bending beneath the twilight breeze.

And my harp peals the woods among:
When vesper lifts its quiet eye,
Commingling with each night-bird's song
That chants its vigils pensively.

And here I sit, until night's noon,
Hath gemmed the heavens with many a star,
And sing beneath the wandering moon
Who comes, high journeying, from afar.

Oh! sweet to me is that still hour
When frown the shades of night around,
Deepening the gloom of forest bower;
Filling the air with awe profound.

I hush my harp, and hush my song,
Low kneeling 'neath the lofty sky,
I hark the nightingale prolong
Her strain of wondrous melody,

Forth gushing like a mountain rill,
So rich, so deep, so clear and free;
She pours it forth o'er dale and hill,
O'er rock and river, lake and tree,

Till morn comes, and, with rosy hand,
Unbars the golden gates of day;
Then, as at touch of magic wand,
The earth is clad in fair array.

Then from its couch the skylark springs;
The trembling drops of glittering dew
Are scattered, as with vigorous wings
It mounts the glorious arch of blue.

Before the strain ceased the hues of sunset had begun to fade away, yet sufficient light remained for Ernest to perceive a man of ancient and venerable aspect seated at the mouth of a deep cavern, under the shade of an immense oak, whose massive limbs and dense foliage stood in dark relief against the sky. Every leaf and twig was dimly pencilled on the silvery blue, the outline of the trunk and larger branches alone being clearly visible. The stranger was clad in a long white robe and dark mantle which partly enveloped his person, and then, falling downwards, swept the ground in picturesque and magnificent folds. His robe was confined by a black girdle, down to which his snowy beard flowed in profusion, and formed a fine contrast to his mantle and belt. His right hand rested upon a harp, whose chords he now and then swept with his left, causing a few sweet transitory notes to issue therefrom, which rose and swelled in an uncertain cadence and then died away in the distance. As Ernest approached, the harper raised his head, and demanded hisname. When Alembert had answered this question to the old man's satisfaction, he requested permission to seat himself beside him for a few moments that he might rest. The harper instantly complied, and after a short pause asked him whence he came, and whither he went, and the reason of his being in so unfrequented and lonely a spot at such an unaccustomed hour. Ernest in reply related the whole of his adventures, and by the time he had completed their recital night had closed in, and the moon had risen. His host now arose and invited him to lodge for that night within his cave. Alembert gladly consented, and together they proceeded to enter. When they were seated at their frugal supper of fruits and herbs, Ernest in his turn begged the old man to recount the circumstances of his own life. To this request he gave a ready assent, and proceeded to unfold the following story:—

'YOU HAVE TOLD me that your latter years have been spent among fairies. I likewise abode for a time with supernatural beings, but theirs was a less gentle nature than those whom you have described. When yet very young I became embued with the spirit of adventure, and determined to go out and seek my fortune in the world. The quarter of the globe which I fixed upon as the first

scene of my wanderings was Asia, and accordingly I embarked myself on board a ship bound for Odessa. Ina few days we set sail, and after a prosperous voyage arrived at that part of the Russian dominions. From thence I proceeded to Tcherkask, where I halted a few days, and then went on to Good-Gard, a mountain in the Caucasus. Here I decided to venture upon crossing that stupendous range alone. Upon communicating my intentions to some of the natives, they solemnly warned me against such an enterprise, assuring me that many powerful gent held their courts among the snows of Elbruz, and Kasbec. These words I disregarded, and as soon as extreme fatigue would permit me I began to ascend the Good-Gard road. With great difficulty I proceeded along this road for several days, until I reached the towering Elbruz. During the whole of my journey this mountain had been partly hidden from me by the minor hills that surrounded it, but upon emerging from a gorge in the last of these a full view of its tremendous magnitude burst upon my sight. It was a fair and sunny afternoon in autumn when I first beheld the sublime vision. The mountain was separated from me only by. a lovely green valley, through which a branch of the Aragua ! wound its silent course. Never shall I forget that inspiring scene. The mountain towered before me, the grandeur of its radiant summit majestically cleaving the skies; its yawning abysses and clefts sufficiently wide to engulf a city; and its immovable aspect firm as if its base were fixed beyond the seas. As I gazed, suddenly the mountain trembled, the top rent asunder, and a huge grim spirit rose from the horrible chasm thus produced. He raised his head to heaven, and uttered a cry which shook all Georgia. At this mystic appearance I sank to the ground insensible. When I recovered from my swoon I found myself in a vast cave, illuminated only by an opening at the top, through which one ray of light streamed in. On looking round I perceived an iron door fitted in the side of the cave. This, with much difficulty, I opened, and found beyond a narrow passage tending downwards. I entered, and continued for several hours to follow whither it led. At length I heard in the distance a dull noise like the roaring of the sea, and after a while found myself borne upon the bosom of a rushing wave. I was hurried through the waters without fear or injury, whilst strange and ghastly scenes saluted my wondering eyes. Anon I was walking at the bottom of the ocean. A thousand huge monsters lay there, glaring with fixed and solemn eyes through the tenebrous gloom. I saw the kraken with its hundred arms, the great whale, the sea bear, and others unknown to dwellers upon the earth. Voiceless they glided through the regions of eternal silence, and the black billows broke far above them in the midst of loneliness and solitude. Unutterable were the feelings with which I viewed the foundation of the everlasting hills, and beheld the trackless pathways of the unfathomed sea. Lustrous gems glittered on every side; groves of coral begirt each rock; myriads of pearls gleamed constantly around; and the loveliest shells shone below me,

to be crushed at each movement of my feet. Slowly I advanced until I espied a cavern, which opened before me. This I entered. Instantly a wave rose behind me and swept me swiftly down an abyss which led beneath the arches of a magnificent palace, larger and grander than any that can be boasted of in the lands which rise above the ocean's surface. There I saw, coiled in his own vast halls, that mystic snake known among ancient Scalds by the name of Jormandugar. He it is who holds the earth girdled in his toils. For many days I sojourned here, and beheld sights of which no mortal tongue can tell. After a season I returned to the cave in Kilbruz, whence I was taken by the spirit who had brought me thither. Since then I have wandered in many regions of the earth, mingled with the peoples of many lands, and seen the myriad wonders of the world. At length, compelled by age, I have retired to this valley, where I have now dwelt in happiness and peace for twenty years.'

HERE the old man ended his recital. Ernest thanked him for his narrative, adding that he likewise longed to spend the remainder of his days in that same lovely glen. The old man approved of his design, and for many years they two dwelt together in perfect harmony, tranquillity, and peace.

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5: The Bottle Imp

Robert Louis Stevenson
1850-1894
New York Herald 8 Feb 1891

THERE WAS A MAN of the Island of Hawaii, whom I shall call Keawe; for the truth is, he still lives, and his name must be kept secret; but the place of his birth was not far from Honaunau, where the bones of Keawe the Great lie hidden in a cave. This man was poor, brave, and active; he could read and write like a schoolmaster; he was a first-rate mariner besides, sailed for some time in the island steamers, and steered a whaleboat on the Hamakua coast. At length it came in Keawe's mind to have a sight of the great world and foreign cities, and he shipped on a vessel bound to San Francisco.

This is a fine town, with a fine harbour, and rich people uncountable; and in particular, there is one hill which is covered with palaces. Upon this hill Keawe was one day taking a walk with his pocket full of money, viewing the great houses upon either hand with pleasure. "What fine houses these are!" he was thinking, "and how happy must those people be who dwell in them, and take no care for the morrow!" The thought was in his mind when he came abreast of a house that was smaller than some others, but all finished and beautified like a toy; the steps of that house shone like silver, and the borders of the garden bloomed like garlands, and the windows were bright like diamonds; and Keawe stopped and wondered at the excellence of all he saw. So stopping, he was aware of a man that looked forth upon him through a window so clear that Keawe could see him as you see a fish in a pool upon the reef. The man was elderly, with a bald head and a black beard; and his face was heavy with sorrow, and he bitterly sighed. And the truth of it is, that as Keawe looked in upon the man, and the man looked out upon Keawe, each envied the other.

All of a sudden, the man smiled and nodded, and beckoned Keawe to enter, and met him at the door of the house.

"This is a fine house of mine," said the man, and bitterly sighed. "Would you not care to view the chambers?"

So he led Keawe all over it, from the cellar to the roof, and there was nothing there that was not perfect of its kind, and Keawe was astonished.

"Truly," said Keawe, "this is a beautiful house; if I lived in the like of it I should be laughing all day long. How comes it, then, that you should be sighing?"

"There is no reason," said the man, "why you should not have a house in all points similar to this, and finer, if you wish. You have some money, I suppose?"

"I have fifty dollars," said Keawe; "but a house like this will cost more than fifty dollars."

The man made a computation. "I am sorry you have no more," said he, "for it may raise you trouble in the future; but it shall be yours at fifty dollars."

"The house?" asked Keawe.

"No, not the house," replied the man; "but the bottle. For, I must tell you, although I appear to you so rich and fortunate, all my fortune, and this house itself and its garden, came out of a bottle not much bigger than a pint. This is it."

And he opened a lockfast place, and took out a round-bellied bottle with a long neck; the glass of it was white like milk, with changing rainbow colours in the grain. Withinsides something obscurely moved, like a shadow and a fire.

"This is the bottle," said the man; and, when Keawe laughed, "You do not believe me?" he added. "Try, then, for yourself. See if you can break it."

So Keawe took the bottle up and dashed it on the floor till he was weary; but it jumped on the floor like a child's ball, and was not injured.

"This is a strange thing," said Keawe. "For by the touch of it, as well as by the look, the bottle should be of glass."

"Of glass it is," replied the man, sighing more heavily than ever; "but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving; or so I suppose. If any man buy this bottle the imp is at his command; all that he desires— love, fame, money, houses like this house, ay, or a city like this city— all are his at the word uttered. Napoleon had this bottle, and by it he grew to be the king of the world; but he sold it at the last, and fell. Captain Cook had this bottle, and by it he found his way to so many islands; but he, too sold it, and was slain upon Hawaii. For, once it is sold, the power goes and the protection; and unless a man remain content with what he has, ill will befall him."

"And yet you talk of selling it yourself?" Keawe said.

"I have all I wish, and I am growing elderly," replied the man. "There is one thing the imp cannot do— he cannot prolong life; and, it would not be fair to conceal from you, there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man die before he sells it, he must burn in hell for ever."

"To be sure, that is a drawback and no mistake," cried Keawe. "I would not meddle with the thing. I can do without a house, thank God; but there is on thing I could not be doing with one particle, and that is to be damned."

"Dear me, you must not run away with things, " returned the man. "All you have to do is to use the power of the imp in moderation, and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort."

"Well, I observe two things," said Keawe. "All the time you keep sighing like a maid in love, that is one; and, for the other, you sell this bottle very cheap."

"I have told you already why I sigh," said the man. "It is because I fear my health is breaking up; and, as you said yourself, to die and go to the devil is a pity for anyone. As for why I sell so cheap, I must explain to you there is a

peculiarity about the bottle. Long ago, when the devil brought it first upon earth, it was extremely expensive, and was sold first of all to Prester John for many millions of dollars; but it cannot be sold at all, unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon. It follows that the price has kept falling in these centuries, and the bottle is now remarkably cheap. I bought it myself from one of my great neighbours on this hill, and the price I paid was only ninety dollars. I could sell it for as high as eighty-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents, but not a penny dearer, or back the thing must come to me. Now, about this there are two bothers. First, when you offer a bottle so singular for eighty odd dollars, people suppose you to be jesting. And second— but there is no hurry about that— and I need not go into it. Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for."

"How am I to know that this is all true?" asked Keawe.

"Some of it you can try at once," replied the man. "Give me your fifty dollars, take the bottle, and wish your fifty dollars back into your pocket. If that does not happen, I pledge you my honour I will cry off the bargain and restore your money."

"You are not deceiving me?" said Keawe.

The man bound himself with a great oath.

"Well, I will risk that much," said Keawe, "for that can do no harm." And he paid over his money to the man, and the man handed him the bottle.

"Imp of the bottle," said Keawe, "I want my fifty dollars back." And sure enough he had scarce said the word before his pocket was as heavy as ever.

"To be sure this is a wonderful bottle," said Keawe.

"And now, good morning to you, my fine fellow, and the devil go with you for me!" said the man.

"Hold on," said Keawe, "I don't want any more of this fun. Here, take your bottle back."

"You have bought it for less than I paid for it," replied the man, rubbing his hands. "It is yours now; and, for my part, I am only concerned to see the back of you." And with that he rang for his Chinese servant, and had Keawe shown out of the house.

Now, when Keawe was in the street, with the bottle under his arm, he began to think. "If all is true about this bottle, I may have made a losing bargain," thinks he. "But perhaps the man was only fooling me." The first thing he did was to count his money; the sum was exact— forty-nine dollars American money, and one Chili piece. "That looks like the truth," said Keawe. "Now I will try another part."

The streets in that part of the city were as clean as a ship's decks, and though it was noon, there were no passengers. Keawe set the bottle in the gutter and walked away. Twice he looked back, and there was the milky, round-

bellied bottle where he left it. A third time he looked back, and turned a corner; but he had scarce done so, when something knocked upon his elbow, and behold! it was the long neck sticking up; and as for the round belly, it was jammed into the pocket of his pilot- coat.

"And that looks like the truth," said Keawe.

The next thing he did was to buy a cork-screw in a shop, and go apart into a secret place in the fields. And there he tried to draw the cork, but as often as he put the screw in, out it came again, and the cork as whole as ever.

"This is some new sort of cork," said Keawe, and all at once he began to shake and sweat, for he was afraid of that bottle.

On his way back to the port-side, he saw a shop where a man sold shells and clubs from the wild islands, old heathen deities, old coined money, pictures from China and Japan, and all manner of things that sailors bring in their sea-chests. And here he had an idea. So he went in and offered the bottle for a hundred dollars. The man of the shop laughed at him at the first, and offered him five; but indeed, it was a curious bottle— such glass was never blown in any human glass-works, so prettily the colours shown under the milky white, and so strangely the shadow hovered in the midst; so, after he had disputed awhile after the manner of his kind, the shopman gave Keawe sixty silver dollars for the thing, and set it on a shelf in the midst of his window.

"Now," said Keawe, "I have sold that for sixty which I bought for fifty— so, to say truth, a little less, because one of my dollars was from Chili. Now I shall know the truth upon another point."

So he went back on board his ship, and, when he opened his chest, there was the bottle, and had come more quickly than himself. Now Keawe had a mate on board whose name was Lopaka.

"What ails you?" said Lopaka, "that you stare in your chest?"

They were alone in the ship's forecastle, and Keawe bound him to secrecy, and told all.

"This is a very strange affair," said Lopaka; "and I fear you will be in trouble about this bottle. But there is one point very clear— that you are sure of the trouble, and you had better have the profit in the bargain. Make up your mind what you want with it; give the order, and if it is done as you desire, I will buy the bottle myself; for I have an idea of my own to get a schooner, and go trading through the islands."

"That is not my idea," said Keawe; "but to have a beautiful house and garden on the Kona Coast, where I was born, the sun shining in at the door, flowers in the garden, glass in the windows, pictures on the walls, and toys and fine carpets on the tables, for all the world like the house I was in this day— only a storey higher, and with balconies all about like the king's palace; and to live there without care and make merry with my friends and relatives."

"Well," said Lopaka, "let us carry it back with us to Hawaii, and if all comes true, as you suppose, I will buy the bottle, as I said, and ask a schooner."

Upon that they were agreed, and it was not long before the ship returned to Honolulu, carrying Keawe and Lopaka, and the bottle. They were scarce come ashore when they met a friend upon the beach, who began at once to condole with Keawe.

"I do not know what I am to be condoled about," said Keawe.

"Is it possible you have not heard," said the friend, "your uncle— that good old man— is dead, and your cousin— that beautiful boy— was drowned at sea?"

Keawe was filled with sorrow, and, beginning to weep and to lament he forgot about the bottle. But Lopaka was thinking to himself, and presently, when Keawe's grief was a little abated, "I have been thinking," said Lopaka. "Had not your uncle lands in Hawaii, in the district of Kau?"

"No," said Keawe, "not in Kau; they are on the mountain-side— a little way south of Hookena."

"These lands will now be yours?" asked Lopaka.

"And so they will," says Keawe, and began again to lament for his relatives.

"No," said Lopaka, "do not lament at present. I have a thought in my mind. How if this should be the doing of the bottle? For here is the place ready for your house."

"If this be so," cried Keawe, "it is a very ill way to serve me by killing my relatives. But it may be, indeed; for it was in just such a station that I saw the house with my mind's eye."

"The house, however, is not yet built," said Lopaka.

"No, nor like to be!" said Keawe, "for though my uncle has some coffee and ava and bananas, it will not be more than will keep me in comfort; and the rest of that land is the black lava."

"Let us go to the lawyer," said Lopaka; "I have still this idea in my mind."

Now, when they came to the lawyer's, it appeared Keawe's uncle had grown monstrous rich in the last days, and there was a fund of money.

"And here is the money for the house!" cried Lopaka.

"If you are thinking of a new house," said the lawyer, "here is the card of a new architect, of whom they tell me great things."

"Better and better!" cried Lopaka. "Here is all made plain for us. Let us continue to obey orders."

So they went to the architect, and he had drawings of houses on his table.

"You want something out of the way," said the architect. "How do you like this?" and he handed a drawing to Keawe.

Now, when Keawe set eyes on the drawing, he cried out aloud, for it was the picture of his thought exactly drawn.

"I am for this house," thought he. "Little as I like the way it comes to me, I am in for it now, and I may as well take the good along with the evil."

So he told the architect all that he wished, and how he would have that house furnished, and about the pictures on the wall and the knick-knacks on the tables; and he asked the man plainly for how much he would undertake the whole affair.

The architect put many questions, and took his pen and made a computation; and when he had done he named the very sum that Keawe had inherited.

Lopaka and Keawe looked at one another and nodded.

"It is quite clear," thought Keawe, "that I am to have this house, whether or no. It comes from the devil, and I fear I will get little good by that; and of one thing I am sure, I will make no more wishes as long as I have this bottle. But with the house I am saddled, and I may as well take the good along with the evil."

So he made his terms with the architect, and they signed a paper; and Keawe and Lopaka took ship again and sailed to Australia; for it was concluded between them they should not interfere at all, but leave the architect and the bottle imp to build and to adorn that house at their own pleasure.

The voyage was a good voyage, only all the time Keawe was holding in his breath, for he had sworn he would utter no more wishes, and take no more favours from the devil. The time was up when they go back. The architect told them that the house was ready, and Keawe and Lopaka took a passage in the Hall, and went down Kona way to view the house, and see if all had been done fitly according to the thought that was in Keawe's mind.

Now, the house stood on the mountain-side, visible to ships. Above, the forest ran up into the clouds of rain; below, the black lava fell in cliffs, where the kings of old lay buried. A garden bloomed about that house with every hue of flowers; and there was an orchard of papaia on the one hand and an orchard of breadfruit on the other, and right in front, toward the sea, a ship's mast had been rigged up and bore a flag. As for the house, it was three storeys high, with great chambers and broad balconies on each. The windows were of glass, so excellent that it was as clear as water and as bright as day. All manner of furniture adorned the chambers. Pictures hung upon the wall in golden frames: pictures of ships, and men fighting, and of the most beautiful women, and of singular places; nowhere in the world are there pictures of so bright a colour as those Keawe found hanging in his house. As for the knick-knacks, they were extraordinary fine; chiming clocks and musical boxes, little men with nodding heads, books filled with pictures, weapons of price from all quarters of the world, and the most elegant puzzles to entertain the leisure of a solitary man. And as no one would care to live in such chambers, only to walk through and view them, the balconies were made so broad that a whole town might have

lived upon them in delight; and Keawe knew not which to prefer, whether the back porch, where you got the land breeze, and looked upon the orchards and the flowers, or the front balcony, where you could drink the wind of the sea, and look down the steep wall of the mountain and see the Hall going by once a week or so between Kookena and the hills of Pele, or the schooners plying up the coast for wood and ava and bananas.

When they had viewed all, Keawe and Lopaka sat on the porch.

"Well," asked Lopaka, "is it all as you designed?"

"Words cannot utter it," said Keawe. "It is better than I dreamed, and I am sick with satisfaction."

"There is but one thing to consider," said Lopaka; "all this may be quite natural, and the bottle imp have nothing whatever to say to it. If I were to buy the bottle, and got no schooner after all, I should have put my hand in the fire for nothing. I gave you my word, I know; but yet I think you would not grudge me one more proof."

"I have sworn I would take no more favours," said Keawe. "I have gone already deep enough."

"This is no favour I am thinking of," replied Lopaka. "It is only to see the imp himself. There is nothing to be gained by that, and so nothing to be ashamed of; and yet, if I once saw him, I should be sure of the whole matter. So indulge me so far, and let me see the imp; and, after that, here is the money in my hand, and I will buy it."

"There is only one thing I am afraid of," said Keawe. "The imp may be very ugly to view; and if you once set eyes upon him you might be very undesirous of the bottle."

"I am a man of my word," said Lopaka. "And here is the money betwixt us."

"Very well," replied Keawe. "I have a curiosity myself. So come, let us have one look at you, Mr. Imp."

Now as soon as that was said, the imp looked out of the bottle, and in again, swift as a lizard; and there sat Keawe and Lopaka turned to stone. The night had quite come, before either found a thought to say or voice to say it with; and then Lopaka pushed the money over and took the bottle.

"I am a man of my word," said he, "and had need to be so, or I would not touch this bottle with my foot. Well, I shall get my schooner and a dollar or two for my pocket; and then I will be rid of this devil as fast as I can. For to tell you the plain truth, the look of him has cast me down."

"Lopaka," said Keawe, "do not you think any worse of me than you can help ; I know it is night, and the roads had, and the pass by the tombs an ill place to go by so late, but I declare since I have seen that little face, I cannot eat or sleep or pray till it is gone from me. I will give you a lantern, and a basket to put the

bottle in, and any picture or fine thing in all my house that takes your fancy;— and be gone at once, and go sleep at Hookena with Nahinu."

"Keawe," said Lopaka, "many a man would take this ill; above all, when I am doing you a turn so friendly, as to keep my word and buy the bottle; and for that matter, the night and the dark, and the way by the tombs, must be all tenfold more dangerous to a man with such a sin upon his conscience, and such a bottle under his arm. But for my part, I am so extremely terrified myself, I have not the heart to blame you. Here I go then; and I pray God you may be happy in your house, and I fortunate with my schooner, and both get to heaven in the end in spite of the devil and his bottle."

So Lopaka went down the mountain; and Keawe stood in his front balcony, and listened to the clink of the horse's shoes, and watched the lantern go shining down the path, and along the cliff of caves where the old dead are buried; and all the time he trembled and clasped his hands, and prayed for his friend, and gave glory to God that he himself had escaped out of that trouble.

But the next day came very brightly, and that new house of his was so delightful to behold that he forgot his terrors. One day followed another, and Keawe dwelt there in perpetual joy. He had his place on the back porch; it was there he ate and lived, and read the stories in the Honolulu newspapers; but when anyone came by they would go in and view the chambers and the pictures. And the fame of the house went far and wide; it was called Ka-Hale Nui— the Great House— in all Kona; and sometimes the Bright House, for Keawe kept a Chinaman, who was all day dusting and furbishing; and the glass and the gilt, and the fine stuffs, and the pictures, shown as bright as the morning. As for Keawe himself, he could not walk in the chambers without singing, his heart was so enlarged; and when ships sailed by upon the sea, he would fly his colours on the mast.

So time went by, until one day Keawe went upon a visit as far as Kailua to certain of his friends. There he was well feasted; and left as soon as he could the next morning, and rode hard, for he was impatient to behold his beautiful house; and, besides, the night then coming on was the night in which the dead of old days go abroad in the sides of Kona; and having already meddled with the devil, he was the more chary of meeting with the dead. A little beyond Honaunau, looking far ahead, he was aware of a woman bathing in the edge of the sea; and she seemed a well grown girl, but he thought no more of it. Then he saw her white shift flutter as she put it on, and then her red holoku; and by the time he came abreast of her she was done with her toilet, and had come up from the sea, and stood by the track-side in her red holoku, and she was all freshened with the bath, and her eyes shone and were kind. Now Keawe no sooner beheld her than he drew rein.

"I thought I knew everyone in this country," said he. "How comes it that I do not know you?"

"I am Kokua, daughter of Kiano," said the girl, "and I have just returned from Oahu. Who are you?"

"I will tell you who I am in a little," said Keawe, dismounting from his horse, "but not now. For I have a thought in my mind, and if you knew who I was, you might have heard of me, and would not give me a true answer. But tell me, first of all, one thing: Are you married?"

At this Kokua laughed out aloud. "It is you who ask questions," said she. "Are you married yourself?"

"Indeed, Kokua, I am not," repled Keawe, "and never thought to be until this hour. But here is the plain truth. I have met you here at the roadside, and I saw your eyes, which are like the stars, and my heart went to you as swift as a bird. And so now, if you want none of me, say so, and I will go on to my own place; but if you think me no worse than any other young man, say so, too, and I will turn aside to your father's for the night, and tomorrow I will talk with the good man."

Kokua said never a word, but she looked at the sea and laughed.

"Kokua," said Keawe, "if you say nothing, I will take that for the good answer; so let us be stepping to your father's door."

She went on ahead of him, still without speech; only sometimes she glanced back and glanced away again, and she kept the string of her hat in her mouth.

Now, when they had come to the door, Kiano came out on his verandah, and cried out and welcomed Keawe by name. At that the girl looked over, for the fame of the great house had come to her ears; and, to be sure, it was a great temptation. All that evening they were very merry together; and the girl was as bold as brass under the eyes of her parents, and made a mock of Keawe, for she had a quick wit. The next day he had a word with Kiano, and found the girl alone.

"Kokua," said he, "you made a mock of me all the evening; and it is still time to bid me go. I would not tell you who I was, because I have so fine a house, and I feared you would think too much of that house and too little of the man that loves you. Now you know all, and if you wish to have seen the last of me, say so at once."

"No," said Kokua; but this time she did not laugh, nor did Keawe ask for more.

This was the wooing of Keawe; things had gone quickly; but so an arrow goes, and the ball of a rifle swifter still, and yet both may strike the target. Things had gone fast, but they had gone far also, and the thought of Keawe rang in the maiden's head; she heard his voice in the breach of the surf upon the lava, and for this young man that she had seen but twice she would have left father

and mother and her native islands. As for Keawe himself, his horse flew up the path of the mountain under the cliff of tombs, and the sound of the hoofs, and the sound of Keawe singing to himself for pleasure echoed in the caverns of the dead. He came to the Bright House, and still he was singing. He sat and ate in the broad balcony, and the Chinaman wondered at his master, to hear how he sang between the mouthfuls. The sun went down into the sea, and the night came; and Keawe walked the balconies by lamplight, high on the mountains, and the voice of his singing startled men on ships.

"Here am I now upon my high place," he said to himself. "Life may be no better; this is the mountain top; and all shelves about me towards the worse. For the first time I will light up the chambers, and bathe in my fine bath with the hot water and the cold, and sleep alone in the bed of my bridal chamber."

So the Chinaman had word, and he must rise from sleep and light the furnaces; and as he wrought below, beside the boilers, he heard his master singing and rejoicing above him in the lighted chambers. When the water began to be hot the Chinaman cried to his master; and Keawe went into the bathroom; and the Chinaman heard him sing as he filled the marble basin; and heard him sing, and the signing broken, as he undressed; until of a sudden, the song ceased. The Chinaman listened, and listened; he called up the house to Keawe to ask if all were well, and Keawe answered him "Yes," and bad him go to bed; but there was no more singing in the Bright House; and all night long, the Chinaman heard his master's feet go round and round the balconies without repose.

Now the truth of it was this: as Keawe undressed for his bath, he spied upon his flesh a patch like a patch of lichen on a rock, and it was then that he stopped singing. For he knew the likeness of that patch, and knew that he was fallen in the Chinese Evil. [footnote: Leprosy.] Now, it is a sad thing for any man to fall into this sickness. And it would be a sad thing for anyone to leave a house so beautiful and so commodious, and depart from all his friends to the north coast of Molokai between the mighty cliff and the sea-breakers. But what was that the case of the man Keawe, he who had met his love but yesterday, and won her but that morning, and now saw all his hopes break, in a moment, like a piece of glass?

Awhile he sat upon the edge of the bath; then sprang, with a cry and ran outside; and to and fro, to and fro, along the balcony, like one despairing.

"Very willingly could I leave Hawaii, the home of my fathers," Keawe was thinking. "Very lightly could I leave my house, the high-placed, the many-windowed, here upon the mountains. Very bravely could I go to Molokai, to Kalaupapa by the cliffs, to live with the smitten and to sleep there, far from my fathers. But what wrong have I done, what sin lies upon my soul, that I should have encountered Kokua coming cool from the sea-water in the evening? Kokua,

the soul ensnarer! Kokua, the light of my life! Her may I never wed, her may I look upon no longer, her may I no more handle with my living hand; and it is for this, it is for you, O Kokua! that I pour my lamentations!"

Now you are to observe what sort of a man Keawe was, for he might have dwelt there in the Bright House for years, and no one been the wiser of his sickness; but he reckoned nothing of that, if he must lose Kokua. And again, he might have wed Kokua even as he was; and so many would have done, because they have the souls of pigs; but Keawe loved the maid manfully, and he would do her no hurt and bring her in no danger.

A little beyond the midst of the night, there came in his mind the recollection of that bottle. He went round to the back porch, and called to memory the day when the devil had looked forth; and at the thought ice ran in his veins.

"A dreadful thing is the bottle," thought Keawe, "and dreadful is the imp, and it is a dreadful thing to risk the flames of hell. But what other hope have I to cure the sickness or to wed Kokua? What!" he thought, "would I beard the devil once, only to get me a house, and not face him again to win Kokua?"

Thereupon he called to mind it was the next day the Hall went by on her return to Honolulu. "There must I go first," he thought, "and see Lopaka. For the best hope that I have now is to find that same bottle I was so please to be rid of."

Never a wink could he sleep; the food stuck in his throat; but he sent a letter to Kiano, and about the time when the steamer would be coming, rode down beside the cliff of the tombs. It rained; his horse went heavily; he looked up at the black mouths of the caves, and he envied the dead that slept there and were done with trouble; and called to mind how he had galloped by the day before, and was astonished. So he came down to Hookena, and there was all the country gathered for the steamer as usual. In the shed before the store they sat and jested and passed the news; but there was no matter of speech in Keawe's bosom, and he sat in their midst and looked without on the rain falling on the houses, and the surf beating among the rocks, and the sighs arose in his throat.

"Keawe of the Bright House is out of spirits," said one to another. Indeed, and so he was, and little wonder.

Then the Hall came, and the whaleboat carried him on board. The after-part of the ship was full of Haoles [footnote: Whites] who had been to visit the volcano, as their custom is; and the midst was crowded with Kanakas, and the forepart with wild bulls from Hilo and horses from Kau; but Keawe sat apart from all in his sorrow, and watched for the house of Kiano. There is sat, low upon the shore in the black rocks and shaded by the cocoa palms, and there by the door was a red holoku, no greater than a fly, and going to and fro with a fly's busyness.

"Ah, queen of my heart," he cried, "I'll venture my dear soul to win you!"

Soon after, darkness fell, and the cabins were lit up, and the Haoles sat and played at the cards and drank whisky as their custom is; but Keawe walked the deck all night; and all the next day, as they steamed under the lee of Maui or of Molokai, he was still pacing to and from like a wild animal in a menagerie.

Towards evening they passed Diamond Head, and came to the pier of Honolulu. Keawe stepped out among the crowd and began to ask for Lopaka. It seemed he had become the owner of a schooner— none better in the islands— and was gone upon an adventure as far as Pola- Pola or Kahiki; so there was no help to be looked for from Lopaka. Keawe called to mind a friend of his, a lawyer in the town (I must not tell his name), and inquired of him. They said he was grown suddenly rich, and had a fine new house upon Waikiki shore; and this put a thought in Keawe's head, and he called a hack and drove to the lawyer's house.

The house was all brand new, and the trees in the garden no greater than walking-sticks, and the lawyer, when he came, had the air of a man well pleased.

"What can I do to serve you?" said the lawyer.

"You are a friend of Lopaka's," replied Keawe, "and Lopaka purchased from me a certain piece of goods that I thought you might enable me to trace."

The lawyer's face became very dark. "I do not profess to misunderstand you, Mr. Keawe," said he, "though this is an ugly business to be stirring in. You maybe sure I know nothing, but yet I have a guess, and if you would apply in a certain quarter I think you might have news."

And he named the name of a man, which, again, I had better not repeat. So it was for days, and Keawe went from one to another, finding everywhere new clothes and carriages, and fine new houses and men everywhere in great contentment, although, to be sure, when he hinted at his business their faces would cloud over.

"No doubt I am upon the track," thought Keawe. "These new clothes and carriages are all the gifts of the little imp, and these glad faces are the faces of men who have taken their profit and got rid of the accursed thing in safety. When I see pale cheeks and hear sighing, I shall know that I am near the bottle."

So it befell at last that he was recommended to a Haole in Beritania Street. When he came to the door, about the hour of the evening meal, there were the usual marks of the new house, and the young garden, and the electric light shining in the windows; but when the owner came, a shock of hope and fear ran through Keawe; for here was a young man, white as a corpse, and black about the eyes, the hair shedding from his head, and such a look in his countenance as a man may have when he is waiting for the gallows.

"Here it is, to be sure," thought Keawe, and so with this man he no ways veiled his errand. "I am come to buy the bottle," said he.

At the word, the young Haole of Beritania Street reeled against the wall.

"The bottle!" he gasped. "To buy the bottle!" Then he seemed to choke, and seizing Keawe by the arm carried him into a room and poured out wine in two glasses.

"Here is my respects," said Keawe, who had been much about with Haoles in his time. "Yes," he added, "I am come to buy the bottle. What is the price by now?"

At that word the young man let his glass slip through his fingers, and looked upon Keawe like a ghost.

"The price," says he; "the price! you do not know the price?"

"It is for that I am asking you," returned Keawe. "But why are you so much concerned? Is there anything wrong about the price?"

"It has dropped a great deal in value since your time, Mr. Keawe," said the young man, stammering.

"Well, well, I shall have the less to pay for it," said Keawe. "How much did it cost you?"

The young man was as white as a sheet. "Two cents," said he.

"What?" cried Keawe, "two cents? Why, then, you can only sell it for one. And he who buys it— " The words died upon Keawe's tongue; he who bought it could never sell it again, the bottle and the bottle imp must abide with him until he died, and when he died must carry him to the red end of hell.

The young man of Beritania Street fell upon his knees. "For God's sake buy it!" he cried. "You can have all my fortune in the bargain. I was mad when I bought it at that price. I had embezzled money at my store; I was lost else; I must have gone to jail."

"Poor creature," said Keawe, "you would risk your soul upon so desperate an adventure, and to avoid the proper punishment of your own disgrace; and you think I could hesitate with love in front of me. Give me the bottle, and the change which I make sure you have all ready. Here is a five-cent piece."

It was as Keawe supposed; the young man had the change ready in a drawer; the bottle changed hands, and Keawe's fingers were no sooner clasped upon the stalk than he had breathed his wish to be a clean man. And, sure enough, when he got home to his room and stripped himself before a glass, his flesh was whole like an infant's. And here was the strange thing: he had no sooner seen this miracle, than his mind was changed within him, and he cared naught for the Chinese Evil, and little enough for Kokua; and had but the one thought, that here he was bound to the bottle imp for time and for eternity, and had no better hope but to be a cinder for ever in the flames of hell. Away ahead of him he saw them blaze with his mind's eye, and his soul shrank, and darkness fell upon the light.

When Keawe came to himself a little, he was aware it was the night when the band played at the hotel. Thither he went, because he feared to be alone; and there, among happy faces, walked to and fro, and heard the tunes go up and down, and saw Berger beat the measure, and all the while he heard the flames crackle, and saw the red fire burning in the bottomless pit. Of a sudden the band played Hiki-ao-ao; that was a song that he had sung with Kokua, and at the strain courage returned to him.

"It is done now," he thought, "and once more let me take the good along with the evil."

So it befell that he returned to Hawaii by the first steamer, and as soon as it could be managed he was wedded to Kokua, and carried her up the mountain side to the Bright House.

Now it was so with these two, that when they ere together, Keawe's heart was stilled; but so soon has he was alone he fell into a brooding horror, and heard the flames crackle, and saw the red fire burn in the bottomless pit. The girl, indeed, had come to him wholly; her heart leapt in her side at sight of him, her hand clung to his; and she was so fashioned from the hair upon her head to the nails upon her toes that none could see her without joy. She was pleasant in her nature. She had the good word always. Full of song she was, and went to and fro in the Bright House, the brightest thing in its three storeys, carolling like the birds. And Keawe beheld and heard her with delight, and then must shrink upon one side, and weep and groan to think upon the price that he had paid for her; and then he must dry his eyes, and wash his face, and go and sit with her on the broad balconies joining in her songs, and, with a sick spirit, answering her smiles.

There came a day when her feet began to be heavy and her songs more rare; and now it was not Keawe only that would weep apart, but each would sunder from the other and sit in opposite balconies with the whole width of the Bright House betwixt. Keawe was so sunk in his despair, he scarce observed the change, and was only glad he had more hours to sit alone and brood upon his destiny and was not so frequently condemned to pull a smiling face on a sick heart. But one day, coming softly through the house, he heard the sound of a child sobbing, and there was Kokua rolling her face upon the balcony floor, and weeping like the lost.

"You do well to weep in this house, Kokua," he said. "And yet I would give the head off my body that you (at least) might have been happy."

"Happy!" she cried. "Keawe, when you lived alone in your Bright House, you were the word of the island for a happy man; laughter and song were in your mouth, and your face was as bright as the sunrise. Then you wedded pour Kokua; and the good God knows what is amiss in her— but from that day you

have not smiled. Ah!" she cried, "what ails me? I thought I was pretty, and I knew I loved him. What ails me that I throw this cloud upon my husband?"

"Poor Kokua," said Keawe. He sat down by her side, and sought to take her hand; but that she plucked away. "Poor Kokua," he said, again. "My poor child— my pretty. And I thought all this while to spare you! Well, you shall know all. Then, at least, you will pity poor Keawe; then you will understand how much he loved you in the past— that he dared hell for your possession— and how much he loves you still (the poor condemned one), that he can yet call up a smile when he beholds you."

With that, he told her all, even from the beginning.

"You have done this for me?" she cried. "Ah, well then what do I care!"— and she clasped and wept upon him.

"Ah, child!" said Keawe, "and yet, when I consider of the fire of hell, I care a good deal!"

"Never tell me," said she; "no man can be lost because he loved Kokua, and no other fault. I tell you, Keawe, I shall save you with these hands, or perish in your company. What! you loved me, and gave your soul, and you think I will not die to save you in return?"

"Ah, my dear! you might die a hundred times, and what difference would that make?" he cried, "except to leave me lonely till the time comes of my damnation?"

"You know nothing," said she. "I was educated in a school in Honolulu; I am no common girl. And I tell you, I shall save my lover. What is this you say about a cent? But all the world is not American. In England they have a piece they call a farthing, which is about half a cent. Ah! sorrow!" she cried, "that makes it scarcely better, for the buyer must be lost, and we shall find none so brave as my Keawe! But, then, there is France; they have a small coin there which they call a centime, and these go five to the cent or thereabout. We could not do better. Come, Keawe, let us go to the French islands; let us go to Tahiti, as fast as ships can bear us. There we have four centimes, three centimes, two centimes one centime; four possible sales to come and go on; and two of us to push the bargain. Come, my Keawe! kiss me, and banish care. Kokua will defend you."

"Gift of God!" he cried. "I cannot think that God will punish me for desiring aught so good! Be it as you will, then; take me where you please: I put my life and my salvation in your hands."

Early the next day Kokua was about her preparations. She took Keawe's chest that he went with sailoring; and first she put the bottle in a corner; and then packed it with the richest of the clothes and the bravest of the knick-knacks in the house. "For," said she, "we must seem to be rich folks, or who will believe in the bottle?" All the time of her preparation she was as gay as a bird; only

when she looked upon Keawe, the tears would spring in her eye, and she must run and kiss him. As for Keawe, a weight was off his soul; now that he had his secret shared, and some hope in front of him, he seemed like a new man, his feet went lightly on the earth, and his breath was good to him again. Yet was terror still at his elbow; and ever and again, as the wind blows out a taper, hope died in him, and he saw the flames toss and the red fire burn in hell.

