PAST MASTERS 232

Douglas Newton
H. Bedford-Jones
Damon Runyon
Edgar Wallace
Edward Dyson
Alice C. Tomholt
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and more

PAST MASTERS 232

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

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1: Fanatic

Patrick Vaux

Maclaren Mein, 1872-1935

Queenslander 7 Nov 1929

Scottish author of marine novels and stories, and some s.f.

LIEUTENANT NORTHROP watched the play of the destroyer from her bridge— watched anxiously. She was thrashing heavily through the waters, and the impact of her sharp bows together with the stress of her 16,000-horsepower turbines, caused her to strain and quiver as if every rivet was sheering loose.

Northrop glanced at his cousin. The O.C. was staring amidships, his body swaying to the swing of his craft, and his brine-bitten eyes winking and in the thin, grey light of that forenoon his face showed pinched and wan, every wrinkle plainly visible. Northrop told himself again that more than hard work and training was marked on it. And was it not a queer jape of the goddess Chance that Strong, of all men, was the officer taking him back to the purgatory of naval life? And the irony of it, that he had chosen the navy to please Aunt Emily.

"It blows! It blows, eh!" cried the O.C, catching his cousin's eye, "but ain't us pushing along, eh? Ought to fetch up with the fleet a little after four bells- Hey, you didn't think to be taken off, did ye, now? Hope you enjoyed your convalescene? Lord, this cruise is no picnic, I can tell you!" Northrop yelled almost surlily. "But for you coming in for mails I wouldn't have been taken off. Fed up with a navy, I am!"

The Junior officer surveyed him in surprise. Yet, after all, Northrop never had made any secret of his lack of enthusiasm for the service, looking on it much as the tallow chandler looks on his wholesale merchant. An expressive grimace contorted Strong's long, thin face, with its mouth so contradictory of the commanding forehead and aggressive, obdurate nose; and he ducked in time to escape a deluge of spray charging over the weather screen.

"That's some of it," he chuckled.

Northrop bit his underlip as he wiped the brine off his face. He realised the contrast between them more acutely than ever. Ah! If only Aunt Emily's many thousands had come to him as she had intended. That was the bitterness of it— the flaw in the will which made him Strong's heir instead of inheriting direct. Yet, so Northrop assured himself, he felt no animus in the matter. No. it was pity, pity mingled with contempt for his cousin's weakness. Leonard called it a weakness. But, on that question, he was a fanatic— his mother having long been a leader in the national temperance movement. His father, incidentally, had died of alcoholism.

Ahead, sunshine flecked the tumbling seas that elsewhere showed leaden grey, shadowed by the plies of massing cloud. Under the gusts of the rising gale the waters were being hammered into chaotic ridges. Between them the long, narrow craft hurled herself, as if steam and steel rendered her invincible.

"HEAVY weather coming down, eh?" The lieutenant turned on catching the O.C.s voice, and flung a deep look at him. Strong's eyes, the underlip so flaccid, his whole carriage were, to the senior, all proofs of indulgence— over-indulgence. Northrop's latent bitterness towards his cousin caused him to lose some of the sense of proportion— where Strong was concerned. The O.C. piped to secure boat, torpedo-tube, and gun weather housings. Northrop moved a few feet down the bridge, and stared at the roaring seas.

"This'll try her build, eh?" roared his cousin.

Leonard did not reply. Bah, the rotter! Had he no regard for the weight of his command? For the high calling of his duty? To indulge in a caulker or two before leaving port, with all this rough weather brewing was, in the teetotaller's estimation, tantamount to a defection of duty. One likes to think, however, that his judgment was warped.

A swirl of wind blew down the fumes from the funnels, and, cursing and spluttering, the two officers staggered clear of them. The senior lieutenant's thoughts went to those below. There men toiled in a suffocating atmosphere of tinned air to assuage the roaring, white-hot furnaces, and the engine-room men went about their duties within the maze of jiggetting machinery; all dependent on their officer. And here, on the bridge, Lieutenant John Strong was again hugging the weather-rail and breathing in the air like a fish; so averred Northrop in his heat of resentment. He denied him a clear brain and vigilant, and questioned himself if it was not his duty to lodge a report. But common sense quashed that notion.

The destroyer thrust herself through the crest of a surge, and the water sluiced knee-deep- over her deck, causing the watch to cling to lifeline and staunchion. Northrop swore viciously as he shook himself. His clothes were wringing wet. for no rubbers or oilers could keep out the spray which was hurtling up over the breastwork and weather screen.

Just then he noticed Strong making a wry contortion of his lean face, and waving his dripping arms joyously.

"Hey, you don't get any of this jolly wet upon your sky-high bridge," was yelled in cheerful derision. "Cocoa and hot-water bottles for you blokes!"

"And no 'Scotch,' either," should have been his cousin's reply, but he choked down utterance, and gave a non-committal nod instead. He was concentrating his attention on a down-Channel liner a few points off their starboard quarter.

By the time taken to drop her astern he could approximately reckon the destroyer's increasing slip and loss of speed in the boisterous seaway.

As time went on Northrop reassured himself that his feeling of present discomfort was a saviour of what he soon would be re-experiencing. All too closely was he familiar with the vagaries of a lively battleship; the blast from her funnels catching him in the nape of his neck as he stepped the bridge; the seas rending upon her great bows to make the foredeck sloppy, and the keeping of a keen lookout something against which body and mind rebel so harassing the conditions. When there is never a rift in the foul, snoring night, and the huge vessel rips onward, trying to keep station among the scooping seas, as her column butts through the night, and the storm. Some £40,000,000 worth of property.

Lieutenant Northrop shivered. Ah, not now would he be getting goosefleshed, so he told himself, if the legacy had been willed direct to him. Money, money, money. It was his constant anxiety. How to secure comfort and ease for his invalid wife, and lighten his burden of debts? Peace with its tardy promotion, and, above all. the unexpected diversion of the fortune which he had been taught to look upon as his own, were combining to break him financially. But, what of his cousin? A sudden Jerk of the hard-pressed craft might send him headlong.... The thought Jagged Northrop like lightning.