It was given out in the country they were gone pleasuring to the States, which was thought a strange thing, and yet not so strange as the truth, if any could have guessed it. So they went to Honolulu in the Hall, and thence in the Umatilla to San Francisco with a crowd of Haoles, and at San Francisco took their passage by the mail brigantine, the Tropic Bird for Papeete, the chief place of the French in the south islands. Thither they came, after a pleasant voyage, on a fair day of the Trade Wind, and saw the reef with the surf breaking, and Motuiti with its palms, and the schooner riding within- side, and the white houses of the town low down along the shore among green trees, and overhead the mountains and the clouds of Tahiti, the wise island.

It was judged the most wise to hire a house, which they did accordingly, opposite the British Consul's, to make a great parade of money, and themselves conspicuous with carriages and horses. This it was very easy to do, so long as they had the bottle in their possession; for Kokua was more bold than Keawe, and whenever she had a mind, called on the imp for twenty or a hundred dollars. At this rate they soon grew to be remarked in the town; and the strangers from Hawaii, their riding and their driving, the fine holokus and the rich lace of Kokua, became the matter of much talk.

They got on well after the first with the Tahitian language, which is indeed like to the Hawaiian, with a change of certain letters; and as soon as they had any freedom of speech, began to push the bottle. You are to consider it was not an easy subject to introduce; it was not easy to persuade people you were in earnest, when you offered so sell them for four centimes the spring of health and riches inexhaustible. It was necessary besides to explain the dangers of the bottle; and either people disbelieved the whole thing and laughed or they thought the more of the darker part, became overcast with gravity, and drew away from Keawe and Kokua, as from persons who had dealings with the devil. So far from gaining ground, these two began to find they were avoided in the town; the children ran away from them screaming, a thing intolerable to Kokua; Catholics crossed themselves as they went by; and all persons began with one accord to disengage themselves from their advances.

Depression fell upon their spirits. They would sit at night in their new house, after a day's weariness, and not exchange one word, or the silence would be broken by Kokua bursting suddenly into sobs. Sometimes they would pray together; sometimes they would have the bottle out upon the floor, and sit all

evening watching how the shadow hovered in the midst. At such times they would be afraid to go to rest. It was long ere slumber came to them, and if either dozed off, it would be to wake and find the other silently weeping in the dark, or perhaps, to wake alone, the other having fled from the house and the neighbourhood of that bottle, to pace under the bananas in the little garden, or to wander on the beach by moonlight.

One night it was so when Kokua awoke. Keawe was gone. She felt in the bed and his place was cold. Then fear fell upon her, and she sat up in bed. A little moonshine filtered through the shutters. The room was bright, and she could spy the bottle on the floor. Outside it blew high, the great trees of the avenue cried aloud, and the fallen leaves rattled in the verandah. In the midst of this Kokua was aware of another sound; whether of a beast or of a man she could scarce tell, but it was as sad as death, and cut her to the soul. Softly she arose, set the door ajar, and looked forth in the moonlit yard. There, under the bananas, lay Keawe, his mouth in the dust, and as he lay he moaned.

It was Kokua's first thought to run forward and console him; her second potently withheld her. Keawe had borne himself before his wife like a brave man; it became her little in the hour of weakness to intrude upon his shame. With the thought she drew back into the house.

"Heavens!" she thought, "how careless have I been— - how weak! It is he, not I that stands in this eternal peril; it was he, not I, that took the curse upon his soul. It is for my sake, and for the love of a creature of so little worth and such poor help , that he now beholds so close to him the flames of hell— ay, and smells the smoke of it, lying without there in the wind and moonlight. Am I so dull of spirit that never till now I have surmised my duty, or have I seen it before and turned aside? But now, at least, I take upon my soul in both the hands of my affection; now I say farewell to the white steps of heaven and the waiting faces of my friends. A love for a love, and let mine be equalled with Keawe's! A soul for a soul, and be it mine to perish!"

She was a deft woman with her hands, and was soon apparelled. She took in her hands the change— the precious centimes they kept ever at their side; for this coin is little used, and they had made provision at a Government office. When she was forth in the avenue clouds came on the wind, and the moon was blackened. The town slept, and she knew not whither to turn till she heard one coughing in the shadow of the trees.

"Old man," said Kokua, "what do you here abroad in the cold night?"

The old man could scarce express himself for coughing, but she made out that he was old and poor, and a stranger in the island.

"Will you do me a service?" said Kokua. "As one stranger to another, and as an old man to a young woman, will you help a daughter of Hawaii?"

"Ah," said the old man. "So you are the witch from the eight islands, and even my old soul you seek to entangle. But I have heard of you, and defy your wickedness."

"Sit down here," said Kokua, "and let me tell you a tale." And she told him the story of Keawe from the beginning to the end.

"And now," said she, "I am his wife, whom he bought with his soul's welfare. And what should I do? If I went to him myself and offered to buy it, he would refuse. But if you go, he will sell it eagerly; I will await you here; you will buy it for four centimes, and I will buy it again for three. And the Lord strengthen a poor girl!"

"If you meant falsely," said the old man, "I think God would strike you dead."

"He would!" cried Kokua. "Be sure he would. I could not be so treacherous— God would not suffer it."

"Give me the four centimes and await me here," said the old man.

Now, when Kokua stood alone in the street, her spirit died. The wind roared in the trees, and it seemed to her the rushing of the flames of hell; the shadows tossed in the light of the street lamp, and they seemed to her the snatching hands of evil ones. If she had had the strength, she must have run away, and if she had had the breath she must have screamed aloud; but, in truth, she could do neither, and stood trembled in the avenue, like an affrighted child.

Then she saw the old man returning, and he had the bottle in his hand.

"I have done your bidding," said he. "I left your husband weeping like a child; tonight he will sleep easy." And he held the bottle forth.

"Before you give it me," Kokua panted, "take the good with the evil— ask to be delivered from your cough."

"I am an old man," replied the other, "and too near the gate of the grave to take a favour from the devil. But what is this? Why do you not take the bottle? Do you hesitate?"

"Not hesitate!" cried Kokua. "I am only weak. Give me a moment. It is my hand resists, my flesh shrinks back from the accursed thing. One moment only!"

The old man looked upon Kokua kindly. "Poor child!" said he, "you fear; your soul misgives you. Well, let me keep it. I am old and can never more be happy in this world, and as for the next— "

"Give it me!" gasped Kokua. "There is your money. Do you think I am so base as that? give me the bottle."

"God bless you, child," said the old man.

Kokua concealed the bottle under her holoku, said farewell to the old man, and walked off along the avenue, she cared not whither. For all roads were not the same to her, and led equally to hell. Sometimes she walked, and sometimes ran; sometimes she screamed out loud in the night, and sometimes lay by the wayside in the dust and wept. All that she had heard of hell came back to her;

she saw the flames blaze, and she smelt the smoke, and her flesh withered on the coals.

Near the day she came to her mind again, and returned to the house. It was even as the old man said— Keawe slumbered like a child. Kokua stood and gazed upon his face.

"Now, my husband," said she, "it is your turn to sleep. When you wake it will be your turn to sing and laugh. But for poor Kokua, alas! that meant no evil— for poor Kokua no more sleep, no more singing, no more delight, whether in earth or heaven."

With that she lay down int he bed by his side, and her misery was so extreme that she fell in a deep slumber instantly.

Late in the morning her husband woke her and gave her the good news. It seemed he was silly with delight, for he paid no heed to her distress, ill though she dissembled it. The words stuck in her mouth, it mattered not; Keawe did the speaking. She ate not a bite, but who was to observe it? for Keawe cleared the dish. Kokua saw and heard him, like some strange thing in a dream; there were times when she forgot or doubted, and put her hands to her brow; to know herself doomed and hear her husband babble, seemed so monstrous.

All the while Keawe was eating and talking, and planning the time of their return, and thanking her for saving him, and fondling her, and calling her the true help er after all. He laughed at the old man that was fool enough to buy that bottle.

"A worthy old man he seemed," Keawe said. "But no one can judge by appearances. For why did the old reprobate require the bottle?"

"My husband," said Kokua, humbly, "his purpose may have been good."

Keawe laughed like an angry man.

"Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Keawe. "An old rogue, I tell you; and an old ass to boot. For the bottle was hard enough to sell at four centimes; and at three it will be quite impossible. The margin is not broad enough, the thing begins to smell of scorching— brrr!" said he, and shuddered. "It is true I bought it myself at a cent, when I knew not there were smaller coins. I was a fool for my pains; there will never be found another: and whoever has that bottle now will carry it to the pit."

"O my husband!" said Kokua. "It is not a terrible thing to save oneself by the eternal ruin of another? It seems to me I could not laugh. I would be humbled. I would be filled with melancholy. I would pray for the poor holder."

Then Keawe, because he felt the truth of what she said, grew the more angry. "Heighty-teighty!" cried he. "You maybe filled with melancholy if you please. It is not the mind of a good wife. If you thought at all of me, you would sit shamed."

Thereupon he went out, and Kokua was alone.

What chance had she to sell that bottle at two centimes? None, she perceived. And if she had any, here was her husband hurrying her away to a country where there was nothing lower than a cent. And here— on the morrow of her sacrifice— was her husband leaving her and blaming her.

She would not even try to profit by what time she had, but sat in the house, and now had the bottle out and viewed it with unutterable fear, and now, with loathing, hid it out of sight.

By-and-by, Keawe came back, and would have her take a drive.

"My husband, I am ill," she said. "I am out of heart. Excuse me, I can take no pleasure."

Then was Keawe more wroth than ever. With her, because he thought she was brooding over the case of the old man; and with himself, because thought she was right, and was ashamed to be so happy.

"This is your truth," cried he, "and this your affection! Your husband is just saved from eternal ruin, which he encountered for the love of you— and you take no pleasure! Kokua, you have a disloyal heart."

He went forth again furious, and wandered in the town all day. He met friends, and drank with them; they hired a carriage and drove into the country, and there drank again. All the time Keawe was ill at ease, because he was taking this pastime while his wife was sad, and because he knew in his heart that she was more right than he; and the knowledge made him drink the deeper.

Now there was an old brutal Haole drinking with him, one that had been a boatswain of a whaler, a runaway, a digger in gold mines, a convict in prisons. He had a low mind and a foul mouth; he loved to drink and to see other drunken; and he pressed the glass upon Keawe. Soon there was no more money in the company.

"Here, you!" says the boatswain, "you are rich, you have been always saying. You have a bottle or some foolishness."

"Yes," says Keawe, "I am rich; I will go back and get some money from my wife, who keeps it."

"That's a bad idea, mate," said the boatswain. "Never you trust a petticoat with dollars. They're all as false as water; you keep an eye on her."

Now, this word struck in Keawe's mind; for he was muddled with what he had been drinking.

"I should not wonder but she was false, indeed," thought he. "Why else should she be so cast down at my release? But I will show her I am not the man to be fooled, I will catch her in the act."

Accordingly, when they were back in town, Keawe bade the boatswain wait for him at the corner, by the old calaboose, and went forward up the avenue alone to the door of his house. The night had come again; there was a light

within, but never a sound; and Keawe crept about the corner, opened the back door softly, and looked in.

There was Kokua on the floor, the lamp at her side, before her was a milk-white bottle, with a round belly and a long neck; and as she viewed it, Kokua wrong her hands.

A long time Keawe stood and looked in the doorway. At first he was struck stupid; and then fear fell upon him that the bargain had been made amiss, and the bottle had come back to him as it came at San Francisco; and at that his knees were loosened, and the fumes of the wine departed from his head like mists off a river in the morning. And then he had another thought; and it was a strange one, that made his cheeks to burn.

"I must make sure of this," thought he.

So he closed the door, and went softly round the corner again, and then came noisily in, as though he were but now returned. And, lo! by the time he opened the front door no bottle was to be seen; and Kokua sat in a chair and started up like one awakened out of sleep.

"I have been drinking all day and making merry," said Keawe. "I have been with good companions, and now I only come back for money, and return to drink and carouse with them again."

Both his face and voice were as stern as judgement, but Kokua was too troubled to observe.

"You do well to use your own, my husband," said she, and her words trembled.

"O, I do well in all things," said Keawe, and he went straight to the chest and took out money. But he looked besides in the corner where they kept the bottle, and there was no bottle there.

At that the chest heaved upon the floor like a sea- billow, and the house span about him like a wreath of smoke, for he saw he was lost now, and there was no escape. "It is what I feared," he thought. "It is she who bought it."

And then he came to himself a little and rose up; but the sweat streamed on his face as thick as the rain and as cold as the well-water.

"Kokua," said he, "I said to you today what ill became me. Now I return to carouse with my jolly companions," and at that he laughed a little quietly. "I will take more pleasure in the cup if you forgive me."

She clasped his knees in a moment; she kissed his knees with flowing tears.

"O," she cried, "I asked but a kind word!"

"Let us never one think hardly of the other," said Keawe, and was gone out of the house.

Now, the money that Keawe had taken was only some of that store of centime piece they had laid in at their arrival. It was very sure he had no mind to

be drinking. His wife had given her soul for him, now he must give his for hers; no other thought was in the world with him.

At the corner, by the old calaboose, there was the boatswain waiting.

"My wife has the bottle," said Keawe, "and, unless you help me to recover it, there can be no more money and no more liquor tonight."

"You do not mean to say you are serious about that bottle?" cried the boatswain.

"There is the lamp," said Keawe. "Do I look as if I was jesting?"

"That is so," said the boatswain. "You look as serious as a ghost."

"Well, then," said Keawe, "here are two centimes; you must go to my wife in the house, and offer her these for the bottle, which (if I am not much mistaken) she will give you instantly. Bring it to me here, and I will buy it back from you for one; for that is the law with this bottle, that it still must be sold for a less sum. But whatever you do, never breathe a word to her that you have come from me."

"Mate, I wonder are you making a fool of me?" asked the boatswain.

"It will do you no harm if I am," returned Keawe.

"That is so, mate," said the boatswain.

"And if you doubt me," added Keawe, "you can try. As soon as you are clear of the house, wish to have your pocket full of money, or a bottle of the best rum, or what you please, and you will see the virtue of the thing."

"Very well, Kanaka," says the boatswain. "I will try; but if you are having your fun out of me, I will take my fun out of you with a belaying pin."

So the whaler-man went off upon the avenue; and Keawe stood and waited. It was near the same spot where Kokua had waited the night before; but Keawe was more resolved, and never faltered in his purpose; only his soul was bitter with despair.

It seemed a long time he had to wait before he heard a voice singing in the darkness of the avenue. He knew the voice to be the boatswain's; but it was strange how drunken it appeared upon a sudden.

Next, the man himself came stumbling into the light of the lamp. He had the devil's bottle buttoned in his coat; another bottle was in his hand; and even as he came in view he raised it to his mouth and drank.

"You have it," said Keawe. "I see that."

"Hands off!" cried the boatswain, jumping back. "Take a step near me, and I'll smash your mouth. You thought you could make a cat's-paw of me, did you?"

"What do you mean?" cried Keawe.

"Mean?" cried the boatswain. "This is a pretty good bottle, this is; that's what I mean. How I got it for two centimes I can't make out; but I'm sure you shan't have it for one."

"You mean you won't sell?" gasped Keawe.

"No, sir!" cried the boatswain. "But I'll give you a drink of the rum, if you like."

"I tell you," said Keawe, "the man who has that bottle goes to hell."

"I reckon I'm going anyway," returned the sailor; "and this bottle's the best thing to go with I've struck yet. No, sir!" he cried again, "this is my bottle now, and you can go and fish for another."

"Can this be true?" Keawe cried. "For your own sake, I beseech you, sell it me!"

"I don't value any of your talk," replied the boatswain. "You thought I was a flat; now you see I'm not; and there's an end. If you won't have a swallow of the rum, I'll have one myself. Here's your health, and goodnight to you!"

So off he went down the avenue toward town, and there goes the bottle out of the story.

But Keawe ran to Kokua light as the wind; and great was their joy that night; and great, since then has been the peace of all their days in the Bright House.

6: Strolling Freddie

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Collected in: *Moon Over Broadway*, 1931

"I'M gonna straighten out," he cried, "as soon as I get to Frisco. If I make that town I'll be okay. Wish me luck, old kid. I'll see you some time again."

Some years ago I frequented a joint in Greenwich Village that was then known as the Red Head. In those happy days, the Village meant more than it does today. And the Red Head at that time, was quite a noble hangout.

It was a rendezvous for dizzy flappers, retired chorines, hopheads, souses, perverts, poets and policemen. It was as dirty a dive as ever needed plenty of fresh air. Today, incidentally, the Red Head has become a flower shop. Beautiful blossoms have replaced the gin blossoms.

The proprietor of the Red Head at that time was a genial gentleman named Mr. Edward Winston. In those days, I had no Broadway column and no expense account with which to conduct one.

Accordingly, I would frequently sit in the Red Head and take cash while Mr. Winston played piano for the customers. Mr. Winston was vastly different from the cabaret proprietors of today. He was his own orchestra then, his own staff of assistants and his own bouncer. When business was bad, he was also his own patron.

Thus, as I sat in the Red Head, took cash and studied the characters, Mr. Winston would sometimes toss me a steak and a plate of soup. This made me deeply grateful to Mr. Winston who, in turn, seemed to take a fancy to me and assured me that I might some day have a cabaret of my own.

Once, much to my pride and satisfaction, Mr. Winston sat down and composed some music to a lyric I had written. It was. a very sad lyric and was titled, as I recall, "When I Return." It rhymed "learn" and "yearn" and was really a very pretty affair.

My song was never published. But it should have been. It was bad enough.

Characters and incidents of those Village days often tumble through my mind. Fragments from the memory of a goofer, as the youthful Mr. Winchell might say.

The patrolman who would leave his beat every hour in order to play the drums for the dancers... Rosebud, the Shubert chorus boy... The taxi drivers with meters that jumped when you looked at them... Blind George, who played the piano and knew all the customers by their voices... The 14-year-old girl who picked up three or four "gentlemen friends" in a night and charged them $5 for a taxi ride around the block... Rudolph, the waiter, who once knocked a

prominent heavyweight flat on his back because the latter called him a thick-headed Dutchman... All these and a thousand more.

But there is one memory more poignant than the rest. And that concerns a boy with curly blonde hair and eyes of blue. His name was Freddie Jacks.

Of all the characters I have ever met, Freddie was the most complex. He would be meek and gentle as a flock of young lambs for days at a time. Suddenly he would fly into a rage and there was no one who could hold him.

When I knew him, Freddie was about 23 years of age. He had drifted into the Village some six months before. His sole possessions in this world were his boyish face, a ukulele and a voice similar to no other I have ever heard.

It was a strange sort of a voice. When he strummed his ukulele and sang softly, it was a kind of childish yodel that one might find in a Gus Edwards' act. But give him enough drinks and his voice would grow heavy. He would throw his ukulele on a table and sing out to the world. And his song would end in a discordant note as Freddie stood with eyes staring upward and hands beating upon his breast.

The boy was a bum. I often suspected that he was on the hop but I was never certain. If he was, that was his business. I never asked him.

He had come from California. That much he admitted. But beyond that, he admitted very little. He had played in vaudeville around the country and was forever attempting to break into an act in New York. He never made the grade, however for when bookings were arranged for him, he failed to show up.

He billed himself as "Strolling Freddie" and sang in any dive that would admit him. Patrons tossed him coins and he would live on these. The Village gals, too, took quite a fancy to him and he never lacked for food.

Aside from women and liquor, then, Freddie had but one hobby. He could not play a piano yet he loved to strike chords upon one. Never when a place was crowded. Always when he was almost alone.

I still have a mental picture of Freddie at two o'clock in the morning just as the Red Head was being closed for the night. He would appear in the door, ukulele in hand and his eyes pleading.

"Please," he would cry, "can I play? Just for ten minutes. No more. Honestly."

Sometimes they would permit him to play. More often they would throw him out. When they allowed him to play, they did it only for the laughs.

Freddie would stroll back to the piano. He would switch on the dim light. And there, sitting in semi-darkness, he would strike the weirdest chords I have ever heard. Sometimes soft. Sometimes harsh. Sometimes uncanny and chilling. And sometimes beautifully melodious.

As he sat there, his strange soul pouring forth in those eerie chords, the boys would stand in the rear and chuckle.

"Look at that dope," they would cry. "He calls that playing. Full of hop, all right. Funny isn't he?"

But somehow or other, I could never laugh.

SUDDENLY, after some eight months of this life in the Village, Freddie appeared in the Red Head one warm afternoon. He wore a hiker's outfit. On his back was a knapsack.

Under his left arm, where he always carried it, was his ukulele.

I looked up at him. And noticed that his eyes were strangely brilliant.

"Going away, Freddie?" I asked.

He nodded and drew me aside. Fishing into his pocket, he drew forth a letter.

"You're the only guy around here that understands me at all, Mark," he murmured. "I'm going away today. I want you to read this letter just to show you that I could be something better if I wanted to."

The letter was postmarked San Francisco. It was from his mother.

I read it hastily as he stepped back and watched me. It was nothing more than the letter of a mother to her boy who has strayed. Nothing new about it. Yet it will never grow old.

"Father has purchased that paper," was the way it read, "and he will be happy to give you work. Won't you come back to us, Freddie? We don't know what you're doing. We so seldom hear from you. You're so far away.

"Please, Freddie, come back to us. Everything is waiting for you. Father isn't angry any more. He'll be happy to see you again.. Please, Freddie. Please."

And so it read on and on for pages and pages. I handed it back to him.

"Going back, Freddie?" I asked.

He nodded. His eyes were very brilliant now.

"Today," he responded. "Right now. Leaving this lousy town to you and the other people who belong here.

"You see, Mark, I've been a bum by choice and not by birth. I had everything a kid could ask for out on the coast, but it wasn't enough for me. I skipped from home when I was fourteen and I've been away most of the time."

I looked into the boy's eyes. It was the first time he had ever opened up to me or anyone else in the Village, for that matter. If only his eyes hadn't been so brilliant

"I want to be decent. But there's something inside of me that makes me feel so strange. I get those uncontrollable fits of temper and I don't know what I'm doing. I want to be an actor a singer a great painter. I want to be so many things. But I seem to be getting nowhere.

"So I'm going back home to start again. Maybe it'll work out. Maybe it won't. But it's worth a try. Isn't it?"

I clasped his hand.

"Sure, it is kid," I responded warmly. "But how are you going to get back? How will you live?"

He smiled and tapped his ukulele.

"I'm hiking it back with this as my pal," he cried. "I'm sleeping under the stars and I'm singing and playing for my meals. I'll get there, never fear.

"I'm gonna straighten out as soon as I get to Frisco. If I make that town, I'll be okay. Wish me luck, old kid. I'll see you sometime again."

We shook hands once more. Warmly. Heartily. He turned his back, stepped through the door and vanished.

A SHORT while ago, a gentleman presented his card at my office. I glanced at it and had him admitted at once. It was Mr. Carl Winston, brother of the Edward Winston who once owned the Red Head in the Village.

Carl had just returned from California. He had been out there several years. He sat down with me and we chatted.

As we smilingly discussed old times, I suddenly thought again of Freddie Jacks.

"Carl," I cried, " you remember Freddie Jacks?"

Mr. Winston nodded.

"Well," I asked, " whatever became of him? Did you meet him on the coast? Has he straightened out?"

Mr. Winston looked at me in amazement.

"Surely you heard about him?" he cried. " You didn't? Why, I thought all the boys knew about it.

"He was hiking back to Frisco and he was only about fifty miles from that city. Guess he must have drunk too much because he got into a barroom fight with a Mexican. From all accounts, he flew into one of his rages, grabbed his ukulele, said he wouldn't need it any more and broke it over the Mexican's head.

"Freddie must have jumped on his head after hitting him because the Mex died the next day. Five months later they hung him for murder in San Francisco.

"Sure, Freddie's dead as hell. Well, he always was a funny guy, anyhow."

YES. He always was a funny guy anyhow....

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7: The Golden Honeymoon

Ring Lardner

1885–1933

Cosmopolitan, July 1922

MOTHER SAYS THAT when I start talking I never know when to stop. But I tell her the only time I get a chance is when she ain't around, so I have to make the most of it. I guess the fact is neither one of us would be welcome in a Quaker meeting, but as I tell Mother, what did God give us tongues for if He didn't want we should use them? Only she says He didn't give them to us to say the same thing over and over again, like I do, and repeat myself. But I say:

"Well, Mother," I say, "when people is like you and I and been married fifty years, do you expect everything I say will be something you ain't heard me say before? But it may be new to others, as they ain't nobody else lived with me as long as you have."

So she says:

"You can bet they ain't, as they couldn't nobody else stand you that long."

"Well," I tell her, "you look pretty healthy."

"Maybe I do," she will say, "but I looked even healthier before I married you."

You can't get ahead of Mother.

Yes, sir, we was married just fifty years ago the seventeenth day of last December and my daughter and son-in-law was over from Trenton to help us celebrate the Golden Wedding. My son-in-law is John H. Kramer, the real estate man. He made $12,000 one year and is pretty well thought of around Trenton; a good, steady, hard worker. The Rotarians was after him a long time to join, but he kept telling them his home was his club. But Edie finally made him join. That's my daughter.

Well, anyway, they come over to help us celebrate the Golden Wedding and it was pretty crimpy weather and the furnace don't seem to heat up no more like it used to and Mother made the remark that she hoped this winter wouldn't be as cold as the last, referring to the winter previous. So Edie said if she was us, and nothing to keep us home, she certainly wouldn't spend no more winters up here and why didn't we just shut off the water and close up the house and go down to Tampa, Florida? You know we was there four winters ago and staid five weeks, but it cost us over three hundred and fifty dollars for hotel bill alone. So Mother said we wasn't going no place to be robbed. So my son-in-law spoke up and said that Tampa wasn't the only place in the South, and besides we didn't have to stop at no high price hotel but could rent us a couple rooms and board out somewheres, and he had heard that St. Petersburg, Florida, was the spot and if we said the word he would write down there and make inquiries.

Well, to make a long story short, we decided to do it and Edie said it would be our Golden Honeymoon and for a present my son-in-law paid the difference between a section and a compartment so as we could have a compartment and have more privatecy. In a compartment you have an upper and lower berth just like the regular sleeper, but it is a shut in room by itself and got a wash bowl. The car we went in was all compartments and no regular berths at all. It was all compartments.

We went to Trenton the night before and staid at my daughter and son-in-law and we left Trenton the next afternoon at 3:23 p.m.

This was the twelfth day of January. Mother set facing the front of the train, as it makes her giddy to ride backwards. I set facing her, which does not affect me. We reached North Philadelphia at 4:03 p.m. and we reached West Philadelphia at 4:14, but did not go into Broad Street. We reached Baltimore at 6:30 and Washington, D.C., at 7:25. Our train laid over in Washington two hours till another train come along to pick us up and I got out and strolled up the platform and into the Union Station. When I come back, our car had been switched on to another track, but I remembered the name of it, the La Belle, as I had once visited my aunt out in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, where there was a lake of that name, so I had no difficulty in getting located. But Mother had nearly fretted herself sick for fear I would be left.

"Well," I said, "I would of followed you on the next train."

"You could of," said Mother, and she pointed out that she had the money.

"Well," I said, "we are in Washington and I could of borrowed from the United States Treasury. I would of pretended I was an Englishman."

Mother caught the point and laughed heartily.

Our train pulled out of Washington at 9:40 p.m. and Mother and I turned in early, I taking the upper. During the night we passed through the green fields of old Virginia, though it was too dark to tell if they was green or what color. When we got up in the morning, we was at Fayetteville, North Carolina. We had breakfast in the dining car and after breakfast I got in conversation with the man in the next compartment to ours. He was from Lebanon, New Hampshire, and a man about eighty years of age. His wife was with him, and two unmarried daughters and I made the remark that I should think the four of them would be crowded in one compartment, but he said they had made the trip every winter for fifteen years and knowed how to keep out of each other's way. He said they was bound for Tarpon Springs.

We reached Charleston, South Carolina, at 12:50 p.m. and arrived at Savannah, Georgia, at 4:20. We reached Jacksonville, Florida, at 8:45 p.m. and had an hour and a quarter to lay over there, but Mother made a fuss about me getting off the train, so we had the darky make up our berths and retired before we left Jacksonville. I didn't sleep good as the train done a lot of hemming and

hawing, and Mother never sleeps good on a train as she says she is always worrying that I will fall out. She says she would rather have the upper herself, as then she would not have to worry about me, but I tell her I can't take the risk of having it get out that I allowed my wife to sleep in an upper berth. It would make talk.

We was up in the morning in time to see our friends from New Hampshire get off at Tarpon Springs, which we reached at 6:53 a.m.

Several of our fellow passengers got off at Clearwater and some at Belleair, where the train backs right up to the door of the mammoth hotel. Belleair is the winter headquarters for the golf dudes and everybody that got off there had their bag of sticks, as many as ten and twelve in a bag. Women and all. When I was a young man we called it shinny and only needed one club to play with and about one game of it would of been a-plenty for some of these dudes, the way we played it.

The train pulled into St. Petersburg at 8:20 and when we got off the train you would think they was a riot, what with all the darkies barking for the different hotels.

I said to Mother, I said:

"It is a good thing we have got a place picked out to go to and don't have to choose a hotel, as it would be hard to choose amongst them if every one of them is the best."

She laughed.

We found a jitney and I give him the address of the room my son-in-law had got for us and soon we was there and introduced ourselves to the lady that owns the house, a young widow about forty-eight years of age. She showed us our room, which was light and airy with a comfortable bed and bureau and washstand. It was twelve dollars a week, but the location was good, only three blocks from Williams Park.

St. Pete is what folks calls the town, though they also call it the Sunshine City, as they claim they's no other place in the country where they's fewer days when Old Sol don't smile down on Mother Earth, and one of the newspapers gives away all their copies free every day when the sun don't shine. They claim to of only give them away some sixty-odd times in the last eleven years. Another nickname they have got for the town is "the Poor Man's Palm Beach," but I guess they's men that comes there that could borrow as much from the bank as some of the Willie boys over to the other Palm Beach.

During our stay we paid a visit to the Lewis Tent City, which is the headquarters for the Tin Can Tourists. But maybe you ain't heard about them. Well, they are an organization that takes their vacation trips by auto and carries everything with them. That is, they bring along their tents to sleep in and cook in

and they don't patronize no hotels or cafeterias, but they have got to be bona fide auto campers or they can't belong to the organization.

They tell me they's over 200,000 members to it and they call themselves the Tin Canners on account of most of their food being put up in tin cans. One couple we seen in the Tent City was a couple from Brady, Texas, named Mr. and Mrs. Pence, which the old man is over eighty years of age and they had come in their auto all the way from home, a distance of 1,641 miles. They took five weeks for the trip, Mr. Pence driving the entire distance.

The Tin Canners hails from every State in the Union and in the summer time they visit places like New England and the Great Lakes region, but in the winter the most of them comes to Florida and scatters all over the State. While we was down there, they was a national convention of them at Gainesville, Florida, and they elected a Fredonia, New York, man as their president. His title is Royal Tin Can Opener of the World. They have got a song wrote up which everybody has got to learn it before they are a member:

The tin can forever! Hurrah, boys! Hurrah!
Up with the tin can! Down with the foe!
We will rally round the campfire, we'll rally once again,
Shouting, "We auto camp forever!"

That is something like it. And the members has also got to have a tin can fastened on to the front of their machine.

I asked Mother how she would like to travel around that way and she said:

"Fine, but not with an old rattle brain like you driving."

"Well," I said, "I am eight years younger than this Mr. Pence who drove here from Texas."

"Yes," she said, "but he is old enough to not be skittish."

You can't get ahead of Mother.

Well, one of the first things we done in St. Petersburg was to go to the Chamber of Commerce and register our names and where we was from as they's great rivalry amongst the different States in regards to the number of their citizens visiting in town and of course our little State don't stand much of a show, but still every little bit helps, as the fella says. All and all, the man told us, they was eleven thousand names registered, Ohio leading with some fifteen hundred-odd and New York State next with twelve hundred. Then come Michigan, Pennsylvania and so on down, with one man each from Cuba and Nevada.

The first night we was there, they was a meeting of the New York-New Jersey Society at the Congregational Church and a man from Ogdensburg, New York State, made the talk. His subject was Rainbow Chasing. He is a Rotarian and a very convicting speaker, though I forget his name.

Our first business, of course, was to find a place to eat and after trying several places we run on to a cafeteria on Central Avenue that suited us up and down. We eat pretty near all our meals there and it averaged about two dollars per day for the two of us, but the food was well cooked and everything nice and clean. A man don't mind paying the price if things is clean and well cooked.

On the third day of February, which is Mother's birthday, we spread ourselves and eat supper at the Poinsettia Hotel and they charged us seventy-five cents for a sirloin steak that wasn't hardly big enough for one.

I said to Mother: "Well," I said, "I guess it's a good thing every day ain't your birthday or we would be in the poorhouse."

"No," says Mother, "because if every day was my birthday, I would be old enough by this time to of been in my grave long ago."

You can't get ahead of Mother.

In the hotel they had a card-room where they was several men and ladies playing five hundred and this new fangled whist bridge. We also seen a place where they was dancing, so I asked Mother would she like to trip the light fantastic too and she said no, she was too old to squirm like you have got to do now days. We watched some of the young folks at it awhile till Mother got disgusted and said we would have to see a good movie to take the taste out of our mouth. Mother is a great movie heroyne and we go twice a week here at home.

But I want to tell you about the Park. The second day we was there we visited the Park, which is a good deal like the one in Tampa, only bigger, and they's more fun goes on here every day than you could shake a stick at. In the middle they's a big bandstand and chairs for the folks to set and listen to the concerts, which they give you music for all tastes, from Dixie up to classical pieces like Hearts and Flowers.

Then all around they's places marked off for different sports and games—chess and checkers and dominoes for folks that enjoys those kind of games, and roque and horse-shoes for the nimbler ones. I used to pitch a pretty fair shoe myself, but ain't done much of it in the last twenty years.

Well, anyway, we bought a membership ticket in the club which costs one dollar for the season, and they tell me that up to a couple years ago it was fifty cents, but they had to raise it to keep out the riff-raff.

Well, Mother and I put in a great day watching the pitchers and she wanted I should get in the game, but I told her I was all out of practice and would make a fool of myself, though I seen several men pitching who I guess I could take their measure without no practice. However, they was some good pitchers, too, and one boy from Akron, Ohio, who could certainly throw a pretty shoe. They told me it looked like he would win them championship of the United States in the February tournament. We come away a few days before they held that and I

never did hear if he win. I forget his name, but he was a clean cut young fella and he has got a brother in Cleveland that's a Rotarian.

Well, we just stood around and watched the different games for two or three days and finally I set down in a checker game with a man named Weaver from Danville, Illinois. He was a pretty fair checker player, but he wasn't no match for me, and I hope that don't sound like bragging. But I always could hold my own on a checker-board and the folks around here will tell you the same thing. I played with this Weaver pretty near all morning for two or three mornings and he beat me one game and the only other time it looked like he had a chance, the noon whistle blowed and we had to quit and go to dinner.

While I was playing checkers, Mother would set and listen to the band, as she loves music, classical or no matter what kind, but anyway she was setting there one day and between selections the woman next to her opened up a conversation. She was a woman about Mother's own age, seventy or seventy-one, and finally she asked Mother's name and Mother told her her name and where she was from and Mother asked her the same question, and who do you think the woman was?

Well, sir, it was the wife of Frank M. Hartsell, the man who was engaged to Mother till I stepped in and cut him out, fifty-two years ago!

Yes, sir!

You can imagine Mother's surprise! And Mrs. Hartsell was surprised, too, when Mother told her she had once been friends with her husband, though Mother didn't say how close friends they had been, or that Mother and I was the cause of Hartsell going out West. But that's what we was. Hartsell left his town a month after the engagement was broke off and ain't never been back since. He had went out to Michigan and become a veterinary, and that is where he had settled down, in Hillsdale, Michigan, and finally married his wife.

Well, Mother screwed up her courage to ask if Frank was still living and Mrs. Hartsell took her over to where they was pitching horse-shoes and there was old Frank, waiting his turn. And he knowed Mother as soon as he seen her, though it was over fifty years. He said he knowed her by her eyes.

"Why, it's Lucy Frost!" he says, and he throwed down his shoes and quit the game.

Then they come over and hunted me up and I will confess I wouldn't of knowed him. Him and I is the same age to the month, but he seems to show it more, some way. He is balder for one thing. And his beard is all white, where mine has still got a streak of brown in it. The very first thing I said to him, I said:

"Well, Frank, that beard of yours makes me feel like I was back north. It looks like a regular blizzard."

"Well," he said, "I guess yourn would be just as white if you had it dry cleaned."

But Mother wouldn't stand that.

"Is that so!" she said to Frank. "Well, Charley ain't had no tobacco in his mouth for over ten years!"

And I ain't!

Well, I excused myself from the checker game and it was pretty close to noon, so we decided to all have dinner together and they was nothing for it only we must try their cafeteria on Third Avenue. It was a little more expensive than ours and not near as good, I thought. I and Mother had about the same dinner we had been having every day and our bill was $1.10. Frank's check was $1.20 for he and his wife. The same meal wouldn't of cost them more than a dollar at our place.

After dinner we made them come up to our house and we all set in the parlor, which the young woman had give us the use of to entertain company. We begun talking over old times and Mother said she was a-scared Mrs. Hartsell would find it tiresome listening to we three talk over old times, but as it turned out they wasn't much chance for nobody else to talk with Mrs. Hartsell in the company. I have heard lots of women that could go it, but Hartsell's wife takes the cake of all the women I ever seen. She told us the family history of everybody in the State of Michigan and bragged for a half hour about her son, who she said is in the drug business in Grand Rapids, and a Rotarian.

When I and Hartsell could get a word in edgeways we joked one another back and forth and I chafed him about being a horse doctor.

"Well, Frank," I said, "you look pretty prosperous, so I suppose they's been plenty of glanders around Hillsdale."

"Well," he said, "I've managed to make more than a fair living. But I've worked pretty hard."

"Yes," I said, "and I suppose you get called out all hours of the night to attend births and so on."

Mother made me shut up.

Well, I thought they wouldn't never go home and I and Mother was in misery trying to keep awake, as the both of us generally always takes a nap after dinner. Finally they went, after we had made an engagement to meet them in the Park the next morning, and Mrs. Hartsell also invited us to come to their place the next night and play five hundred. But she had forgot that they was a meeting of the Michigan Society that evening, so it was not till two evenings later that we had our first card game.

Hartsell and his wife lived in a house on Third Avenue North and had a private setting room besides their bedroom. Mrs. Hartsell couldn't quit talking about their private setting room like it was something wonderful. We played cards with them, with Mother and Hartsell partners against his wife and I. Mrs. Hartsell is a miserable card player and we certainly got the worst of it.

After the game she brought out a dish of oranges and we had to pretend it was just what we wanted, though oranges down there is like a young man's whiskers; you enjoy them at first, but they get to be a pesky nuisance.

We played cards again the next night at our place with the same partners and I and Mrs. Hartsell was beat again. Mother and Hartsell was full of compliments for each other on what a good team they made, but the both of them knowed well enough where the secret of their success laid. I guess all and all we must of played ten different evenings and they was only one night when Mrs. Hartsell and I come out ahead. And that one night wasn't no fault of hern.

When we had been down there about two weeks, we spent one evening as their guest in the Congregational Church, at a social give by the Michigan Society. A talk was made by a man named Bitting of Detroit, Michigan, on "How I Was Cured of Story Telling." He is a big man in the Rotarians and give a witty talk.

A woman named Mrs. Oxford rendered some selections which Mrs. Hartsell said was grand opera music, but whatever they was my daughter Edie could of give her cards and spades and not made such a hullaballoo about it neither.

Then they was a ventriloquist from Grand Rapids and a young woman about forty-five years of age that mimicked different kinds of birds. I whispered to Mother that they all sounded like a chicken, but she nudged me to shut up.

After the show we stopped in a drug store and I set up the refreshments and it was pretty close to ten o'clock before we finally turned in. Mother and I would of preferred tending the movies, but Mother said we mustn't offend Mrs. Hartsell, though I asked her had we came to Florida to enjoy ourselves or to just not offend an old chatter-box from Michigan.

I felt sorry for Hartsell one morning. The women folks both had an engagement down to the chiropodist's and I run across Hartsell in the Park and he foolishly offered to play me checkers.

It was him that suggested it, not me, and I guess he repented himself before we had played one game. But he was too stubborn to give up and set there while I beat him game after game and the worst part of it was that a crowd of folks had got in the habit of watching me play and there they all was, hooking on, and finally they seen what a fool Frank was making of himself, and they began to chafe him and pass remarks. Like one of them said: "Who ever told you you was a checker player!"

And: "You might maybe be good for tiddle-de-winks, but not checkers!"