To starboard a surge creamed down, and smote the destroyer vindictively, and another hit her on that quarter. She reeled under their blows, every one holding hard on rail and lifeline. The senior lieutenant frowned. A tense, excited expression overspread his harsh face. A large ocean tramp, away to port, was rolling heavily. Abeam, a barque was standing up-channel under close-reefed topsails and a storm jib. Astern the liner's smoke was wavering like a mile-long dusky plume low over the waters. Northrop, moving up the bridge, touched the O.C. on his left arm. He pointed to the barque, and then at the cargo steamer. His cousin nodded, and cast an eye into the heart of the gale.

"Yes. And a nasty crush of sea getting up, too," he roared, "but I keep on for all she's worth. Some of the C.l.C.'s mail imperative, so I was told."

"Crack on, then, and be damned!" Northrop exploded, "but, 'member, there's the risk."

AGAIN the vessel threw herself across an expanding deepening gulf, and, then into the rising slope beyond. The cresting tip of it broke down in flood over bows, foredeck, and bridge, Northrop's face deepened in expression, and John Strong wondered why he looked so grim. But the O.C.'s bearing was one of confidence, and, being sure of his craft, his crew, and himself, he was but little concerned about the dirty weather.

The hurrying boat, caught in a jumble of conflicting seas, heaved erratically over on her broadside, and swung back again. Lieutenant Strong staggered headlong; caught all unawares. Then it was that the idea took Northrop completely captive that in such a lurch Strong might tilt a-lee, to his fatal end.

The destroyer, as if answering him, heeled steeply to port, and then to starboard, like a live thing bent on unsaddling her rider. Northrop clung to the bridge rail. Anger at his cousin, wrath at himself, a lurking hope of Strong's sudden end, together with fears for the vessel, all were tugging hard on his heartstrings.

LIEUTENANT NORTHROP was psychic-predeterminative. Just then a stoker scrambled on deck amidships. He flung up his arms in a gesture of despair. The startled bridge bawled to him. "Makin' water like a mill-sluice," the man roared; "she's goin', she's goin'!"

And, even as the stokehold voice tube shrilled the news Strong's voice was ringing steady and clear.

"Clear lower deck. Out boats!"; for the O.C. felt his vessel buckling beneath his feet. "Seas have broken her back," he jerked out to his cousin. Yes, SOS for wireless cabin. Jump along amidships, and loose off half a dozen rounds.... Steady, lads, steady. We're safe enough with those craft around."

Resolute and collected, the commanding officer stayed his men. And remorse, poignant and afflictive, took possession of Northrop. Here was no officer incompetent and muddle-headed through liquoring.

STEAM broke in clouds from below, and the stem and stern began to double amidships as if on a hinge there. The bluejackets and stokers ceased getting away the rafts and canvas craft, and, obeying orders, they jumped where the crowded boats lay tossing. The destroyer's siren still droned for help, and her wireless crackled till the O.C., thrusting his head into the cabin, told the tight-throated yeoman to jump for the boats. Already the liner had replied, and was hurrying up astern. At hand, the British tramp was answering on her horn, and her boats were being eased off their chocks. The hull of the sinking destroyer dipped to port, and an inroad of sea washed Strong off his feet as he staggered to the craft's lurching. He lay sprawling abaft the bridge ladder, unable to get on his feet. Northrop reeled toward him along the crumpling deck.

"JUMP, Len, Jump! Leg broken, and some ribs, too. Jump. Never mind me."

"Helen! Remember Helen. Oh, God, my Helen!"

That was all the fanatic cried as, with gasping breath and strung thews, he picked up his cousin.

For a moment he tried to balance himself for the throw. Then the men in the whaler's sternsheets gripped Strong by shoulders and neck before he sank again, and hauled him inboard. Northrop was flung backward by the impetus of his cast. The stem and the stern were then collapsing. And down the tilting foredeck he slipped, and the belch of scalding steam hid him.

Strong declares his cousin did sacrifice himself for him. Fanaticism and self-expiation often go together.

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2: Tom Silver's Bus

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

In: *The Short Stories of Warwick Deeping*, Cassell, 1930

HIS WIFE was troubled about him, for when, after fifteen years of married life, a man becomes moody and strange and sits and stares at the fire and does not always hear what is said to him, a woman begins to ask herself questions.

The Silvers had no children. They had lived in the same cottage in Paradise Row ever since they had been married, a red brick cottage with a green door and railings, and Tom Silver had always kept the little front garden full of flowers. At the back of Paradise Row ran a branch of the River Bourne, and the strips of ground belonging to the cottages ended in the green of old pollarded willows. The Silvers had in their piece of garden a magnificent old pear tree, all white in the spring, and flaming red and gold in the autumn. Blackbirds loved this tree, and on spring mornings early a cock would usually be singing in it.

But Mary Silver was troubled.

For Tom had always been a man of calculable moods and habits, and for years she had had the feeling that she knew all about him that there was to know, but now she was not so sure.

"Hear the bird, mother?"

This spring he had not called her attention to the blackbird in the pear tree, nor had he boasted gently about the size of the polyanthus flowers in the patch of front garden. She had seen him standing quite still with his foot on the garden fork, staring at the soil, but not as though he saw anything singular in the soil. He stared at the fire in just the same way.

Mary would say to herself: "Now, what's wrong with my Tom?"

For a deep and sure affection united them, and like many childless people they had grown into and through each other. Silver was a driver-mechanic, and had worked for a dozen years at "Green's Garage," in Malton. Old Green thought a lot of him, this silent Tom Silver, blond and fresh-coloured, with blue eyes that were apt to go dreamy, a man who did not like to be talked to when he was at work, and who resented interference. If a sick engine needed a physician, Silver was the man for it. His big, strong, dexterous hands were loving and patient.

For the job was his, and a mere money-getting world is slow to realize how much the job is part of the worker's soul. Tom Silver found his secret joy in it, his justification, little strange ecstasies of self-expression. Something clicked to beneath his skilful fingers, or a stammering engine became sweet and alive.

Always he had come back to Mary with a kind of contentment in his eyes.

"Tea ready, mother?"

He had had the air of a man who had completed something, exorcised some little devil of disharmony. The job was good.

But this spring his eyes had changed. They had a sort of sadness, a perplexity. He did not look at the familiar things about the cottage and garden as he had been accustomed to look at them. He was silent, preoccupied.

Mary was troubled. She knew her man, and that Tom did not go off round the corner. She had never known him to get silly about a girl, and to come back to her looking sheepishly and deceitfully cheerful. He did not drink; he was not interested in "horses." He had no worries, save the worries that attach themselves inevitably to the life of a man who works for a weekly wage.

Was it their lack of children?

Now between Mary and Tom there had always been a simple and intimate confidence. They had nothing to conceal from each other. They were simple people uttering simple words, and giving expression to their natural feelings. They had become necessary to each other in a way that is not understood by those whose mating has been solely and transiently of the flesh.

Mary asked her question.

"What's worrying you, Tom?"

He had slipped his feet into his slippers, and was lighting his pipe while she mended the fire. He held the match to the tobacco, and his hand was steady. He neither resented nor shirked her question; he answered it.

"Blessed if I know, mother."

Which was strange, so strange that she stood holding the poker and looking down at him with a puzzled intentness.

"How can that be?"

His blue eyes raised themselves to her dark ones.

"Sounds silly. Yes, I guess it does. But it isn't exactly worry, mother, it's a sort of feeling."

"A sort of feeling?"

"Yes— that's all I can call it."

She stirred the fire, and her face was thoughtful. She was wise as to the ordinary problems of a working woman's life: the rent, the bills, the fear of sickness, a dread of strikes.

"Nothing wrong at the shop?"

"Nothing."

"No one's been hurting your feelings?"

He smiled. He patted her back.

"No; I've no grouse on. It's a decent shop, and I count a bit with the boss. I'm on the job all the time."

She said, gravely and softly:

"I've never known you like this before."

He answered her just as simply:

"Maybe I'm a blooming fool. It's news to me, mother, but I don't get the feel I did from handling tools."

"You're fed up?"

"No; not exactly that. It's as though something funny was working inside me and couldn't get out."

Now this might have seemed a strange confession for a working-man to make, and a woman less wise than Mary Silver might have been sceptical, but Tom was not the sort of man who boiled over like some fussy little kettle. There was something funny and restless inside him, and what exactly— was it? He could not give it a name, and an unnamed thing casts a shadow.

"Is it something you want and haven't got, Tom?"

"I don't know, old girl."

"Is it because I haven't given you children?"

He looked up suddenly at that. He reached out and drew her against him.

"No; nothing that touches you, mother. I know what I've got. It's just a sort of restlessness. Don't you worry."

But Mary did worry, though she worried in secret; for she had a feeling that her man was not happy, and when he was not happy, no blackbird sang for her in the pear tree. But what was the matter with him? He had a good job; he was respected. When anything difficult had to be done at the garage Tom Silver was turned loose upon it. That sort of pride mattered to a man like Tom; and yet, as she watched him, it seemed to her that the pride had gone out of him. He was less taut about the shoulders. A vague listlessness possessed him.

She lay awake at night, worrying. She even wondered whether Tom was ill, and whether this moodiness was a symptom, the first shadow of some insidious, creeping sickness. She lay and listened to his breathing, but Tom slept as he had always slept.

Tom Silver knew one thing, he had lost the joy of his hands. He could not say how or why. The strange inwardness of the change was beyond him— that steel should have become dead metal, and an engine a mere machine. The wrench and the drill and the pliers, the reamer, the hack-saw and the hammer did not leap lovingly into his hands. There were days when he was short of temper. He would curse, and in cursing begin to fume and to fumble. Something was out of gear between Tom Silver and his craft.

Then, one evening, looking at the faces of the pansies in his garden, he remembered.

"Funny little devils! They're alive, just like people."

Yes; he remembered. His discontent had dated from that day when there had been a smash in the London road in front of him, and he had gone to help

and had found himself helpless. A woman was screaming. She lay there by the kerb, all bloody. And he had stood and stared. The job had beaten him.

He went into the cottage. His eyes had a strange look. He spoke to Mary, who was putting fresh buttonholes into a shirt.

"I've got it, mother."

"What, my dear?" For there were times when she called him "my dear" like a child.

"It isn't steel; it's flesh."

She waited upon this strange saying.

"A machine's a dead thing. I haven't got the hands for a thing that's alive."

He went on to tell her about the smash in the London road. He had been in charge of a private car for the day, driving two ladies up to town; they were going to a theatre. His blue eyes seemed to be looking at the things he described; his big hands rested on his knees.

"It gave me a sort of shock, mother. I was shaky for the rest of the drive. I think it's been on my mind, made me sort of discontented."

"But it wasn't your job, Tom. You can't blame yourself."

His blue eyes stared.

"Well, that's so. But somehow— I seemed to feel that it was the sort of job I wanted to be able to tackle. It wasn't that I was afraid of it. I didn't just know how to tackle it."

"It's a doctor's job, my dear."

"In a manner of speaking— yes, old girl. When a machine goes wrong, it's been my job to help to put it right. But a body's more than a machine. I'm always seeing that poor lady lying screaming in the road, and me as helpless as one of those rich young boobs who hog it in high-powered cars and can't do more than lift the bonnet flap when something goes wrong."

She nodded her head at him.

"You want to get to know?"

"That's it, mother."

Knowing him as she did Mary was not surprised when little red books appeared in the cottage, and her man sat at night studying them. She consented. Tom had always been a man for teaching himself things. He was thorough— through and through. He would spread out diagrams on the kitchen table, and go to the trouble of making large copies of them in blue and red chalk. He hung these diagrams on the bedroom door, and stood and studied them when he was dressing in the morning.

He was teaching himself the anatomy of the human body as he had taught himself the anatomy of cars. He could have talked to Mary about the brachial and the femoral arteries, and what you might be able to do when a fellow got his throat cut on the jagged glass of a broken windscreen, but he was not a

talkative person. Bandages appeared in the cottage, and at night his wife would humour him and pull off her shoe, and allow him to make use of her leg. She would sit and sew and watch his serious, absorbed face, and his deliberate and dexterous fingers.

One day he came back with the strangest of purchases, an awkward looking object in a sack. Using the backyard as an operating theatre he extracted the object from the sack. He explained the affair to Mary.

"I had to drive old Mr. Morriaty over to that sale at Milford. He said to me: 'Tom, I shall be here most of the day. You had better amuse yourself, somehow.' I had a look over the house, and there was this doll shoved away in a job lot. I had a brain wave, mother, and I bought it."