I almost felt like letting him beat me a couple games. But the crowd would of knowed it was a put up job.

Well, the women folks joined us in the Park and I wasn't going to mention our little game, but Hartsell told about it himself and admitted he wasn't no match for me.

"Well," said Mrs. Hartsell, "checkers ain't much of a game anyway, is it?" She said: "It's more of a children's game, ain't it? At least, I know my boy's children used to play it a good deal."

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "It's a children's game the way your husband plays it, too."

Mother wanted to smooth things over, so she said: "Maybe they's other games where Frank can beat you."

"Yes," said Mrs. Hartsell, "and I bet he could beat you pitching horse-shoes."

"Well," I said, "I would give him a chance to try, only I ain't pitched a shoe in over sixteen years."

"Well," said Hartsell, "I ain't played checkers in twenty years."

"You ain't never played it," I said.

"Anyway," says Frank, "Lucy and I is your master at five hundred."

Well, I could of told him why that was, but had decency enough to hold my tongue.

It had got so now that he wanted to play cards every night and when I or Mother wanted to go to a movie, any one of us would have to pretend we had a headache and then trust to goodness that they wouldn't see us sneak into the theater. I don't mind playing cards when my partner keeps their mind on the game, but you take a woman like Hartsell's wife and how can they play cards when they have got to stop every couple seconds and brag about their son in Grand Rapids?

Well, the New York-New Jersey Society announced that they was goin' to give a social evening too and I said to Mother, I said: "Well, that is one evening when we will have an excuse not to play five hundred."

"Yes," she said, "but we will have to ask Frank and his wife to go to the social with us as they asked us to go to the Michigan social."

"Well," I said, "I had rather stay home than drag that chatterbox everywheres we go."

So Mother said: "You are getting too cranky. Maybe she does talk a little too much but she is good hearted. And Frank is always good company."

So I said: "I suppose if he is such good company you wished you had of married him."

Mother laughed and said I sounded like I was jealous. Jealous of a cow doctor!

Anyway we had to drag them along to the social and I will say that we give them a much better entertainment than they had given us.

Judge Lane of Paterson made a fine talk on business conditions and a Mrs. Newell of Westfield imitated birds, only you could really tell what they was the way she done it. Two young women from Red Bank sung a choral selection and

we clapped them back and they gave us "Home to Our Mountains," and Mother and Mrs. Hartsell both had tears in their eyes. And Hartsell, too.

Well, some way or another the chairman got wind that I was there and asked me to make a talk and I wasn't even going to get up, but Mother made me, so I got up and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said. "I didn't expect to be called on for a speech on an occasion like this or no other occasion as I do not set myself up as a speech maker, so will have to do the best I can, which I often say is the best anybody can do."

Then I told them the story about Pat and the motorcycle, using the brogue, and it seemed to tickle them and I told them one or two other stories, but altogether I wasn't on my feet more than twenty or twenty-five minutes and you ought to of heard the clapping and hollering when I set down. Even Mrs. Hartsell admitted that I am quite a speechifier and said if I ever went to Grand Rapids, Michigan, her son would make me talk to the Rotarians.

When it was over, Hartsell wanted we should go to their house and play cards, but his wife reminded him that it was after 9:30 p.m., rather a late hour to start a card game, but he had went crazy on the subject of cards, probably because he didn't have to play partners with his wife. Anyway, we got rid of them and went home to bed.

It was the next morning, when we met over to the Park, that Mrs. Hartsell made the remark that she wasn't getting no exercise so I suggested that why didn't she take part in the roque game.

She said she had not played a game of roque in twenty years, but if Mother would play she would play. Well, at first Mother wouldn't hear of it, but finally consented, more to please Mrs. Hartsell than anything else.

Well, they had a game with a Mrs. Ryan from Eagle, Nebraska, and a young Mrs. Morse from Rutland, Vermont, who Mother had met down to the chiropodist's. Well, Mother couldn't hit a flea and they all laughed at her and I couldn't help from laughing at her myself and finally she quit and said her back was too lame to stoop over. So they got another lady and kept on playing and soon Mrs. Hartsell was the one everybody was laughing at, as she had a long shot to hit the black ball, and as she made the effort her teeth fell out on to the court. I never seen a woman so flustered in my life. And I never heard so much laughing, only Mrs. Hartsell didn't join in and she was madder than a hornet and wouldn't play no more, so the game broke up.

Mrs. Hartsell went home without speaking to nobody, but Hartsell stayed around and finally he said to me, he said: "Well, I played you checkers the other day and you beat me bad and now what do you say if you and me play a game of horseshoes?"

I told him I hadn't pitched a shoe in sixteen years, but Mother said: "Go ahead and play. You used to be good at it and maybe it will come back to you."

Well, to make a long story short, I give in. I oughtn't to of never tried it, as I hadn't pitched a shoe in sixteen years, and I only done it to humor Hartsell.

Before we started, Mother patted me on the back and told me to do my best, so we started in and I seen right off that I was in for it, as I hadn't pitched a shoe in sixteen years and didn't have my distance. And besides, the plating had wore off the shoes so that they was points right where they stuck into my thumb and I hadn't throwed more than two or three times when my thumb was raw and it pretty near killed me to hang on to the shoe, let alone pitch it.

Well, Hartsell throws the awkwardest shoe I ever seen pitched and to see him pitch you wouldn't think he would ever come nowheres near, but he is also the luckiest pitcher I ever seen and he made some pitches where the shoe lit five and six feet short and then schoonered up and was a ringer. They's no use trying to beat that kind of luck.

They was a pretty fair size crowd watching us and four or five other ladies besides Mother, and it seems like, when Hartsell pitches, he has got to chew and it kept the ladies on the anxious seat as he don't seem to care which way he is facing when he leaves go.

You would think a man as old as him would of learnt more manners.

Well, to make a long story short, I was just beginning to get my distance when I had to give up on account of my thumb, which I showed it to Hartsell and he seen I couldn't go on, as it was raw and bleeding. Even if I could of stood it to go on myself, Mother wouldn't of allowed it after she seen my thumb. So anyway I quit and Hartsell said the score was nineteen to six, but I don't know what it was. Or don't care, neither.

Well, Mother and I went home and I said I hoped we was through with the Hartsells as I was sick and tired of them, but it seemed like she had promised we would go over to their house that evening for another game of their everlasting cards.

Well, my thumb was giving me considerable pain and I felt kind of out of sorts and I guess maybe I forgot myself, but anyway, when we was about through playing Hartsell made the remark that he wouldn't never lose a game of cards if he could always have Mother for a partner.

So I said: "Well, you had a chance fifty years ago to always have her for a partner, but you wasn't man enough to keep her."

I was sorry the minute I had said it and Hartsell didn't know what to say and for once his wife couldn't say nothing. Mother tried to smooth things over by making the remark that I must of had something stronger than tea or I wouldn't talk so silly. But Mrs. Hartsell had froze up like an iceberg and hardly said good night to us and I bet her and Frank put in a pleasant hour after we was gone.

As we was leaving, Mother said to him: "Never mind Charley's nonsense, Frank. He is just mad because you beat him all hollow pitching horseshoes and playing cards."

She said that to make up for my slip, but at the same time she certainly riled me. I tried to keep ahold of myself, but as soon as we was out of the house she had to open up the subject and begun to scold me for the break I had made.

Well, I wasn't in no mood to be scolded. So I said: "I guess he is such a wonderful pitcher and card player that you wished you had married him."

"Well," she said, "at least he ain't a baby to give up pitching because his thumb has got a few scratches."

"And how about you," I said, "making a fool of yourself on the roque court and then pretending your back is lame and you can't play no more!"

"Yes," she said, "but when you hurt your thumb I didn't laugh at you, and why did you laugh at me when I sprained my back?"

"Who could help from laughing!" I said.

"Well," she said, "Frank Hartsell didn't laugh."

"Well," I said, "why didn't you marry him?"

"Well," said Mother, "I almost wished I had!"

"And I wished so, too!" I said.

"I'll remember that!" said Mother, and that's the last word she said to me for two days.

We seen the Hartsells the next day in the Park and I was willing to apologize, but they just nodded to us. And a couple days later we heard they had left for Orlando, where they have got relatives.

I wished they had went there in the first place.

Mother and I made it up setting on a bench.

"Listen, Charley," she said. "This is our Golden Honeymoon and we don't want the whole thing spoilt with a silly old quarrel."

"Well," I said, "did you mean that about wishing you had married Hartsell?"

"Of course not," she said, "that is, if you didn't mean that you wished I had, too." So I said:

"I was just tired and all wrought up. I thank God you chose me instead of him as they's no other woman in the world who I could of lived with all these years."

"How about Mrs. Hartsell?" says Mother.

"Good gracious!" I said. "Imagine being married to a woman that plays five hundred like she does and drops her teeth on the roque court!"

"Well," said Mother, "it wouldn't be no worse than being married to a man that expectorates towards ladies and is such a fool in a checker game."

So I put my arm around her shoulder and she stroked my hand and I guess we got kind of spoony.

They was two days left of our stay in St. Petersburg and the next to the last day Mother introduced me to a Mrs. Kendall from Kingston, Rhode Island, who she had met at the chiropodist's.

Mrs. Kendall made us acquainted with her husband, who is in the grocery business. They have got two sons and five grandchildren and one great-grandchild. One of their sons lives in Providence and is way up in the Elks as well as a Rotarian.

We found them very congenial people and we played cards with them the last two nights we was there. They was both experts and I only wished we had met them sooner instead of running into the Hartsells. But the Kendalls will be there again next winter and we will see more of them, that is, if we decide to make the trip again.

We left the Sunshine City on the eleventh day of February, at 11 a.m. This give us a day trip through Florida and we seen all the country we had passed through at night on the way down.

We reached Jacksonville at 7 p.m. and pulled out of there at 8:10 p.m. We reached Fayetteville, North Carolina, at nine o'clock the following morning, and reached Washington, D.C., at 6:30 p.m., laying over there half an hour.

We reached Trenton at 11:01 p.m. and had wired ahead to my daughter and son-in-law and they met us at the train and we went to their house and they put us up for the night. John would of made us stay up all night, telling about our trip, but Edie said we must be tired and made us go to bed. That's my daughter.

The next day we took our train for home and arrived safe and sound, having been gone just one month and a day.

Here comes Mother, so I guess I better shut up.

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8: Reardon's Rhapsodies

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 15 May 1919

LAST week an old friend of mine burst out of France as if he was soda from a bottle and poured his enthusiasm over me.

"Glad to meet you, old fellow!" he cried. "Couldn't run across you anywhere in France. And we've been busy! I've been in twenty-nine hop-overs in five months."

I knew him at once; but it was when he said this that I remembered, also, his idiosyncrasies. One of the best fellows in the world, he likes to talk to an audience; and he does things worth talking about, too. It was just as well the hotels were open, because he obviously wanted something to mix with his soda.

"A tankard, please, miss," he said. "I've had twenty-nine hop-overs in five months."

He spoke as though he had forgotten to refresh himself between the acts, and had just arrived from the last exploit with a large thirst.

I forget what it was that caused the civilian to join in the conversation ; but it was a glorious opportunity.

"My dear sir," said Reardon, "I've been in twenty-nine hop-overs during the last five months"

The civilian was so impressed that he ordered drinks— twice. Then a friend of the civilian came in.

"My friend here, if I may call him so," said the First Citizen, "has just come over from France."

"Twenty-nine hop-overs in five months," said Reardon.

I thought he had done very well there and might like a new stage-setting for his masterpiece; so shortly I drew him away.

Reardon thought of a hostelry of his own, but had grown hazy about its location. At least he said he had; but, as he took the opportunity to tell the policeman about what had happened in France during the last five months, and then went his way without listening to the policeman's directions, I have some doubts.

The landlady evidently knew him.

"You said you were going to write," she remarked coldly.

"My dear lady, I've had twenty-nine hop-overs in the last five months," began Reardon; and was completely forgiven. Subsequently he gave the tally to different people— until I lost count. I was not annoyed for a long time. I love my friends' peculiarities because I like to laugh at them. But when he bumped into a

set of statuary and apologised by saying that he had only just come from France, and had had twenty-nine hop-overs in five months, I got tired.

He tried to be good. We visited a tavern which has historical associations, and I was quite pleased with him. A board mentioning some of the associations caught his eye.

"Boswell and Johnson used to dine here," he said. "It's very interesting to come to these old places."

I liked this.

"I wonder," he said, musingly— "I wonder what these old beggars would think of twenty-nine hop-overs in five months!"

I firmly took him to his train. And, anyway, the hotels were closing. Reardon had a little trouble over his change.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, it's my fault— it's all right." he said, hastily; and turned apologetically to the girl ticket-seller. "You see, I've been used to counting in francs. I've just come from France; and I've been in—"

He was inclined to resent the push, until I explained that the crowd was shoving behind me.

His compartment had other occupants, mostly women ; but he secured a corner seat.

"Well, good-bye, old man." he said. "It was good to have met you. When a man—"

"Yes, I know," I said quickly. "You needn't mention it."

"Of course you do!" he said, heartily.

"You know what it is like in France; but you have never—"

"I haven't!" I chipped in. "But all the same. I can understand what it's been like."

"Twenty—" he began.

"No; sixteen minutes to," I interrupted.

He sighed in a baffled manner, and became grave.

"You remember that grey-haired lady we passed?" he said sentimentally. "She reminded me of my mother."

"We all think of home sometimes," I said sympathetically.

"Yes," he mused. "I wonder what she would think of me being in twenty-nine hop-overs in five months."

The train steamed out. But I fancied I detected a smile of triumph in a corner of it.

9: The Spectral Mortgage

Frank R. Stockton

1834-1902

Collected in: *The Lady, or the Tiger*? 1911

TOWARD the close of a beautiful afternoon in early summer I stood on the piazza of the spacious country-house which was my home. I had just dined, and I gazed with a peculiar comfort and delight upon the wide-spreading lawn and the orchards and groves beyond; and then, walking to the other end of the piazza, I looked out toward the broad pastures, from which a fine drove of cattle were leisurely coming home to be milked, and toward the fields of grain, whose green was beginning already to be touched with yellow. Involuntarily (for, on principle, I was opposed to such feelings) a pleasant sense of possession came over me. It could not be long before all this would virtually be mine.

About two years before, I had married the niece of John Hinckman, the owner of this fine estate. He was very old, and could not be expected to survive much longer, and had willed the property, without reserve, to my wife. This, in brief, was the cause of my present sense of prospective possession; and although, as I said, I was principled against the voluntary encouragement of such a sentiment, I could not blame myself if the feeling occasionally arose within me. I had not married my wife for her uncle's money. Indeed, we had both expected that the marriage would result in her being entirely disinherited. His niece was John Hinckman's housekeeper and sole prop and comfort, and if she left him for me she expected no kindness at his hands. But she had not left him. To our surprise, her uncle invited us to live with him, and our relations with him became more and more amicable and pleasant, and Mr. Hinckman had, of late, frequently expressed to me his great satisfaction that I had proved to be a man after his own heart; that I took an interest in flocks and herds and crops; that I showed a talent for such pursuits; and that I would continue to give, when he was gone, the same care and attention to the place which it had been so long his greatest pleasure to bestow. He was old and ill now, and tired of it all; and the fact that I had not proved to be, as he had formerly supposed me, a mere city gentleman, was a great comfort to his declining days.

We were deeply grieved to think that the old man must soon die. We would gladly have kept him with us for years; but, if he must go, it was pleasant to know that he and ourselves were so well satisfied with the arrangements that had been made. Think me not cold and heartless, high-minded reader. For a few moments put yourself in my place.

But had you, at that time, put yourself in my place on that pleasant piazza, I do not believe you would have cared to stay there long; for, as I stood gazing over the fields, I felt a touch upon my shoulder. I cannot say that I was actually

touched, but I experienced a feeling which indicated that the individual who had apparently touched me would have done so had he been able. I instantly turned, and saw, standing beside me, a tall figure in the uniform of a Russian officer. I started back, but made no sound. I knew what the figure was. It was a spectre— a veritable ghost.

Some years before this place had been haunted. I knew this well, for I had seen the ghost myself. But before my marriage the spectre had disappeared, and had not been seen since; and I must admit that my satisfaction, when thinking of this estate, without mortgage or incumbrance, was much increased by the thought that even the ghost, who used to haunt the house, had now departed.

But here he was again. Although in different form and guise, I knew him. It was the same ghost.

"Do you remember me?" said the figure.

"Yes," I answered: "I remember you in the form in which you appeared to me some time ago. Although your aspect is entirely changed, I feel you to be the same ghost that I have met before."

"You are right," said the spectre. "I am glad to see you looking so well, and apparently happy. But John Hinckman, | understand, is in a very low state of health."

"Yes," I said: "he is very old and ill. But I hope," I continued, as a cloud of anxiety began to rise within me, " that his expected decease has no connection with any prospects or plans of your own."

"No," said the ghost. "I am perfectly satisfied with my present position. I am off duty during the day; and the difference in time between this country and Russia gives me opportunities of being here in your early evening, and of visiting scenes and localities which are very familiar and agreeable to me."

"Which fact, perhaps, you had counted upon when you first put this uniform on,"' I remarked.

The ghost smiled.

"I must admit, however," he said, " that I am seeking this position for a friend of mine, and I have reason to believe that he will obtain it."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Is it possible that this house is to be haunted by a ghost as soon as the old gentleman expires? Why should this family be tormented in such a horrible way? Everybody who dies does not have a ghost walking about his house."

"Oh, no!" said the spectre. " There are thousands of positions of the kind which are never applied for; but the ghostship here is a very desirable one, and there are many applicants for it. I think you will like my friend, if he gets it."'

"Like him!" I groaned.

The idea was horrible to me.

The ghost evidently perceived how deeply I was affected by what he had said, for there was a compassionate expression on his countenance. As I looked at him an idea struck me. If I were to have any ghost at all about the house, I would prefer this one. Could there be such things as duplex ghostships? Since it was day here when it was night in Russia, why could not this spectre serve in both places? It was common enough for a person to fill two situations. The notion seemed feasible to me, and I broached it.

"Thank you," said the ghost. "But the matter cannot be arranged in that way. Night and day are not suitably divided between here and Russia; and, besides, it is necessary for the incumbent of this place to be on duty at all hours. You remember that I came to you by day as well as at night?"

Oh, yes! I remembered that. It was additionally unfortunate that the ghostship here should not be one of the limited kind.

"Why is it," I asked, "that a man's own spirit does not attend to these matters? I always thought that was the way the thing was managed."

The ghost shook his head.

"Consider for a moment," here plied, "what chance a man's own spirit, without experience and without influence, would have in a crowd of importunate applicants, versed in all the arts, and backed by the influence necessary in such a contest. Of course there are cases in which a person becomes his own ghost; but this is because the position is undesirable, and there is no competition."

"And this new-comer," I exclaimed, in much trouble, " will he take the form of Mr. Hinckman? If my wife should see such an apparition it would kill her."

"The ghost who will haunt this place," said my companion, "will not appear in the form of John Hinckman. I am glad that is so, if it will please you; for you are the only man with whom I have ever held such unrestrained and pleasant intercourse. Good-by."

And with these words no figure of a Russian officer stood before me.

For some minutes I remained motionless, with downcast eyes, a very different man from the one who had just gazed out with such delight over the beautiful landscape. A shadow, not that of night, had fallen over every thing. This fine estate was not to come to us clear and unencumbered, as we thought. It was to be saddled with a horrible lien, a spectral mortgage.

Madeline had gone up stairs with Pegram. Pegram was our baby. I disliked his appellation with all my heart; but Pegram was a family name on Madeline's side of the house, and she insisted that our babe should bear it. Madeline was very much wrapped up in Pegram, often I thought too much so; for there were many times when I should have been very glad of my wife's society, but was obliged to do without it because she was entirely occupied with Pegram. To be sure, my wife's sister was with us, and there was a child's nurse; but, for all that,

Madeline was so completely Pegramized, that a great many of the hours which I, in my anticipations of matrimonial felicity, had imagined would be passed in the company of my wife, were spent alone, or with the old gentleman, or Belle.

Belle was a fine girl; to me not so charming and attractive as her sister, but perhaps equally so to some other persons, certainly to one. This was Will Crenshaw, an old school-fellow of mine, then a civil engineer, in South America. Will was the declared suitor of Belle, although she had never formally accepted him; but Madeline and myself both strongly favored the match, and felt very anxious that she should do so, and indeed were quite certain that when Will should return every thing would be made all right. The young engineer was a capital fellow, had excellent prospects, and was my best friend. It was our plan that after their marriage the youthful couple should live with us. This, of course, would be delightful to both Belle and her sister, and I could desire no better companion than Will. He was not to go to distant countries any more, and who could imagine a pleasanter home than ours would be.

And now here was this dreadful prospect of a household ghost!

A week or so passed by, and John Hinckman was no more. Every thing was done for him that respect and affection could dictate, and no one mourned his death more heartily than I. If I could have had my way he would have lived as long as I, myself, remained upon this earth.

When every thing about the house had settled down into its accustomed quiet, I began to look out for the coming of the expected ghost. I felt sure that I would be the one to whom he would make his appearance, and with my regret and annoyance at his expected coming was mingled a feeling of curiosity to know in what form he would appear. He was not to come as John Hinckman—that was the only bit of comfort in the whole affair.

But several weeks passed, and I saw no ghost; and I began to think that perhaps the aversion I had shown to having such an inmate of my household had had its effect, and I was to be spared the infliction. And now another subject occupied my thoughts. It was summer, the afternoons were pleasant, and on one of them l asked Belle to take a walk with me. I would have preferred Madeline, but she had excused herself as she was very busy making what I presumed to be an altar cloth for Pegram. Itturned out to be an afghan for his baby carriage, but the effect was the same: she could not go. When I could not have Madeline I liked very well to walk with Belle. She was a pleasant girl, and in these walks I always talked to her of Crenshaw. My desire that she should marry my friend grew stronger daily. But this afternoon Belle hesitated, and looked a little confused.

"I am not sure that I shall walk to-day."

"But you have your hat on," I urged: "I supposed you had made ready for a walk."

"No," said she: "I thought I would go somewhere with my book."

"You haven't a book," I said, looking at her hands, one of which held a parasol.

"You are dreadfully exact," she replied, with a little laugh: "I am going into the library to get one."

And away she ran.

There was something about this I did not like. I firmly believed she had come down stairs prepared to take a walk. But she 'did not want me; that was evident enough. I went off for a long walk, and when I returned supper was ready, but Belle had not appeared.

"She has gone off somewhere with a book,"' I said. "I'll go and look for her."

I walked down to the bosky grove at the foot of the sawn, and passed through it without seeing any signs of Belle. Soon, however, I caught sight of her light dress in an open space a little distance beyond me. Stepping forward a few paces I had a full view of her, and my astonishment can be imagined when I saw that she was standing in the shade of a tree talking to a young man. His back was turned toward me, but I could see from his figure and general air that he was young. His hat was a little on one side, in his hand he carried a short whip, and he wore a pair of riding-boots. He and Belle were engaged in very earnest conversation, and did not perceive me. I was not only surprised but shocked at the sight. I was quite certain Belle had come here to meet this young man, who, to me, was a total stranger. I did not wish Belle to know that I had seen her with him; and so I stepped back out of their sight, and began to call her. It was not long before I saw her coming toward me, and, as I expected, alone.

"Indeed," she cried, looking at her watch, "I did not know it was so late."

"Have you had a pleasant time with your book?" I asked, as we walked homeward.

"I wasn't reading all the time," she answered.

I asked her no more questions. It was not for me to begin an inquisition into this matter. But that night I told Madeline all about it. The news troubled her much, and like myself she was greatly grieved at Belle's evident desire to deceive us. When there was a necessity for it my wife could completely de-Pegramize herself, and enter with quick and judicious action into the affairs of others.

"I will go with her to-morrow," she said. "If this person comes, I do not intend that she shall meet him alone."

The next afternoon Belle started out again with her book; but she had gone but a few steps when she was joined by Madeline, with hat and parasol, and together they walked into the bosky grove. They returned in very good time for supper; and as we went in to that meal, Madeline whispered to me:

"There was nobody there."

"And did she say nothing to you of the young man with whom she was talking yesterday?" I asked, when We were alone some hours later.

"Not a word,"' she said, "though I gave her every opportunity. I wonder if you could have been mistaken."

"I am sure I was not," I replied. "I saw the man as plainly as I see you."

"Then Belle is treating us very badly," she said. "If she desires the company of young men let her say so, and we will invite them to the house."

I did not altogether agree with this latter remark. I did not care to have Belle know young men. I wanted her to marry Will Crenshaw, and be done with it. But we both agreed not to speak to the young lady on the subject. It was hot for us to pry into her secrets, and if any thing was to be said she should say it.

Every afternoon Belle went away, as before, with her book; but we did not accompany her, nor allude to her newly acquired love for solitary walks and studies. One afternoon we had callers, and she could not go. That night, after I had gone to sleep, Madeline awoke me with a little shake.

"Listen," she whispered. "Whom is Belle talking to?"

The night was warm, and all our doors and windows were open. Belle's chamber was not far from ours; and we could distinctly hear her speaking in a low tone. She was evidently holding a conversation with some one whose voice we could not hear.

"I'll go in," said Madeline, rising, "and see about this."

"No, no," I whispered. " She is talking to someone outside. Let me go down and speak to him."

I slipped on some clothes and stole quietly down the stairs. I unfastened the back door and went round to the side on which Belle's window opened. No sooner had I reached the corner than I saw, directly under the window, and looking upward, his hat cocked a good deal on one side, and his riding-whip in his hand, the jaunty young fellow with whom I had seen Belle talking.

"Hello!" I cried, and rushed toward him. At the sound of my voice he turned to me, and I saw his face distinctly. He was young and handsome. There was a sort of half laugh on his countenance, as if he had just been saying something very witty. But he did not wait to finish his remark or to speak to me. There was a large evergreen near him; and, stepping quickly behinu it, he was lost to my view. I ran around the bush, but could see nothing of him. There was a good deal of shrubbery hereabouts, and he was easily able to get away unobserved. I continued the search for about ten minutes, and then, quite sure that the fellow had got away, I returned to the house. Madeline had lighted a lamp, and was calling down-stairs to ask if I had found the man; some of the servants were up, and anxious to know what had happened; Pegram was crying; but in Belle's room all was quiet. Madeline looked in at the open door, and saw her lying

quietly in her bed. No word was spoken; and my wife returned to our room, where we discussed the affair for a long time.

In the morning I determined to give Belle a chance to speak, and at the breakfast-table I said to her:

"I suppose you heard the disturbance last night?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "Did you catch the man?"

"No," I answered, with considerable irritation, "but wish I had."

"What would you have done if you had caught him?" she asked, as with unusual slowness and deliberation she poured some cream upon her oat-meal.

"Done!" I exclaimed, "I don't know what I would have done. But one thing is certain, I would have made him understand that I would have no strangers prowling around my house at night."

Belle colored a little at the last part of this remark; but she made no answer, and the subject was dropped.

This conversation greatly pained both Madeline and myself. It made it quite clear to us that Belle was aware that we knew of her acquaintance with this young man, and that she still determined to say nothing to us, either in the way of confidence or excuse. She had treated us badly, and we could not help showing it. On her side Belle was very quiet, and entirely different from the gay girl she had been some time before.

I urged Madeline to go to Belle and speak to her as a sister, but she declined. "No," she said: "I know Belle's spirit, and there would be trouble. If there is to be a quarrel I shall not begin it."'

I was determined to end this unpleasant feeling, which, to me, was almost as bad as a quarrel. If the thing were possible I would put an end to the young man's visits. I could never have the same opinion of Belle I had had before; but if this impudent fellow could be kept away, and Will Crenshaw should come back and attend to his business as an earnest suitor ought, all might yet be well.

And now, strange to say, I began to long for the ghost, whose coming had been promised. I had been considering what means I should take to keep Belle's clandestine visitor away, and had found the question rather a difficult one to settle. I could not shoot the man, and it would indeed be difficult to prevent the meeting of two young persons. over whom I had no actual control. But I happened to think that if I could get the aid of the expected ghost the matter would be easy. If it should be as accommodating and obliging as the one who had haunted the house before, it would readily agree to forward the fortunes of the family by assisting in breaking up this unfortunate connection. If it would consent to be present at their interviews the affair was settled. I knew from personal experience that love-making in the presence of a ghost was extremely unpleasant, and in this case I believed it would be impossible.

Every night, after the rest of the household had gone to bed, I wandered about the grounds, examining the porches and the balconies, looking up to the chim- neys and the ornameats on top of the house, hoping to see that phantom, whose coming I had, a short time before, anticipated with such dissatisfaction and repugnance. If I could even again meet the one who was now serving in Russia, I thought it would answer my purpose as well.

On the third or fourth night after I had begun my nocturnal rounds, I encountered, on a path not very far from the house, the young fellow who had given us so much trouble. My indignation at his impudent reappearance knew no bounds. The moon was somewhat obscured by fleecy clouds; but I could see that he wore the same jaunty air, his hat was cocked a little more on one side, he stood with his feet quite wide apart, and in his hands, clasped behind him, he held his riding-whip. I stepped quickly toward him.

"Well, sir!" I exclaimed.

He did not seem at all startled.

"How d'ye do? " he said, with a little nod.

"How dare you, sir," I cried, "intrude yourself on my premises? This is the second time I have found you here, and now I want you to understand that you are to get away from here just as fast as you can; and if you are ever caught again anywhere on this estate, I'll have you treated as a trespasser."

"Indeed," said he, "I would be sorry to put you to so much trouble. And now let me say that I have tried to keep out of your way, but since you have proved so determined to make my acquaintance I thought I might come forward and do the sociable."

"None of your impertinence," I cried. "What brings you here, anyway?"

"Well," said he, with a little laugh, " if you want to know, I don't mind telling you I came to see Miss Belle."

"You confounded rascal!" I cried, raising my heavy stick. "Get out of my sight, or I will break your head!"

"All right," said he, "break away!"

And drawing himself up, he gave his right boot a slap with his whip.

The whip went entirely through both legs! It was the ghost!

Utterly astounded I started back, and sat down upon a raised flower-bed, against which I had stumbled. I had no strength, nor power to speak. I had seen a ghost before, but I was entirely overcome by this amazing development.

"And now I suppose you know who I am," said the spectre, approaching, and standing in front of me. "The one who was here before told me that your lady didn't fancy ghosts, and that I had better keep out of sight of both of you; but he didn't say any thing about Miss Belle: and by George! sir, it wouldn't have mattered if he had; for if it hadn't been for that charming young lady I shouldn't have been here at all. I am the ghost of Buck Edwards, who was pretty well

known in the lower part of this county about seventy years ago. I always had a great eye for the ladies, sir, and when I got a chance to court one I didn't miss it. I did too much courting, however; for I roused up a sealous fellow, named Ruggles, and he shot me in a duel early one September morning. Since then I have haunted, from time to time, more than a dozen houses where there were pretty girls."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, now finding strength, " that a spirit would care to come back to this earth to court a girl?"

"Why, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed the phantom of Buck Edwards. "Do you suppose that only old misers and lovelorn maidens want to come back and have a good time? No, sir! Every one of us, who is worth anything, comes if he can get a chance. By George, sir! do you know I courted Miss Belle's grandmother? And a couple of gay young ones we were too! Nobody ever knew any thing of it, and that made it all the livelier."

"Do you intend to stay here and pay attention to my sister-in-law?" I asked, anxiously.

"Certainly I do," *was the reply. "Didn't I say that is what I came for?"'

"Don't you see the mischief you will do?" I asked. "You will probably break off a match between her and a most excellent gentleman whom we all desire—"

"Break off a match!" exclaimed the ghost of Buck Edwards, with a satisfied grin. "How many matches I have broken off! The last thing I ever did, before I went away, was of that sort. She wouldn't marry the gentleman who shot me." There was evidently no conscience to this spectre.

"And if you do not care for that," I said, in considerable anger, " I can tell you that you are causing ill-feeling between the young lady and the best friends she has in the world, which may end very disastrously."'

"Now, look here, my man,"' said the ghost; "if you and your wife are really her friends you won't act like fools and make trouble."

I made no answer to this remark, but asserted, with much warmth, that I intended to tell Miss Belle exactly what he was, and so break off the engagement at once.

"If you tell her that she's been walking and talking with the ghost of the fellow who courted her grandmother, — I reckon she could find some of my letters now among the old lady's papers if she looked for them, — you'd frighten the wits out of her. She'd go crazy. I know girls' natures, sir."

"So do I," I groaned.

"Don't get excited," he said. "Let the girl alone, and every thing will be comfortable and pleasant. Good-night."

I went to bed, but not to sleep. Here was a terrible situation. A sister-in-law courted by a ghost! Was ever a man called upon to sustain such a trial! And I must sustain it alone. There was no one with whom I could share the secret.

Several times after this I saw this baleful spectre of a young buck of the olden time. He would nod to me with a jocular air, but I did not care to speak to him. One afternoon I went into the house to look for my wife; and, very naturally, I entered the room where Pegram lay in his little bed. The child was asleep, and no one was with him. I stood and gazed contemplatively upon my son. He was a handsome child, and apparently full of noble instincts ; and yet I could not help wishing that he were older, or that in some way his conditions were such that it should not be necessary, figuratively speaking, that his mother should continually hover about him. If she could be content with a little less of Pegram and a little more of me, my anticipations of a matrimonial career would be more fully realized.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind I raised my eyes, and on the other side of the little bedstead I saw the wretched ghost of Buck Edwards.

"Fine boy," he said.

My indignation at seeing this impudent existence within the most sacred precincts of my house was boundless.

"You vile interloper!" I cried.

At this moment Madeline entered the room. Pale and stern, she walked directly to the crib and took up the child. Then she turned to me and said:

"I was standing in the door-way, and saw you looking at my babe. I heard what you said to him. I have suspected it before." And then, with Pegram in her arms, she strode out of the room.

The ghost had vanished as Madeline entered. Filled with rage and bitterness, for my wife had never spoken to me in these tones before, I ran down-stairs and rushed out of the house. I walked long and far, my mind filled with doleful thoughts. When I returned to the house, I found a note from my wife. It ran thus.

"I have gone to aunt Hannah's with Pegram, and have taken Belle. I cannot live with one who considers my child a vile interloper."

As I sat down in my misery, there was one little spark of comfort amid the gloom. She had taken Belle. My first impulse was to follow into the city and explain every thing; but I quickly reflected that if I did this I must tell her of the ghost, and I felt certain that she would never return with Pegram to a haunted house. Must I, in order to regain my wife, give up this beautiful home? For two days I racked my brains and wandered gloomily about.

In one of my dreary rambles I encountered the ghost. "What are you doing here?" I cried. "Miss Belle has gone."

"I know that," the spectre answered, his air expressing all his usual impertinence and swagger, "but she'll come back. When your wife returns, she's bound to bring young Miss."

At this, a thought flashed through my mind. If any good would come of it, Belle should never return. Whatever else happened, this insolent ghost of a gay young buck should have no excuse for haunting my house.

"She wiil never come back while you are here," I cried.

"I don't believe it," it coolly answered.

I made no further assertions on the subject. I had determined what to do, and it was of no use to be angry with a vaporing creature like this. But I might as well get some information out of him.

"Tell me this," I asked; " if, for any reason, you should leave this place and throw up your situation, so to speak, would you have a successor?"

"You needn't think I am going," it said contemptuously. " None of your little tricks on me. But I'll just tell you, for your satisfaction, that if I should take it into my head to cut the place, there would be another ghost here in no time."

"What is it," I cried, stamping my foot, "that causes this house to be so haunted by ghosts, when there are hundreds and thousands of places where such apparitions are never seen?"

"Old fellow," said the spectre, folding its arms, and looking at me with half-shut eyes, "it isn't the house that draws the ghosts, it is somebody in it; and as long as you are here the place will be haunted. But you needn't mind that. Some houses have rats, some have fever-and-ague, and some have ghosts. Au revoir."

And I was alone.

So then the spectral mortgage could never be lifted.

With heavy heart and feet I passed through the bosky grove to my once happy home.

I had not been there half an hour when Belle arrived. She had come by the morning train, and had nothing with her but a little hand-bag. I looked at her in astonishment.

"Infatuated girl," I cried, "could you not stay away from here three days?"

"I am glad you said that," she answered, taking a seat; "for now I think I am right in suspecting what was on your mind. I ran away from Madeline to see if I could find out what was at the bottom of this dreadful trouble between you. She told me what you said, and I don't believe you ever used those words to Pegram. And now I want to ask you one question. Had I, in any way, any thing to do with this?"

"No," said I, "not directly." And then emholdened by circumstances, I added: "But that secret. visitor or friend of yours had much to do with it."

"I thought that might be so," she answered; "and now, George, I want to tell you something, I am afraid it will shock you very much."

"I have had so much to shock me lately that I can stand almost any thing now."

"Well then, it is this," she said. "That person whom I saw sometimes, and whom you once found under my window, is a ghost."

"Did you know that?" I cried. "I knew it was a ghost, but did not imagine that you had any suspicion of it.'

"Why, yes," she answered, "I saw through him almost from the very first. I was a good deal startled, and a little frightened when I found it out; but I soon felt that this ghost couldn't do me any harm, and you don't know how amusing it was. I always had a fancy for ghosts, but I never expected to meet with one like this."

"And so you knew all the time it wasn't a real man," I exclaimed, still filled with astonishment at what I had heard.

"A real man! " cried Belle, with considerable contempt in her tones. "Do you suppose I would become acquainted in that way with a real man, and let him come under my window and talk to me? I was determined not to tell any of you about it; for I knew you wouldn't approve of it, and would break up the fun some way. Now I wish most heartily that I had spoken of it."

"Yes," I answered, "it might have saved much trouble."

"But, oh! George," she continued, "you've no idea how funny it was! Such a ridiculous, self-conceited, old-fashioned ghost of a beau!"

"Yes," said I, "when it was alive it courted your grandmother."

"The impudence!" exclaimed Belle. "And to think that it supposed that I imagined it to be a real man! Why, one day, when it was talking to me it stepped back into a rose-bush; and it stood there ever so long, all mixed up with the roses and leaves."

"And you knew it all the time?"

These words were spoken in a hollow voice by some one near us. Turning quickly, we saw the ghost of Buck Edwards, but no longer the jaunty spectre we had seen before. His hat was on the back of his head, his knees were turned inward, his shoulders drooped, his head hung, and his arms dangled limp at his sides.

"Yes," said Belle, "I knew it all the time."

The ghost looked at her with a faded, misty eye; and then, instead of vanishing briskly as was his wont, he began slowly and irresolutely to disappear. First his body faded from view, then his head, leaving his hat and boots. These gradually vanished, and the last thing we saw of the once Buck Edwards was a dissolving view of the tip-end of a limp and drooping riding-whip.

"He is gone," said Belle. " We'll never see him again."

"Yes," said I, "he is gone. I think your discovery of his real nature has completely broken up that proud spirit. And now, what is to be done about Madeline?"

"Wasn't it the ghost you called an interloper?" asked Belle.

"Certainly it was," I replied.

"Well, then, go and tell her so," said Belle.

"About the ghost and all!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly," said she.

And together we went to Madeline, and I told her all. I found her with her anger gone, and steeped in misery. When I had finished, all Pegramed as she was, she plunged into my arms. I pressed my wife and child closely to my bosom, and we wept with joy.

When Will Crenshaw came home and was told this story, he said it didn't trouble him a bit.

"I'm not afraid of a rival like that," he remarked. "Such a suitor wouldn't stand a ghost of a chance."

"But I can tell you," said Madeline, "that you had better be up and doing on your own account. A girl like Belle needn't be expected to depend on the chance of a ghost."

Crenshaw heeded her words, and the young couple were married in the fall. The wedding took place in the little church near our house. It was a quiet marriage, and was attended by a strictly family party. At the conclusion. of the ceremonies I felt, or saw, for I am sure I did not hear— a little sigh quite near me.

I turned, and sitting on the chancel-steps I saw the spectre of Buck Edwards. His head was bowed, and his hands, holding his hat and riding-whip, rested carelessly on his knees.

"Bedad, sir!" he exclaimed, "to think of it! If I hadn't cut up as I did I might have married, and have been that girl's grandfather!"

The idea made me smile.

"It can't be remedied now," I answered.

"Such a remark to make at a wedding!" said Madeline, giving me a punch with her reproachful elbow.

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10: "Madam, I'm Adam!"

Holman Day

1865-1935

The Red Book Magazine Jan 1923

MR. HENRY KOSHLAND destroyed the earth— toppled its cloud-capped towers and mashed flat the embellishments of civilization and the works of man. Made a clean job of it— bingo! Just like that!

Then, having destroyed the earth and the fullness thereof, Mr. Koshland, searching his mind for something bigger in the way of an idea, found himself up against it!