He exhibited his purchase, a battered lay-model such as is used by artists. Its articulated limbs could be set in any position, and to Tom Silver it would serve as a model of the human figure.

"I can work on it, mother; practise putting up fractures."

Tom's dummy was put to live in the tool-shed at the end of the garden, and on summer evenings Tom would get busy on "Cuthbert," as he called the creature. He applied splints and bandages to fractured legs and thighs and arms, and Cuthbert was a model patient. He never struggled or made a fuss.

Mary bore with her man's obsession. She could not see that it was going to have any practical bearing on life, or that Tom would be able to exercise his new craft in the world of reality. But he was absorbed in it; it seemed to have cured his restlessness. He had ceased to sit and stare.

Now, Malton was a rapidly growing town. It had shed its village smock. Houses were springing up everywhere, and new building estates eating into the green fields and causing the death of old trees. Motor cars multiplied. And Malton and its responsible citizens began to visualize the expanding needs of the community.

Malton had its cottage hospital and its local fire brigade, its district nurses, and its various clubs, but its hospital was proving itself inadequate. Also, Malton had taken to itself a bright and brisk new doctor, "Young Smith," as Malton called him. Young Smith was a very live person, and a very capable surgeon. He began to be felt in the place.

One morning Mr. Green came down to the workshop where Tom was fitting new pistons in an engine.

"Heard the news, Tom?"

Tom had heard some news.

"The town's to have a motor-ambulance, and they have asked me to run it."

Tom straightened his long back. His eyes had grown dreamy.

"Going to do it, sir?"

"Well, yes; but it isn't the job for any ordinary chap. Dr. Smith's been talking to me. Naturally the man who drives the ambulance has got to know how to handle a case."

Tom nodded.

"Obviously. It's not an amateur job. I could take it on."

Old Green stared at him.

"You may be a damned fine mechanic, Tom, but what do you know about first aid?"

"I've been studying. I guess I'm as good as any St. John's Ambulance man, any day. I'm not gassing."

Mr. Green knew that Tom Silver did not gas, but his curiosity was piqued.

"You've been studying? What for?"

Tom wiped his hands on a wad of cotton waste.

"Just felt I had to, that's all. I've seen one bad smash, and it got me cold. No more use than a bloody kid. After that I felt I'd learn something in case I saw another."

Mr. Green— who was a shrewd old John Bull of a man, and who knew just what a fellow like Silver was worth— grunted and looked thoughtful.

"Well, you'd better go up and see Dr. Smith. He's one of those thorough chaps. He doesn't take things on tick."

Tom knocked off work a little earlier than usual, and when Mary heard him coming in the back door she glanced at the clock and wondered why her man was half an hour before his time, but when she saw Tom's face she knew that something had happened, and something that he found good. Also, she allowed him the pleasure of giving her a surprise, because if a man has no one to whom he can say: "Well, what do you think of that!" life is no better than an old clothes shop.

He assumed a casualness.

"Can you put on tea, mother?"

"The kettle's just on the boil."

"Then I'll have a little shaving-water."

She allowed him his mystery. But what was the great occasion which demanded that Tom should shave himself a second time in one day? In any other man she would have postulated woman. She heard him rummaging about upstairs, and when he came down to her he was wearing a clean collar and shirt and his dark blue Sunday suit. His eyes had a deep, challenging smile.

She looked him over.

"Well, what's on, my lad?"

"Going up to see Dr. Smith."

"That's the new doctor. Is he wanting a chauffeur?"

"No; it's like this, mother. The town's getting a motor-ambulance. Our people are going to run it. I told the boss I was for the job."

"Whole time?"

"No; part time job. But Dr. Smith's hot stuff. Naturally they don't want a chap on the car who can't handle a case."

Mary poured out his tea.

"I'm glad, Tom," she said. "I know it's what you've been hankering after. I'm glad."

So Tom Silver went up to see Dr. Smith, who was a brisk, stout fellow with the cut of a naval man, and Dr. Smith looked at Silver and liked him. He liked him very well.

Dr. Smith had a bright eye and a mischievous tongue. As a student he had been a slogging boxer, and even now he liked to give a man a punch and see how he reacted.

He questioned Tom.

"Look here, supposing you found a chap in the road with his throat cut, broken glass, and bleeding like hell, what would you do?"

Tom stood like a man on parade.

"Put my fingers to the wound, sir, and try to get hold of the bleeding point."

"You would. And supposing you found a fellow lying beside the road, after an accident, what would you do first?"

"Look at him, sir."

"Look at him?"

"See if I could spot anything before messing him about."

Dr. Smith laughed.

"Who taught you that?"

"Well, when an engine has chucked up, sir; you have a look round before getting out a spanner. Besides, I'm not raw to the job."

Dr. Smith's glance said: "You'll do. You'll do damned well."

And Tom Silver went back to his wife and sat by the fire with her and looked happy.

Tom Silver was very proud of the new ambulance. It had a cream-coloured body, black wings, and a red cross on the side panels, and he cherished it as a man cherishes his first car. But more so, for this ambulance symbolized to Silver his passion to serve; and, in serving, to express that something in himself which makes man imagine God. This was no mere handling of cold steel, but a task into which compassion entered, and in helping the sick and the injured the soul of Tom Silver was satisfied.

There were other men who did not understand this. They said: "Old Tom's got a nerve. No sort of bloody mess seems to put the wind up him. He's a hard nut."

But Tom Silver was anything but hard; he was gentle. His urge to help was so strong that he did not flinch or hesitate. And as his confidence grew his pride in his job grew with it. He knew that he could help those who were helpless.

One winter morning, when the wet pavements had been iced by a sudden frost, someone slipped and broke a leg. It happened just outside the post-office, and at an hour when all the doctors were out on their rounds. Tom was sent for, and with a police constable to help him he set the broken leg, and carried the patient off in the ambulance.

Dr. Smith, intercepted somewhere on his round by a telephone message, drove down to the hospital, and seeing Silver afterwards, asked him a question.

"Was that your job, Tom?"

"Yes, sir."

"Couldn't have done it better myself."

Silver went pink under his brown skin, and that flush remained with him all the morning. He carried the warmth of it back to Mary at the dinner hour, and it helped to add savour to Irish stew.

"That sort of thing makes a job seem worth while, mother."

And Mary knew that her man was finding life good.

Meanwhile Malton grew and flourished amazingly; and its citizens, confronted with the inadequacy of a ten-bed cottage hospital, decided that Malton must step into the line of progress. Dr. Smith blew hither and thither like a stout breeze. Money was promised, fêtes organized, beds endowed. And so it came about that a new hospital was planned and put into being, and Tom Silver watched it grow. He had given his guinea; but he felt that there was more of him than twenty-one shillings in that handsome, red brick building.

It was to be so, for it had been decided by the committee that the new hospital should have a motor-ambulance, and a driver permanently attached to it, and Tom Silver was offered the post.

Old Green was inclined to growl about it. He did not want to part with his prize mechanic. He tackled Tom.

"I'll make it worth your while to stay on."

Tom looked embarrassed.

"It's very good of you, sir, but I've got to go. It isn't that I'm not well satisfied here."

"You'll be dropping good money, and the chance of a share. I'll give you a day to think it over."

Tom went home and put it to his wife.

"I shall be dropping fifteen bob a week, mother."

"Well, drop them, my dear."

He crossed over to where she was sitting and kissed her.

"You always were a great little woman. My heart's in the job."

Two more years passed, and Tom Silver was very much a person. He had a local reputation. Other men said: "There goes old Tom in his bloody old bus." But it was said kindly, for Tom and his sanguinary vehicle were realities in the life of Malton and the neighbourhood. He was something of an autocrat: no one else was allowed to touch his ambulance; the blankets had to be just so, and the stretchers spotless. When Tom had to collect a case from a cottage he was addressed as "Mr. Silver," and there is no doubt that Tom was considered to be as much a public institution as the local police inspector, or the clerk to the Urban District Council.

Well-to-do cases sometimes offered Tom Silver tips. He accepted tips; he passed them on to Mary, so that there should be less chance of her missing those fifteen shillings.

ONE FOGGY DAY in November, about two o clock in the afternoon, the ambulance was rung for. The hospital porter who took the message, dashed out to warn Tom.

Station bus had a smash on Tipsy Hill.— Urgent.

Tom knew those station buses, clattering, ramshackle, go-as-you-please crates of glass and tin that careered up and down to and from Malton station. Often he had cursed those buses and their drivers, but the strangest thing of all was that he did not remember that Mary was going over to Telford market to shop, and that she had taken one of those buses to the station. He just forgot, or his job and its urgency left a blind spot in his mind. He had his ambulance out and on the road in less than a minute after the porter had warned him.

He got to the place before the doctors. In the fog he saw a row of fir trees, and one of those tin-pot buses with its silly wheels in the air half in and half out of a clump of furze, and round it a little group of people. He sprang down; he elbowed through.

"Anybody hurt?"

Someone stared him in the face. And then he heard a voice, a little, moaning voice: "I want my Tom. Will someone fetch my Tom."

Silver saw her lying there on the grass; two men were kneeling, and one of them was fumbling with a handkerchief. The handkerchief was all red, so were the man's hands, and he had the flurried, helpless air of a fellow who was frightened.

"She's bleeding like— I can't— Where are the doctors?"

Silver was down on his knees. He had edged the other man aside.

"It's all right, mother; I'm here."

But within him there was terror, such fear as he had never known. He remembered afterwards that his hands had felt paralysed until the warm blood had touched them, and they had seemed to become alive. They were him: the man, Tom Silver. Afterwards, his lower lip showed red where he had bitten it.

The doctor came. It was Smith.

"What, Tom? Good lord, man! It's—"

Silver's teeth showed in a kind of smile.

"All right, sir; I've got my fingers in it. Artery— broken glass."

"Good. Can you hang on?"

"What do you think."

"Right, you stick to it while we lift."

That night Tom Silver was sitting in front of the fire in the hospital porter's room. He had been home once to the cottage in Paradise Row to fetch some things for his wife, and to feed the cat, but he had not wanted to stay there. The cottage was too empty and strange. So he sat and waited and wondered; and the hospital seemed a silent place, and this silence was like a door that presently would open.

It did open. A face looked in— the waggish, kindly, mischievous face of Dr. Smith.

"All right, Tom. She'll do."

That was all. He closed the door, and Tom sat and stared at the fire. He thought: "Seems strange somehow how things happen. Just as though they were meant to happen. Maybe God means 'em to happen."

———————

3: The Battle of Lodi

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

The Lone Hand, 1 July 1914

THE one-armed schoolmaster, who had violently assaulted and beaten Fatty Eager on a tender part, turned back to the school, his arm somewhat weary of the beatings of the morning, his conscience at rest as of one who had done virtuously and well.

"He wouldn't wear Dan Peberdy's hat because it was an ugly hat, wouldn't he?" said the master to himself. "I'll teach him."

Fatty Eager ran bellowing to the scrub and ran till he could no more. Then he stopped and sobbed his pain, and looked about him. Dan Peberdy has collared his cap and left him the terrible hat which Mrs. Peberdy had made Dan wear to school. And just because he would rather go bare-headed than wear Dan's ugly hat, the master had punished Fatty.

He was alone; that was the only thing to be grateful for. By-and-bye he heaved a great sigh and walked on eating a great sugar stick. The shocking hat was much too small for him; the sun was too strong to allow him to go bare-headed. He walked on, chewing the lolly stick and the bull's-eye he took from another pocket. At intervals his memory made him feel his thwackings anew and he roared again, but only for a moment, as the sweets called him to eat. While he ate he wept silently for his wrongs.

He turned out of the scrub at a fence corner and met an enemy, Jack Farrar, a boy with a very piratical reputation as regards marbles or sweets. He was not for school that day; he was an explorer, with his coat tied as for a swag and his shirt sleeves rolled to the elbow. Sore from his beating, Eager's heart sank as he saw the other.

The quick-eyed, brown-haired, big-nosed small-mouthed boy rubbed the skin off his sun-burned arms— sun-burned by design, and of which he was proud. Then he looked at the fat colorless, small-nosed, small-eyed boy's shocking hat, next at the boy's pendulous chops as the fat boy's jaws champed the hard bull's eye. In the fat boy's eyes grew an expression of alarm at the scrutiny. The instinct of self-preservation prompted him to chew more quickly.