After he had sold out the Empyrean Sweets Company and had invested the proceeds in the Royal Arcade Theater, and had studied the films for three months, Mr. Koshland was thoroughly qualified to tell the world what was the matter with the movie industry. The main trouble was too much sweet stuff, averred Mr. Koshland, having been weaned from sweet stuff by the candy business.

"Torch 'em up with a title, and knock 'em down with a bam— and you've got 'em," summed up in one declaration Mr. Koshland's conclusions as an empiricist after his three months of exhibitor's experience; he had no use for theorists: he knew.

Therefore, Mr. Koshland went into producing on his own hook. And how he happened to think of something to produce was this:

The city went eminent-domaining it one day, extended the reservoir system, took in Diamond Lake and ordered off the shore the Ne Plus Ultra Recreation Park, a private enterprise. There was an auction sale of the buildings. Mr. Koshland went along to bid, as a silent partner, in behalf of his brother Pete, a building-wrecker who had himself just been wrecked by a building to the extent of a broken leg and a few fractured ribs.

After Mr. Henry Koshland sat into the auction game, thriftily jacking the bids by the offer of odd dollars, being a man who believed in the magic of odd numbers, there was born to him a specific idea out of the general notion that he was buying for wrecking purposes all those buildings that ranged from popcorn booths to the Castle of Splendor. Mr. Koshland had the inspired conviction that if the structures of the Ne Plus Ultra were going to be wrecked, the thing to do was to wreck 'em good and proper, and make the wrecking process pay its way.

So it happened that Mr. Koshland got control of enough of the world for his purposes, and annihilated it so utterly by fire and earthquake that all the folks who beheld the tumultuous doings, as caught by the camera's eye, were agreeably willing to meet Mr. Koshland halfway and be convinced for the time

being, till they were out on the street waiting for cars, that all the world was actually destroyed. The drama was produced under the title: "*The Last Man*."

"And a helluva good title, too," declared Mr. Koshland, who had been convinced by his Royal Arcade experience with posters that the title was half— if not three-quarters— the battle. He released for a lump price through ready takers, and settled with Pete after a session which wrecked the wrecking partnership. Pete bewailed this unorthodox system of wrecking; he considered that if the thing had been held up till he was around and about again on his game leg, he could have done a profitable job of salvaging while the hurry and scurry of demolition was going on.

Mr. Koshland expressed his contemptuous sentiments regarding the figure that Pete would have cut, sorting shingle-nails and piling scantling while the world was being destroyed. "It shows how far apart we are on business notions, now that I'm a producer. Producers don't take expense into account! Not no more! You'll see how I'll produce!" Thus, Henry.

But after having tried for the space of a whole week to produce a solid precipitate, so to speak, from his boiling thoughts, considering the problem of a successor to "*The Last Man*," Mr. Koshland had not been able to secure anything for a "bam" that would top his first killer. There was a nebulous idea, to be sure, but he was not getting anywhere with it!

Capturing no full-fledged story, after such frantic mental galloping, he seemed to be wasting time. He assured himself that nothing could be the matter with his brains— he had always been quick as a flash in meeting the candy-market with novelties. Afterward, discussing the matter, he dwelt with astonishment on the fact that the idea of "The First Woman" to follow "The Last Man" had not come to him in the snap of a finger.

"But I'm all go-ahead in business," he declared. "I don't look behind. Progressive, that's me! I was thinking all the time what a fine picture it would be to make it a thousand years from now. I'm so lively on the jump up close with the times, that to hop ahead one or two thousand years— it's nothing. But the darned fools say they don't know how to write it out for me, what it will be so far ahead. I'm progressive enough so that I know. I'll write it myself when I have time."

Any fair-minded person would have agreed with Mr. Koshland that there was no time for that writing after the second "helluva good title" came along. He knew it for what it was worth, the moment it rang in his ears.

He had been calling Lew Keyes names because Lew seemed to be irritatingly uncertain in regard to what sort of scenario would hit off conditions a thousand years hence. Mr. Koshland insisted that contemporary affairs had been done todeath; for the last three weeks of his ownership of the Royal Arcade, the only way he had been able to hold his attention in leash as a critic, in order to see a

picture through, was to plant himself in the middle of a row, flanked right and left by matrons with laps heaped high with hats and purchases. By reflecting that women would advise their friends to stay away from a theater where the proprietor was such a boor that he walked on patrons' feet, right in the middle of a picture, he managed to stick in his place.

"And your best idea of what is going to happen a thousand years ahead, it aint so good as what's happening on the screen now, bad as it is," he declared to Lew. "I have hired you off that newspaper, Keyes, in the hopes that you could keep it up right along, writing about things that have never happened. What you quit so soon for, now that you work for me?"

"It takes time to think up a big thing."

"But I thought how to destroy the world when I was between bids at Ne Plus Ultra. Quick, like that!" He clacked his finger into his palm. "Next I think quick to make a picture a thousand years from now."

"I reckon it's ne plus ultra on that dope, so far as I'm concerned. I'll resign, if you say so."

But Mr. Koshland, who was of an inquiring turn of mind, had his interest piqued by Keyes' qualifying reference to the dope.

"Is it something besides a park name, the Ne Plus Ultra?"

"It means nothing ahead— nothing more to come, as you might say!"

Mr. Koshland wiped his forehead. "I hope I haven't bought a hoodoo name along with that park," he fretted. "It's a whole week that I've been thinking, and I haven't even got a title. And that's half the battle, as I have always said, because the story writes itself after we have the title. And you have always wrote about the things that never happened, and now you can't write. If it aint a hoodoo, then why can't you?"

Mr. Keyes had a certain sort of satiric humor in him, even if he did not have inspiration always on tap. "I might say with Napoleon, answering the question about ability, 'Able was I ere I saw Elba.' "

"You don't mean that I hurt your eyesight so much that you can't get your mind onto your work, hey?" demanded Mr. Koshland with considerable truculence.

"Oh, it's nothing personal. I only quoted that for fun— because it's a palindrome."

"It's what?"

"Pal-in-drome."

"Then what is a pal-in-drome?" Mr. Koshland's inquiring propensity was right up on its hind legs.

"Write down what I said."

The employer was at his desk, and he wrote slowly and carefully while his press-agent dictated.

"Spell it backward. It reads the same."

Mr. Koshland painstakingly convinced himself of the truth of that peculiarity.

"There are plenty of 'em," writer Keyes informed him. "There's 'Yreka Bakery' and—"

Mr. Koshland, taking nothing for granted in this new activity as a philologist, wrote down those words too.

"But the best one of all, to my mind, is 'Madam, I'm Adam,' " pursued the press-agent indifferently.

Keyes was jumped out of that indifference by the prompt and galvanic manner in which Mr. Koshland displayed his emotions. The latter lifted his voice into a shrill, "What?" Then he leaped up and stood in his chair, in order, evidently, to lift his voice-to the height which the occasion demanded. "What? Say it so I don't think I'm dreaming it."

Mr. Keyes repeated.

"And you had that in your head all the week while I've been putting my brains on night and day shifts, and you don't tell me? Were you holding out on me? What for? Do you intend to produce for yourself? It's *it*!"

"*What*'s it?" demanded Mr. Keyes, much mystified.

Mr. Koshland's next phase of emotion— repressed, inforced calm, calm secured by the throttling method— was more impressive than his outspoken violence. He was ominously satiric when he slid down and sat in the chair and explained meticulously to Mr. Keyes that what "it" was was a little dog playing marbles with the goldfish in the beef stew and having such a good time; it was a lovely grapefruit all so nicely served with drawn butter; it was—

But Mr. Koshland banged his fist and got back to business and called Mr. Keyes some more names and informed him that what "it" was was a title— and that if it were not for him, Mr. Koshland, there would never be any producing done by the firm; but that it was hard lines when he was obliged to do mental pocketpicking in order to get an idea out of an employee. "But it's why I'm in the game— why I belong in the game. I see where others don't see!" He rapped his knuckles on top of his head, in the middle of the bald spot, and averred that he harbored a thousand of 'em in there. Whatever they might be, he did not say; nor did Mr. Keyes say what he wanted to say, that they'd better stay there because they couldn't pick up much of a living in the aridity on the outside of Mr. Koshland's head.

"One, or two thousand years ahead— the idea— it's easy for me! Two or three thousand years backward for a jump— it's just as easy. Talk about your pal-in-drome— aint I one?"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Keyes, getting a little comfort by viewing the word as an epithet.

" 'Madam, I'm Adam!' You see now, eh? Now that I'm so quick to show you!"

"Sure! It's the First Woman, following the Last Man."

"You're waking up. It's slow. But I have hopes. You're mumbling in your sleep."

"Well, what else would it be but an Eve story?"

Mr. Koshland tossed up his arms in a gesture of despair. "Gone to sleep again!"

"But it's got to be an Eve story!"

"Because she's another pal-in-drome— her name is— you think she has got to be signed on for that, eh? Don't you think nothing about anybody else but Eve, and she has been done to death? And where's the second-wife interest to come in unless there's children by the first wife to wean away the husband and get it so that the sacrifice is made? Or unless the second wife has a past to be shown up? And Eve had no past. She didn't even grow up. Keyes, don't you know the facts about your own relations, way back? Is it that a reporter on a newspaper don't have to know anything about facts?"

Mr. Keyes had opened his eyes in frank amazement. He had been giving Mr. Koshland grudging credit for knowing how to make candy and money, and the money was giving Mr. Keyes twice the pay he had been getting on a newspaper. But Mr. Koshland as a historian— well, Mr. Keyes would have laughed in his sleeves if his sleeves had not been rolled to his shoulders so that he could enjoy the summer salubriousness and get at his typewriter more conveniently.

"I ask you a plain question, easy answered," pursued Mr. Koshland with heat, not liking Mr. Keyes' expression, "and you look at me like I don't know all about Adam's first wife, and the. trouble there was in the family before he was married to Eve."

"You're raving!" adventured the press-agent, unable to endure any more onslaughts on his journalistic omniscience.

MR. KOSHLAND set his fat hands on the arms of his chair and leaned low and far forward, and his posture and his bulging eyes made him look like a particularly indignant frog. "And you don't know about Lillie?"

Mr. Keyes said he didn't, and said so with derogatory emphasis.

"Perhaps in the next job you get after you have lost this one, which is lost already, you can make good if you tell 'em there is one thing you know. It's a thing I'll tell you!"

But Mr. Koshland sat back in his chair and sighed and shook his head, like a man who had started to climb a mountain and had given up the project in despair. Tackling this monumental ignorance was too much of a job! "No, you'd better not know it. As it is you win a prize for being what you are. But, yes, I will tell you so that you can see that a man like me has knowledge to give away and makes no account of it, while a man like you wants to sell something he don't

have; it's a fine living you can go and make on the curb, if you aint called in a hurry to cover after selling short!"

He put up a pudgy forefinger: "Lillie, she was Adam's first wife. I say nothing against her. But there was trouble. I leave that as it is. What I know privately I keep to myself," declared Mr. Koshland, blending his generosity in giving away information, free of charge, with the generosity of friendly tact in handling a touchy matter. "But what's on the records, it's all right to speak about. After Adam got married the second time, Lillie, she used to come round in the night and scare the children.

"But this jabber to you gets me nothing," pursued the boss, plunging back to business with a snap. "It's for me to go ahead!

I have to do it myself. 'Madam, I'm Adam!' It writes itself for him and Lillie! He slaps his chest and brags about himself, and the trouble starts! You see it?"

"It ought to be great stuff," agreed Mr. Keyes.

Mr. Koshland's eyes glistened. "You give me credit, eh?"

"I'll have to, boss. And I reckon I can see the drift, now that you have passed me the hunch. I've been playing the thing all along on the idea that there was only one woman. But if there was another besides Eve, then it's natural to assume there were still others, and—"

Mr. Koshland put up his open hand and sliced the air, remorselessly cutting off the suggestions that he saw on the way.

"Nix! I make clean pictures. That's me! There are too many scandals already on the releases without you and me going back into a scandal in our own family. She is a new woman, that first one. She starts to run Adam and the world. It's Thorna Poole for the part— sure it is!"

THE press-agent, in an agreeing mood, indorsed the suggestion.

Miss Poole, at the climax of the world's destruction, in the sacrificial spirit of true womanhood, had lugged the overwhelmed Last Man on her shoulders for three hundred feet (of film) and had supported him on upstretched and sinewy arms for two hundred more film feet while smoke and flame and serpents wreathed around those arms; Miss Poole was perfectly wonted to snakes, having juggled certain lissome and lethargic pythons in a Ne Plus Ultra sideshow, besides shimmying with a dancing bear.

"She has the snakes still. There's her bear, old Nicodemus, that she will meet in the cave. She lives in the cave, and the rent is raised, or something, and she has to go and live in a new cave ' and has to evict the bear that lives there; and I guess the women, when they see that, will say that flat-hunting, tough as it is in these days, aint having to put out snakes and a bear before the phono- i graph and the rubber-plant can be lugged in— and that's why the picture will make 'em contented and forget some of their troubles— and that's half the battle in

putting over a picture good and strong. And the title— we have it!" rattled on Mr. Koshland breathlessly. "And you see I have the picture writing itself so fast I can't keep up!"

He put his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat and surveyed Mr. Keyes with complacent superiority.

The boss had been a hard man to live with during the week that had been devoted to the thousand-years-ahead scenario. In this new and triumphant mood his personality was decidedly more engaging. Mr. Keyes had been quite willing to quit, considering what he had been going through in order to earn his salary. Now, Mr. Keyes, viewing the new good humor, was willing to hang on. And in the way of hanging on, he set his mental teeth into the thing, so to speak. Lively and energetic thinking in a crisis does bring results, if one is sufficiently desperate!

"By jiminy, boss, I see, and I'm cantering along with you neck and neck on the press stuff. But hold on!" He assumed an expression that was properly contrite and doleful. "I'm fired! You don't want it from me!"

"I gave you facts you didn't know— free, glad," declared Mr. Koshland. "And how when you can give me something, and you haven't given me nothing for a week, you dry up."

"I'll meet you halfway. Knowledge for knowledge!" Keyes assured him. "Then we'll part square, at any rate. Here's the dope! Don't you remember that fellow who went into the woods a few years ago— went in without clothes or tools or weapons— went in and made his way barehanded and fed himself, and all that, and come out clothed in skins? Sure, you remember him!"

Koshland shook his head. "I was in the candy business then," he said.

"Well, he went in, and the papers were full of the story. A killer for press-stuff. Now do you see?"

"You're telling *me*, now. Go ahead!" But Mr. Koshland was exhibiting lively interest.

"For press-stuff— before we start work on the picture— send in a woman to do the same trick! Cave-stuff! Like that woman probably had to do for herself before she hitched in with Adam, no hint at first that our dame is tied up in any way with a moving-picture proposition! Can't you see the headlines, boss?"

"Yes!" admitted Mr. Koshland; he added avidly: "Free!"

"Sure, all free! They'll eat it up!"

"But what will the woman eat? For the screen play she does the cave-stuff in the studio, of course. But for the press-stuff it must be outdoors."

"Hish!" Mr. Keyes put his hand to the side of his mouth. "Fake it! Plant clothes, grub and gun and knife. It'll be easy. I know the right kind of a place. When I was a boy I lived up that way. It's named Misery Gore. It's all rocks and gorges and streams and woods. Nobody lives there. There's only two or three

ways of getting into the place by passes through the rocks, unless you climb mountains; we can let her loose and keep out the rubbernecks. Do you need to have cinch spelled out any plainer than that?"

Mr. Koshland tried to hold himself down to a judicial air of reserve, wishing to keep Mr. Keyes in the strictly clipped-wing state. "I'll say this much; it's feasible!" he agreed. "Of course, it aint a new idea, seeing that the man has done it."

"But this is a woman — the interest will be twice as big."

"I'll admit that it may be a little more than feasible, seeing that it's a woman. You take my car and go bring Thorna Poole."

ON the way to fetch Miss Poole, Mr. Keyes stopped at the public library, desiring to post up on a lady to whom he referred familiarly as "Lillie" when he made inquiries of a considerably shocked attendant, who proceeded tartly to set him right. He discovered that Mr. Koshland had not been far out of the way in dealing with the high spots in Lilith's career. "But when it comes to putting the trimmings onto this thing," he assured himself, "I'll be the main lad on the top of the stepladder with my mouth full of tacks!"

When the "trimmings" had been hitched on, Mr. Koshland admitted that Mr. Keyes did have capabilities of his own. "But the big idea being mine, it's like I have the brains to own the store and hire you to dress the windows. It's nice pieces they have in the papers about her this morning."

Miss Poole's declaration of what she proposed to do to show a woman's up-to-date nature in this era of feminine assertiveness won plenty of space in the news-prints. Mr. Keyes fixed up the public declaration for the lady, who said privately that she would stand for anything provided it could be made certain that nobody could see her wearing clothes, after she had hopped off into the wilderness without garments. "And that aint as funny as it sounds, being unlike what most any lady would say," she stated. "But the duds and the eats must be planted for me, for I've got my health and my looks to take care of, now that I'm in the fillums. On the other hand, my professional reputation aint ever been smirched by a fake, and that reputation is twice as important now. But I know my limitations— and it's hard enough these days to get grub and clothes with cash, to say nothing of going after 'em with a stone hatchet."

The big idea on which Mr. Keyes hung all his trimmings was this: Miss Poole would drop from the apex of today right down through all the thousands of years and land on the bedrock of the primitive, and when Mr. Keyes said "drop," he meant just what he said.

MISS Poole arrived in the neighborhood of Misery Gore in a flying-machine, and the pilot maneuvered skillfully, and she dropped with a parachute into a

small clearing, carefully located in advance, and where the cameras and newspaper men were waiting. She was garbed as an aviatrix and came down spick-andspan and smiling, and was caught in her progress and in her poses by stills and the cinema.

Mr. Koshland was the first to shake her hand when the billowing folds of the parachute had been pulled away from her. He slipped to her a folded paper that he had been palming. "As a friend and a well-wisher, I give you a hearty welcome," he declaimed; then he bent down to pull away a guy-cord and whispered: "It's all on the paper— map and marks where we planted the stuff. We did it last night. You needn't worry."

Under pretense of adjusting the hair beneath her cap, Miss Poole tucked the paper into her coiffure.

"As a friend and a well-wisher for this lady," stated Mr. Koshland, for the benefit of the lads with pads and pencils, and having already aired his knowledge of history, "I'll say that she is on the square to do as Lillie done, and she starts as Lillie herself was— only there aint any fig\leaves growing around here."

The bystanders exhibited plenty of interest.

"But as a friend I have picked these burdock leaves and fastened 'em together so she can be as Lillie was in the summer weather. And she will kill savage beasts and make herself skin clothes to show that she could live here in cold weather, too, if she didn't have to go home away from here pretty quick to— to—"

It was such a beautiful opportunity to slip in a word about Miss Poole's pressing professional engagement, to follow her essay at stone-ageing it, that Impresario Koshland almost choked when he shut off his speech and walked to Miss Poole with the primitive garment. He found his chance to whisper: "You'll see on the map where we have hitched Nicodemus in a raspberry patch. He's having such a good time eating berries that when you hit him in the back of the head he wont notice it, only to die happy."

Mr. Koshland felt that he could not afford to have the attendant publicists too greatly offended by Miss Poole's modest avoidance of the ultra-realistic in the career of Lilith. Therefore he appointed a committee to get busy and receive the lady's garments as they should be flung over the canvas, screen behind which she retreated; he assured the gentlemen of the camera that they would be allowed to shoot at will when the lady came forth in her burdock attire.

"Miss Poole will also do an interpretative dance," explained Mr. Keyes, steadfastly intent on the trimmings of the affair. "Lilith about to plunge into the darkest ages! Lilith facing the dangers of the wilderness!"

In view of that promise, the newspaper men became expectantly and entirely absorbed in the affairs in the clearing that was just outside the fastnesses of the wilderness of Misery Gore.

RIGHT in the middle of the fastnesses, down in the bottom of the deepest gorge, Mr. Ravelo Trask was absorbed on his own hook. He was contending with a mystery that had split his placid life wide open and was causing him to marvel wildly what the blue blazes was happening in the world— and for him, as a recluse trapper for fifty years in that region, the world was bounded by the mountains of the Gore.

Anybody looking down into the gorge would have beheld a slouchy and mangy black bear sitting on a log, smoking a corncob pipe and surveying with grunts and moans of amazement and trepidation a heterogeneous collection of objects heaped on the ground.

The bear was Mr. Trask.

As a trapper, tamer and breeder of mink, fisher and their like, he had evolved an unique system of his own in making himself as much a part of the life of the region 'as possible; on his rounds he wore a bearskin and plodded on all fours a good part of the time, accompanied by two domesticated minks and a bobcat. He found that he was accepted by the general run of fur-bearing animals as a compatriot, rather than a death-dealing human being. An undisguised man would have precipitated an exodus of his means of livelihood; in his furry domino Mr. Trask was complacently tolerated by all, and his native companions served as decoys. He even masked his habitation, dwelling in a cozy little nook that resembled a boulder covered with brook mosses.

Mr. Trask, having made a business of following trails and detecting signs, knew the status quo of his own locality as an artcollector knows his canvases.

Mr. Koshland was more or less of an Indian in business, but he was far from having an Indian's traits in woodcraft, and his tracks and his clumsily marked hiding-places were open to an expert's view— as plain as a connoisseur of paintings would find vandal scratches across his choicest works. Therefore Mr. Trask, beginning his placid rounds of the day, had been successively interested, alarmed and stupefied by discoveries, and at last sat on the log and dragged on his pipe and made funny noises in his throat. He had ferreted faithfully and had collected from their hiding-places every rag and stitch of the cached clothing— a woman's clothing— tins of queerly named food, a gun, ammunition, a keen hunting-knife and any amount of assorted truck, including scented soap, tooth-paste, and other toilet appurtenances.

Considering the amazing collection that he had heaped in front of him in the bottom of the gorge and surveyed in a state of mind only one removed from panic, Mr. Trask gave merely languid side-glances at an airplane when it came

whirring and whizzing into view over the distant tree-tops. He had never seen a flying-machine; he had never heard anything sensible regarding one, and would not have believed in any such thing, even if somebody had told him about it; his settled principle was— having been hoaxed in times past when he had gone to the nearest town to sell off his skins— never to believe in anything that was told to him about what was going on in the world at large.

"That thing, whatever it is, is simply and predickly more of it, and the same," he informed the goggling bobcat. "Only it don't come up to this here stuff for taking up my attention and interest and making me wonder what's going to bust out next in this world."

HE saw the parachute drop in its first terrifying thrust through the air, open its top and float downward. The bobcat got behind the log and squalled. "Yes. interesting enough prob'ly. perviding I had time to give it attention and thought," stated Mr. Trask, turning his back on the spectacle and poking at the collection in front of him with the claws of his adoptive hind foot. "But this here is more ponifferous to me right at the present time. All I've got to say is this: that if they're distributing women and their fixings around in these parts, they haven't got the system ringdinkled up right; it's too hit-or-miss and scattering."

He gathered up all the stuff in his arms and went waddling down the gulch and disappeared in the mossy wart that served him for a home.

"This here aint no kind of a shower that I want to be caught out in. I reckon I'll stay under kiver till it's over," he informed Nature, in genleral, as he stepped into sanctuary'.

MISS Poole tripped about her prehistoric job after she had terpsichoreally interpreted Lilith's emotions, clad in her garb of leaves and holding a threatening rock in each hand. Everybody present assured her that her costume was f very fetching.

"I'll tell you what, boss," said she to Mr. Koshland, passing a word in private before the plunge into the wilderness, "I aint going to snuff out old Nicodemus. What's the use? Let him enjoy life! The leaves is enough for togs— and they're all saying a good word for 'em."

"But unless you kill the savage beast and wear the skin when you show up to the world, the story aint no good," objected the em. ployer. "And he aint no use, anyway. His teeth is gone, and he'll die pretty quick, so we aint destroying money."

"He has been my pet, and it would give me the wallopies to wear his skin. I wont kill him."

"But you've got to be the wild woman, and you're supposed to eat him. too. It makes the story," pleaded Mr. Koshland.

"I wont do it." insisted the lady. "I'm feeling wild enough to have my own way."

Miss Poole was still having her own way when black night filled all the crannies and gulches of Misery Gore with the opaque completeness of coal-tar in a bucket. She continued to be wild, too! She was much wilder than she had ever expected to be. And that way she was still having— the way of her own— had become a much muddled proposition as to routes and direction. because she had succumbed to an ecstasy of rage and had torn up her chart and stamped on the tatters.

What kind of a chart it was, according to her belief, was thoroughly understood by all the abashed little birds within hearing distance. In her strictly stone-age mood she had flung words at that chart as she would have heaved - rocks at a viper. Instead of finding clothes and food and weapons, she had been finding only fresh incentives to invent further expletives to use in her summary of the general mental, moral and business qualifications of Mr. Henry Koshland. She decided that she was at that moment a prehistoric woman all right enough, in point of equipment, even if she had not really intended to go the limit in the matter. To say nothing of not being able to find a stitch of clothing or a morsel of food, she was not sure of even finding the solid earth in the stifling blackness. The earth, in that rugged country, had a queer way of dropping out from underfoot whenever she tried to walk.

A hearty and unexpected thunder-shower had banged a sunset salute and mixed pellets of hail in its downpour; the rain kept up during the evening. It was a hard night for a lady in a burdock-leaf costume. Furthermore, in the panic that always overtakes neophytes who are conscious of being lost in the wilderness, she had ripped through undergrowth without reflecting that burdock leaves will not stand really rough wear. Miss Poole came to have strong personal convictions in regard to a man who would turn her loose in the wilderness with a slip of paper for aid and a lettuce salad for garb.

She raised her voice and clamored in the night for Nicodemus.

Her intentions in regard to him were not well defined just then. She knew that she was wild enough to alter her opinions of him as a pet and to slay him for the pelt he wore, even if she were obliged to skin him with her teeth and a sharp rock. On the other hand, she would have been grateful for his companionship and knew that he would meekly serve as a footwarmer if she could find him and snuggle up beside him. She reckoned that Nicodemus must be frightened and lonesome too. He was of the city as much as she.

She guessed right in regard to Nicodemus. He truly was frightened and lonesome when the tempest thundered and the rain fell and the blackness of night descended on the forest. He was not of the forest, not he! He craved the companionship of humans. But he did not come to the call of Miss Poole. He had

long before attended to his own case and had pulled up his stake and had instinctively sought out Mr. Trask— thereby topping out Mr. Trask's monopoly of the full collection of the props of the Koshland Photoplay Company.

FULL of raspberries and fraternal feeling, Nicodemus pologetically slouched in at the open door of Mr. Trask's retreat and stood erect and wistfully made the obeisance that Miss Poole had impressed upon him as being good manners.

Mr. Trask, on account of the inclemency of the evening and entertaining in the back of his head an apprehension that, in those troublous times and in that season of mysteries, he might be compelled to make a quick get-away, was arrayed in his bearskin. But his natural instincts as a makeshift bear did not extend to any depth below the skim When Nicodemus dropped upon all fours and amicably sidled toward the host, Mr. Trask was dreadfully frightened and stood up and cursed horribly by reason of that fright.

"I aint no bear," he informed the caller.

Nicodemus did not require any vocal assurances on that point. He would have run away from a real wild bear with just as much speed as Mr. Trask could have shown in flight if inspired by menace of the sort.

Nicodemus was filled with thankful joy in finding one of the agreeable specimens of humankind with whom he had always been associated, and the garb this person wore was, at first glimpse, merely reassuring evidence that he liked bears. When Mr. Trask picked up a three-legged stool and showed hostility, Nicodemus bowed again.

Mr. Trask considered that he knew a whole lot about wild animals, and he found this amazing politeness absolutely baleful. It presaged something wholly outside his reckoning. Since his return from his foraging, he had been meditating further, sorting over his loot, and had decided that the world was tipped upside down and was being "sluiced to sancho, hell-bent by the slippery-ellum route." Now it looked to him as if the bears were on the way too. This particular bear further astounded Mr. Trask by shuffling a bit of a jig and by sticking out an appealing paw for a handshake after the jig was finished.

Then Mr. Trask astounded the bear; the host banged the polite caller on the head with the three-legged stool, drove his foot against Nicodemus with a thrust that sent him slumping into a corner and fled out into the night with a hoarse squawk of terror.

As much as he admired human beings, Nicodemus, after his years of meek submission to training, was also accustomed to the churlish vagaries of human temperament. He whined his regret at this misunderstanding for a few minutes after Mr. Trask's departure, then went to sleep behind the stove.

Mr. Trask, after he had roamed in the night for a little while, began to assure himself that he was not afraid of a bear as a bear, having been for fifty years a

hunter. Therefore he tiptoed back to see what could be done in the matter. He did not marvel because he had run away before intrepid second thought came to him. His nerves had been unstrung by the previous experiences of the day; even at that, so ran his thoughts, he would have been up and coming in the case of an onslaught by a savage bear, a bear who stuck to business according to approved bear methods.

But to have a bear come in from the night, and bow and scrape and dance and want to shake hands— it was distinctly irregular. Mr. Trask excused himself for his precipitate flight. It was a crazy bear! Mr. Trask had known for a long time that all the world outside of Misery Gore was crazy. He was determined to suppress lunacy in his own bailiwick, remorselessly, without mercy— and no bear could come it over him by any such airs! If this thing were not discouraged, bears would be coming- around seeking to kiss him and maybe sing songs.

But when Mr. Trask peered in at the open door, he noted that the intruder was lying behind the stove directly under the rack where the shotgun and the rifle were hung. Such being the circumstances, and there being no telling what a lunatic bear would do if he were stirred up, Mr. Trask unhasped the door of a kennel, called out the tame bobcat and the domesticated minks and took to the woods again.

IN the first flicker of the gray dawn Miss Poole dared to walk away from the spot where she had been jumping up and down and threshing her arms in order to keep from freezing to death. Therefore, before long, the lady happened upon the homeless Mr. Trask, who was sitting on the log at the bottom of the gulch, snoring in unquiet slumber with his elbows propped on his knees.

Miss Poole knew that she was thoroughly wild; she had been telling herself so in the dark hours. But when she spied game, and began to hunt around to find the biggest rocks she could manage as weapons, her mood of implacable savageness was screwed up to concert pitch. She had definitely ceased to view Nicodemus as a pet. He was merely a resource in extremity. She desperately feared that she could not find her way out of that tangle of landscape. And in the condition in which she was, as to raiment, she rather fervently hoped she could not find her way out just then— at any rate, not until she had been able to touch up her toilet in some degree.

Mr. Koshland and bug-eyed observers were guarding the passes— that was the understanding. As she looked at it, to give up after one night and sneak out to them and cry quits was to spoil a professional future of which she had become jealous and extremely proud in anticipation of fame to be won. Miss Poole had plenty of grit and strength. And she was raving mad with Mr. Koshland. She was convinced that he had lied to her in order to put her through

the real stunt, in his fear lest the newspaper sleuths would be able to detect a fake.

All her tumultuous emotions were blended into grim determination to show 'em! She had never skinned a bear! But she needed something more substantial for clothing than the ribs of burdock leaves! She had never tried to eat raw bear! But she had no notion of spoiling a career by dying of hunger when there was a bear handy.

It was fortunate for Mr. Trask that he had brought along a vigilant friend in the person of the bobcat. Otherwise the desperate, prehistoric woman would have secured her quarry. The first rock missed him by a narrow margin. The bobcat squalled. Miss Poole had been able to register distance and elevation by her first shot, and Mr. Trask opened his eyes just in time to dodge the second missile, which was coming straight at his head.

HE leaped up, fell over the log and regained his balance on all fours and was more frightened by what he beheld than he had been by the rock that whizzed past his ear. In tattered newspapers which had been wrapped around his saltpork purchases, he had read about "the new woman" and had been indifferently interested in the clamor over dress-reform. This amazing specimen of the twin contentions was coming at him with fresh rocks. One of the rocks glanced off his back as he turned to flee. He stumbled to his feet and let out all links of speed, with the minks and the bobcat as pacemakers. He knew by the rocks that crashed into the bushes and barked the trees along his line of retreat that the attacker was attentively and consistently with him.

Mr. Trask was fully conscious that he had had no success whatever in attempting to explain to a bear that he himself was not a bear. This assailant, whatever she or he or it might be, seemed to be in no state of mind to be willing to listen to any sort of explanations. Furthermore, so it seemed to the gasping fugitive, he had mislaid his voice. The morning light was wan and eerie. Mr. Trask, running, was not sure, as he pondered, just what he had seen. He did not dare to take the time to look back and make sure. The ground was rough and required all his attention. Therefore he put his dependence on speed and on his knowledge of an especial place of refuge. This was a dark cave by the side of Tougas Brook, where he stored his pelts in an atmosphere that kept them pliable.

The mouth of the cavern was hidden by bushes, and Mr. Trask dived through them like a circus rider through a hoop, putting his faith in two possibilities of salvation: perhaps the pursuer would not see where he went; probably, were it really a woman, she would not dare to follow him. If she did venture to follow—

She did!

MISS Poole had a professional future in films ahead of her, and a professional future as an animal trainer behind her; and ambition was putting the goad to her natural self-reliance. She was after food and raiment, both of them on the hoof within reaching distance, and she proposed to get what she was after. Beyond all question, if Mr. Trask had been made aware that this new woman doggedly purposed to kill him and wear his hide, he would have died of sheer terror then and there in his tracks; but Mr. Trask was too thoroughly conversant with the methods of wild game to allow himself to be caught at bay in a *cul de sac*. He had dodged into the cave because it offered still another, and a final resource: there was a sort of a chimney in the rocks leading up to the slope above. He climbed up nimbly and galloped on his way; the bobcat and the minks ducked out past Miss Poole in the darkness and escaped.

As soon as Mr. Trask was out of the chimney, the dim light of the morning entered by that passage.

Miss Poole beheld objects that instantly availed to take her mind off the chase and turn it to matters that were more suitable for feminine consideration.

Furs! Many furs!

She knelt and stroked them and fondled them and held them to her cheeks and murmured her delighted surprise. Then she heaped them in her arms and went forth from the cavern and examined her treasures in the light of the morning. She did not attempt to classify them. She did not bother her head about the natural history end of the discovery. Her joyous vision embraced possibilities of muffs and stoles and coats and toques! She could see where her professional film future was well furred up, at any rate. And in the extremity of dishabille in which she found herself on that bleak morning, and in that keen wind that followed the rain, she was not taking time to bother about the fine rights of property or to what extent findings were keepings. For that matter, she reflected that perhaps wild animals crawled into caves and shed their skins after the fashion of the snakes with which she was familiar.

Beside the brook there were bushes with long thorns. She patched up a garment of assorted furs that swathed her from neck to heels and dragged on the ground.

The two domesticated minks came down to the brook to fish for their breakfast, not minding the furred Miss Poole in the least, having been habituated by association with Mr. Trask to feel perfectly at home in the presence of a human being thus attired. When they clambered upon the bank, each lugging a good-sized trout, they were painfully disillusionized by being obliged to dodge rocks that this skin-clad person flung' at them; they dropped the fish and scurried away.

IN the daylight Miss Poole was able to retrace her steps, or at least to find her way through a pass, and she arrived at a farmhouse where Mr. Koshland and his party had located themselves. She was obtrusively gnawing at a raw fish when she walked in on Mr. Koshland, and she flung the fish in his face and followed it with prolonged objurgation.

It required a full half-hour of apology, protestation, entreaty and fulsome promises of more salary and a share in the royalties before the new wild spirit of the primitive woman indicated the least symptom of being tamed, before Miss Poole consented to drop her role.

"Well, answer me this! Do you admit I have done it?" she demanded.

"Yes!" bleated Mr. Koshland. "But how— "

"Do you admit I have done it all on my own hook?"

"Sure! But the thief that stole all my good property, he—"

"Forget it! I don't need to fake nothing in my professional career. I come out eating my breakfast, don't I?" She picked the fish from the floor and bit into it.

"Yes, you do! But how do you catch 'em?"

"That's my own business! And it's my own business how I got these skins after I played September Morn when the foliage dropped off! I aint sure yet that you aint a piker, Koshland, but we'll let it stand at that, on condition that a new contract is to be drawed. And I want a scenario for a Frozen North picture, seeing I've got the furs!"

Mr. Koshland had a temper of his own when his inquiring disposition had been snubbed. "Keep it to yourself how you got 'em, if I ain't fit to know about the things you do when you're working on the salary I give you. But I think they got so scared they jumped out of their skins when they saw you looking like you say you looked."

"We'll let it go at that, if you say so," retorted Miss Poole stiffly. "But we'll consider that's about enough from you on the subject, Koshland, and that goes for now, and from now on! "

And as the lady said, so it was. And that's all she ever did say!

SHE had come out from the south side of Misery Gore. Mr. Trask marched down over the mountain from the north side. He lugged a croker-sack on his back, and it was stuffed with articles that he never showed to anybody. He found a job as a hired man on a farm, and he always kept his mouth shut about a bear who danced and tried to shake hands and about a— well, Mr. Trask shook his head dubiously when his thoughts ran on that matter and on what he kept hidden in the croker-sack, and he allowed his general explanation to new and inquiring friends to cover the whole question: he said that he had come out to dwell among human beings because living too long alone in the woods, as a

hermit trapper, was apt to "tiddledoo a man's brains, no matter how naturally solid the brains was."

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11: The Feast of Nemesis

"Saki"

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

The Morning Post 25 Feb 1913

"IT'S A GOOD thing that Saint Valentine's Day has dropped out of vogue," said Mrs. Thackenbury; "what with Christmas and New Year and Easter, not to speak of birthdays, there are quite enough remembrance days as it is. I tried to save myself trouble at Christmas by just sending flowers to all my friends, but it wouldn't work; Gertrude has eleven hot-houses and about thirty gardeners, so it would have been ridiculous to send flowers to her, and Milly has just started a florist's shop, so it was equally out of the question there. The stress of having to decide in a hurry what to give to Gertrude and Milly just when I thought I'd got the whole question nicely off my mind completely ruined my Christmas, and then the awful monotony of the letters of thanks: 'Thank you so much for your lovely flowers. It was so good of you to think of me.' Of course in the majority of cases I hadn't thought about the recipients at all; their names were down in my list of 'people who must not be left out.' If I trusted to remembering them there would be some awful sins of omission."

"The trouble is," said Clovis to his aunt, "all these days of intrusive remembrance harp so persistently on one aspect of human nature and entirely ignore the other; that is why they become so perfunctory and artificial. At Christmas and New Year you are emboldened and encouraged by convention to send gushing messages of optimistic goodwill and servile affection to people whom you would scarcely ask to lunch unless some one else had failed you at the last moment; if you are supping at a restaurant on New Year's Eve you are permitted and expected to join hands and sing 'For Auld Lang Syne' with strangers whom you have never seen before and never want to see again. But no licence is allowed in the opposite direction."

"Opposite direction; what opposite direction?" queried Mrs. Thackenbury.

"There is no outlet for demonstrating your feelings towards people whom you simply loathe. That is really the crying need of our modern civilisation. Just think how jolly it would be if a recognised day were set apart for the paying off of old scores and grudges, a day when one could lay oneself out to be gracefully vindictive to a carefully treasured list of 'people who must not be let off.' I remember when I was at a private school we had one day, the last Monday of the term I think it was, consecrated to the settlement of feuds and grudges; of course we did not appreciate it as much as it deserved, because, after all, any day of the term could be used for that purpose. Still, if one had chastised a smaller boy for being cheeky weeks before, one was always permitted on that

day to recall the episode to his memory by chastising him again. That is what the French call reconstructing the crime."

"I should call it reconstructing the punishment," said Mrs. Thackenbury; "and, anyhow, I don't see how you could introduce a system of primitive schoolboy vengeance into civilised adult life. We haven't outgrown our passions, but we are supposed to have learned how to keep them within strictly decorous limits."

"Of course the thing would have to be done furtively and politely," said Clovis; "the charm of it would be that it would never be perfunctory like the other thing. Now, for instance, you say to yourself: 'I must show the Webleys some attention at Christmas, they were kind to dear Bertie at Bournemouth,' and you send them a calendar, and daily for six days after Christmas the male Webley asks the female Webley if she has remembered to thank you for the calendar you sent them. Well, transplant that idea to the other and more human side of your nature, and say to yourself: 'Next Thursday is Nemesis Day; what on earth can I do to those odious people next door who made such an absurd fuss when Ping Yang bit their youngest child?' Then you'd get up awfully early on the allotted day and climb over into their garden and dig for truffles on their tennis court with a good gardening fork, choosing, of course, that part of the court that was screened from observation by the laurel bushes. You wouldn't find any truffles but you would find a great peace, such as no amount of present-giving could ever bestow."