Jacky Farrar spoke the schoolboy back-slang, which was the wonder of the uninitiate.

"lvgay emway umsay ollyway."

The fat boy's eyes protruded over the lids surprise and fear fought for mastery.

"Whatcher mean?" he faltered at last, dribbling sugar between the words.

"Oh," said Jacky Farrar, translating impatiently. "You *are* a fool! I said give me some of that lolly."

"I can't, see there!"

"Yes, you can. Come on. Dub up."

"No, really. My mother told me to eat it all myself."

"She won't know. Come on."

"No, I can't! I do as she tells me whether she knows or not."

With a very virtuous expression he swallowed the first bull's eye, put the second in his mouth, chewed it so quickly that he choked for a moment; but recovered and swallowed it almost whole, ere evil-minded boys and men of Belial should seize his substance and betray him.

The other boy, aghast at the selfishness which was foreign to himself, groped in his mind for an elaborate insult; and as the second bull's eye disappeared he said, contriving to saturate his tone with insult, "Your old man wears your old woman's stockuns."

The pale face of the fat boy reddened at the insult, and he retorted hotly: "So's yours!"

"Say that again an' I'll block yer hat."

The danger replaced Eager's anger with fear, and he muttered, "Don't you, anyway.''

"Will you say it again?"

"Never mind."

'Say 'never mind' to me again— will yer, I dare yer!"

"Well— you leave me alone."

"Say 'leave me alone' again, I dare yer!"

"I'll tell my mother,"

"Y'r mother! She wears your old man's socks, too."

"I'll tell the teacher."

"Will you, sneak! You're frightened of the hat. There's mine!" He threw on the ground an ancient cloth cap, stained, torn, and valueless to anyone but the owner. The fat boy averted his eyes. The cap in that instant became a menace to him.

"Garn!" said the other boy, disgustedly picking up his cap, and then suddenly, "I'll have first block."

The fat boy seized the rim of the hat with both hands; the dreaded moment had arrived.

Jacky Farrar sprang into the air and came down with open hand. "Squash!" The hat was forced over the fat boy's ears.

Before he could draw it off to examine the injury, his bursting heart had told him it had been mortal to the hat. He heard the brown-haired boy running schoolwards, sounding his cheerful Indian whoop of victory as he ran. And then

round the corner of Breillatt's paddock came a dozen boys, as the fat boy was drawing the hat from his ears. For safety he put it on again and held it as before.

"First block," they cried. The blow of the first fist wedged the hat again and left the fat boy in darkness. Smash! Crash! Slap! Squash! He ran the gauntlet of them all. They went over the paddock assaulting each other in their joy. The fat boy rescued himself from his ruined hat and burst into tears. Then he heard footsteps approaching at a run; he turned there was Eric Regard, the smallest boy m the school.

"First block," cried Eric joyously, and came on at a gallop. The big, fat boy could not find sufficient courage even for the infant. Carrying his insulting hat in his hand he ran off at top speed.

"First block," panted Eric in derision, and gave up the chase.

Jacky Farrar ran through the scrub, jumping up to catch a handful of overhanging leaves from the smaller trees, and as he ran he whooped his Red Indian whoop and was answered.

In the scrub he found two other apaches, Joe Regard and Dan Peberdy to wit.

"H'lo, Jacky."

"H'lo Ott. Such a game! Fatty Eager's got your hat and we've all blocked it."

As he spoke the scrub was filled with running boys, fresh from "blocking", laughing their cruel joy. They passed, and after them came Eager, crying as he ran from the smallest boy in the school. They let him pass, themselves unseen, and on he went to school and more "blocking" and contumely. The three conspirators stayed in the bush; they decided there was to be no more school that day. Then Eric discovered them and would not be denied. So there were four truants for that afternoon. His master's moral lesson, so far, was of no avail.

Lucy Bennett came along the track, beautiful, fragile, flushed by heat and weariness. Her dress was only knee low, but believing herself alone and unnoticed, she had lifted one side of it high to play "mothers" and minced along like a very new and self-conscious mother, bending over the doll in her arms as she walked. This mock maternity was the only one she would know, if that pink, flushed skin told truth. They let her pass unhailed.

Then the four decided to be bushrangers for the day, and began their career of crime as the rusty bell rang for afternoon school. The master, noting the absence of the four, and hearing Eager's tale of wreck and battery, decided to treat Peberdy and Joe Regard and Jacky Farrar as if they were the real criminals they were pretending to be. For the master, excellent man as he was, was English, and did not understand the native born, the "currency" as the imported "sterling" contemptuously called them, affecting to despise because they did not understand.

They were make-believe bushrangers with much difficulty, because they had only the scenery and neither the costumes, properties, nor arms for the play. By common consent they wearied of pointing sticks alleged to be guns at one another and crying "Bang!" to signify to the police that they were now duly killed. It was at this moment of ennui that Billy Pagan came walking quickly along the track to school. As usual he had a book, popular rumor said that he took books to bed with him.

"Hullo, Otto," he said, stopping before their battlefield.

"Hullo, Billy. You're too late for school," said Dan Peberdy. "The bell went lots o' time ago."

"I was reading," replied Billy Pagan. "It's a splendid book. *Tales of the Spanish Main*— pirates y' know. Hullo. There's Shink the Profit."

"Shink the Profit" was so called because of his innate huckstering and a nose for profits that would have made the fortunes of a Venetian ghetto. He was a thin, sallow boy, with piercing black eyes, and a nose that looked sharp enough to be piercing also.

He stopped and held up a toy pistol.

"Whatcher give me for it?" he asked.

"A piscul! A piscul!" said Eric in great delight.

They chaffered with the Profit for many minutes, and at last a bargain was struck. He was to be paid a penny in cash and four king beetles in kind; and was further to be permitted to play with the pistol, and be admitted to the gang for that day only.

The cash payment was deferred indefinitely, the beetles were paid on the spot. Billy Pagan, now twelve, and earning wrongly a reputation for attention to duty because he played and read prohibited books for almost all the hours of school, and did all his lessons in the last half-hour, put *Tales of the Spanish Main* down the back of his trousers, and by virtue of strength and assertiveness, took the pistol and so invested himself with the captaincy. They played soldiers, with deadly ambush and bloodless carnage and promotion for Billy to a Field Marshal-ship in half an hour, because he held the twopenny pistol which snapped paper caps. Occasionally Dan Peberdy, Joe, Eric and Jacky Farrar were allowed to fire the ordnance; but the real owner never touched the pistol again that day. He followed the army as directed by Billy Pagan through Austerlitz and over the bridge of Lodi, and in the retreat from Moscow, whining "Gimme me pistol, I tell yer! Gimme me pistol!"