"I shouldn't," said Mrs. Thackenbury, though her air of protest sounded a bit forced; "I should feel rather a worm for doing such a thing."

"You exaggerate the power of upheaval which a worm would be able to bring into play in the limited time available," said Clovis; "if you put in a strenuous ten minutes with a really useful fork, the result ought to suggest the operations of an unusually masterful mole or a badger in a hurry."

"They might guess I had done it," said Mrs. Thackenbury.

"Of course they would," said Clovis; "that would be half the satisfaction of the thing, just as you like people at Christmas to know what presents or cards you've sent them. The thing would be much easier to manage, of course, when you were on outwardly friendly terms with the object of your dislike. That greedy little Agnes Blaik, for instance, who thinks of nothing but her food, it would be quite simple to ask her to a picnic in some wild woodland spot and lose her just before lunch was served; when you found her again every morsel of food could have been eaten up."

"It would require no ordinary human strategy to lose Agnes Blaik when luncheon was imminent: in fact, I don't believe it could be done."

"Then have all the other guests, people whom you dislike, and lose the luncheon. It could have been sent by accident in the wrong direction."

"It would be a ghastly picnic," said Mrs. Thackenbury.

"For them, but not for you," said Clovis; "you would have had an early and comforting lunch before you started, and you could improve the occasion by mentioning in detail the items of the missing banquet— the lobster Newburg and the egg mayonnaise, and the curry that was to have been heated in a chafing-dish. Agnes Blaik would be delirious long before you got to the list of wines, and in the long interval of waiting, before they had quite abandoned hope of the lunch turning up, you could induce them to play silly games, such as that idiotic one of 'the Lord Mayor's dinner-party,' in which every one has to choose the name of a dish and do something futile when it is called out. In this case they would probably burst into tears when their dish is mentioned. It would be a heavenly picnic."

Mrs. Thackenbury was silent for a moment; she was probably making a mental list of the people she would like to invite to the Duke Humphrey picnic. Presently she asked: "And that odious young man, Waldo Plubley, who is always coddling himself— have you thought of anything that one could do to him?" Evidently she was beginning to see the possibilities of Nemesis Day.

"If there was anything like a general observance of the festival," said Clovis, "Waldo would be in such demand that you would have to bespeak him weeks beforehand, and even then, if there were an east wind blowing or a cloud or two in the sky he might be too careful of his precious self to come out. It would be rather jolly if you could lure him into a hammock in the orchard, just near the spot where there is a wasps' nest every summer. A comfortable hammock on a warm afternoon would appeal to his indolent tastes, and then, when he was getting drowsy, a lighted fusee thrown into the nest would bring the wasps out in an indignant mass, and they would soon find a 'home away from home' on Waldo's fat body. It takes some doing to get out of a hammock in a hurry."

"They might sting him to death," protested Mrs. Thackenbury.

"Waldo is one of those people who would be enormously improved by death," said Clovis; "but if you didn't want to go as far as that, you could have some wet straw ready to hand, and set it alight under the hammock at the same time that the fusee was thrown into the nest; the smoke would keep all but the most militant of the wasps just outside the stinging line, and as long as Waldo remained within its protection he would escape serious damage, and could be eventually restored to his mother, kippered all over and swollen in places, but still perfectly recognisable."

"His mother would be my enemy for life," said Mrs. Thackenbury.

"That would be one greeting less to exchange at Christmas," said Clovis.

12: The Dogs of War

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 5 July 1939

"IF only I had that Mr. Herr Hitler here in these flats," said Mrs. Parsley— "not that he is the sort of man I would like to have owing me rent— I would let him have a piece of my mind. All the upset he is making! Only last night I was thinking of advertising them empty flats; but when I read that in the paper about Hitler letting loose the dogs of war it put me right off."

The repercussion of world politics upon the affairs of my landlady was astonishing, as Mrs. Parsley's reactions frequently are. Soothingly I suggested that she might advertise her flats with entire safety. There might not be a war.

"Out of all this turmoil we may reach a stage when people will refuse to quarrel," I suggested comfortingly.

"Not married couples," retorted Mrs. Parsley decisively. "It would be too much to expect them to see the terror of their ways. I suppose it was that paper talking about dogs that upset me. Well might they call them the dogs of war, for there's nothing people will fight over so easily, as I learnt to my sorrer. I like them myself; for dogs are intellergent animals, like men, only they're faithful. But never again will I permit them to be kept in my flats.

"Not now," corrected Mrs. Parsley. "Once l thought it didn't matter; and look what came of it! With the place full of substitute babies and Mr. Slompack exposed as one of them whitened steeplechases in wolf's clothes with a poor abandoned wife crying on his doorstep, as they say. And everybody saying ne should provide the girl with a home. The police here, and everything!"

Mrs. Parsley paused for breath. It seemed a long way from Hitler ; but the hint about the moral downfall of Mr. Slompack, always standing as a rock of respectability in Mrs. Parsley's establishment, interested me.

"I will say that Mr. Slompack brought it on himself. 'Let us all keep dogs,' he said. Little did he know that them were fatal words.

"Everybody had always thought Mrs. Fidgett's pom, which she called Doodems, was a pest, but when Mr. Grampy, who was a new tenant, brought Cancan, which it was kennelled in the yard, the ill-feeling was distendified, as the saying is. Mrs. Fidgett said Cancan's howling at night upset Doodems's nerves, and Mr. Grampy said it was Doodems's yapping that made Cancan howl.

"They were regular bony distensions, if ever there were any. Mr. Grampy said Cancan was a goldmine. It was always going to win some big race; and the men were on its side because Mr. Grampy gave them inflammation about dogs that were going to win races, and they could always lose their money in backing it. When Cancan didn't win, Mr. Grampy said it was because Doodems's yapping

had kept him awake and spoilt his rendition. But there were others who didn't like Cancan's howling, like Mrs. Turner, who said, it was a sign of a death and sent for the doctor to see whether she was dying. Mrs. Turner always said she would be better off in heaven; but, although heaven may be a happy landing, as they say in the hymn, I've never known anyone who wasn't upset at the idea of going there.

"It was when I told the men, who put all the trouble on to Doodems, that I had told Mrs. Fidgett she could have Doodems in her flat just as any other tenants who liked could have dogs, and my word was my bondage, that Mr. Slompack said that about everybody keeping dogs.

"IT was no sooner said than done in the eye, as the books say; at least some of the tenants got dogs; and when them dogs started fighting on the landings, and the owners began quarrelling, I wished I had put my foot down before it all started. Even the Major, who had always been friends with him, was soon threatening to punch Mr. Wassail on the nose (which the word he used was 'snout,' but I won't demean myself) because his Airedale had nearly torn his fox-terrier to pieces.

"Mr. Slompack had had an inferior motive when he had said that, so it appears. It sounded strange to me when he said he had a dog in quarantine which a friend of his travelling in Europe had sent out, asking him to look after it until his return; and Mr. Slompack said that as everybody was keeping dogs he might as well bring Toby here as put him in a dogs' home.

"Never in my widest dreams of having rice, as Mr. Slompack himself says, did I think that there could be a dog the size of Toby. When I first saw that dog I nearly fainted ; I thought it was another lion. And them dogs nearly fainted, too. Doodems had come to the top of the stairs to yap, as he often did, as if he owned the place ; but when he saw Toby he jest gave a yelp and bolted for the flat. It was the same with the other dogs. One moment you would see them ; but suddenly they would be gone, and you knew they had seen Toby. And Cancan, when Toby went 'woof!' got into his kennel as far as he could go and forgot all about his howling.

"Mr. Slompack brought the dog up the stairs to show how gentle it was, with all its size. Very proud of it he was.

" 'Look how he pricks his ears!' he says. 'Listen! Do you hear that baby crying? Toby hears it. His filigree is a breed of dogs trained to rescue children who were lost on the mountains or in the woods. Toby was only a pup when he left his home; but the instink is in him.'

"Mrs. Fidgett said Toby was a scandal; and some of the men didn't like it; but the people in the neighborhood looked upon that dog as an unnatural curio and used to follow them when Mr. Slompack led him out for a walk on a leech.

"IF Mr. Slompack had always kept him on a leech, though, all might have been well. Little did I think that the day when Mr. Slompack thought Toby might have a run by himself, as he had an appointment, was going to be the momentary day it proved.

"When Toby found he was free he jumped in the air with a 'woof' which made a horse across the street look as if it wanted to bolt. He gave a look at Mr. Slompack as much as to ask wasn't he coming, and off he boundered.

" 'He's a great dog,' says Mr. Slompack proudly. 'I feel that animal would do a great deal for me.'

"If Mr. Slompack had only known what that dog was going to do for him he would have turned in his grave, if he had been in it.

"Before we knew where we were or what was happening these flats seemed to be full of babies. The first was outside Mr. Slompack's door, when Mrs. Turner came rushing down, all agitated, to call me up. There was several women there all standing round, afraid of the dog, and there was a baby between his paws playing with them, quite happy. Toby's tail was banging against the door as if he was knocking to get in. But I was used to feeding him, and it's well known that a dog won't bite the Anne what feeds him. No sooner had I picked up that baby than Toby gives a great 'woof' and out he boundered again.

"Mrs. Wallsley, when the dog was gone, wanted me to let her hold the baby, which I was only too glad to do; and we were all sitting together in the lounge at the top of the stairs, saying that that there instink is a thing that works in a wondrous way its blunders to perform, and that it was wonderful that that dog hadn't been out half an hour before it found a lost baby, when Toby brings the second baby in.

" 'Good heavens,' cries Mrs. Wassail, 'babies can't be lost at this rate. I wonder if they are really lost babies. I hope he doesn't bring back any more.'

"For Toby had no sooner seen me than he plumped the second baby in my lap, gave a 'woof' and out he went again.

" 'Won't Mr. Slompack be pleased,' says Mrs. Fidgett, sarcastic like.

"Mr. Slompack wasn't pleased; not when he knew. At first, when he saw us women with them two babies, he used some of that Hairy Percy's flage that he likes so much. 'What is it —a mothers' meeting?' he asks. But he was took aback when we all started to tell him about how Toby was bringing in babies as if the place was one of them screeches. And just to prove our words there was sounds like a baby crying ; and up the stairs bounders Toby with a third. He just put this one in my lap and started to leap round Mr. Slompack, woofing like anything.

" 'Good heavens!' exclaimed Mr. Slompack. 'This is awful. Lie down! Good dog.'

"Mr. Slompack only said that about being a good dog to quieten Toby; but the dog must have taken it for praise and discouragement. Mr. Slompack made a grab at his collar, but missed, and, in spite of him calling out to it, the dog went rushing down them stairs like one of them caravans that crash down the mounting side. We heard him woof out in the street.

" 'This is terrible! ' cries Mr. Slompack. It was terrible, too, having babies brought to the establishment not in single flies but in battle lions, as the saying goes. Not that them women seemed to think it so terrible. They seemed quite pleased to have babies to nurse, especially that Mrs. Wallsley, though she had told me once that she and her husband had decided they couldn't afford any themselves and, anyway babies were a lot of bother.

" 'We must consider how to get these babies back to their mothers,' says Mr. Slompack, worried.

"There wasn't any occasion to think of that for long; it was a case of Mahomets going for the mountains, as the Bible says.

"IT frightened seven monks' groans out of me, as the saying is, when that mob of people came pouring up the stairs, following Toby. He had another baby in his mouth, but he was growling so that they were afraid to take it from him. Soon that crowd was everywhere on the stairs and right out in the street, so people told me later, going on as if they were going to pull the place down, and talking about kidnappers who trained dogs to steal babies. It was as if all Clapham was let loose. There was so much diffusion that you could hardly hear them babies howling, let alone what anyone said, except one man with a gruff voice who kept saying that a man ought to stoush 'im.

"I must say that not even Horatius who played bridge while the crusaders attacked Rome could have been more cool than Mr. Slompack ; he stood there like Ajax defiling the lightning; although he might not have been so good if Toby hadn't been beside him growling at them which came too near, which they didn't. They was all afraid of Toby, which who wouldn't be? But in spite of him some women burst out of the crowd and seized babies, hugging them. But they weren't satisfied with getting their babies back. They told Mr. Slompack off terribly, all speaking together.

"Confucius was worse, confound it, as the Bible says, when them firemen came forcing their way up the stairs, somebody, seeing the crowd, having rung up the fire brigade. But by-and-bye the tumors die down, with the crowd satisfied to say 'Give it to 'im, missus! Good on you! 'E deserves it all.'

" 'Keeping a huge dog what snatches babies out of their prams when a woman's back is only turned for a moment!' says one of the women.

" 'The baby must have cried,' says poor Mr. Slompack, 'and the dog—'

" 'Can't a poor mite cry without being kidnapped by a great caverning animal?' asks another woman.

" 'A man oughter shoot the beast,' says the man with the gruff voice. It gave me a start, thinking there'd be shooting; but I could do nothing. If they had been tenants I could have given them notice ; but they weren't.

"I expect it was that pound each that Mr. Slompack gave the mothers that modified them, after he'd tried to explain about it being the dog's instink; but I dare say it was the money he gave the man with the gruff voice, thinking he was a father, which it turned out he wasn't, to buy his friends a drink that did most good.

" 'Come on, boys,' he says. 'He's a sport, anyway. It's not his fault; and he's going to keep the dog chained up.' "

"IT was surprising how empty the place seemed when that crowd had gone; and Mr. Slompack looked quite pleased, in spite of all it had cost him, tipping the firemen and all. Little did he know that his troubles was just beginning.

" 'Who does this baby belong to?' asks Mrs. Turner.

"There it was asleep in her arms and quite unconscientious of all the tumors. Mr. Slompack said probably its mother would turn up soon; but it was still there when he came back from chaining up Toby, which the poor brute looked disappointed at not getting the praise he must have thought he earned. And by that time Detective Cassidy and a policeman were there, too, to see what all the rumpus had been about.

" 'We'll have the baby sent to Scarba,' says Mr. Cassidy.

" 'I don't know. The mother may come here. I feel guilty in a way,' says Mr. Slompack, 'and perhaps—'

" 'Oh, it would be best to keep it here! I'll look after the little darling!' cried Mrs. Wallsley.

"Everybody thought that was a happy dissolution; so the police said the child could stay pro temper, which was something it certainly showed when it woke up. But no mother turned up in spite of a taxfully-worded notice in the paper.

"So the baby stayed. The tenants called it 'Mr. Slompack's baby,' which he didn't altogether like, no doubt thinking it was hardly respectable, him being a bachelor. The poor man didn't know that there was much worse waiting for him in that corney cup-holder of Time of which the poet sings.

"There wasn't any trouble about looking after the baby, except that Mrs. Turner didn't see why Mrs. Wallsley should have a monotony of it, and even Mrs. Fidgett, besides Mrs. Wassail, wanted to have a share.

"Them women was all against it when Mr. Slompack said that something would have to be done about the child, and as it was his irresponsibility he thought he had better send it to Scarba. He said he thought it would be best to

talk it over in his flat. Almost every woman in the place took that as a generous invitation.

"But I was downstairs, that being a night new tenants were to come, when a young woman came to me and asked if this was the place where the lost baby was. She seemed weighed down by weighty woe; but she was very well dressed.

" 'It's in Mr. Slompack's flat at this moment,' I says.

" 'Is that Mr. Tom Slompack?' she asks; and hardly waiting for me to say 'yes' and tell her which flat it was, up she rushes, me after her. She burst into the flat, which the door was open, like a bolt from the balloon and dives over to the baby to hug it and cry 'Oh, my precious little darling!' But she left it in Mrs. Wassail's arms— which was having it for a time. She rushes to Mr. Slompack and throws her arms round him.

" 'Oh, Tom! Oh, my dear, dear husband!' she cries, weeping. 'Fancy my having found you! Fancy that dear dog having brought our lovely little baby to its own father.'

"IF ever there was a bolt from a bombshell that was! And a pretty kettle of fish and chips it was, too. You should have seen the way all those women looked at Mr. Slompack!

"Mr. Slompack might have been as cool as that Horatius playing bridge before that mob downstairs ; but he wasn't that way now, trying to unwrap himself from that young woman, which she refused to be unwrapped, and telling her that she was historical and he'd never seen her before.

" 'Oh, Tom, Tom!' she cries, all piteous. 'Is your memory gone? Of course, I knew it must have gone, or you wouldn't have deserted me the morning after we were married. But you can't throw me off now we've met by a coracle.'

"You never saw such a scene! I couldn't make heads and tails of it, what with that woman talking with tears in her voice, the more so when Mr. Slompack had broken away and got round the other side of the table, and kept saying that he wasn't married and didn't know her; and the women saying that they knew all the time that there was something queer about Mr. Slompack. They seemed certain that she really was his wife.

" 'Oh, how can he say he never saw me before?' wails the woman. 'I have my marriage lines in my box which I can show. It says Thomas Slompack. We met in the train coming from Melbourne; and although it was all very sudden he made me believe he had fallen in love with me at first sigh. And so had I with him. I had had to leave my position in the country because of the way my employer behaved, without money; and I thought he pitied me. Directly the train arrived we got married. Then we went to a hotel. I trusted him and was happy; but he went out after breakfast, and I never saw him again. Not till now. And now he—'

" 'The callow brute! ' says Miss Perry; and she was not the only one who spoke as that Mrs. Slompack, as it seemed she was, broke down, weeping.

" 'Well might he say he felt guilty about that baby,' says Mrs. Fidgett.

" 'lt's preterposterous! ' cries Mr. Slompack. 'lf a Thomas Slompack married this woman, it wasn't me. She's a complete stranger."

"Mrs. Slompack gave a moan like a wounded heart, as the saying is, though, of course, a heart, being a mere orgy of the body, can't speak. 'Isn't it terrible?' she wails. 'He seemed such a kind man ; if he hadn't made me believe that he loved me, I wouldn't have married him. I always put it down, him losing his memory, to him having been intoxicated on the train.'

" 'Me intoxicated on the train!' yells Mr Slompack, looking as if he was going to burst.

" 'You've got your baby! I'll be glad if you'll all leave my flat,' he says. 'I've had enough of this. That woman must take her baby away.'

" 'But where am I to go?' cries Mrs Slompack. 'I've worked hard to keep my baby— our baby; but l was put out of my lodgings because I had no money. I was looking for new ones when my dear babe disappeared. I've been looking for it ever since ; and I've got no home and no money.'

" 'Oh, if you're without money, that's different. I wouldn't see any woman in want. Give her this,' Mr Slompack says, keeping the other side of the table still.

" 'You could stay in my flat to-night with your dear baby,' says Mrs. Turner. 'That inhuman monster may think better of it in the morning.'

"HOW Mr. Slompack got them all out of his flat I do not know; but I know he slammed the door very hard. Never in my born existence did I know such a hulloobulloo. The news about Mr. Slompack being really a married man was all over the flats like wildflowers. The women had always seemed annoyed at Mr. Slompack being a bachelor, with the money he seemed to have which a wife would be able to spend; and I think they felt a triumph in having him married.

"But the things they said about the poor man! It was Miss Perry who called him a whitened steeplechase, and nearly all them women said that they had known all along that there was something queer about him. They must have watched him as the cat watches the mice at play the way they remembered how he had been to Melbourne, and hadn't come back here straight when he returned, and had looked as if he had been drinking heavily.

"Some were for advising Mrs. Slompack to go for him for maintenance; they said she could get five or six pounds a week and wouldn't need to be worried with him. And others thought that Mr. Slompack had some good in him and would do the right thing.

" 'Especially as you have a dear little baby,' says Mr Wassail sedimentally. 'No man will turn against his own child— if he is a man.'

"It seemed as if the indignation meetings of women were going on amongst the flats all night long, and saying what a brute Mr. Slompack had shown himself. It must've been them that thought there might be a happy ending which prevailed, for I found Mrs Slompack with the baby in her arms and Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Wallsley with her tapping at Mr. Slompack's door in the morning.

" 'Baby wants to say good morning to its daddy,' says Mrs. Slompack in a cooing voice like one that wanted to let bygones be bygones.

" 'The pigheaded brute!' says Mr, Turner. 'We've been knocking for a quarter of an hour and he won't take any notice.'

"Which the reason why was plain that very moment, when Mr. Slompack came up the stairs from the street.

" 'You can all come in,' he says, and goes on speaking. 'I'm not married to this woman. That's Preterposterous. But she says she is without money, and she has a baby. I've been out to cash a cheque. Now I'm willing to give her twenty pounds if she will go away and find lodgings for herself and the child.'

" '*Your* child, Tom,' she says. 'Oh, you can't mean to cast me off like this.'

'If you've got any claim against me,' says Mr. Slompack, as cold as a bicycle, 'you can prove it in court. Meantime, here's the money; take it or leave it.'

" 'Brute,' says Mrs. Turner. 'Hard-hearted brute."

" 'I think perhaps, I'm too damned soft-hearted,' he says.

" 'Who will look after the baby for you?' says Mrs. Wallsey quickly.

" '*W*e will,' says Mrs Turner. 'There's no need for you to hurry to return, dear.'

"SHE didn't either. When Mr. Slompack came back at lunchtime sort of anxious to see that she had gone, the baby was still here. We were in the lounge with it; and Mr. Slompack had to stand what them women said about him changing his mind and doing the right thing. He was so worried that he couldn't retortoise anything.

" 'Here she comes!' he said suddenly.

"But it was Detective Cassidy and two women. The young one pushed up in front of him.

"There wasn't any mistake about this young woman; and if that there Solomon who had to cut a baby in two to decide which was which had been present he wouldn't have had any doubt about who was a mother. She didn't take any notice of Mr. Slompack or any of us. With something like a yell she rushes forward sudden and grabs the baby from Mrs. Fidgett's arms, hugs it to her, then holds it off look at and then flops into a chair rocking it her arms like the broken doll of the song. All the time she was crying 'Oh, my baby! My little darling!'

"Detective Cassidy was standing there looking all soft-like, as even policemen can look, and pleased with himself as if he was entirely irresponsible for everything, including the curse of true love which was running t 0 ad f hat smoodge again. And he told us about it:

"Mrs Bradley was called away sudden to go to her mother who they thought was dying, and she asked her landlady to look after the baby, who was asleep in a pram on the verandah, while she was away— which, being a very motherly woman, she was ready do. When Mrs. Grabbit saw the pram empty she thought the mother must have found she couldn't leave her baby, and, being in a hurry, just returned and grabbed the child. It wasn't till Mrs Bradley came back that they both had the historics, nearly, discovering the baby was missing— missing for days. But we was able to fix them up at the station.

" 'But,' I says, 'what about the other mother? We was expecting her back any moment.'

" 'What!' exclaims Mr. Cassidy. 'What other mother? I never heard yet of an infant having two mothers.'

" 'Nuisance Nancy, I bet!' cries Mr. Cassidy when we told him; and the way he described her down to her peroxide hair and her eyes that looked as if they couldn't tell a lie, which I never believe them sort of eyes myself, was like two peas in a pod. 'She won't come back,' he says. 'So she put over the tale of a romance in a train, and a marriage at the end of it, did she? And then being deserted at the hotel, and thinking the husband had only lost his memory?'

" 'It was something like that,' says Mr. Slompack, very uncomfortable.

" 'That's her lay,' says Mr. Cassidy. 'She actually worked that on a young man who was just going to go to the church to be married and done for; how we heard of it was because, after paying her twenty-five quid to get rid of her, the chap rang us up in case there was a scene at the church. He thought she genuinely believed that what she said was true, y'see. She seizes on anything that's going; makes a nuisance of herself until she's given money to get rid of her. That's why we call her Nuisance Nancy. I suppose you gave her some money, Mr. Slompack?'

" 'Well— er— I did,' says Mr. Slompack. 'But I don't think we need say anything about that.'

" 'There you are, y'see! ' says Mr. Cassidy, with a shrug. 'We could have a lot on Nuisance Nancy only people who've been had won't go on. We want to get her. Would you be prepared to lay a charge, Mr. Slompack?'

" 'No, I won't,' he says, defiant. And sometimes I thinks, afterwards, that he'd almost sooner have been really married to that Nuisance Nancy than have all the tenants know he had been the victimisation of a trick like that. Which all that should have cleared Mr. Slompack from the vile aspershums that had been cast upon him. But it didn't. Miss Perry, for instants, said he must have a

guiltless conscientiousness to have parted with his money like he did. Perhaps he really did marry a young woman he met in a train under a name he used as an alibi, and then deserted her; which would account for him remaining a bachelor. Them women did hate that Mr. Slompack being a bachelor!

"The first thing Mr. Slompack did was to take Toby out to the Home for Dogs, where if he got out and started bringing back babies there wouldn't be any trouble like we had. And the first thing I did was to get Sandy, the odd-jobs man, to put up a notice that no dogs was allowed in the flats.

But it was Mr. Wassail that showed how everybody was disgusted with dogs.

" 'That damned Cancan! ' he says. 'We lose our money on it; and then when we're too upset here to think of it, it wins! At ten to one. Damn' dogs! I've given my Airedale to Detective Cassidy.'

"Which Detective Cassidy didn't know that that very morning it had bitten the postman," concluded Mrs. Parsley.

13: The First Foot

Robert Barr
1850-1912
National Advocate (Bathurst) 21 June 1902

THE HOUSE was chaos. One lamp burned, a cheap made-in-Germany affair, which gave sufficient light to show the hopeless disorder of the room. The furniture stood about at all impossible angles, pictures, instead of being neatly arranged upon the walls, rested on the floor, leaning their faces against the wainscot as things in grief; books, loosely tied with coarse string were flung here, a bundle of fire irons huddled there. Chaos indescribable. But Stuart Brazier was a methodical, philosophic soul, the very type of the satisfied and satisfactory suburban dweller. He had glanced at the disheartening scramble of furniture and ornaments without the least little discouragement. Tomorrow, not tonight, he would begin to set things to rights.

The June night closed in, and Stuart Brazier sat in his comfortable chair, smoking and turning matters over in his mind. He was glad to be at length in the first detached house he had ever possessed; he thought of its spacious lawns, spacious for a London suburb, and of the grounds well bushed in from spying neighbours. He was glad, too, that he had sent his wife and little girl to Margate where in bracing air they would know nothing of the discomforts of a moving day.

The dust and the turmoil of the morning, the heavy boots trampling on un carpeted stairs, the sight of men straining in their determination not to injure heavy furniture, the sounds of hammers and falling things; the whole picture of turning out of one house and going into another, had got upon his nerves just a little, and now that he sat at rest, he felt disinclined to stir himself. But write to Margate he must. His wife would look to receive a letter from him the first thing in the morning, telling her all about it; assuring her that no precious family god had been broken, and that her jewellery box was quite safe. After their little girl, the chief care of the Braziers was that small tin box, which contained the wife's valuables. Its contents were richer than are usually found in a suburban villa, for both Stuart Brazier and his wife were connected with people who could well afford to remember, in a pleasant and substantial way, birthdays, and did remember them.

At length Stuart Brazier stirred himself. He refilled and lighted his huge homely pipe, gathered a miscellaneous collection of bric-a-brac off the round table, and sat down to write.

He wrote cheerfully, telling all about the small events that make up a moving, and strangely enough had just finished these words: 'Like a tinker I am happy in my squalor, all I yearn for is company; and I wonder who will first foot

our new house?' when his ear caught the sound of footsteps coming boldly up the gravel path which led to the front door. Brazier listened, and then quickly glanced at his watch.

'Ten o'clock,' he muttered to himself. 'Too late to be the last post. Now, who the deuce is coming, and what does he want? Perhaps one of the movers has left something behind.'

As the crushing sounds drew nearer, Brazier made out that there must be more than one person approaching the door. The windows of the room in which he sat were wide open, allowing him to hear with great distinctness.

Outside, the night was pitch dark, occasionally illuminated by heat lightening clouds blotted out moon and stars, the whole world seemed to pant in the clammy heat of threatening rain. Within a few yards of the front door the visitors paused, and the next instant Brazier heard the high-pitched voice of a woman say:

'I'm sure there's robbers in: I feel it in my bones.'

'Be quiet, dear, do shut up,' roughly commanded the voice of a man.

'How can I be quiet if burglars and housebreakers are rumpling and tearing my—'

'Oh, shut up. You'll be in hysterics first thing you know, You'd better stop out of 'arm's way. Go back there... to them bushes and keep still.'

'I wouldn't leave you for worlds, indeed and indeed I wouldn't. I would die of fright, I know I would.'

'Well then keep your 'ead shut, and let me and the constable do the talking or anything else.'

Brazier grinned, and started for the door taking the miserable light with him. Before he had picked his way through the furniture to the hall, the front bell was rung violently. He placed the lamp on the hall table, and flinging open the door, asked: 'Well, what's up?'

'What's up, indeed! How have you got into this house?' demanded someone; he could not well see who.

'By promising to pay rent, principally,' Brazier replied goodnaturedly, realising that a mistake had been made, a mistake that would turn out all right for him in the end.

Peering into the darkness, he saw that the party numbered three, a man, a woman and a constable. The man had in his hand a large Gladstone bag, which, before replying to Brazier's little witticism, he proceeded to place upon the grass.

'Well, by 'eavens, you're a cool customer, you are. What are you doing in my 'ouse?'

'I'm not in your house.'

'It's a lie, you are!' exclaimed the man in a passion, 'You thought to 'ave the place all right for a quiet search, I suppose, but you've been found out, you 'ave. You're trapped, you are.'

'Be calm, sir, and don't talk nonsense if you can help it,' Brazier replied. 'This is my house and it is filled with my furniture. I moved in today—'

'I know jolly well you moved in today, and I know jolly well you'll move out to-night. Policeman, I give this man in charge.'

The policeman looked at Brazier, but made no move.

'Constable,' said Brazier, now thoroughly amused, 'there is a ludicrous mistake here somewhere. The irate gentleman perhaps has taken a house nearby and moved into it. as I have into this to-day. He has made a mistake in the number of his house.'

Turning to the stranger, he continued: 'If your good lady and you will step in, and glance at the furniture, you will find out that you are in the wrong. I'm sorry there is not a better light for you, but you will perhaps make that do.'

Without a word, the two stepped into the hall. Turning to address , a pleasant remark to the policeman, Brazier suddenly found himself sprawling on the gravel path, and at the same instant heard the door shut to with a bang. The policeman hastened forward to assist the astonished man to his feet. Before astonishment and anger allowed him to open his mouth, Brazier heard the voice of the woman sing out,

'Go away, you wicked housebreaker, or the policeman will take you in charge,' and next the front windows were checked down in great haste. '

'What possesses those two people; I surely they are out of their minds?' Brazier said at length to the attentive policeman. 'That's my house, I have valuables in there. I can't have strangers in possession and unwatched, I don't care who they are, or how mistaken they may be. I must ask you to get them out without delay.'

'I have no right, to break into a house, sir,' answered the constable. 'To speak plain, I don't know either of you, so I can't tell whose house it is. You may be right or you know, sir, he may be right. How am I to know which is which?'

'I had possession, you saw that,' hotly replied Brazier. 'You saw me installed in the house. Isn't that enough for you?'

'Certainly not, sir. You had possession, then I was on your side; they have possession now, and I am on their side— that is, in a way. Blest if I know what's up though, between you all. I would not have taken you out, nor can I take them out.'

'You're partly responsible, you know. If you had not been here with them, I would not have given them my chance to break in.'

'They didn't break in, you showed I them in. I wouldn't have let 'em break in, no fear. But you asked them in as polite as a preacher, and you see they've accepted.'

'You allowed them to assault me, and to evict me—'

'Me? How could I help what they did? It was all done in the twinkling of an eye. I didn't know the man was going to give you his shoulder.'

'You have seen him do an illegal thing—'

'There's no use your talking to me. You'd better see the sergeant at the station. Between you and me, I think this is a summons job. It will take you a day or two to get them out, even if they don't belong here, if they sit tight.'

'Summons to get heaven knows who out of my house, just because they have the daring impudence to get in, in the way they did! They'll suffer for this, if there is any law in the land. They're impostors, the chances are they're worse; they're thieves.'

Out of the first floor window a head was thrust, and a man's voice asked:

' 'Asn't he gone yet? Let 'im go, policeman. We've no further use for 'im.'

'Are you people staying in?' asked the policeman.

'Of course we are; it's our 'ouse, and I suppose we 'ave a right to stay 'ere for the night, ain't we?'

'What am I to do, constable?' asked Brazier, for the first time realising that the matter of getting two stubborn people out of his house was likely to be a much more tedious business than getting them in. 'What do you advise?'

'Now that your temper has left you, and you ask advice, I'll give it. To tell the truth, I don't like the look of things here, so I'll stay and keep a sharp watch on what goes on. You cut off as fast as you can go to the station, and explain matters to the sergeant in charge. Tell him P.C. Foster sent you, You know the station?'

'No, I don't.'

'Well, outside your gate, turn to the left and keep straight on to the end of the street. You'll find it a goodish, step, you will, so you may as well make haste. I'll watch these gentry, I will.'

Stuart Brazier, hatless and slippers on feet darted down the gravel walk, and at his best pace made off in the direction indicated to him by the policeman. He could not keep from grinning ruefully at his words regarding the 'first foot.' Here was a pleasing first foot, indeed. How his wife would laugh and enjoy the plight— providing always that nothing happened to her treasures! But he solaced himself the couple must be crazy, and crazy people do not steal, however much they may delight in destroying.

He had gone but a few hundred yards before good fortune came to him.

At the corner of a street he came within an ace of running full tilt against two mounted policemen, who, having met, were passing the time of night with

each other. All breathless, Stuart Brazier explained matters to them. When they had heard they quickly swung off their horses. One constable led thee animals to a lamp-post, to which he secured them; the other closely questioned Brazier.

'What do you say the constable's name is?'

'Foster.'

'Yes, and did Foster tell you this was the way to the station?'

'Yes, he said turn to the left when you get out of your gate. I turned to the left.'

'I'm afraid in your anxiety you have mistaken what he said. You should have turned to your right.'

'He said left, I'm sure.'

'It does not matter now that you've met us. Come on, and we'll see what's to do. Please make no noise; you can't tell what's up or who's about.'

All three scaled the palings, at the corner of Brazier's garden, and keeping in the shadow of the bushes as noiselessly and as quickly as ferrets, they made their way to a spot that commanded a view of the hall door.

'I don't see Foster,' one whispered.

'He may be at the back of the house,' the other answered, 'or he may not be here at all.'

'You're right,' replied the first. 'You slip up under the shadow and take your stand against the front door.'

Turning to Brazier, he whispered, 'Now you stick by me and don't funk, you know. Is the back door locked?'

'It was when I left the house.'

'All right, be as silent as a ghost now, and when I shove in the door with my shoulders, you float this light in ahead of me. We'll rush right in pell-mell. I may as well tell you there is no policeman named Foster in this district. But I know who Foster is. I think he's Jim Cumming, the cunningest— but no talk now, come on and be steady.'

The door went in with a crash to the might of the constable's great shoulders, and two seconds later Brazier stood in his dining-room. Before him. in various attitudes of surprise and vicious terror, were three men dressed in ordinary clothes. The bogus policeman grasped a chair by the back and swung it to strike, but the real constable's voice rang out: 'Jim, don't do that. You should know better. It will go hard enough with you as matters stand. Don't make a fool of yourself. Don't earn more time.'

The ruffian put down the chair without a word and seated himself upon it.

'You have me fair and square, you have, and no mistake, 'Who's with you?'

'Ronald, he's at the front door.' Turning to Brazier, the policeman said, 'Let my chum in, please.'

'You have to be doing something always, Jim. This is a new wheeze you've struck?'

'Yes, and a good one, only I'm out of luck of late. Think of the bareheaded fool running against you two! I counted on him looking for the station for a bit yet.'

The constable ran his eye over the other two, he that so lately was a woman and the other who had the Gladstone bag.

'These are new friends?' queried the policeman.

'Yes, and good 'uns, too; they played the game well; Claude here made a fetching gal, but there, where's the use of talking now it's all over! You haven't such a thing as a glass of beer or a little whisky in the house?'

Brazier had to admit that he hadn't.

'No apology, mister,' said Jim. 'I know you've just moved in. Luck is down on us with both feet to-night.'

'Where's your togs?' asked the policeman.

'You'll find my policeman's uniform in the front room. Claude, you left your petticoats upstairs, didn't you?'

An hour later Stuart Brazier, back from the police station, picked up the thread of his letter, and told of his company and the 'first foot.'

14: The Officer in Charge

A Far Inland Sketch

John Arthur Barry

1851-1911

Collected in: *Steve Brown's Bunyip, and Other Stories*, 1905

'A RISING TOWNSHIP of some four hundred inhabitants, situated on the Trickle Trickle River. Distance from Sydney, north-west, six hundred and fifty miles.'

Thus the *Australian Gazetteer*, speaking of the far-inland village of Jillibeejee. For days you shall have ridden over bush roads, fetlock deep in dust, through monotonous open forest, or over still more monotonous plain, ere, far away on a dry brown ridge, you catch the glitter of something in the bright, hot sunshine. This proceeds from the first roof in Jillibeejee. Then, making your horse stride carefully over the Trickle Trickle, whose banks are apt to crumble, you breast the ridge and take a bird's-eye view of the township as it lies frying in the sun.

This ridge must be fully fifty feet above the level of the surrounding country, and is probably the 'rising' referred to by the jocular *Gazetteer*.

The first building is deserted; so is the second. As you ride along you come to others, dilapidated but, from sounds within, peopled. There are altogether forty houses in Jillibeejee, which, by the *Gazetteer's* reckoning, gives us an average of ten inmates to each one.

I am afraid the *Gazetteer* has never been to Jillibeejee.

In fact, very few people ever do seem to go there. Those that do, either depart again very shortly, or stay until theirs makes one amongst a collection of rudely-fenced enclosures on the banks of the Trickle Trickle, inside which sleep the pioneers of the place.

Perhaps the first emotion that arises in the visitor's mind is of wonder that any pioneer, no matter how hard up he may have been, should have thought it worth while to commence pioneering at Jillibeejee. The second, that any others should ever join him in such a speculation. Neither tree nor any other green thing meets the sight. All is brown, barren, desolate— apparently a 'waste land where no one comes, or hath come since the making of the world,' except that intrepid band in possession.

Why do people live here? How do they live? I must discover this, if possible, before leaving. Having no time to spare, I begin at once.

He is six feet in his stockings, broad, massive, hirsute, and tanned. The insignia of office in such a place would be an absurdity. Therefore his raiment is nondescript, and mostly slouch hat. This is the man who rules the official destinies of the settlement— the 'Officer in Charge.' To him I propound my conundrum.

'Ah,' replies he; 'ye shud jist come aroun' whin ut's a wet saison, an' thin ye'd see the differ av ut.'

'Yes,' I remark. 'And when may that time be due?'

'God knows,' says he piously, and with a sigh. 'I've bin here four year, an' I've seen ut wanst. Ye cudn't see the counthry for a week bekase av the wather. Thin, afther, comes the grass an' the clover six feet high. Ut's a great counthry, them times, so it is, sorr.'

It is high noon as I and my friend stroll along the fiery, dusty track amongst the iron-roofed ovens large and small.

Everybody seems asleep, save that now and again we catch a glimpse of women, wan and prematurely old-looking.

In the sun's eye a man lies in the brown dust. He is on his back, his hat off, and snoring stertorously up at a cloud of mosquitoes, sandflies, and other abominations hovering and buzzing about his face.

With a look of solicitude my guide exclaims,—

'Sure, now, that's Tim Healy, come in from Out Back, an' his cheque gone already! Lend a hand, will ye, sorr, wid the other ind av him. The poor devil 'll be sthruck intirely here, so he will.'

So, one at each 'ind,' we bear the man from Out Back into the comparative shade of a verandah, where the constable takes off his boots, loosens his shirt collar, and props his head up, saying,—

'There, the cratur, mebbe he'll waken wid nothin' worse nor a sore head, an' a limekiln in the throttle av him.'

A fit man and a proper, this one, I reflect, to be Officer in Charge of this half-forgotten fragment of a people.

So, presently, I am not surprised at hearing that, in addition to that title, he bears the important ones of Clerk of Petty Sessions, Registrar of Small Debts Court and Births, Land Bailiff, Inspector of Slaughterhouses, Curator's Agent, and others equally pertinent to his surroundings, but which I have forgotten.

Entering the parlour of the one public-house, silent and deserted but for clouds of humming flies, a drowsy landlord, booted and spurred for riding, answers our knock.

'I was goin' over the river an hour ago,' he explains, rubbing his bleary eyes, 'to run a beast in; but two or three of the boys wos here larst night, an' they kep' it up; so I lays down on the sofy an' drops right off. What'll ye have, gents?'

I ask for beer. My companion smiles and 'takes' rum.

'Lor bless yer!' exclaims the landlord, 'there ain't bin no beer here this twelvemonth or more! I got some, somewheres, on the teams. But, the way things is, it'll be another twelvemonth afore they show up. Dry time, ye see, sir.'

'Well, then,' I say, 'have you any whisky?'

'There was a bottle or two, but the boys— ' he commenced, when,—

'What's the use av batin' about the bush that way?' puts in my companion. 'Why don't ye tell the gint at wanst that sorra a dhrop'll he get in Jillibeejee, bar the rum utself. I've dhrunk worse in Port Mackay. Ut's a wholesome dhrink, in moderation, an' wid jist a suspicion o' Trickle Trickle at the bottom av the tumbler.'

So rum it is. The Officer in Charge takes his, I notice, very nearly pure, and without winking. We help ourselves, and the price is one shilling each.

It is still terribly hot.

'It must be a long way over one hundred degrees in the shade,' I remark.

'Come acrost to the station,' says the Officer in Charge, 'an' we'll see. There's no shade whatever in Jillibeejee. But there's the best that is. Sure, ut's weatherboard an' lined— the only wan in the town. There's a thermomether there as tells how big a hate's on.'

So we go over. The place is like a furnace, and the glass registers one hundred and twenty-seven degrees.

'And you've been here some years!' I gasp, sliding off my chair, a wet, limp heap, on to the floor, and staying there.

'I have, indade, sorr,' replies he. 'The first summer I was minded to blow me head off wid me pistol. The second was near as bad; but I don't fale 'em so much now. Whin the wet do come, ut's almost as thryin'; for the san'-flies an' miskitties bangs Banagher. Ay, ut's dull an' lonesome like, sure enough, till the b'ys comes in for a change; an' thin, if ye'll belave ut, Jillibeejee is as ructious a towneen as is on God's earth.'

'Come in from where? Where the deuce can anybody come in from? And who in the world would come to such a hole as this 'for a change?' I ask irritably, whilst wringing my pocket handkerchief, as the heat proves too trying.

'Whisht!' replies my host placidly. 'Ye'll mebbe have noticed that there's not many min in Jillibeejee, knockin' aroun' like?'

'Only the fellow,' I answer, 'that we put in the verandah.'

'Ay, he's iver wan o' the fust, is Tim Healy,' says the Officer in Charge. 'Whin the others are comin' in, he'll be afther going back, stone bruk, so he will, poor divil!'

'In from *where*? Back to *where*?' I cry impatiently.

'To an' fro the big stations on the border, over yander,' replies he, with a wave of his hand westward. 'To the back av beyant, where they digs dams, an' sinks wells, an' fences an' fights wid the naygurs, an' herds cattle, an' gathers up a cheque, and thin comes back like pilicans to their women and children on the edge o' the wiltherness here. Good b'ys, in the main,' he continues; 'just a little rough, perhaps, when the rum's in. Ye see, sorr, ye can't expeck much else from the craturs, for, iv this is bad, ut's Hell utself out yander in the new counthry,

where there's no law, no polis, no nothin'. D'ye wander at the b'ys, now, wantin' a change out av ut wanst an' agin?'

'Well, perhaps not. But what must that other life be like?'

So, in the gloaming, hot and close, with a hot-looking moon hanging in a hazy sky, I depart from Jillibeejee, leaving its Officer in Charge— strong man, and a very fit— stroking a great black beard meditatively, and possessing his soul in patience for the stirring times which herald the advent of his charges from the 'Back av Beyant.'

15: The Mystery at Styles Court

"Sapper"

H. C. McNeile 1888-1937

Collected in: *Call for Ronald Standish*, 1936

OF ALL the cases in which I have had the privilege of working with Ronald Standish, I think the most amazing was the one which had for its setting the historic old house of Styles Court. Much water has flowed under the bridge since the events I am about to relate took place: it is, in fact, only for that reason that it is permissible for me to commit them to paper. And even to-day some of the actors in the drama must be veiled under fictitious names, though to many the task of identifying them will not prove difficult.

Styles Court is a charming Elizabethan manor situated in the gently undulating country which lies north of the South Downs between Pulborough and Petworth. Originally the home of an old Sussex yeoman family it had continued in their possession from father to son for over two centuries, until increasing taxation and decreasing revenue had enforced its sale. It had passed into the hands of a wealthy stockbroker named Cresswell who, fortunately, had excellent taste as well as a considerable bank balance. This gentleman, in addition to installing running water and other necessities of modem life, also added a large room which started life with the intention of being used for billiards and finished its career as a sitting cum dance cum general utility room. He spared no expense over it. On the outside it conformed exactly to the rest of the house in a way which did credit to the architect; inside it provided all that the most comfort-loving individual could demand. It was completely separate from the rest of the house, being connected with it by a short passage, and so possessed four outside walls. But an excellent system of central heating and a huge log fire made it perfectly habitable on even the coldest winter's day. And if I seem to have devoted over much space to the details of a mere room, the time has not been wasted, since it was to prove the scene of the whole tragedy.

It was on a morning in early September, 192—, that the telephone rang in Ronald's flat. I was with him at the time and we were debating on the rival merits of our respective links for a day's golf, when the interruption occurred. It was Cresswell himself who was on the line— we both knew him fairly well— and he wanted to know if he could come round immediately.

"Moreover," said Ronald as he put down the receiver, "I am inclined to think, Bob, that our golf is not likely to materialise. There was a note of urgency in Tom Cresswell's voice that I fear means business."

He arrived in a quarter of an hour, and with him was another man whose face seemed vaguely familiar to me. Cresswell introduced him as Sir James Lillybrook, and then I remembered that I had seen him at a City dinner some

months previously. He was the guest of honour: one of those Powers behind the throne in the Treasury of whom the public rarely hears. And it was easy to see at a glance that, on this occasion, the usual unemotional expression of the highly placed permanent official was only maintained with difficulty.

"Can you chuck everything, Ronald," said Cresswell, "and put yourself at the disposal of Sir James?"

"Everything, at the moment," said Ronald with a smile, "consists of where Bob and I were going to play golf to-day. So fire ahead. Sir James. I hope no miscreant has been tampering with the Income Tax."

"I see, Mr. Standish," answered the other gravely, "that you know who I am, so I will not waste my breath by pointing out that at such a time as this, only the gravest emergency would have brought me to consult you."

Ronald held up his hand.

"One moment, if you please. Sir James. Bob and I are only humble readers of the newspapers, and are not behind the scenes. Is anything of special import brewing? From your words, I gather it is. And—" as he noticed a certain reticence on the other's face— "I need hardly point out to you, that if you desire my assistance, it is essential that I should be in full possession of all the facts.

"All," he repeated quietly.

"I quite appreciate your point, Mr. Standish," said Sir James. "And I will put all the relevant facts in front of you."

He paused for a moment or two as if marshalling his thoughts: then speaking in the concise, almost legal manner of a senior Civil servant, he began.

"Two months ago, my chief, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, rented Styles Court from Mr. Cresswell."

"I saw that Mr. Bignor had done so," said Ronald. "He is there at present, I understand— and not in the best of health."

"Precisely: he is not in the best of health. Now, even from a superficial study of the newspapers, you are probably aware that the condition of affairs in Europe to-day, is very unsettled. And it is no exaggeration to say that the Press, with their usual loyalty, have not divulged one half of what they know. In a nutshell, conditions have seldom been graver, and, as usual, finance is at the root of half the trouble. Problems of security and boundaries play their part, but, *au fond*, everything comes back to money.

"Realising this fundamental fact, Mr. Bignor some months ago started tentative negotiations with the representatives of certain foreign powers for a joint discussion on the position. And the essence of his idea was secrecy. No Press, however devoted, could be expected to refrain from comment on a conference such as we have become accustomed to since the war. And so, through channels into which I need not go at the moment, except to say they were not the usual diplomatic ones, his plans gradually took shape and the thing

was arranged. No whisper of the thing escaped: the papers are still in complete ignorance of it.

"Under normal circumstances the meetings would have taken place in London, but the unexpected indisposition of the Chancellor rendered that impossible. And so it was decided to hold them at Styles Court. Do you by any chance know the house?"

"I do," said Ronald.

"Then you know the annexe Mr. Cresswell has built on and I need not bother to describe it to you. The first of the meetings was held a fortnight ago in that room. The delegates had come separately, and by devious routes, and I am certain— or I was then— that no inkling of what was taking place leaked out."

"One point I would like cleared up," interrupted Ronald. "What are the countries concerned?"

Sir James hesitated: then drawing a piece of paper towards him he wrote some words on it.

"I see," said Ronald, concealing a smile at such an excess of caution.

"So there were just the three delegates, Mr. Bignor and yourself at the meeting?"

"Each delegate was accompanied by one adviser, who filled the same position as I did."

"Therefore there were eight of you in all?"

"That is correct. The meeting commenced after lunch, and lasted till dinner, when the delegates motored back to London, having arranged the date for the next meeting. And though this first discussion had only been on general lines, even at that one many things had been said which it was essential should not be divulged. For I need hardly point out to you, Mr. Standish, how invaluable inside information would be on matters of that sort to international financiers. You may judge then of our amazement and dismay, when it became obvious to us the next day, that that was just what had happened. Either a certain group on the Continent had pulled off an almost incredible fluke, or...."

"Someone had blown the gaff," put in Ronald quietly.

"So it seemed at the time. Which put everyone, as you can well imagine, in a very awkward position. The three principals were as much above suspicion as Mr. Bignor: their three advisers were occupying positions as responsible as I was myself. In short, the only solutions that occurred to us were that someone had, quite unintentionally, been indiscreet, or that, during the afternoon some of our conversation had been overheard by a listener outside. And so at our next meeting we decided— I should say Mr. Bignor and I decided— to eliminate, at any rate, the second alternative. As you know, the room has four outside walls, and two Scotland Yard men were posted so that no one could approach the annexe unseen.

"With regard to the other solution the matter had, of course, to be alluded to, and the ground was delicate. But with that characteristic directness which marks one of the nations represented, we got over the awkwardness more easily than I anticipated. Without any preliminary beating about the bush, and with a smile which robbed the remark of any offence he said— 'Wal, gentlemen, I guess that someone, without intending to, has spilt the beans. We'll have to watch it this time.' "

Sir James shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry to say that his words had no effect on the culprit. To use his own phrase, the beans were spilt again. The Scotland Yard men were satisfied that no one had been near the annexe; the possibility of it having been a fluke on the first occasion was eliminated, and we were left with the unpleasant impression that one of us was a traitor."

"One might almost say certainly," said Ronald.

"At the time I would have agreed with you: I did agree with you. Now— and this is my reason for coming here— don't know. I have heard of your great reputation, Mr. Standish," he continued courteously, "but even you would have been powerless, I venture to think, to have kept such track of several people in London that you could have spotted the culprit. A word over the telephone, spoken in code from a bedroom was all that was necessary to convey the information. But at the time, as I say, I thought it was a certainty; we did. Which rendered the atmosphere almost intolerable.

"It was again the American who saved the situation with his usual blunt candour. I will not attempt to repeat his actual words, but shorn of trappings his remarks boiled down to this. One of us eight was giving the show away— he could not even exempt Mr. Bignor, who, though he was confined to the house had easy access to the telephone. And if that was so it was useless to continue the discussions. But in order to make absolutely certain, before taking such a drastic step as calling the conference off he suggested the following plan, if Mr. Bignor approved. We should all make Styles Court our head-quarters, and remain there for the night and day following our next meeting. And if no information leaked out the case would be proved and there would be nothing for it but for everyone to return home. He pointed out that as we were all under equal suspicion, no one need feel any offence should that suspicion prove wrong.

"Mr. Bignor agreed, and suggested the further precaution that the telephone should be disconnected."

Sir James lit a cigarette.

"I suppose I should say the scheme was a success. Certainly it seems to have cleared all of us, even if it has deepened the mystery. As you can imagine, everyone was ostentatiously careful of what they did. The telephone was out of

action: no letter was sent: no one left the house save for a stroll in the garden and then he took care not to go alone. Additional men were drafted in from Scotland Yard, and it is certain that no stranger approached the house. And yet, next day it was obvious that all our precautions were in vain: the information had been passed on. How? Where is this leakage?"

"The servants," said Ronald thoughtfully.

"A C.I.D. man was seated during the whole meeting at the entrance to the passage leading to the annexe."

"Tell me, Sir James," said Ronald after a while, "the nature of the information. What I am trying to get at is this. For it to be of value to the people at the other end would it have to be a long and complicated message? Or would some simple order such as Sell so-and-so short : Buy such-and-such a stock, be sufficient?"

"Undoubtedly, that would be enough."

"Under those circumstances an easy code with an electric torch from a bedroom window would do the trick."

"Would anyone risk it knowing the house was watched?"

"True," agreed Ronald. "And yet it has got through somehow."

"I am asking you to find out how that somehow is. If, Mr. Standish, it was only a group of financiers pulling off a scoop it wouldn't matter so much, though it would be very annoying. But bigger things are involved: international problems of far-reaching importance."

"You are proposing to hold more meetings?"

"More or less continuously over next week-end," said Sir James. "And since they will be the last, decisions may be taken then which must not be divulged."

"I see," said Ronald. "Well, Sir James, if I come down I take it you will be able to give me every facility for making enquiries."

"Short of being actually present at the meeting, Mr. Standish, you can do what you like and go where you please. All we ask is that you should solve the mystery."

He rose, and shortly afterwards left with Tom Cresswell.

"A bit of a teaser, Bob," remarked Ronald, as he stuffed his pipe. "What do you make of it?"

"That you hit the nail on the head when you suggested signalling from a window."

"Almost too obvious to be correct. Sir James was right there. Would the guilty man have dared risk it knowing the house was being watched by a cordon of the keenest eyed men in the world? Still, it remains a possibility, and about the only one I see so far. So let's get down there at once. Bob; we've got a couple of days to spy out the land."

MR. BIGNOR having evidently been put wise to our arrival, received us with the greatest courtesy.

"I sincerely hope," he said as he shook hands, "that you be able to solve it, though I confess that I see no ray of light myself."

He apologised for not being able to put us up, but Ronald assured him that we were quite comfortable at the local inn. And with that we left to start investigations. And the first man we ran into was Inspector Mclver, an old friend of ours. He grinned when he saw us.

"Horse, foot and artillery all mobilised," he remarked. "But honestly, Mr. Standish," he grew serious again, "it is a bit of a poser."

"So it seems," said Ronald, leading the way towards the annexe, where a man was seated in an arm-chair quietly smoking. He sprang to his feet as the inspector entered.

"All correct, sir," he reported.

"This room has had a man in it day and night, Mr. Standish, ever since the last meeting," said Mclver. "And during the coming conference someone will be here up to the moment the gentlemen arrive, and will take over again the instant things are finished for the day."

"You examined the room, of course?"

"Almost to the extent of ripping up the wainscotting," grunted Mclver.

"Naturally, I need hardly have asked. How many men did you have round the house that night?"

"Enough to keep every room under observation," said the inspector. "If you are thinking of the possibility of someone signalling, rule it out."

Ronald nodded.

"And how many inside?"

"A man at the foot of the staircase; a man at the foot of the servants' staircase, and two men doing a general patrol all night. Though really the gentlemen themselves were their own best detectives; each of them is watching his next door neighbour as if he was a convicted murderer."

"I gathered that from Sir James," said Ronald with a smile.

"Now, of course, it is better. They feel they have been given a clean bill of health, and are certain that the information has been obtained from an outside source."

"And what do you think yourself, Mclver?"

"Just this," said the inspector grimly. "Whatever may have happened last time, there is going to be no outside source this next one. Excuse me, Mr. Standish, I'm wanted."

He bustled away, and we strolled out into the garden. The afternoon was hot, and throwing myself on a shady bank I took off my hat and let the faint breeze play round my forehead. In the distance a small river wound its way

through the fields, whilst just below me the owner of a neighbouring farm was cutting his com. He worked by hand in the old-fashioned way, and the field— for the job was nearly finished— was covered with neatly arranged stooks. And as I watched him the contrast struck home forcibly. Behind me, the might of a great police force mobilised to prevent international complications; in front, not a hundred yards away, one of the real fundamentals of life— unchanged for thousands of years. And in all probability the diplomats would have felt scandalised had it been suggested to them that they and all they stood for were the less important of the two.

A tall man came striding across the field, and pausing for a moment to speak to the farmer, came on up the slight rise towards us. It was Sir James, and he stopped as he reached us.

"I am glad you have been able to come so promptly," he said. "It is too early, I suppose, to ask if you've come to any conclusion?"

"None, I fear, Sir James," answered Ronald. "And I see no chance of doing so until the next conference begins. I have talked to McIver, but the scent is altogether too cold to arrive at any conclusions at present."

"He's the Scotland Yard man in charge?"

"Yes. And a very able officer. I have worked with him often. By the way, when was Mr. Bignor taken ill?"

Sir James thought for a moment.

"Two days before the first meeting."

"So that it was only just before that meeting that it was decided to hold the conference here and not in London?"

"It was decided on the actual morning," said Sir James.

"And how was the decision communicated to the delegates?"

"By my secretary personally."

"No possibility of any leakage there, I suppose?"

"Absolutely none," cried Sir James emphatically. Merriman is beyond suspicion."

He strode away towards the house, and Ronald knocked out his pipe and got up.

"Let's go back to the pub, Bob," he said. "A pint of ale is indicated. We might walk over the fields."

Our direction lay via the cornfield. And as we came abreast of the farmer he greeted us cheerily.

"Nearly finished, I see," remarked Ronald. "You've got good weather for it."

The old man nodded. "Might be worse," he conceded. "Be you gennelmen staying up at the Court?"

"No, we're at the Angel. I suppose," he went on casually, "a good many tourists and strangers come down to these parts?"

"A tidy few; mostly earlier in the year though. And we had some of them dratted hikers a few days ago."

"But they don't do any damage, do they?"

The farmer snorted.

"Not 'xactly damage; but silly nonsensical mischief. But what do they want to upset the stooks for? That's what I want to know."

"Why don't you tell them to put 'em up again?"

"They were gone before I got here in the morning," said the old man.

"Well, we all have our worries," said Ronald with a smile. "Good day to you."

We strolled on, Ronald deep in thought.

"A definite snorter this, Bob," he said at length. "Since it was only decided on the actual morning of the first meeting to hold it here, how could any outside agency get the news in time to alter their plans, unless there is a traitor in the camp?"

"One of the servants at Styles Court would have been in a position to pass that on."

"Granted. But in view of the fact that, but for the Chancellor's indisposition, the conference was to have been held in London, what would have been the object of an outside agency squaring a servant here? If the original plan had been adhered to, none of the servants here would have been any use."

"That's so," I agreed.

"Well— give it up. Thank heavens, here's the pub! I can do with that pint."

I HARDLY saw him at all during the next two days. He disappeared after breakfast and only returned in time for dinner each night. Moreover he was not communicative, and I could tell by various little signs that things were not going well. He would discuss anything except the point at issue, and even then periodically he would fall into a brown study, staring out of the window, and drumming on the table with his finger nails.

I knew of old the futility of questioning him, so I possessed my soul in patience till he should choose to be more talkative. Twice McIver came to the inn and they had long consultations, but it was not until Friday that Ronald alluded to the matter again with me.

"Now we start the doings, Bob," he said. "And it is a lucky thing that the weather is set fine. For the next few days we join McIver's merry lads."

"Delighted to hear it," I cried. "The last two days have not been a scream of gaiety."

"Sorry, old boy," he said. "Afraid it's been damned dull for you. And the trouble of it is that I may be on the wrong line now."

"You've got an idea anyway?"

"The vaguest," he said briefly. "Bring your little camera with you.''

I slipped it in my pocket and we started off.

"Are we going to take pictures of the delegates?" I asked.

"No, my dear Bob, we are not. We are, if luck is with us, going to take pictures of the sleepy English country-side."

We reached Styles Court and Mclver joined us.

"They've all arrived, Mr. Standish, and the conference begins after lunch."

"You examined the room again thoroughly this morning?"

"Every nook and cranny of it. There's nothing there. Would you like to walk round the defences?" he asked jocularly.

"Hardly necessary," laughed Ronald. "I can see 'em bristling. No— I'll just take a photograph. Come along. Bob."

We went to the bank where we had rested three days before.

"A charming view," said Ronald. "I see that the farmer, who rejoices in the delicious name of Buzzle, has finished his labours, and the golden corn, if not actually waving, looks delightful in the foreground. Take a picture, Bob."

"I don't see anything particularly charming about it," I remarked.

"That's because you lack the artistic sense," he grinned.

"And now we can go back to the pub."

"But I thought we were joining the party here."

"Only at stated intervals, old boy," he answered. "Mclver is quite capable of holding the fort in our absence. Provided we are back here before dawn to-morrow all will be well."

And not another word would the aggravating blighter say, save a few vague generalities which only increased my curiosity.

"It can't be coincidence. Bob, and yet... Anyway, we'll know for certain to-morrow."

"What?" I demanded.

"If it's coincidence," he grunted.

He woke me at four o'clock next morning, and waited with barely concealed impatience whilst I put on some clothes.

"Don't forget your camera," he cried, as I bolted a cup of tea.

And then he led me, almost at a run, back to our vantage point in the grounds of Styles Court. We passed two of the C.I.D. men, yawning and stiff from their night's vigil, and after a while Mclver joined us. The first faint streaks of dawn were showing over the downs: a low lying mist covered the country in front of us like a carpet. And then the sun itself showed over the ridge of hills. The mist eddied in thin wisps and began to lift, and glancing at Ronald I saw his eyes were gleaming with excitement.

Slowly the sun crept up above the horizon the white blanket rolled sluggishly back from the little hill on which we stood. And suddenly Ronald gave a cry of triumph.

"So it wasn't coincidence! We've solved the first part of the problem. Take a photo, Bob."

"But I'll only get the cornfield," I protested.

"That's all I want," he answered.

I focused the camera, and as I did so there came the drone of an aeroplane in the distance. The noise came nearer and nearer and glancing up I saw the machine. It was a Puss Moth flying low, and with a roar it passed over the house and disappeared.

"Now then, Mclver," cried Ronald, "it's up to you. There's not a moment to be lost. Get to the village and fuse the bally telephone wires if necessary."

"I hope to Heaven you're right, Mr. Standish," said the inspector.

"Of course I'm right, man. For God's sake get a move on."

Mclver hurried away and Ronald turned to me.

"Take another photo. Bob, now that the light is better, to make sure. And then we'll rout the local chemist out of his bed and force him to develop them."

I made a second exposure, and still feeling completely bewildered followed him back to the inn.

"Perhaps you will now condescend to enlighten me," I remarked peevishly.

"All in good time, old boy," he answered. "The method we know: the culprit we don't— as yet."

THE SNAPSHOTS were ready by ten o'clock, and slipping them into an envelope I stepped out into the street just as Mclver passed in a car. A youngish man was with him, and when I got back to the hotel, the car was standing empty outside the door. Of Ronald there was no sign, and I sat down in the lounge to wait for him. Ten minutes passed— a quarter of an hour, and then I saw him coming down the stairs. And a casual remark died on my lips: never had I seen him so grave and so stern.

Behind him was Mclver with the other occupant of the car, who was now looking thoroughly frightened.

"You have the prints. Bob?" said Ronald, coming across to me.

I handed him the envelope.

"Good. Then come in here with me. I am expecting a visitor shortly. Mclver— will you wait in the bar."

He led the way into a small parlour and I followed. Then, having examined the snap-shots, he flung himself into a chair.

"My God! Bob," he said heavily, "the end of this hunt is a bit of a nerve shatterer."

He sat smoking moodily till the landlord opened the door and ushered in Sir James Lillybrook.

"I got your message, Mr. Standish, and since it was so urgent I came at once. Have you discovered anything?"

"I have," said Ronald.

"Well, please be as quick as possible," remarked Sir James. "We are meeting at eleven to-day."

"Will you look at those two snapshots, Sir James," said Ronald quietly.

The other glanced at them, and for an instant his eyes dilated.

"—with special reference to the cornfield," continued Ronald.

"Well," said Sir James. "I am looking."

"Do you notice any difference beyond the obvious one of the mist?"

"I can't say that I do."

"One of them. Sir James, was taken last night, and all the stooks of corn are standing upright. The other was taken this morning and three of the stooks are lying flat."

"Now you mention it, so they are. But what is the significance of that?"

Ronald went to the door.

"McIver," he called, "will you both come here."

And as Sir James's eyes fell on the young man he gave a strangled gasp and swayed as if he was going to fall. Ronald closed the door again, and with his back to it stood watching the other who was struggling to regain his self control.

"I see you recognise the pilot of the aeroplane," said Ronald gravely. "Well, Sir James, it is not for me to ask what induced a man in your position to act as a traitor to his country: presumably it was money. All I am concerned with is my own course of action. When you all dispersed after the earlier meetings and went back to London, the thing was easy. Then, when you remained here, you had to think of another plan. So by knocking over different numbers of stooks of corn you arranged to send different messages to the men who are in league with you, through the pilot outside— who I am glad to say had no idea what he was really doing. And my plain duty is to report what I have discovered at once to Mr. Bignor."

"For God's sake don't, Mr. Standish," cried Sir James in a shaking voice. "Think of the disgrace. I could never stand it, I had been speculating: I was desperate. My son: he's just left Sandhurst. My wife...."

But Ronald's expression showed no sign of relenting: in his particular code some things were beyond the pale.

"Because of your wife, and because of your son, and even more because of the hideous public scandal which would be involved, I am going to make a suggestion to you. There is good rough shooting round Styles Court...."

While a man may count ten they stared at one another: then Sir James Lillybrook rose, and without a word walked through the hall to his waiting car.

I GOT things out of Ronald that afternoon. He spoke in jerky, clipped sentences— sentences punctuated by long pauses when he stared with sombre eyes over the fields at Styles Court.

"Buzzle, the farmer, and the hikers. Hikers wouldn't knock down stooks... Besides, the mist... They wouldn't sleep out in the open at this time of year if they could avoid it... Then the aeroplane... Buzzle remembered it flying so low over his farm that he looked out, and it was then he saw that some stooks had been knocked down...And that morning was the only morning they were knocked down... And that morning was the morning of the conference when special precautions were taken. Coincidence perhaps: but it used to be done in the war if you remember, signalling to aeroplanes by signs on the ground...

"I was sure it was somebody engaged in the conference: no outside agency could have got on to things so promptly without inside information. ... But I never dreamed it was Sir James... Once the delegates had given up returning to London after the meetings he had to act quickly... Told young Ramsden, the pilot, that the number represented a code message to a bookmaker... Gave him a telegraphic address to send it to, and pitched a yarn about liking his flutter but not daring to send betting wires from Styles Court... Appealed to the boy's sense of sport... And, of course, he has no idea even now of the real meaning of the messages..."

"How did you get Ramsden?" I put in.

"McIver had a man at every aerodrome within a radius of ten counties... Picked up the right one on the telephone this morning."

He rose and walked up and down with his hands in his pockets.

"Just luck. If Buzzle hadn't mentioned hikers that first day we saw him the plan would have succeeded. No outsider would notice a few stocks lying flat, or attach any importance to it. And it only took half a minute after dark for Sir James to stroll into the field and upset 'em. The poor devil was so sure he could not be found out that he actually came to me when Bignor proposed outside help. God! Bob— was I right in what I suggested to him? Hallo! landlord, what's the matter?"

"Accident up at the Court, sir. One of the gents staying there— Lillybrook the name is, I think— was out shooting. And the gun went off when he was getting over a fence. Killed him on the spot. Shockingly careless some gentlemen are with guns. Some beer, sir?"

But Ronald Standish did not seem to hear the question. And after a while he turned on his heel and swung away down the village street. For there are times when it is well that a man should be alone.

———————————

16: The Kidnapping of Lieut. Wally

Sumner Locke
1881-1917
Weekly Times Annual (Melbourne) 4 Nov 1916

"DON'T know anything worse to a woman," said Miss Sophy Trent, "than being absolutely refused and turned down by the man you have asked to marry you, when he has come back from the war."

"Meaning— Cadwallader, of course, Miss Sophy. Were you not engaged before the war?"

The girl brushed a hand over her bronze hair and lifted the sapphires of her face to her companion.

"Never engaged. Wally would not consent to it. He always adored me. Said it a number of times. I simply go mad about him, and though he was never in a position to marry… it's so different now."

"Hardly!" The crusty old bachelor talking in the little rose garden overlooking the harbor never minced matters to Miss Trent. "Wally has all the more reason to— to refuse your offer, Sophy, seeing that he has returned with less than he went away with."

The girl tossed a fluffy curl out of her eyes.

"Pooh! What does it matter? I don't call an arm and an ear missing anything at all. I was always keen on marrying Wally— he has such splendid brains. One would get used to— to things very quickly; and, after all, he has one arm left and one ear."

"And both his legs and a splendid head upon his body; but, Miss Sophy— you've got to consider him."

"That's precisely what I am doing. He is aching to marry me."

"Are you certain?"

"Don't be silly, John. You're getting too old to notice, I suppose."

"But I understand Cadwallader never believed much in marrying. Said it spoiled the love affair. I understood, too, that you had that kind of futurist opinion once upon a time, my dear."

"Once upon a time— certainly. I thought it beastly to argue about a chop. It sounded so greasy, and like a kitchen maid having her beau into a meal without a cloth."

"But neither you nor Cadwallader need have been without a cloth. Before Wally went out to Gallipoli he had a decent job at the bank—?"

"Which paid just enough for him to keep going, with a game of golf and an income for his poor mother, who recently died of shock. Wally is a splendid fellow, and we would never dream of marrying anyone unless it was ourselves. There was not enough money, even with mine; but now—"

"Now there is less, and you insist on—"

He stopped. It was hardly fair to accuse her of running after his friend.

"And wouldn't you insist if you loved a— a woman, and she came home from the war maimed and depressed, with one arm missing and one ear cut off her head? Of course you would, so as to be able to look after her. That is what I intend to do for Wally whether he likes it or not."

"Oh, I've no doubt he will like it considerably. I— I know I should. Say, have you ever tried kidnapping? It's the very latest thing in preliminary honeymoons."

The girl stabbed him with a look of blue-black contempt.

"It is the easiest thing imaginable," he went on. "You can kidnap a king or a butterfly under ten minutes if you only know how. My last experience was a Duchess— you need not look so cross, Sophy. I kidnapped her for another chap when I was in Vienna. Oh, dear, what a time I had."

"Stop being a fool if you can, John, and let's have some of the sensible ideas."

"Very well— this is my particular suit I should say. I lead through strength."

"Go on."

"It's for you to go on, Miss, Sophy. Get busy and kidnap Wally for all you're worth. It's the very easiest thing if you can drive a motor— and that seems to be one of your chief assets in this case."

The girl's eyes brightened. "Kidnap Wally! I believe I could,"

"I don't mind handing you out some of my experience with the— Duchess," John announced.

"Talk sense and listen to me."

The sun dipped behind the hills at the horizon. The fat cynic rose to depart. When he had gone he left behind him one of those neat little crazy schemes, purely his own, and manufactured in such a way as to be very effective in Lieutenant Cadwallader's special case.

THE JOVIAL CYNIC turned the wheel of his magnificent little touring car into the drive leading up to Miss Trent's uncle's house. The girl came out with a distinctly pale look about her, and with her followed Lieutenant Cadwallader, whose right coat sleeve hung limp to his side.

Sophy carried the rugs and a warm coat; the Lieutenant, a simple dust overall. By his manner he looked as happy as a schoolboy going out for his first ride.

They both threw a jocular remark to the bachelor, to which he replied, in a cool kind of way:

"Suppose you don't understand these gears sufficiently to drive with your left hand?" he asked, the Lieutenant. "I'm afraid I've got to leave you to Miss Sophy otherwise, as I've got a directors' meeting at five."

"Good lord, John; it's nearly that now. Suppose we give up the drive."

"Not on your life. You want all the air you can get now you are out of the trenches. Come on! Sophy has run this car lots of times."

"I'd trust Sophy— as I'd trust myself, if it had been a case of my understanding a car. I'll have to learn how to drive left-handed. Come on, Sophy! Which is the thingumabob you start her with?"

For answer Sophy pushed forward a lever, and they shot straight down the drive. There was scarcely time for a word of farewell to the man left standing there, but she had received her instructions, and he had managed to whisper in an undertone as she had been taking her seat behind the wheel, "Ring me if there is any trouble. You've got petrol to last two hundred miles."

They whizzed through the streets of Manly, heading off along the Narrabeen road. The Lieutenant sat close, because he liked it, and Sophy allowed him to for reasons of her own.

They spun along, making speed at thirty-five, then forty. Above this she dared not go.

Later, when the cold water began to trickle into her eyes with unbidden nervousness, and the paddocks ahead loomed as if they were crossways instead of parallel, she leaned over and touched something just to the left of them. She turned on the fullest lights. Cadwallader took the opportunity to suggest returning. He thought they had come far enough.

"Tired?" she said, and went on to forty-two.

"Gee whiz, no; but I've got to get back in time to dress for that affair tonight—"

All the satisfaction he got was the jerk of the girl's elbow as she turned the car into another long strip of open country.

"Say, my dear girl, we'll never, make it," he said later, as the full dark hung down in front. Sophy laughed, and he put his left arm across and gripped her by the wrist.

"You'll have an accident if you do that, Wally."

"Good Lord, I thought— see here, Sophy, I've got to make a recruiting speech at a quarter to nine sharp. You know it's the Jolly Old Boys' Club shivoo, and they are making a special feature of me as a member and a 'returned.' "

For an answer he heard Sophy's quick little laugh. She slowed down to. thirty-five, and then took a look right into his face.

"I'm kidnapping you, Lieutenant Cadwallader. And you are not going to the Jolly Boys' Club."

"Good Heavens, Sophy— what madness. You dear little girl, I love you ever so much for thinking me worth it but we simply must return in time."

"Not till I've finished kidnapping you. Don't you think it's great fun?"

"I think it's just—d . Sophy, don't play fool tonight."

"Fool, indeed! I never was more serious! You would have done the same if it had been me. S'pose I went to war and came home— only three-quarters—" Her voice died into a sob.

"But, dear— don't you understand? I would be doing you a grievous harm to marry you. Incapable, on a pauperish pension, with the only hope of learning to write with my left hand and making something out of it— perhaps enough to keep me in clothes and cigars."

"I suppose you'll admit now that I've got a pair of hands if you haven't. Can't I run this car? Can't I scrub?"

The Lieutenant gave a jump. She let the car out again and he subsided.

"Oh, you foolish girl— well, go on. I am never going to consent."

"Not in the great cause, of your country? That speech of yours at the Jolly Old Boys' Club. It might be the means of getting twenty members belonging to it to 'sign on' this very night. You must see that, Wally? You've got your duty plain."

He ground his teeth together, but his face paled in the uncertain light.

"Yes, by God— and I am going to do it. Take me back, Sophy, or—"

"Or you will try and climb out." Again she speeded up and laughed back at him. She had to laugh, or she would have wept.

For ten minutes the Lieutenant argued. He cursed Gallipoli at the top of his voice.

"Do you think I am so weak," he cried, shaking with fury, "so weak as to allow a woman, you least of all, to be a general servant to me— to have to depend on her—?"

"Weak?" Sophy raised her voice as well. "I never knew anyone, so strong."

"And how long is this ridiculous farce going on?" he said, sitting back, as if resisting it no longer. "I presume the oil tank must peter out some time?"

"Two hundred miles, I believe. At least, John said so."

"John— is he in it as well? I'll break his— head."

"Of course, if you are really serious." Sophy put on her best smile and voice. "If you think it wiser to return now, it is a very easy matter. Are there to be ladies there tonight?"

"Wives of members— that is all. Sophy, for Heaven's sake—" he began to plead again.

"As sure as you make that speech I'm going to be there to hear you."

"Silly little thing— you're not my wife."

"I shall be before you make that recruiting speech. We come to a little church a bit further on."

It was then two hours since they had left Manly. The Club, was there, but he knew he had to dress and shave and there was the return journey to be taken. Breakdowns might be counted in as well.

Thoroughly pessimistic about his chances, he threw himself against her shoulder.

"Sophy, it can't be done." His voice was steady, and he tried to take her hand off the wheel.

"Nonsense! It can. John and I secured a special licence, and anyway we can be temporarily married out here. Next week we can have another ceremony to make it really secure."

"I won't hear of it, and I defy you, Sophy, to go on another inch."

She turned the wheel again into another long open road leading to nowhere, but a little church, with two yellow eyes of light, suddenly showed up on a hill.

"Stop the car, Sophy. I command you,"

"I don't belong to your squad," she said

"Stop— I'll shout out and compel you to let me down, in ten minutes."

"Go on, shout! What's the use? If l let you out now you would not get home before midnight. There is no train for hours. You'd have to get into the car again. And of course I should drive— you can't."

"It seems I am considered a blessed infant. Curse John— I'll see that he goes to the 'front.' Lazy good for nothing— fat hog of a—"

"Steady!" said Sophy. They were passing the church. "Shall I stop? There is a minister I presume who would marry us." no

"I'll give up the speech!" His voice was almost a sob. "Let me out! I'll telephone."

She sent the car on again.

"Go on, telephone!" she laughed.

Recklessly Cadwallader caught at her wrist again with his strong left hand.

"The speech can go to blazes; but you can let me down here?"

"What for?"

"I'm going to make a fuss. Telephone, of course, for another car."

"What's the matter with this one?"

He shivered her with a look. "You're the matter!" he said.

Sophy flushed. She thought that perhaps he was a trifle rude to her. She threw in her second gear.

"Am I? I think perhaps that you are trying to get out of making that speech. You don't care to send men, perhaps, to what you know is—"

"Be quiet!" he demanded. She burst into tears.

"Now we've done it!" said Lieutenant Wally. "Sophy, can't you see I don't want to marry you?"

She turned the full lamps of her angry eyes upon him. They were long past the church.

"How can you lie like that? Say it, looking right at me!"

Taking one hand off the wheel, she touched his face. Cadwallader threw back his head.

"It is a matter of my honor, and you don't seem to think of that."

"Honor! Is there no honor in being true to your love?"

"I am being true."

He leaned over her. The car ran at a slower rate.

"Yes— to your beastly, horrid, selfish opinions. You want to sacrifice me as you have your arm— don't you ever think of a woman's heart, Wally, when— it comes to a time like this?"

"Oh, Hades!" He sat backhand for a time there was silence. Sophy turned the car right round.

"We will go back to the church. No further— except you tell me now, with me looking right at you, that you don't want me for your wife."

"I don't w-a-n— look here, Sophy, I don't want any wife."

"That has nothing to do with me. You cannot say you don't want me, and you know you can't."

"I can!" He sat straight. "I don't want you." An amused smile trickled out at the corner of his mouth. "I don't want you! I won't have you!"

"Straight?" She was looking right at him.

"Straight!" He deliberately smiled outright.

"Very well. I shall drive you home. You can go to your club, and I— well, I shall accept the offer made by Captain Bruce."

"Don't know him. I hope he will make you a good mate."

"At least he tells the truth about needing me. He has no legs at all!"

Wally stiffened. "By Jove, then, you're not going to marry him. I'll get John to kidnap you first."

They were arriving at the little church again. The lights still shone.

"Your last chance, Lieutenant Cadwallader, to sacrifice me to a man with no legs."

"You're not serious?"

"I am."

"Stop the car! No, go ahead. I won't be married in such a place."

"I refuse to be married anywhere else. I want to go to the club as your wife."

Lieutenant Cadwallader caught hold of her suddenly. The car skidded a moment, but she managed to right it and stopped the engine in time.

"Might have had an accident," she said. "How careless!"

"I've had two already— one at the front, and the other is this affair. I've never been in a worse smash-up. Come on, Sophy, get it over."

"Sure you want to?" she queried. She handed him a ring.

"As if it ever mattered if I didn't... I'll hang John by the neck."

But John was hanging himself his collar in a frantic endeavor to search the road from the window of his rooms.

Miles away the kidnapped young officer called him up on the 'phone. ,

"Say— I'll be there in time, but it's a close shave. Tell 'em 'I'm bringing my wife. Had to do it, curse you, John! but I am ever so thankful. Sophy threatened to marry some rotten chap called Bruce— worse off than I am— the fellow who lost both his legs."

John replied, "Bruce? I never heard of him. Are you sure is was Bruce?"

Wally hung up the receiver and turned to the girl.

"John doesn't know Bruce. he has never heard of him."

"Neither have I!" said his wife.

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17: The Rescue of Pluffles

Rudyard Kipling
1865-1936
The Civil and Military Gazette 20 Nov 1886
Collected in: *Plain Tales from the Hills*, 1888

Thus, for a season, they fought it fair—
She and his cousin May—
Tactful, talented, debonnaire,
Decorous foes were they;
But never can battle of man compare
With merciless feminine fray.
Two and One.