Whereat Napoleon turned to Marshal Ney, and said; "What d'ye think of him, Ott?"

"Oh, never mind him! The enemy is approaching, your Magotsey." That was Joe's nearest approach to king talk.

"Gimme me pistol! I'll tell th p'leece."

"Didn't we buy it off yer," demanded Dan, otherwise Augereau.

"Shink's a beast," said Napoleon.

"Y' bought it an' yer didn't pay me. Gimme me pistol."

"Never mind payin'," said Dan. "We owe it to you, and that's enough "

"But y' said I could play, too."

"Well, so y' can."

"Well, lemme play with the pistol."

"Oh!" said Napoleon, "you can't be a general because we're generals, and Eric and Jacky are the army."

"Let him be something," interposed Jacky Farrar, unusually mildly.

"Let him be a 'orse, an' Eric'll ride him inter the battle," was Dan's suggestion.

"I won't! I won't be a 'orse."

"You can be a baggage waggon then, said Napoleon, whose patience was exhausted.

"I won't! I won't! Gimme me pistol!"

"We won't, there! We bought it and it's ours."

Shink the Profit's mental agony was terrible to witness. He ran at them all in turn kicking viciously, and they repulsed him laughingly; but when he struck Eric, Joe dealt him a shrewd blow on the nose. Then Shink left them, going to the scrub in the direction of the school, and calling out as he disappeared that the master should know, and Constable Duffy should know, and that there would be trouble toward for this assault and robbery.

They played out the drama of the Napoleonic wars in a further ten minutes, and searched for other worlds to conquer recognising that the new worlds must be conquered by spears, as all the paper caps were used. Eric relieved them with a suggestion. His father had a shot gun (which they could not get), but he used powder for the shot gun, and the flask was kept in the spare room.

With the promise of powder Billy became military again.

"That's the thing," said he excitedly. "Let's get the powder and make a bridge and put the powder under it with a little bit of candle, and then we'll be Austrians and blow ourselves up."

Objections were overruled. Joe and Farrar departed to the burglary; and Billy Pagan and Dan Peberdy and Eric tunnelled a bull-ants' nest and prepared the bridge for the explosion, keeping at a respectful distance from the infuriated ants.

In half an hour the raiders returned with the powder-flask, the candle end, and a box of matches. Joe explained that they had been delayed a little because Jack Farrar desired to drop a lighted match into the powder-flask to see if the powder were really good. They had had little trouble in the theft; but feared that they had been recognised while making good the escape.

Billy Pagan made a train of powder leading to the flask, which was nearly full, lighted a quarter of an inch of candle-end, and placed it in a heap of the explosive.

"I have timed the explosion for the Austrians' attempt on the bridge," he said. "General, you and Ott be Austrians."

"But we'll get blown up," said Marshal Ney.

"I'll come after you, won't I? And I'll get blown up, too," replied Napoleon.

This phase of the matter satisfied them. They withdrew from the ant-hill and waited for Napoleon's signal to make Austrians of them. Napoleon and Augereau stayed, and but for the interruptions, they would have been blinded by the explosion. But they heard the barking of the profane dog who had tracked the burglars; and Dan Peberdy saw advancing from the school-track the master and Mr. Tittibockel, who had been to the school to make his usual complaint of some scholar or other.

Dan Peberdy realised the danger. "Nit! Nit!" he called, almost in a whisper. "Old Tittibockel an' Slater."

As the men shouted at them, Napoleon, Marshal Ney and Augereau jumped to cover and fled. The foolish dog barked at the excavation and attracted the men. They came to it and stood over the mine. The bridge of Lodi covered the explosion from them, and the sun hid the candle light. The idiotic dog barked again, scratched at the ant-hill where the busy and enraged bull-ants were already covering the clothes of the stupid, solemn Mr. Slater and of Mr. Tittibockel, who enraged the ants more because he broke the roof in with his officious walking stick.

"Go 'way, dog," said Mr. Tittibockel, striking at the dog, who eluded the stick and tore up more sand.

"The dog's mad," said the master. The ants discovered the master's flesh as he spoke, and he became mad also.

"Damn the ants! There's another."

"Damn the ants!" said Mr. Tittibockel in his turn, and both turned their backs on the ant-hill but did not leave it, the necessity of searching their clothes was so instant that they searched where they stood. The dog scratched again, and the ants bit him and he turned to howl.

There was no time. Lodi blew up; powder and small gravel pierced the fleshy parts of the master and of Mr. Tittibockel, and peppered the dog as with small shot, wherefore he put his helm hard down, ran home distracted, and in great terror hid himself under Joe's bed in the attic.

The master swore in good, manly fashion, stripped in the bush and cleared himself of the bull-ants, and, smarting all over, walked back to the school, cursing Mr. Tittibockel's visit and his haste to avenge law and order on the mere advice of a despoiled Shink the Profit. He released the scholars at once, and

retired to hunt overlooked bull-ants and to tend to his bruises. He had just concluded his labor of love when Shink the Profit came to ask if his dear, kind teacher had recovered the pistol. At the mention of pistols and their implied connections with explosives, the good, kind teacher seized the astonished Profit and beat him to a standstill.

When the children passed the late scene of the Battle of Lodi there was but a torn ant-hill to mark the struggle, the bodies of the wounded, and a hundred or so of unwounded, savage ants, these latter ready to eat anything that moved.

Napoleon, his generals and the army, had fled to the river. Mr. Tittibockel, ant-bitten and exploded, uttered loud howls as he ran through the bush and along the road clawing at marauding ants, and too frightened to stop and kill.

When he reached his sister's house, Constable Duffy, now restored to favor, was sitting under his own peach-tree reading the *Nation*. The long howl of his brother-in-law, as he tore towards the house, disturbed him.

" 'Tis like the ulicawn," said Mr. Duffy.

And, indeed, it sounded like nothing else

than a death howl.