MRS. HAUKSBEE was sometimes nice to her own sex. Here is a story to prove this; and you can believe just as much as ever you please.

Pluffles was a subaltern in the "Unmentionables." He was callow, even for a subaltern. He was callow all over— like a canary that had not finished fledging itself. The worst of it was he had three times as much money as was good for him; Pluffles' Papa being a rich man and Pluffles being the only son. Pluffles' Mamma adored him. She was only a little less callow than Pluffles and she believed everything he said.

Pluffles' weakness was not believing what people said. He preferred what he called "trusting to his own judgment." He had as much judgment as he had seat or hands; and this preference tumbled him into trouble once or twice. But the biggest trouble Pluffles ever manufactured came about at Simla— some years ago, when he was four-and-twenty.

He began by trusting to his own judgment, as usual, and the result was that, after a time, he was bound hand and foot to Mrs. Reiver's 'rickshaw wheels.

There was nothing good about Mrs. Reiver, unless it was her dress. She was bad from her hair— which started life on a Brittany's girl's head— to her boot-heels, which were two and three-eighth inches high. She was not honestly mischievous like Mrs. Hauksbee; she was wicked in a business-like way.

There was never any scandal— she had not generous impulses enough for that. She was the exception which proved the rule that Anglo–Indian ladies are in every way as nice as their sisters at Home. She spent her life in proving that rule.

Mrs. Hauksbee and she hated each other fervently. They heard far too much to clash; but the things they said of each other were startling— not to say original. Mrs. Hauksbee was honest— honest as her own front teeth— and, but for her love of mischief, would have been a woman's woman. There was no honesty about Mrs. Reiver; nothing but selfishness. And at the beginning of the

season, poor little Pluffles fell a prey to her. She laid herself out to that end, and who was Pluffles, to resist? He went on trusting to his judgment, and he got judged.

I have seen Hayes argue with a tough horse— I have seen a tonga-driver coerce a stubborn pony— I have seen a riotous setter broken to gun by a hard keeper— but the breaking-in of Pluffles of the "Unmentionables" was beyond all these. He learned to fetch and carry like a dog, and to wait like one, too, for a word from Mrs. Reiver. He learned to keep appointments which Mrs. Reiver had no intention of keeping. He learned to take thankfully dances which Mrs. Reiver had no intention of giving him. He learned to shiver for an hour and a quarter on the windward side of Elysium while Mrs. Reiver was making up her mind to come for a ride. He learned to hunt for a 'rickshaw, in a light dress-suit under a pelting rain, and to walk by the side of that 'rickshaw when he had found it. He learned what it was to be spoken to like a coolie and ordered about like a cook. He learned all this and many other things besides. And he paid for his schooling.

Perhaps, in some hazy way, he fancied that it was fine and impressive, that it gave him a status among men, and was altogether the thing to do. It was nobody's business to warn Pluffles that he was unwise. The pace that season was too good to inquire; and meddling with another man's folly is always thankless work. Pluffles' Colonel should have ordered him back to his regiment when he heard how things were going. But Pluffles had got himself engaged to a girl in England the last time he went home; and if there was one thing more than another which the Colonel detested, it was a married subaltern. He chuckled when he heard of the education of Pluffles, and said it was "good training for the boy." But it was not good training in the least. It led him into spending money beyond his means, which were good: above that, the education spoilt an average boy and made it a tenth-rate man of an objectionable kind. He wandered into a bad set, and his little bill at Hamilton's was a thing to wonder at.

Then Mrs. Hauksbee rose to the occasion. She played her game alone, knowing what people would say of her; and she played it for the sake of a girl she had never seen. Pluffles' fiancee was to come out, under the chaperonage of an aunt, in October, to be married to Pluffles.

At the beginning of August, Mrs. Hauksbee discovered that it was time to interfere. A man who rides much knows exactly what a horse is going to do next before he does it. In the same way, a woman of Mrs. Hauksbee's experience knows accurately how a boy will behave under certain circumstances— notably when he is infatuated with one of Mrs. Reiver's stamp. She said that, sooner or later, little Pluffles would break off that engagement for nothing at all— simply to gratify Mrs. Reiver, who, in return, would keep him at her feet and in her

service just so long as she found it worth her while. She said she knew the signs of these things. If she did not, no one else could.

Then she went forth to capture Pluffles under the guns of the enemy; just as Mrs. Cusack–Bremmil carried away Bremmil under Mrs. Hauksbee's eyes.

This particular engagement lasted seven weeks— we called it the Seven Weeks' War— and was fought out inch by inch on both sides. A detailed account would fill a book, and would be incomplete then. Any one who knows about these things can fit in the details for himself. It was a superb fight— there will never be another like it as long as Jakko stands— and Pluffles was the prize of victory. People said shameful things about Mrs. Hauksbee. They did not know what she was playing for. Mrs. Reiver fought, partly because Pluffles was useful to her, but mainly because she hated Mrs. Hauksbee, and the matter was a trial of strength between them. No one knows what Pluffles thought. He had not many ideas at the best of times, and the few he possessed made him conceited. Mrs. Hauksbee said:— "The boy must be caught; and the only way of catching him is by treating him well."

So she treated him as a man of the world and of experience so long as the issue was doubtful. Little by little, Pluffles fell away from his old allegiance and came over to the enemy, by whom he was made much of. He was never sent on out-post duty after 'rickshaws any more, nor was he given dances which never came off, nor were the drains on his purse continued. Mrs. Hauksbee held him on the snaffle; and after his treatment at Mrs. Reiver's hands, he appreciated the change.

Mrs. Reiver had broken him of talking about himself, and made him talk about her own merits. Mrs. Hauksbee acted otherwise, and won his confidence, till he mentioned his engagement to the girl at Home, speaking of it in a high and mighty way as a "piece of boyish folly." This was when he was taking tea with her one afternoon, and discoursing in what he considered a gay and fascinating style. Mrs. Hauksbee had seen an earlier generation of his stamp bud and blossom, and decay into fat Captains and tubby Majors.

At a moderate estimate there were about three and twenty sides to that lady's character. Some men say more. She began to talk to Pluffles after the manner of a mother, and as if there had been three hundred years, instead of fifteen, between them. She spoke with a sort of throaty quaver in her voice which had a soothing effect, though what she said was anything but soothing. She pointed out the exceeding folly, not to say meanness, of Pluffles' conduct, and the smallness of his views. Then he stammered something about "trusting to his own judgment as a man of the world;" and this paved the way for what she wanted to say next. It would have withered up Pluffles had it come from any other woman; but in the soft cooing style in which Mrs. Hauksbee put it, it only made him feel limp and repentant— as if he had been in some superior kind of

church. Little by little, very softly and pleasantly, she began taking the conceit out of Pluffles, as you take the ribs out of an umbrella before re-covering it. She told him what she thought of him and his judgment and his knowledge of the world; and how his performances had made him ridiculous to other people; and how it was his intention make love to herself if she gave him the chance. Then she said that marriage would be the making of him; and drew a pretty little picture— all rose and opal— of the Mrs. Pluffles of the future going through life relying on the "judgment" and "knowledge of the world" of a husband who had nothing to reproach himself with. How she reconciled these two statements she alone knew. But they did not strike Pluffles as conflicting.

Hers was a perfect little homily— much better than any clergyman could have given— and it ended with touching allusions to Pluffles' Mamma and Papa, and the wisdom of taking his bride Home.

Then she sent Pluffles out for a walk, to think over what she had said. Pluffles left, blowing his nose very hard and holding himself very straight. Mrs. Hauksbee laughed.

What Pluffles had intended to do in the matter of the engagement only Mrs. Reiver knew, and she kept her own counsel to her death. She would have liked it spoiled as a compliment, I fancy.

Pluffles enjoyed many talks with Mrs. Hauksbee during the next few days. They were all to the same end, and they helped Pluffles in the path of Virtue.

Mrs. Hauksbee wanted to keep him under her wing to the last. Therefore she discountenanced his going down to Bombay to get married. "Goodness only knows what might happen by the way!" she said. "Pluffles is cursed with the curse of Reuben, and India is no fit place for him!"

In the end, the fiancee arrived with her aunt; and Pluffles, having reduced his affairs to some sort of order— here again Mrs. Hauksbee helped him— was married.

Mrs. Hauksbee gave a sigh of relief when both the "I wills" had been said, and went her way.

Pluffies took her advice about going Home. He left the Service, and is now raising speckled cattle inside green painted fences somewhere at Home. I believe he does this very judiciously. He would have come to extreme grief out here.

For these reasons if any one says anything more than usually nasty about Mrs. Hauksbee, tell him the story of the Rescue of Pluffles.

18: Glamour

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1900-1954

Australian Women's Weekly, 5 Sep 1956

IT was one of those mornings when everything went wrong. First, Liz burned Fred's oatmeal— why did he want oatmeal for breakfast, anyway!

Then the coffee boiled over like Vesuvius and scalded her finger, then the toast gave a remarkable imitation of the pillar of smoke that guided the Israelites out of Egypt, and all the time Fred preserved that easy, contented, unruffled front, enjoying his paper, his porridge, his boiled eggs and toast. A happy guy, Fred Remeck— a good husband and provider.

He loved to sit and watch pretty, dark-eyed Liz.

"Must have a few children soon, Liz," he'd said once or twice. "You know how to make a home for a man; you'd be good with babies. "We could do up the spare room," he went on eagerly. "Tell you what, I'll get some paint at the end of the week and we could start painting over the weekend. That room will make a fine nursery."

"Soon, Fred," Liz would agree, and she really did intend to have a family.

But this morning the thought of having a few more porridge-and-egg customers for breakfast made Liz positively ill. She couldn't even face the breakfast dishes.

Liz sat at the littered table for an hour, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Then she got up, dressed, and, with a glad sense of escape, left the snug little flat.

Liz decided on a new hair-do and a new beauty parlor. The one she hit on bore the intriguing name of Le Salon Pompadour, operated by Madame Mimi Laforet, born Mary Leferts, who had a system which she put right to work on Liz.

As soon as she saw Liz, Mimi widened her wondrous eyes and looked startled.

"You— why, I could have sworn when I looked up and saw you that you were Niki Sandor—"

"Who, me?" Liz looked dazed. "You mean you mistook me for the film star? Why, I don't look—"

"You are her image," said Mimi "In Hollywood I worked on Miss Sandor often. And you— you have the same hair, the same light in the black eyes. Ah. I know just what madame needs—"

She put Liz in the rose-pink salon, shampooed her hair till it shone, cut, shaped, set, and dried.

She suggested a new make-up, a new manicure with a fascinating new nail-polish, and reshaped her eye-brows completely.

It ran into money, but when Liz saw the finished product in the big mirror she forgot all about the cost. Mimi was right. She did look like Niki Sandor. She was glamorous, exotic, sultry as a south sea lagoon before a tempest.

"You are like a princess awakened," sighed Mimi.

"I— I do feel different." Liz said, and even the voice was changed lower, huskier. "It's like magic."

It really was. She spent the afternoon in a theatre that was showing Niki Sandor's latest: "*Escape to Love*." She hadn't even touched the breakfast dishes when Fred came home. She was sitting in the window, limned against the dying day in a pose that she had borrowed from Niki in one of her big scenes.

"Hello, Liz!" Fred greeted her as usual and came over to kiss her. He looked a bit puzzled when she gave him a cool, scented cheek instead of the warm, soft mouth he loved. But, flopping down into an easy chair with his paper, he asked, "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, I took the day off. Fred. I felt a bit miffed—" Niki had used that word in the movies. "I needed something to waken me up, so I went to a beauty parlor and to a movie

"You do look different," said Fred slowly, studying her.

Liz stood up and preened prettily. "Like me?" she asked. "My new hair-do and make-up?"

"I love you as you are. Liz. You know that. You're always just what I wanted. I'm never unhappy with you."

"I'll make you love me more, Fred. I'll make you happier yet."

In the days that followed the uncomplicated, easygoing Liz became a new creation— complex, mysterious, unpredictable. On the street several times she saw people stop and stare and once she was sure she heard he magic name of Niki Sandor. She went to all Niki's pictures. She bought stills of the glamorous star and studied them.

She grew in beauty, in allure. Everyone noticed it. Madame Laforet even began to wonder sometimes if it really wasn't Niki who came with that sinuous glide into her shop for beauty treatments she did not need.

All the world saw a different Liz and reacted differently to her— Fred was the only one who didn't seem to realise or care. Fred went his slow, easy, contented way, eating his porridge, his eggs, his toast— when he got them; just smiling at the blue silk house-coat, the lovely slippers, the expensive shirts and ties she bought him as befitting the consort of the new Liz— "Please call me Lizbeth"— Remeck.

You couldn't make a dint in Fred's aplomb, his changeless ways of living. He was a printer by trade. Liz knew very little about him in the years before he married her. He'd been everywhere. She wondered at him. Surely he could see the difference in his wife

"Must start having some family, Liz— Lizbeth." he said once or twice again.

"Oh, Fred— there's lots of time. There are so many things in the world beyond the humdrum bourgeois matters of food and family—"

''Name two," grinned Fred, and went on puffing away at his old pipe.

This went on for months and showed no sign of ending. Liz loved her new role of glamor queen. She reached the heights the day two schoolgirls asked her for her autograph— "Please, Niki— Miss Sandor— we knew you in a moment— oh, won't you—"

Liz brushed them off. She floated home on a cloud of ecstasy and burst into the flat in a fever of bliss

"Fred! What do you know! Fred, you've got a wife people can't tell apart from Niki Sandor! Some kids just asked me for my autograph! Can you beat that? Fred— Fred—"

The sudden, strange stillness hit her like a blow. It was frightening, terrible. Fred was gone. She knew it before she found the note:

I'm leaving, Lizbeth. I have a job down south. I'll have a lawyer get in touch with you. I'll see you don't want for anything. I loved my Liz.

Fred.

She couldn't cry: she couldn't seem to think. She slumped into a chair and leafed through the movie magazine she'd brought home with her, turning to the article— "The Early Days of Niki Sandor."

And the lines hit her harder than the flat's empty silence

—my first husband was the finest man I've ever known or ever hope to know. We were divorced. He left me because he couldn't stand anything phony and in this trade you have to be phony. He was a man named Fred Remeck. I often wonder what became of him—

———————

19: The Panacea Boom

Ladbroke Black

1877-1940

Ballarat Star 27 June 1902

"GEE!" exclaimed the American, in the commercial room of the "Malt and Shovel." "You talk about advertising enterprise in this country; why, it's nothing to what we do in the States. You've heard, of course, of the Panacea Boom? What— never? What do they do with your memories in this country, anyway ? Well, drink with me, boys, and I'll tell you."

The waiter having taken our orders, the American began:

"Out West in Bugsville there was a man called Parker who was the proprietor of a patent metal polisher. Somehow or other, this polisher fell flat— wouldn't sell at all; so that Parker began to think that people had given up polishing metal and that it was high time he gave up trying to sell what they didn't want. One morning, while he was thinking things over, a stranger suddenly entered his office without knocking, and took a seat. Parker was just about to tell him that the Public Information Bureau was round in the next block, when he spoke first.

" 'You are the proprietor of Parker's Peerless Polisher, I believe?'

"Parker admitted it without a blush.

" 'You want to make a fortune out of the polisher— that so?'

"Parker, whose liver was out of order, said 'No.' He was running his business as a local branch of the New York Charity Organisation Society. The stranger took this question as answered in the affirmative, and began to explain what he'd come for.

"I can't tell you all he said, but it amounted to this:— Parker was to change his polisher into a patent medicine. 'Parker's Priceless Panacea,'— it answered just as well that way, and was to give him, the stranger, a hundred thousand dollars and a quarter of the profits if, before the year was out, Parker made, through his agency, a million dollars.

"Parker saw he didn't stand to lose anything anyway, and as he hadn't ever made more than a few cents out of the polisher, he wasn't particular about losing nothing on the chance of gaining a million or so. Well, he and the stranger fixed up things between them, and when the arrangement was in black and white the stranger explained his idea.

"Parker was to get four intimate friends whom he could trust to promise that when they bought anything, from a drink to a bar of soap, they would mention the name of Parker. Each of these four friends was to get four other friends to do likewise, and they in their turn were to get four other apiece, and

so on. It was, in fact, to be a snowball, with Parker's name instead of the usual penny stamp.

"Well, though Parker had no great idea of the scheme, he got the first four friends, swore them to secrecy, and then went home to await the result. After three days there were about a thousand people going about Bugsville dropping in at the stores and bars; and saying that they had been asked to mention the name of Parker when they ordered anything.

"Before the end of the week there wasn't a man in the town who didn't about Parker. The number increased m geometrical progression, and, of course, it soon got too big for Bugsville. then the whole state began talking of him, and before a month had elapsed the entire population of the United States had the name of Parker on their lips. After that it got into Europe, and just flashed through the United Kingdom.

"On the Continent it caught on like measles, and at the end of six months the priests were talking about him in Thibet. Then the papers took it up, and it was calculated afterwards by Dr .Dolt Fuoling, the eminent statist, that if the columns of printed matter which dealt with the question 'who is Parker?' were placed end to end they would encircle the earth at the equator ten times and leave enough paper over to print six editions of all the morning papers in the world. Editors offered prizes for the best solution, and when Mr Hiram P. Buckle, of New Capernaum, told his constituents that if they asked him who was Parker, he would reply that he didn't know and didn't care, they up and threw him out, and he daren't show his face in that district for the rest of his life. People got frightened— somehow thought Parker was an anarchist scare. A well-known politician in this country formed a party, on the motto—'Everybody — meaning the Opposition— who mention's Parker, is giving a vote to the Wooli-Woolis'— at that time the Wooli-Wooli niggers in West Africa were seeing how near they could get to maxims without being hurt. In France, the Nationalists made out it was an insult to the Army, and in Russia, they sent people who mentioned Parker to Siberia, and a new sect sprung up called Parker Martyrs. The climax was reached when the Japanese Government, in giving an order for anew battleship to a Glasgow firm, stated that they had been requested to mention the name of Parker.

"When the excitement was at its height, a note appeared one morning in all the principal newspapers in the world to the effect that on such-and-such a day the answer to the question, 'Who is Parker?' would be announced.

"Well, I can tell you, curiosity was at boiling point. People stayed up all night just to hear the news. Just before the newspapers went to press on the day appointed, a telegram reached them, which ran something like this:— *'Who is Parker'— the great mystery— the man whose name is ringing through the*

world? Parker is the benefactor of the Human Race. Parker is the proprietor of 'Parker's Priceless Panacea.' On sale everywhere.

"At the same time as this information reached the public, the panacea was on sale in every known city in the world. The first day alone realised five million dollars, for everybody bought a box to see what it was like, or to keep as a souvenir. Before six months were up, Parker and his partner shared in sixty million of dollars between them, and sold out the patent to a company for another ten million. That, gentlemen, was the Panacea Boom— the finest, and cheapest advertisement that was ever known. You've never had anything like it on this side of the ditch."

There was a dead silence when the American had finished. Then Smith, who is in fancy goods, marked time with his feet on the ground.

"What's that?" said the American sharply.

"The feet of the young men," said Smith.

"What young men?"

"The young men who came to fetch Ananias."

Then somebody laughed.

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20: The Senator's Laundry

James De Mille
1836-1880
In: *The Dodge Club*, 1869

Chapter 36 of the humorous book of the Continental travels of a small group of Americans in 1859

SIGNORA Mirandolina Rocca, who was the landlady of the house where the Club were lodging, was a widow, of about forty years of age, still fresh and blooming, with a merry dark eye, and much animation of features. Sitting usually in the small room which they passed on the way to their apartments, they had to stop to get their keys, or to leave them when they went out, and Buttons and Dick frequently stopped to have a little conversation. The rest, not being able to speak Italian, contented themselves with smiles; the Senator particularly, who gave the most beaming of smiles both on going and on returning. Sometimes he even tried to talk to her in his usual adaptation of broken English, spoken in loud tones to the benighted but fascinating foreigner. Her attention to Dick during his sickness increased the Senator's admiration, and he thought her one of the best, one of the most kind-hearted and sympathetic of beings.

One day, toward the close of their stay in Rome, the Senator was in a fix. He had not had any washing done since he came to the city. He had run through all his clean linen, and came to a dead stand. Before leaving for another place it was absolutely necessary to attend to this. But how? Buttons was off with the Spaniards; Dick had gone out on a drive. No one could help him, so he tried it himself. In fact, he had never lost confidence in his powers of making himself understood. It was still a fixed conviction of his that in cases of necessity any intelligent man could make his wants known to intelligent foreigners. If not, there is stupidity somewhere. Had he not done so in Paris and in other places?

So he rang and managed to make the servant understand that he wished to see the landlady. The landlady had always shown a great admiration for the manly, not to say gigantic charms of the Senator. Upon him she bestowed her brightest smile, and the quick flush on her face and heaving breast told that the Senator had made wild work with her too susceptible heart.

So now when she learned that the Senator wished to see her, she at once imagined the cause to be any thing and every thing except the real one. Why take that particular time, when all the rest were out? she thought. Evidently for some tender purpose. Why send for her? Why not come down to see her? Evidently because he did not like the publicity of her room at the Conciergerie.

She arrayed herself, therefore, in her brightest and her best charms; gave an additional flourish to her dark hair that hung wavingly and luxuriantly, and still

without a trace of gray, over her forehead; looked at herself with her dark eyes in the glass to see if she appeared to the best advantage; and finally, in some agitation, but with great eagerness, she went to obey the summons.

Meantime the Senator had been deliberating how to begin. He felt that he could not show his bundle of clothes to so fair and fine a creature as this, whose manners were so soft and whose smile so pleasant. He would do anything first. He would try a roundabout way of making known his wishes, trusting to his own powers and the intelligence of the lady for a full and complete understanding. Just as he had come to this conclusion there was a timid knock at the door.

"Come in," said the Senator, who began to feel a little awkward already.

"*E permesso?*" said a soft, sweet voice, "*se puo entrare?*" and Signora Mirandolina Rocca advanced into the room, giving one look at the Senator, and then casting down her eyes.

"*Umilissima serva di Lei, Signore, mi commandi.*"

But the Senator was in a quandary. What could he do? How begin? What gesture would be the most fitting for a beginning?

The pause began to be embarrassing. The lady, however, as yet was calm—calmer, in fact, than when she entered.

So she spoke once more.

"*Di che ha Ella bisogna, Illustrissimo?*"

The Senator was dreadfully embarrassed. The lady was so fair in his eyes. Was this a woman who could contemplate the fact of soiled linen? Never.

"Ehem!" said he.

Then he paused.

"*Serva devota*," said Signora Mirandolina. "*Che c'e, Signore.*"

Then, looking up, she saw the face of the Senator, all rosy red, turned toward her with a strange confusion and embarrassment in his eye; yet it was a kind eye—a soft, kind eye.

"*Egli e forse innamorato di me*," murmured the lady, gathering new courage as she saw the timidity of the other. "*Che grandezza!*" she continued, loud enough for the Senator to hear, yet speaking as if to herself. "*Che bellezza! un galantuomo, certamente— e quest' e molto piacevole.*"

She glanced at the manly figure of the Senator with a tender admiration in her eye, which she could not repress, and which was so intelligible to the Senator that he blushed more violently than ever, and looked helplessly around him.

"*E innamorato di me, senza dubio*," said the Signora, "*vergogna non vuol che si sapesse.*"

The Senator at length found voice. Advancing toward the lady he looked at her very earnestly, and as she thought very piteously held out both his hands,

then smiled, then spread his hands apart, then nodded and smiled again, and said:

"Me— me— want— ha— hum— ah! You know— me— gentleman— hum— me— Confound the luck!" he added, in profound vexation.

"*Signore*," said Mirandolina, "*la di Lei gentelezza me confonde.*"

The Senator turned his eyes all around, everywhere, in a desperate, half-conscious search for escape from an embarrassing situation.

"*Signore noi ci siamo sole, nessuno ci senti*," remarked the Signora encouragingly.

"Me want to tell you this!" burst forth the Senator. "Clothes—you know—washy—washy." Whereupon he elevated his eyebrows, smiled, and brought the tips of his fingers together.

"*Io non so che cosa vuol dir mi, Illustrissimo*," said the Signora, in bewilderment.

"You— you— you know. Ah? Washy? Hey? No, no," shaking his head, "not washy, but *get* washy."

The landlady smiled. The Senator, encouraged by this, came a step nearer.

"*Che cosa? Il cuor me palpita. Io tremo*," murmured La Rocca.

She retreated a step. Whereupon the Senator at once fell back again in great confusion.

"Washy, washy," he repeated mechanically, as his mind was utterly vague and distrait.

"*Uassi-Uassi?*" repeated the other interrogatively.

"Me—"

"*Tu*," said she, with tender emphasis.

"Wee, mounseer," said he, with utter desperation.

The Signora shook her head.

"*Non capisco. Ma quelle, balordaggini ed intormentimente, che sono si non segni manifesti d'amore?*"

"I don't understand, marm, a single word of that."

The Signora smiled. The Senator took courage again.

"The fact is this, marm," said he firmly, "I want to get my clothes washed somewhere. Of course you don't do it, but you can tell me, you know. Hm?"

"*Non capisco.*"

"Madame," said he, feeling confident that she would understand that word at least, and thinking, too, that it might perhaps serve as a key to explain any other words which he might append to it, "my clothes— I want to get them washed— laundress— washy— soap and water— clean 'em all up— iron 'em— hang 'em out to dry. Ha?"

While saying this he indulged in an expressive pantomime. When alluding to his clothes he placed his hands against his chest, when mentioning the drying of

them he waved them in the air. The landlady comprehended this. How not? When a gentleman places his hand on his heart, what is his meaning?

"*O sottigliezza d'amore!*" murmured she. "*Che cosa cerca*," she continued, looking up timidly but invitingly.

The Senator felt doubtful at this, and in fact a little frightened. Again he placed his hands on his chest to indicate his clothes; he struck that manly chest forcibly several times, looking at her all the time. Then he wrung his hands.

"*Ah, Signore*," said La Rocca, with a melting glance, "*non è d'uopo di desperazione.*"

"Washy, washy—"

"*Eppure, se Ella vuol sposarmi, non ce difficoltà*," returned the other, with true Italian frankness.

"Soap and water—"

"*Non ho il coraggio di dir di no.*"

The Senator had his arms outstretched to indicate the hanging-out process. Still, however, feeling doubtful if he were altogether understood, he thought he would try another form of pantomime. Suddenly he fell down on his knees, and began to imitate the action of a washer-woman over her tub, washing, wringing, pounding, rubbing.

"*O gran' cielo!*" cried the Signora, her pitying heart filled with tenderness at the sight of this noble being on his knees before her, and, as she thought, wringing his hands in despair. "*O gran' cielo! Egli è innamorato di me non puo parlar Italiano e cosi non puo dirmelo.*"

Her warm heart prompted her, and she obeyed its impulse. What else could she do? She flung herself into his outstretched arms as he raised himself to hang out imaginary clothes on an invisible line.

The Senator was thunderstruck, confounded, bewildered, shattered, overcome, crushed, stupefied, blasted, overwhelmed, horror-stricken, wonder-smitten, annihilated, amazed, horrified, shocked, frightened, terrified, nonplussed, wilted, awe-struck, shivered, astounded, dumfounded. He did not even struggle. He was paralysed.

"*Ah, carissimo*," said a soft and tender voice in his ear, a low, sweet voice, "*se veramenta me ami, saro lo tua carissima sposa*—"

At that moment the door opened and Buttons walked in. In an instant he darted out. The Signora hurried away.

"*Addio, bellissima, carissima gioia!*" she sighed.

The Senator was still paralysed.

After a time he went with a pale and anxious face to see Buttons. That young man promised secrecy, and when the Senator was telling his story tried hard to look serious and sympathetic. In vain. The thought of that scene, and the cause

of it, and the blunder that had been made overwhelmed him. Laughter convulsed him. At last the Senator got up indignantly and left the room.

But what was he to do now? The thing could not be explained. How could he get out of the house? He would have to pass her as she sat at the door.

He had to call on Buttons again and implore his assistance. The difficulty was so repugnant, and the matter so very delicate, that Buttons declared he could not take the responsibility of settling it. It would have to be brought before the Club.

The Club had a meeting about it, and many plans were proposed. The stricken Senator had one plan, and that prevailed. It was to leave Rome on the following day. For his part he had made up his mind to leave the house at once. He would slip out as though he intended to return, and the others could settle his bill, and bring with them the clothes that had caused all this trouble. He would meet them in the morning outside the gates of the city.

This resolution was adopted by all, and the Senator, leaving money to settle for himself, went away. He passed hurriedly out of the door. He dared not look. He heard a soft voice pronounce the word "*Gioia!*" He fled.

Now that one who owned the soft voice afterward changed her feelings so much toward her "gioia" that opposite his name in her house-book she wrote the following epithets: *Birbone*, *Villano*, *Zolicaccio*, *Burberone*, *Gaglioffo*, *Meschino*, *Briconaccio*, *Anemalaccio*. *

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** Rascal; ill-mannered; clod; mongrel; clumsy; mean; scoundrel; animalistic.*

21: The Crossed Gloves

A. E. W. Mason
1865-1948
Collected in: *Ensign Knightley, and other stories*; 1901

"ALTHOUGH you have not been near Ronda for five years," said the Spanish Commandant severely to Dennis Shere, "the face of the country has not changed. You are certainly the most suitable officer I can select, since I am told you are well acquainted with the neighbourhood. You will ride therefore to-day to Olvera and deliver this sealed letter to the officer commanding the temporary garrison there. But it is not necessary that it should reach him before eleven at night, so that you will still have an hour or two before you start in which you can renew your acquaintanceships, as I can very well understand you are anxious to do."

Dennis Shere's reluctance, however, was now changed into alacrity. For the road to Olvera ran past the gates of that white-walled, straggling *residencía* where he had planned to spend this first evening that he was stationed at Ronda. On his way back from his colonel's quarters he even avoided those squares and streets where he would be likely to meet with old acquaintances, foreseeing their questions as to why he was now a Spanish subject and wore the uniform of a captain of Spanish cavalry and by seven o'clock he was already riding through the Plaza de Toros upon his mission. There, however, a familiar voice hailed him, and turning about in his saddle he saw an old padre who had once gained a small prize for logic at the University of Barcelona, and who had since made his inferences and deductions an excuse for a great deal of inquisitiveness. Shere had no option but to stop. He broke in, however, at once on the inevitable questions as to his uniform with the statement that he must be at Olvera by eleven.

"Fifteen miles," said the padre. "Does it need four hours and a fresh horse to journey fifteen miles?"

"But I have friends to visit on the way," and to give convincing details to an excuse which was plainly disbelieved, Shere added, "Just this side of Setenil I have friends."

The padre was still dissatisfied. "There is only one house just this side of Setenil, and Esteban Silvela I saw with my own eyes to-day in Ronda."

"He may well be home by now, and it is not Esteban whom I go to see."

"Not Esteban," exclaimed the padre. "Then it will be—"

"His sister, the Señora Christina," said Shere with a laugh at his companion's persistency. "Since the brother and sister live alone, and it is not the brother, why it will be the sister. You argue still very closely, padre."

The padre stood back a little from Shere and stared. Then he said slyly, and with the air of one who quotes:

"All women are born tricksters."

"Those were rank words," said Shere composedly.

"Yet they were often spoken when you grew vines in the Ronda Valley."

"Then a crowd of men must know me for a fool. A young man may make a mistake, padre, and exaggerate a disappointment. Besides, I had not then seen the señora. Esteban I knew, but she was a child, and known to me only by name." And then, warmed by the pleasure in his old friend's face, he said, "I will tell you about it."

They walked on slowly side by side, while Shere, who now that he had begun to confide was quite swept away, bent over his saddle and told how after inheriting a modest fortune, after wandering for three years from city to city, he had at last come to Paris, and there, at a Carlist *conversazione*, had heard the familiar name called from a doorway, and had seen the unfamiliar face appear. Shere described Christina. She walked with the grace of a deer, as though the floor beneath her foot had the spring of turf. The blood was bright in her face; her brown hair shone; she was sweet with youth; the suppleness of her body showed it and the steadiness of her great clear eyes.

"She passed me," he went on, "and the arrogance of what I used to think and say came sharp home to me like a pain. I suppose that I stared— it was an accident, of course— perhaps my face showed something of my trouble; but just as she was opposite me her fan slipped through her fingers and clattered on the floor."

The padre was at a loss to understand Shere's embarrassment in relating so small a matter.

"Well," said he, "you picked up the fan and so—"

"No," interrupted Shere. His embarrassment increased, and he stammered out awkwardly, "Just for the moment, you see, I began to wonder whether after all I had not been right before; whether after all any woman would or could baulk herself of a fraction of any man's admiration, supposing that it would only cost a trick to extort it. And while I was wondering she herself stooped, picked up the fan, and good-humouredly dropped me a curtsey for my lack of manners. Esteban presented me to her that evening. There followed two magical months in Paris and a June in London."

"But, Esteban?" said the padre, doubtfully. "I do not understand. I know something of Esteban Silvela. A lean man of plots and devices. My friend, do you know that Esteban has not a groat? The Silvela fortunes and estate came from the mother and went to the daughter. Esteban is the Señora Christina's steward, and her marriage would alter his position at the least. Did he not spoil the magic of the months in Paris?"

Shere laughed aloud in assured confidence.

"No, indeed," said he. "I did not know Esteban was dependent on his sister, but what difference would her marriage make? Esteban is my best friend. For instance, you questioned me about my uniform. It is by Esteban's advice and help that I wear it."

"Indeed!" said the padre, quickly. "Tell me."

"That June, in London, two years ago— it was by the way the last time I saw the señora— we three dined at the same house. As the ladies rose from the table I said to Christina quietly, 'I want to speak to you to-night,' and she answered very simply and quietly, 'With all my heart.' She was not so quiet, however, but that Esteban overheard her. He hitched his chair up to mine; I asked him what my chances were, and whether he would second them? He was most cordial, but he thought with his Spaniard's pride that I ought— I use my words, not his— in some way to repair my insufficiency in station and the rest; and he pointed out this way of the uniform. I could not resist his argument; I did not speak that night. I took out my papers and became a Spaniard; with Esteban's help I secured a commission. That was two years ago. I have not seen her since, nor have I written, but I ride to her to-night with my two years' silence and my two years' service to prove the truth of what I say. So you see I have reason to thank Esteban." And since they were now come to the edge of the town they parted company. Shere rode smartly down the slope of the hill, the padre stood and watched him with a feeling of melancholy.

It was not merely that he distrusted Esteban, but he knew Shere, the cadet of an impoverished family, who had come out from England to a small estate in the Ronda valley, which had belonged to his house since the days of the Duke of Wellington in Spain. He knew him for a man of tempests and extremes, and as he thought of his ardent words and tones, of his ready acceptance of Esteban's good faith, of his description of Christina, he fell to wondering whether so sudden and violent a conversion from passionate cynic to passionate believer would not lack permanence. There was that little instructive accident of the dropped fan. Even in the moment of conversion so small a thing had almost sufficed to dissuade Shere.

Shere, however, was quite untroubled— so untroubled, indeed, that he even rode slowly that he might not waste the luxury of anticipating the welcome which his unexpected appearance would surely provoke. He rode into the groves of almond and walnut trees and out again into a wild and stony country. It was just growing dusk when he saw ahead of him the square white walls of the enclosure, and the cluster of buildings within, glimmering at the foot of a rugged hill. The lights began to move in the windows as he approached, and then a man suddenly appeared at his side on the roadway and whistled twice loudly as though he were calling his dog. Shere rode past the man and through

the open gates into the courtyard. There were three men lounging there, and they came forward almost as if they had expected Shere. He gave his horse into their charge and impetuously mounted the flight of stone steps to the house. A servant in readiness came forward at once and preceded Shere along a gallery towards a door. Shere's impetuosity led him to outstep the servant, he opened the door, and so entered the room unannounced.

It was a long, low room with a wainscot of dark walnut, and a single lamp upon the table gave it shadows rather than light. He had just time to notice that a girl and a man were bending over the table in the lamplight, to recognise with a throb of the heart the play of the light upon the girl's brown hair, to understand that she was explaining something which she held in her hands, and then Esteban came quickly to him with a certain air of perplexity and a glance of inquiry towards the servant. Then he said:—

"Of course, of course, you stopped and came in of your own accord."

"Of my own accord, indeed," said Shere, who was looking at Christina instead of heeding Esteban's words. His unexpected coming had certainly not missed its effect, although it was not the effect which Shere had desired. There was, to be sure, a great deal of astonishment in her looks, but there was also consternation; and when she spoke it was in a numbed and absent way.

"You are well? We have not seen you this long while. Two years is it? More than two years."

"There have been changes," said Esteban. "We have had war and, alas, defeats."

"Yes, I was in Cuba," said Shere, and the conversation dragged on impersonal and dull. Esteban talked continually with a forced heartiness, Christina barely spoke at all, and then absently. Shere noticed that she had but lately come in, for she still wore her hat, and her gloves lay crossed on the table in the light of the lamp; she moved restlessly about the room, stopping now and then to give an ear to any chance noise in the courtyard, and to glance alertly at the door; so that Shere understood that she was expecting another visitor, and that he himself was in the way. An inopportune intrusion, it seemed, was the sole outcome of the two years' anticipations, and utterly discouraged he rose from his chair. On the instant, however, Esteban signed to Shere to remain, and with a friendly smile himself made an excuse and left the room.

Christina was now walking up and down one particular seam in the floor with as much care as if the seam was a tight-rope, and this exercise she continued. Shere moved over to the table and quite absently played with the gloves which lay there, disarranging their position, so that they no longer made a cross.

"You remember that night in London," said he, and Christina stopped for a second to say simply and without any suggestion that she was offended, "You should have spoken that night," and then resumed her walk.

"Yes," returned Shere. "But I was always aware that I could not offer you your match, and I found, I thought, quite suddenly that evening a way to make my insufficiency less insufficient."

"Less insufficient by a strip of brass upon your shoulder," she exclaimed passionately. She came and stood opposite to him. "Well, that strip of brass stops us both. It stops my ears, it must stop your lips too. Where did we meet first?"

"In Paris."

"Go on!"

"At a Carlist—" and Shere broke off and took a step towards her. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "I never thought of it. I imagined you went there to laugh as I did."

"Does one laugh at one's creed?" she cried violently; and Shere with a helpless gesture of the hands sat down in a chair. Esteban had fooled him, and why, the padre had shown Shere that afternoon, Esteban had fooled him irreparably; it did not need a glance at Christina, as she stood facing him, to convince him of that. There was no anger against him, he noticed, in her face, but on the contrary a great friendliness and pity. But he knew her at that moment. Her looks might soften, but not her resolve. She was heart-whole a Carlist. Carlism was her creed, and her creed would be more than a creed, it would be a passion too. So it was not to persuade her but rather in acknowledgment that he said:

"And one does not change one's creed?"

"No," she answered, and suggested, but in a doubtful voice, "but one can put off one's uniform."

Shere stood up. "Neither can one do that," he said simply. "It is quite true that I sought my commission upon your account. I would just as readily have become a Carlist had I known. I had no inclination one way or the other, only a great hope and longing for you. But I have made the mistake, and I cannot retrieve it. The strip of brass obliges me to good faith. Already you will understand the uniform has had its inconvenience. It sent me to Cuba, and set me armed against men almost of my own blood. There was no escape then; there is no escape now."

Christina moved closer to him. The reticence with which Shere spoke, and the fact that he made no claim upon her made her voice very gentle.

"No," she agreed. "I thought that you would make that answer. And in my heart I do not think that I should like to have heard from you any other."

"Thank you," said Shere. He drew out his watch. "I have still some way to go. I have to reach Olvera by eleven;" and he was aware that Christina at his side

became at once very still, so that even her breathing was arrested. For her sigh of emotion at the abrupt mention of parting he was thankful, but it made him keep his eyes turned from her lest a sight of any distress of hers might lead him to falter from his purpose.

"You are riding to Olvera?" she asked, after a pause, and in a queer muffled voice.

"Yes. So I must say good-bye," and now he turned to her. But she was too quick for him to catch a glimpse of her face. She had already turned from him and was walking towards the door.

"You must also say good-bye to Esteban," said she, as though to gain time. With her fingers on the door-handle she stopped. "Tell me," she exclaimed. "It was Esteban who advised the army, who helped you to your commission? You need not deny it! It was Esteban," she stood silent, turning over this revelation in her mind. Then she added, "Did you see Esteban in Ronda this afternoon?"

"No, but I heard that he was there. I must go."

He took up his hat, and turning again towards the door saw that Christina stood with her back against the panels and her arms outstretched across them like a barrier.

"You need not fear," he said to reassure her. "I shall not quarrel with Esteban. He is your brother, and the harm is done. Besides, I do not know that it is all harm when I look back in the years before I wore the uniform. In those times it was all one's own dissatisfactions and trivial dislikes and trivial ambitions. Now I find a repose in losing them, in becoming a little necessary part of a big machine, even though it is not the best machine of its kind and works creakily. I find a dignity in it too."

It was the man of extremes who spoke, and he spoke quite sincerely. Christina, however, neither answered him nor heard. Her eyes were fixed with a strange intentness upon him; her breath came and went as if she had run a race, and in the silence seemed unnaturally audible.

"You carry orders to Olvera?" she said at length. Shere fetched the sealed letter out of his pocket.

"So I must go, or fail in my duty," said he.

"Give me the letter," said Christina.

Shere stared at her in amazement. The amazement changed to suspicion. His whole face seemed to narrow and sharpen out of his own likeness into something foxy and mean.

"I will not," he said, and slowly replaced the letter. "There was a man in the road," he continued slowly, "who whistled as I passed— a signal, no doubt. You are Carlist. This is a trap."

"A trap not laid for you," said Christina. "Be sure of that! Until you spoke of Olvera I did not know."

"No," admitted Shere, "not laid for me to your knowledge, but to Esteban's. You were surprised at my coming— Esteban only at the manner of my coming. He asked if I had ridden into the gates of my own accord I remember. He was in Ronda this afternoon. Very likely it was he who told my colonel of my knowledge of the neighbourhood. It would suit his purposes well to present me to you suddenly, not merely as an enemy, but an active enemy. Yes, I understand that. But," and his voice hardened again, "even to your knowledge the trap was laid for the man who carries the letter. You have your share in the trick." He repeated the word with a sharp laugh, savouring it, dwelling upon it as upon something long forgotten, and now suddenly remembered. "A murderous trick, too, it seems! I wonder what would have happened if I had not turned in at the gates of my own accord. How much farther should I have ridden towards Olvera, and by what gentle means should I have been stopped?"

"By nothing more dangerous than a hand upon your bridle and an excuse that you might do me some small service at Olvera."

"An excuse, a falsity! To be sure," said Shere bitterly. "Yet you still stand before the door though you know the letter will not be yours. Is the trick after all so harmless? Is there no one— Esteban, for instance— in the dark passage outside the door or on the dark road outside the gates?"

"I will prove to you you are wrong."

Christina dropped her arms to her side, moved altogether from the door, and rang a bell. "Esteban shall come here; he will see you outside the gates; he will set you safely on your road to Olvera." She spoke now quite quietly; all the panic and agitation had gone in a moment from her face, her manner, and her words. But the very suddenness of the change in her increased Shere's suspicions. A moment ago Christina was standing before the door with every nerve astrain, her face white, and her eyes bewildered with horror. Now she stood easily by the table with the lighted lamp, speaking easily, playing easily with the gloves upon the table. Shere watched for the secret of this sudden change.

A servant answered the bell and was bidden to find Esteban. No look of significance passed between them; by no gesture was any signal given. "No harm was intended to any man," Christina continued as soon as the door again was closed; "I insisted— I mean there was no need to insist; for I promised to get the letter from the bearer once he had come into this room."

"How?" Shere asked with a blunt contempt. "By tricks?"

Christina raised her head quickly, stung to a moment's anger; but she did not answer him, and again her head drooped.

"At all events," she said quietly, "I have not tried to trick you," and Shere noticed that she arranged with an absent carelessness the gloves in the form of a cross beneath the lamp; and at once he felt that her action contradicted her

words. It was merely an instinct at first. Then he began to reason. Those gloves had been so arranged when first he entered the room. Christina and Esteban were bending over the table. Christina was explaining something. Was she explaining that arrangement of the gloves? Was that arrangement the reason of her ready acceptance of his refusal to part with his orders? Was it, in a word, a signal for Esteban— a signal which should tell him whether or not she had secured the letter? Shere saw a way to answer that question. He was now filled with distrust of Christina as half an hour back he had been filled with faith in her; so that he paid no heed to her apology, or to the passionate and pleading voice in which she spoke it.

"So much was at stake for us," she said. "It seemed a necessity that we must have that letter, that no sudden orders must reach Olvera to-night. For there is some one at Olvera— I must trust you, you see, though you are our pledged enemy— some one of great consequence to us, some one we love, some one to whom we look to revive this Spain of ours. No, it is not our King, but his son— his young and gallant son. He will be gone to-morrow, but he is at Olvera to-night. And so when Esteban found out to-day that orders were to be sent to the commandant there it seemed we had no choice. It seemed those orders must not reach him, and it seemed therefore— just so that no hurt might be done, which otherwise would surely have been done, whatever I might order or forbid— that I must use a woman's way and secure the letter."

"And the bearer?" asked Shere, advancing to the table. "What of him? He, I suppose, might creep back to Ronda, broken in honour and with a lie to tell? The best lie he could invent. Or would you have helped him to the lie?"

Christina shrank away from the table as though she had been struck.

"You had not thought of his plight," continued Shere. "He rides out from Ronda an honest soldier and returns— what? No more a soldier than this glove of yours is your hand," and taking up one of the gloves he held it for a moment, and then tossed it down at a distance from its fellow. He deliberately turned his back to the table as Christina replied:

"The bearer would be just our pledged enemy— pledged to outwit us, as we to outwit him. But when you came there was no effort made to outwit you. Own that at all events? You carry your orders safely, with your honour safe, though the consequence may be disaster for us, and disgrace for that we did not prevent you. Own that! You and I, I suppose, will meet no more. So you might own this that I have used no tricks with you?"

The appeal coming as an answer to his insult and contempt, and coming from one whose pride he knew to be a real and dominant quality, touched Shere against his expectation. He faced Christina on an impulse to give her the assurance she claimed, but he changed his mind.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked slowly, for he saw that the gloves while his back was turned had again been crossed. He at all events was now sure. He was sure that those crossed gloves were a signal for Esteban, a signal that the letter had not changed hands. "You have used no tricks with me?" he repeated. "Are you sure of that?"

The handle of the door rattled; Christina quickly crossed towards it. Shere followed her, but stopped for the fraction of a second at the table and deliberately and unmistakably placed the gloves in parallel lines. As the door opened, he was standing between Christina and the table, blocking it from her view.

It was not she, however, who looked to the table, but Esteban. She kept her eyes upon her brother, and when he in his turn looked to her Shere noticed a glance of comprehension swiftly interchanged. So Shere was confident that he had spoiled this trick of the gloves, and when he took a polite leave of Christina and followed Esteban from the room it was not without an air of triumph.

Christina stood without changing her attitude, except that perhaps she pushed her head a little forward that she might the better hear the last of her lover's receding steps. When they ceased to sound she ran quickly to the window, opened it, and leaned out that she might the better hear his horse's hoofs on the flagged courtyard. She heard besides Esteban's voice speaking amiably and Shere's making amiable replies. The sharp hard clatter upon the stones softened into the duller thud upon the road; the voices became fainter and lost their character. Then one clear "good-night" rang out loudly, and was followed by the quick beats of a horse trotting. Christina slowly closed the window and turned her eyes upon the room. She saw the lamp upon the table and the gloves in parallel lines beneath it.

Now Shere was so far right in that the gloves were intended as a signal for Esteban; only owing to that complete revulsion of which the padre had seen the possibility, Shere had mistaken the signal. The passionate believer had again become the passionate cynic. He saw the trick, and setting no trust in the girl who played it, heeding neither her looks nor words nor the sincerity of her voice, had no doubt that it was aimed against him; whereas it was aimed to protect him. Shere had no doubt that the gloves crossed meant that he still had the sealed letter in his keeping, and therefore he disarranged them. But in truth the gloves crossed meant that Christina had it, and that the messenger might go unhindered upon his way.

Christina uttered no cry. She simply did not believe what her eyes saw. She needed to touch the gloves before she was convinced, and when she had done that she was at once not sure but that she herself in touching them had ranged them in these lines. In the end, however, she understood, not the how or why, but the mere fact. She ran to the door, along the gallery, down the steps into

the courtyard. She met no one. The house might have been a deserted ruin from its silence. She crossed the courtyard to the glimmering white walls, and passed through the gates on to the road. The night was clear; and ahead of her far away in the middle of the road a lantern shone very red. Christina ran towards it, and as she approached she saw faces like miniatures grouped above it. They did not heed her until she was close upon them, until she had noticed one man holding a riderless horse apart from the group and another coiling up a stout rope. Then Esteban, who was holding the lantern, raised his hand to keep her back.

"There has been an accident," said he. "He fell, and fell awkwardly, the horse with him."

"An accident," said Christina, and she pointed to the coil of rope. It was no use for her now to say that she had forbidden violence. Indeed, at no time, as she told Shere, would it have been of any use. She pushed through the group to where Dennis Shere lay on the ground, his face white and shiny and tortured with pain. She knelt down on the ground and took his head in her hands as though she would raise it on to her lap, but one man stopped her, saying, "It is his back, *señora*." Shere opened his eyes and saw who it was that bent over him, and Christina, reading their look, was appalled. It was surely impossible that human eyes could carry so much hate. His lips moved, and she leaned her ear close to his mouth to catch the words. But it was only one word he spoke and repeated:—

"Tricks! Tricks!"

There was no time to disprove or explain. Christina had but one argument. She kissed him on the lips.

"This is no trick," she cried, and Esteban, laying a hand upon her shoulder, said, "He does not hear, nor can his lips answer;" and Esteban spoke the truth. Shere had not heard, and never would hear, as Christina knew.

"He still has the letter," said Esteban. Christina thrust him back with her hand and crouched over the dead man, protecting him. In a little she said, "True, there is the letter." She unbuttoned Shere's jacket and gently took the letter from his breast. Then she knelt back and looked at the superscription without speaking. Esteban opened the door of the lantern and held the flame towards her. "No," said she. "It had better go to Olvera."

She rode to Olvera that night. They let her go, deceived by her composure and thinking that she meant to carry it to "the man of great consequence."

But Christina's composure meant nothing more than that her mind and her feelings were numbed. She was conscious of only one conviction, that Shere must not fail in his duty, since he had staked his honour upon its fulfilment. And so she rode straight to the commandant's quarters at Olvera, and telling of an accident to the bearer, handed him the letter. The commandant read it, and was most politely distressed that Christina should have put herself to so much

trouble, for the orders merely recalled his contingent to Ronda in the morning. It was about this time that Christina began to understand precisely what had happened.

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22: Shocks

Algernon Backwood

1869-1951

The Strand Magazine, Sep 1930

Collected in *Shocks*, Grayson & Grayson, 1935

JOHN FEEK, well over forty, was still evidently a child at heart, for as he heard the postman's knock the same ridiculous old dream rose in his mind— namely, that a letter would someday bring him surprising luck. Out of the blue this letter would come; there would be nothing to lead up to it; it would prove a shock, but a delightful one. It was a dream he shared, of course, with countless other people who have never quite grown up.

After the knock came a pause. He listened. Yes, he heard steps coming upstairs towards the door of his little sitting-room.

"Evening post, sir," said the lodging-house maid, "and a letter for you."

She laid it beside his reading-lamp and went out, closing the door upon the smell of cabbage which had followed her upstairs.

"Thank you, Emma," remarked John Feek, casually, as though his correspondence was unwieldy and a single letter hardly worth bringing up to him. He eyed the typewritten envelope distastefully, and as he did so his dream took wings as usual. Then, turning it over, he read the name of the sender printed on the back.

"Dustworthy and Sons," he said aloud, with more interest in his manner. "So it's not a bill or circular after all!"

Dustworthy and Sons had been his family solicitors for as long as he could remember. James Dustworthy, the head of the old firm, used to play tennis with his father thirty years before, to dine with them at home; he had administered the small estate when his father died, and he still paid him the two hundred pounds a year that came from some trust funds, five thousand pounds or so, an uncle had left him. But John Feek had not seen Mr. Dustworthy for many years, not since boyhood, in fact. He had rather neglected his father's friend, though he owed him many kindnesses. To tell the truth, he only thought about him when the letter came with the quarterly payment. This he would duly acknowledge with some polite and kindly remark or other about Mr. Dustworthy's health and family. Of late years, however, it was one of the sons, now partners in the firm, who sent the payments. Mr. James Dustworthy, of course, must be getting old, leaving more and more of the routine business to his sons.

"No money, anyhow," reflected John Feek with a sigh, still eyeing the envelope without enthusiasm before opening it. "It's not due for a couple of days yet."

It was this small income that provided his excuse for not really working; it just enabled him to live; his literary gifts might otherwise have led to something, for his two small volumes of occasional verse— one of them published at his own expense, he remembered with regret— had been well enough noticed. His talent was mediocre, yet it was a talent worth developing; strangers had written— they liked it.

While these vague thoughts passed through his mind he had opened the envelope. To his surprise the signature, at which he glanced first, was that of James Dustworthy, senior. The letter itself caused him even more surprise:

Dear Mr. Feek,—

I should be very much obliged if you would make it convenient to call upon me at the earliest possible moment. There is a matter of importance concerning yourself about which I should like to talk with you personally, rather than write.

May I hope that eleven o'clock tomorrow, though such short notice, will suit you?

Trusting you are well, and with kindest memories of the pleasant days I spent in your late father's house,

I am,

Yours very truly,

James Dustworthy, Sr.

John Feek's immediate impression was one of vague uneasiness, as though the letter emanated something unpleasant, its wording a trifle ominous even; but a second reading helped to dissipate this. A sense of trouble, none the less, hung about the communication; he disliked that "of importance"; the phrasing was so urgent. He asked himself, like a schoolboy, what he had done, what he had been up to, what enemies he had, what person or persons he had wronged? He found no answer to his searching. His life, certainly, was not blameless, yet he had committed no crime— that he could think of. He was ever his own worst enemy; and to tell the truth, he was unable to recall a single individual, man or woman, whom he had treated badly, or who was hostile to him. Search as he might, no single name occurred. His dreamy, generous, lazy character was, in fact, a lovable one. He was an idler, nothing worse. And in the end he came to the conclusion that this "uneasiness" was due to a bad conscience that pricked him because he rather loafed through life. This was the decision he came to finally. And he at once replied to Mr. Dustworthy, senior, that he would be happy to call at eleven o'clock next morning, as suggested.

He went out and posted the letter at the corner pillar-box himself.

"It must be something unusually important," he reflected, as he slipped the letter in, "or the old boy himself wouldn't have written!" And he went to bed in due course, excited a little perhaps, but distinctly easier in his mind. "James

Dustworthy— the head of the firm," was his last thought. "And a big, old-established firm into the bargain!"

ii

IT WAS Henry Dustworthy, one of the sons, who received him on the stroke of eleven next morning with great politeness, yet obviously did not know him. Neither man, for that matter, recognised the other, having never met previously. And when Feek explained that Mr. James Dustworthy, Mr. Dustworthy, senior, had made the appointment, Henry obviously did not know about that either. He was shown in ceremoniously, however, without delay. He bowed. He sat down. Mr. James Dustworthy wore a beard. Feek had not the slightest recollection of him. The face of his boyhood had entirely vanished from his memory. He stared uncomfortably. The room, though severe, was friendly. Feek's conscience gave him vague, fugitive trouble. Mr, Dustworthy's smile, however, at once set him at his ease. "I am not to be disturbed," said the head of the firm to Henry, who retired, his eyes alight with curiosity. The door was shut.

Aware that his feeling of disquiet might return at any moment, hampering his best judgement of what was to come, Feek broke the pause which threatened to prolong itself:

"I received your letter, Mr. Dustworthy," he remarked, as casually as he could. "It was very pleasant to hear from you again. I— I'm really ashamed to think how long it is since I saw you. I have such pleasant memories of my boyhood days— when my father— you and my father—"

Mr. Dustworthy interrupted, yet in a stately, serious way that only men of the law can compass. He smiled, a bowed, the tips of his fingers met in front of his face.

"I wrote, Mr. Feek," he began, gravely, looking at him over the top of those fingers, "because I felt you would prefer to hear verbally what I have to say, rather than"— he smiled stiffly— "read it through the medium of what is sometimes called a lawyer's letter."

He paused, but made no slightest movement; the long-winded sentence died away. Feek's uneasiness rose and fell. He tried to estimate the other's attitude. There was nothing to estimate. No hint escaped. It struck him incongruously, too, that, search as he might, no trace of the early days was discoverable in that bearded visage.

"Quite so, quite so. I appreciate it," he murmured, wondering what was to follow. In spite of himself and his innocent life, he felt his skin grow moist a little. "I came at once," he added.

Mr. Dustworthy, senior, bowed almost imperceptibly. His black coat, his dry voice, his keen eyes that saw everything while betraying nothing, seemed very solemn— unnecessarily so, Feek assured himself.

"Your father," resumed the lawyer at length, "was kind enough to number me among his friends, his personal friends. I keep the most happy feeling for all the members of his family. I am only too glad, too proud, to be the means of conveying pleasant news—"

John Feek could not contain himself; the reaction set in so suddenly.

"Then— it *is* good news?" he exclaimed. "I wonder if perhaps—"

Mr. Dustworthy drew himself up. "I should hardly have written to you as I did," he announced, "nor, indeed, sent you the personal letter I did, unless it concerned a matter that you would be pleased to hear about."

John Feek remembered that his father had been in the Treasury, a man of some importance. He had been useful to Dustworthy and Sons in many ways.

"Oh, that's nice of you," he stammered. "I— er— might have known that, of course. Only— your letter made me wonder perhaps a little— what had happened. Do, please, tell me—"

He could think of nothing else to say. He was afraid to ask outright. That sense of disquiet still lurked in him somewhere. "It's going to be all right, anyhow," he consoled himself quickly. "Only, the old boy's damned slow about it."

Mr. Dustworthy stiffened visibly, as though he had read his client's thought.

"It concerns," he went on almost coldly, "a legacy— a possible legacy—"

"For me? For myself?" burst in John Feek, unable to keep it back.

"A legacy," Mr. Dustworthy picked up the unfinished sentence where it had been interrupted, "that concerns yourself, yes— from someone who appreciates your— er— work— your writing, I mean— but who insists upon conditions."

"Conditions?" repeated Feek, stupidly.

"What I may call," explained the lawyer, "*unusual* conditions— rather."

He lowered his eyes and stroked his beard, while apparently looking for papers that were not on his desk and that he did not expect to be on his desk. He was waiting, obviously, for his client's gasp. It came. More than a gasp, however, it was a smothered effort to recover breath. For John Feek filled his lungs, trying to appear unconcerned. His heart was beating at an absurd rate, he realised.

"Yes," he said, "quite so, Mr. Dustworthy," as though he had expected something of the sort, whereas in reality he had expected something entirely different. "And with conditions, you say? Unusual conditions?" he repeated, burning to ask the amount, but not yet daring to. His skin was growing moister yet cooler at the same time. That his "work" should have found an appreciative individual did not surprise him, such was his poet's belief in himself, but that this

appreciation should take the form of a legacy seemed hardly of this world. With conditions, too! Unusual conditions! What on earth could they be, these conditions? It was the amount of the legacy, however, that bulked largest in his mind. Sums of twenty pounds, fifty pounds, even a hundred pounds occurred to him. His breath, certainly, was now difficult to manage.

"Ah, yes," he articulated with an effort, as no word came from the man of law; "and— what are the conditions, Mr. Dustworthy? Are they *very* unusual?" He really wanted to ask if they were impossible to accept.

"Strictly speaking," stated the lawyer, "I should have said condition. For there is only one. The condition is anonymity." He stopped dead.

John Feek's mind likewise stopped dead for a moment. The long word, so ordinary otherwise, suddenly had no precise meaning for him. It sounded unpleasant almost, even a trifle mysterious. Its definition escaped him absurdly. Inner excitement had scattered his wits. He could not concentrate.

"Oh, I see, yes— of course," he replied. "That does happen sometimes, doesn't it?"

"No doubt," agreed Mr. Dustworthy, somewhat coolly, "it *can* happen sometimes. My own experience, however, of nearly half a century"— he looked almost patriarchal, stroking his beard— "does not support its frequent occurrence." He paused again. "I consider it, Mr. Feek," he went on, presently, "unusual, but, in this case perhaps, understandable." They stared at one another for a moment in silence. "An annual sum of money," he added with a pontifical air, "is given to you, Mr. Feek, anonymously for your life, anonymity being the essential condition."

"My life!" cried John Feek, making it a question as well as an exclamation.

Mr. Dustworthy made no reply to this inanity. He sat back and settled his glasses. There came another pause.

"Anonymity," repeated John Feek, as the meaning of the word came back to him at last. "You mean— I must never know who gives me this sum?" How much was it, he wondered, oh, how much?

"That is the condition," repeated Mr. Dustworthy. "You must never know from whom this money is received."

John Feek, with a tremendous effort, kept silence. The sum, meanwhile, was growing in his mind. He reached a hundred pounds, even a hundred and fifty pounds. The words "money" and "receive" stung a thousand thoughts and questions into life. He hovered towards two hundred pounds even. To tell the truth, he could hardly believe this was not a dream. When a dream comes true, occurred to him, it means that one is asleep or dead.

"Never?" he repeated, stupidly.

Mr. Dustworthy bowed. "Never," he echoed, solemnly, like Poe's Raven.

In this moment John Feek's rather childlike mind was filled suddenly to the brim with his dream. If he came into money, what would he do with it? And through his excited thoughts flew simultaneously also the answers he had always given to himself. He reviewed swiftly the friends he would help, the needy folk he would subsidise, the Tom, Dick, Harry, and Mary whose difficult lives he would make easier. This, to his credit, flashed upon his bewildered mind without hesitation. Idler and loafer he might be; he was; but his greatest happiness would ever be the surprise, the unexpected joy of this kind he could give to others. This, certainly, was real in him. His old dream, that a letter would startlingly turn his aimless life into some sort of usefulness seemed coming true. He had now reached three hundred pounds.

The great question burst out of him at last:

"And what amount, Mr. Dustworthy," he asked as calmly and legally as he could, "is in question?"

The lawyer eyed him steadily over the tips of his touching fingers. The ghost of something like a cold smile just touched his lips. The lips moved then. "You must prepare yourself, perhaps, for a slight shock," he began. "The donator appreciates your— work." He hesitated for an instant, giving the excited Feek an odd impression that he rather resented saying what he was about to say. "The amount of the legacy," he concluded almost frigidly, "is five thousand pounds a year."

John Feek stared into the other's face. "I see," was the only comment he could think of, though its brief utterance nearly choked him. "Five thousand pounds a year," he repeated, as if to himself.

The sound of his voice rang on and on, it seemed, filling the quiet room. Five thousand pounds. Five thousand pounds. He saw it in figures, then in letters. The exact amount of his capital, curiously enough, occurred to him. Five thousand every year. He tried to work it out by the month, by the quarter, but figures always muddled him.

Mr. Dustworthy, it seems, talked for some time, but Feek did not take in what he said. What did it matter? Ah, five thousand pounds a year was over one thousand pounds a quarter, he realised.

"And— I may feel sure, quite sure?" he asked at length. "Can I really count on it— till I die, I mean?"

The answer was like solid cement being lowered into place:

"Unquestionably. The securities yielding this amount are in my keeping. The first instalment, provided you accept the condition of anonymity, will be paid into your bank as from the first of the month, today being the fifteenth— tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning, yes, I see," repeated Feek, more to himself than to the lawyer. Then, suddenly, a question occurred to him. "And why," he asked,

abruptly, "why does she wish— why, I mean, can't I thank her?" He stared hard at Mr. Dustworthy, straight into his eyes. "I can understand her liking my poems," he added, "but why— why mayn't I even thank her?"

The appraising legal mind examined him through extremely clear glasses. "I was not aware," said its owner, suavely, "having stated that the donator was a— lady."

Feek, struggling swiftly with himself, recovered his equilibrium. He re-crossed his legs, a trifle awkwardly. "I beg your pardon," he said, clumsily, Mr. Dustworthy making no sign that he heard the words, much less that they deserved a rejoinder. "I gather, however," he commented, judicially, after what seemed to Feek another interminable pause. "that you will accept the legacy." It was not a question but a statement. His eyes gazed straight into his client's face above the tips of those lean, white, inhuman fingers. He waited.

John Feek gazed back at him. He did not reply at once. He paused. His mind, of course, was already made up. He was thinking furiously of Tom, Dick, Harry, and Mary, to say nothing of himself. He would accept. He would accept instantly and unconditionally. He would accept— before he woke up, before he found himself dead, before something— something that threatened menacingly, making his heart sink— happened to prove it all a dream, before the legacy, in a word, took wings and vanished. And yet he hesitated, gazing hard into the lawyer's bearded face in front of him, and, as he gazed, seeing— for the first time— the younger face, the face of thirty years ago, when its owner was a beardless young man, the face that came to play tennis with his father, that came to dine.

"It would— I suspect— be ungracious of me— not to," he brought out at length, in a tone he forced himself to keep normal, even judicial.

Mr. Dustworthy, making no comment, watched him closely.

"You yourself," pursued Mr. Feek, "if I may ask— would advise—"

Mr. Dustworthy, alone knowing all the facts, replied at once, almost, indeed, interrupting his client: "It is not a matter upon which I can offer any advice," he said, firmly. "Advice of any kind," he added. "The decision, Mr. Feek, must lie solely with yourself. The legacy," he contributed further, as though he mentioned a legal detail no client could be expected to know, "is tax-free."

"Tax-free!" exclaimed Feek. "That means, I take it, that—"

"Precisely," came the quick answer, accompanied by a patient little inclination of the legal head.

John Feek reflected for some minutes, though hardly knowing why he did so, nor what exactly he reflected about.

"You can— you will, at least, convey my thanks— my gratitude—" he began.

"That," replied the man of law, succinctly, "I can assuredly— and will— do, yes."

Somehow, thought John Feek, left to himself a moment, it was all too wonderful to be true. There was a catch somewhere. It was not quite credible. Swift thoughts flashed and vanished. He remembered his first uneasiness. He remembered the lawyer's odd hesitation, his queer resentment, his air, once or twice, of inexplicable hostility, his icy manner of conveying what he called "pleasant news." Something was wrong, he felt. This time tomorrow— it was now eleven-thirty— over one thousand pounds would be lying in his bank. At the moment he had forty-seven pounds lying there, ten pounds of which was earmarked for rent. He was aware, as the lawyer had warned him, of a certain shock. This shock was understandable. What he found less understandable was this faint "uneasiness" that refused obstinately and finally to be explained away.

"It's natural enough, after all," he reflected, confusedly, "that someone, a woman probably, has liked my stuff— my work, my poems," he hastened to correct himself, "and wishes to show it in this way. Such things have happened before."

He heard his own voice speaking aloud again:

"You know of no reason, Mr. Dustworthy— if I may put it in that way— why I should decline— this legacy?" He realised that his uneasiness expressed itself thus spontaneously without his quite intending it.

"None whatever," was the answer, given, however, with the faintest imaginable shade of hesitation, a hesitation Feek noticed and disliked.

"And— there's no obligation involved— of any sort?" inquired Feek, again rather surprised at his own question.

"None, Mr. Feek," came the reply as before, and, as before, with the same unwelcome ghost of hesitation. Feek sensed again, as he heard it, the singular hint of disapproval, as if the man of law, while pleased to convey good news, at the same time resented— shrank from— doing so.

A longish pause followed, during which the two men gazed into each other's eyes, Feek imagining in the bright orbs facing him an inexplicable combination of ice and passion, of violent welcome and yet of equally violent resentment, of something that desired while it hated.

"I am happy to accept the legacy— and the conditions," he said at length, with as much dignity as he could summon to his aid— and walked away, wondering why the old lawyer, his father's friend, seemed vaguely hostile, vaguely resentful. He walked away— on air.

"This one brief hour," he thought to himself as he strode home to his lodgings upon a carpet of electric air, "has been worth to me a cycle of Cathay! One crowded hour of glorious life with a vengeance! By gad!" And he drew into his lungs a deep breath of the Hampstead air. Time, he realised, is measurable by its content, rather than by its mere duration. "It's the intensity, by Jove, that counts! Existence is one thing, living is another. shock, yes— I've had several

shocks— but shocks drive one explosively out of an accustomed rut. I'd willingly give my last ten years of living in a rut— crystallised the blessed shocks of this single, brief little hour. It's been an eternity!"

iii

FOR A LONG TIME John Feek was quite unable to relate the experience to reality; the new factors were difficult to adjust upon the basis of life as it had been. It was too wonderful to be true, he kept saying to himself. He understood how a shock of happiness might well send a mind off its balance.

How the day passed, he hardly knew. Too excited to sleep, when it ended, he passed a night of broken intervals, making plans, constructing his future anew, envisaging a fairyland which was far from being merely a selfish one. Across every dream, whether a waking or a sleeping one, there fell, however, that faint shadow he had noticed during what he now styled the "immortal interview" with the man of law. He remembered his own vague uneasiness. That scarcely perceptible hesitation, that veiled hostility, in the manner of Mr. Dustworthy came back to him again and again.

In the morning, exhilarated still but not refreshed, Feek made a valiant and determined effort to face things practically and sensibly. He evoked his whole store of common sense to help him in the new adjustment to this change in his life. He walked for miles across Hampstead Heath and Highgate; he read a good deal; he thought things over carefully. He felt the need of a pause; he waited; he did not even go to his bank. Long ago, too, he had given up any hope of guessing who his generous admirer might be— a woman probably, he decided, an entire stranger, at any rate. And he read from cover to cover again both his little books of verse, read them with new joy, with deeper appreciation, finding them good, better than he had believed. It did not surprise him that some rich and big-hearted stranger shared this appreciation, and wished to prove it in this delightful anonymous manner.

Once or twice, as a man is said to pinch himself to prove he is not dreaming, he felt the desire to telephone to the Dustworthy office and confirm the fulfilment of his incredible dream. But he resisted the impulse. That staid old firm, established over a century, with a family business of eminently respectable and distinguished clients, largely Burke, he remembered— a firm of this kind did not make mistakes.

A shutter had flown up in his mind disclosing a new horizon, so that even his lodgings wore a different air. All minor troubles had vanished utterly. Once or twice, such is human nature, he surprised a meanish thought scuttling into its hole: "It might have been twice the amount! It might just as well have been ten thousand pounds!"— but the thought merely flashed and disappeared. He set to

work meanwhile to write a few letters, enclosing cheques to various needy friends to whom a present, tactfully offered, would come, like his own good fortune, out of the blue. He felt he simply *must* share his marvellous luck with others; nor was this superstition merely the prompting of a really generous nature. Likewise, he wrote cheques in settlement of the few bills he owed. These cheques he dated a couple of days ahead, the covering letters one day ahead, for he decided not to post them until he had called first at the bank. Of the forty-seven pounds lying there to his credit, he now had nothing left.

And that evening he dined at his club, inviting a friend, an acquaintance rather, for whom he felt nothing in particular, but who gave him a pleasant smile of greeting in the reading-room, and who, faintly surprised at the invitation, yet accepted it. "But why should I sponge on you, Feek? I was dining here, anyhow." "But why not?" insisted Feek. "Give me the pleasure. I'm alone."

"D'you know, I rather wanted to give a little dinner here one night next week," Feek mentioned over their glass of port. "A bit of luck— oh, nothing to write home about— has come my way, and I feel I ought to celebrate."

The friend, not really interested, agreed. "Always propitiate the gods, yes!" He smiled, for he understood now the reason he had been invited to dine, and this set him more at his ease. They chatted on, discussing the details idly, and the evening passed quite cheerily. Before going home— he walked from Brook Street to his Hampstead lodgings— some half-a-dozen friends he saw had accepted invitations and congratulated him, among them a critic who had damned his volumes with the faintest kind of praise. They ascribed the luck he mentioned to a horse, or the Stock Exchange.

SLEEP CAME to an exhausted mind and body that night, and he woke in the morning clear-headed and refreshed. The dislocating effects of the first shock were passing. He would go to his bank at once. That was the first thing. After that he would look about for a decent flat suitable to his larger income. In the evening he would post those letters. Too busy to read his morning newspapers he stuffed it into his pocket. He took a taxi. As he walked up the steps into his bank the newspaper slipped from his pocket, and, stooping to pick it up, his eye caught a name in big letters on the front page. It was a headline, and the name was "Dustworthy." Something clutched at his throat. He glanced swiftly at the captions. James Dustworthy, senior partner in the old-established firm of Dustworthy and Sons, had been found dead in his private room at the office. His head was in the gas stove. He had killed himself.

John Feek stopped dead, then turned slowly towards the steps he had just come up. His heart, as he did so, seemed to drop down through the whole length of his body and burst upon the granite floor. What he felt, or thought, or imagined, he hardly knew. He experienced no emotion he could have named. He

was numb. There seemed nothing but a blank inside him, an empty void where his heart and mind had been. Mechanically he signalled to a driver. In the taxi, as he hurried to the offices of the firm in Essex Street— no taxi had ever gone so slowly nor by so circuitous a route!— his thoughts gradually collected themselves a little. They provided no convincing consolation. His hands and feet were cold. It was barely eleven o'clock, but even at this hour he found so many people outside the door and in the waiting-room that his sense of horrible bewilderment increased. A feeling of futility overwhelmed him too. Offering a message of formal condolence, but learning nothing by way of information, much less of comfort, from the clerk of the closed offices, he went out into the street again, without a plan.

The club occurred to him, but he presently found himself walking past it; and a second time he walked the whole way out to Hampstead. The familiar house, as he looked at it, had lost the new, different air it had worn since the "immortal interview"; it looked now exactly as it had always looked during the dozen years he had lived there. He fumbled for his latchkey. He passed through the dim, odoriferous hall, and up the creaking stairs.

As he entered his modest sitting-room, a knock rang out loudly— almost challengingly, he thought— on the front door below, the knock that had always summoned that fantastic and ridiculous dream into his mind, the postman's knock. A queer revulsion swept over him. A moment later the maid was in the room beside him. He had not yet taken off his overcoat, much less sat down.

"A letter for you, sir," came the familiar words, as the girl placed the letter on the table and went out. Without moving, he eyed the envelope distastefully, as he noticed, too, the smell of cabbage on the stairs again. The name and address were written by hand, but in a writing he did not recognise. Turning the envelope over, he read the name of the sender printed on the back: "Dustworthy and Sons." He leaned against the closed door for support, while states the envelope with fingers that trembled so they seemed all clumsy thumbs. The contents of the letter were written by hand as well:

Dear Mr. Feek,—

When this letter reaches you, I shall be dead. I have arranged for delay in posting it.

I have been speculating for some time, disastrously, with certain funds, your own capital among them. Your £5,000 is lost.

Seeking out some form of compensation for you, I came to the conclusion that one thing only lay in my power— to give you, namely, a single day, at least, of very great happiness. It would prove illusory, but, while it lasted, would be intense and satisfying. Human pleasures, of course, all are illusory, as mentioned in your poem 'DUST.' It was this poem, indeed, that gave me my idea.

I invented the legacy, making the annual amount the exact sum of your capital I have lost.

If for one single day you have, as I sincerely trust, enjoyed the belief that you possessed, instead of £5,000 capital an income of £5,000 a year, your happiness has been so intense that it has provided the fairest amount of compensation in my power to offer, if only, alas, now in retrospect.

With the kindest memories of the pleasant days I spent in your late father's house.
I am,
Yours un-faithfully,
James Dustworthy, Sr.

Only one thought worthy of the name passed through his mind, repeating and repeating itself. Though the words changed variously, the thought remained the same! "The firm will make it good, of course." The idea of the legacy, it seems, was not present; it was the capital sum, the money that enabled him to live without undue exertion, that filled his mind exclusively. "For their own sake alone! For the reputation of the firm! They're bound to. Of course they will. They *must*."

He did not analyse the letter, its unusual wording, the absence of one single expression of regret, the insulting, dreadful comedy of the adverb in the signature. All his energy concentrated itself, apparently, in the one main thought that the firm would be bound to make good his loss. He said the words aloud, over and over again— over and over again.

John Feek, by now, had experienced too many shocks to know quite what he was about, perhaps. He believes he swallowed some lunch, he believes he went out again and walked over Hampstead Heath in rain, but he knows one thing positively— that he eventually encountered, at some street corner or other, Highgate way, a boy holding out a wet, windblown placard, whose big black letters seemed to stun him with the terrible words they formed. Before killing himself, James Dustworthy had filed his petition in bankruptcy. This final shock, robbing him of his last slim hope, fell upon him like a bullet that thuds into a corpse. He felt nothing at all.

The next thing, anyhow, that Feek remembered with any distinctness was being in his dingy sitting-room again, his eye resting upon a little pile of unposted letters, letters that he somehow could not bring himself to the point of tearing up. His mind, besides, was not considering them with any real seriousness, for its attention was fixed upon another fact of more immediate importance, the fact that there were cheaper, meaner rooms on the top floor of the lodging-house, and that these rooms, he knew, were vacant. The bedraggled newspaper, whose placard had stunned him, lay on the carpet beneath his wet boots; he had read every word of the brief statement that concerned him.

The fact that Mr. Dustworthy's brain had given way for some weeks before the final act, and that he had been subject during this period to grave hallucinations, held no interest, as it held no consolation, for John Feek. His

condition was black, hopeless, the interior confusion rather dreadful. The series of recent shocks to his own mind, first of intense happiness, then of equally deep disappointment, had certainly disturbed his equilibrium. He caught all manner of horrible notions flashing to and fro, grimacing at him as they traced ominous, even dangerous patterns in his disordered thoughts. He remembers, however, putting away the heap of unposted letters in a desk, just as he remembers glancing round the room, in a cold, deliberate, calculated sort of way that both pleased and frightened him, to see if it contained a gas stove. It did not. Of course, he had forgotten. He had often meant to persuade the landlady to install one. The day, besides, was a nice warm summer's day. Absurd! He laughed— aloud. He sat down and opened a book— of poems. They did not interest him. They were cheap, their emotion was not honestly felt, they were artificial and self-conscious, they were his own. In particular he read one called DUST. Its falsity disgusted him. A spontaneous inspiration flamed— he knew now how it should have been written. He began scribbling some lines upon a back page.

During which a considerable time, an hour certainly, must have passed, for the light had begun to fail. A sound in the house below disturbed him, making him start. It was a knock, a postman's knock. His only reaction to it was a shudder; a sense of shuddering anticipation certainly ran through him. Was it, however, a real knock, he asked himself? Was it not only in his mind, a delusion? He would go on hearing these knocks, these awful postman's knocks, all his life probably. He never wanted to see another letter again so long as he lived. The sight of a typed envelope, the sound of a postman's knock, were associated in his mind with dread and disappointment only. The idea, at any rate, brought to his notice one sensible thought— he must write a letter himself, he remembered, several letters, for that matter. He must put off the club dinner. Ill health, he decided, would be the best excuse to offer, adding something about the "occasion, he hoped, being only postponed."

"A letter for you, sir," sounded a voice in the air beside him.

He had not heard the steps on the stairs, he had not heard the girl come in, he did not hear her go out again. He did not want to get a letter from anywhere or anybody, and he eyed this one that lay on his table with dislike and loathing even, with something of horror too. For the typewritten envelope bore the same inscription as the two former ones; it was from Dustworthy and Sons. He did not open it because he did not dare to, but neither did he dare destroy it. He merely smiled bitterly, as he locked it away in the desk with the heap of unposted letters. A couple of days later another letter, similarly inscribed, arrived and joined it in the desk.

WHAT JOHN FEEK endured during that couple of days, and for several subsequent couples of days as well, need not be described in detail. That his courage made him presently face life again is the only item worthy of mention, perhaps, for it persuaded him eventually to open and read those two odious letters, which, he saw, were signed by Henry Dustworthy, son of the dead man. Nothing more, he felt, could possibly happen to him now; no further shock could touch him.

Without noticing it, Feek read the later one first. It expressed formal anxiety that no receipt had come to hand for the cheque recently enclosed. Feek then tore open the earlier one. It enclosed the firm's cheque for the usual quarterly payment of his income, and went on to explain briefly that James Dustworthy's petition in bankruptcy was due to a delusion on his "poor father's" part that he had committed various illegal acts, but that actually, the firm was entirely solvent as usual, and that, in fact, the whole thing was an hallucination on his part, caused by— there followed a Latin word that in plain English was "madness."

No reference to the legacy lay in that letter, it being obviously a portion of the suicide's delusion. But John Feek, Henry was pleased to add, was mentioned in his "poor father's will" for a sum of five thousand pounds, "which amount will be duly paid into your bank as soon as probate is granted."

John Feek took the unposted letters from his desk and slipped them into the nearest Hampstead pillar-box. They were dated several days before, but that, John Feek considered, really did not matter.

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