"Don't talk yer French to me," said his wife, crossly; ignorant that the baby under her arm was being nursed upside down.

" 'Tis then! The ulicawn. Lissen t' that! It do be like keenin' at a long meanther."

At that moment Mr. Tittibockel, still clawing at his legs and hair, rushed past them with another howl and disappeared into his bedroom.

"It's Simon," said his sister, "poor Simon killed I"

Constable Duffy was too pleased to doubt the fact as his wife's brother's howls, now mingled with naughty words, continued.

"You! You great, big, red-faced fool," said his wife. "Go an' see what's the matter."

Constable Duffy obeyed, but did not return immediately. For half an hour he was engaged picking the ants ff Mr. Tittibockel— bulldog ants which died in the execution of their duty and fully justified their name, for they had buried their heads in the educated grocer, and had to be torn away piecemeal.

"Am I wounded, Duffy?" asked Mr. Tittibockel, quaveringly.

"There do be little pieces cut out of you, that do be the bull-ants. An' there do be little smooth holes in you, that do be the gravel, I tink."

Mr. Tittibockel groaned. "The murderers! Filled with stones from the explosion— oah, the murderers!"

"An' there do be little blue marks under your skin, that do be the powther that fly up."

"Oh, the murderers! The powder flew up!"

" 'Tis better than if it had been your face."

"Better! How could it be better, Duffy? How *could* it? Oh, the murderers!"

"Whoy!" said Duffy, with the kindest intention in the world; "no one can see the blue marks where they are."

"Duffy," said Mr. Tittibockel, "you're a very ignorant man."

At dusk, under the influence of three glasses of brandy and egg, Mr. Tittibockel stopped groaning; but he did not sleep well for many nights.

Mr. Regard was apprised of the theft of the powder flask and its results, and he thought of Mr. Slater's proposed Moral Lesson and smiled. Thereafter he went to the corner of the paddock by the creek and cut a supple switch of quince. Joe and Eric came in late, and were allowed to eat in silence. In this they were better off than Dan Peberdy, who was beaten once for truancies, once for burglaries, once for explosions, and twice for losing the first of the awful hats, each beating being without interval and cumulative. Jacky Farrar escaped; Billy Pagan said his lessons without an error, and looked up at his father with the clear blue eyes of an angel, and the rapt ecstatic gaze of a very pure saint, and his father's heart was made glad.

But Joe and Eric went to bed, sick with apprehension, and ten minutes later there were stripes and pains and confusion and much howling and tears, so that Fun o' the World screamed in sympathy. The baby's terror at the pain of others would have shortened the punishment had not the dog saved the situation at the price of his own skin. In the alarms and excitement of the beating he lost the fear which had kept him under Eric's bed for hours. He raised his voice with the others and was discovered.

Mr. Regard beat him under every bed and around the room and down the stairs, and there he had to wait and be flogged again before a door was mercifully opened for escape.

The dog went to his lair in the garden, dazed by the injustice of it all. He had forgiven his master in the morning by licking all the blacking off his boots, and had been beaten for his magnanimity; he had barked at an ant-hill, and the ant-hill had stung him all over, and then exploded and blown him up; he had suffered cruel fear, and when, hearing beloved voices in conflict, he had barked under the bed to reassure them that mad master of his had whipped him more. All night he turned and moaned and rose up and whimpered and lay down again. But at last come the Morning Glory; he arose and stretched himself, and quite forgot his thwackings when the house door opened and Fun o' the World and Eric came out to play. For the beating and the terror had gone with the night, like a cruel dream, and young blood sang its delight in the day that was to come.

4: Alexander and the Lady

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Short Stories, Oct 1918

Collected in: *The Adventures of Heine*, 1919

The first of 18 humorous short stories narrated by Heine, the boastful, cowardly and incompetent head of the German spy ring in World War 1 England, who bumbles from one failure to the next. The series began in October 1918.

SECRET SERVICE work is a joke in peace time and it is paid on joke rates. People talk of the fabulous sums of money which our Government spend on this kind of work, and I have no doubt a very large sum was spent every year, but it had to go a long way. Even Herr Kressler, of the Bremen-America Line, who gave me my monthly cheque, used to nod and wink when he handed over my two hundred marks.

"Ah, my good Heine," he would say, stroking his stubbly beard, "they make a fool of me, the Government, but I suppose I mustn't ask who is your other paymaster?"

"Herr Kessler," said I earnestly, "I assure you that this is the whole sum I receive from the Government."

"So!" he would say and shake his head: "Ah, you are close fellows, and I mustn't ask questions!"

There was little to do save now and again to keep track of some of the bad men, the extreme Socialists, and the fellows who ran away from Germany to avoid military service. I often wished there were more, because it would have been possible to have made a little on one's expenses. Fortunately, two or three of the very big men in New York and Chicago knew the work I was doing, and credited me with a much larger income than I possessed. The reputation of being well off is a very useful one, and in my case brought me all sorts of commissions and little tips which I could profitably exploit on Wall Street, and in one way or another I lived comfortably, had a nice apartment on Riverside Drive, backed horses, and enjoyed an occasional trip to Washington, at my Governments expense.

I first knew that war was likely to break out in July. I think we Germans understood the European situation much better than the English and certainly much better than the Americans, and we knew that the event at Sarajevo— by the way, poor Klein of our service and an old colleague of mine, was killed by the bomb which was intended for the Archduke, though nobody seems to have noticed the fact— would produce the war which Austria had been expecting or seeking an excuse to wage for two years.

If I remember aright, the assassination was committed on the Sunday morning. The New York papers published the story on that day, and on the Monday afternoon I was summoned to Washington, and saw the Secretary, who was in charge of our Department on the Tuesday evening after dinner.

The Secretary was very grave and told me that war was almost certain, and that Austria was determined to settle with Serbia for good, but that it was feared that Russia would come in and that the war could not be localised because, if Russia made war, Germany and France would also be involved.

Personally, I have never liked the French, and my French is not particularly good. I was hoping that he was going to tell us that England was concerned and I asked him if this was not the case. To my disappointment, he told me that England would certainly not fight, that she would remain neutral, and that strict orders had been issued that nothing was to be done which would in any way annoy the English.

"Their army," he said, "is beneath contempt, but their navy is the most powerful in the world and its employment might have very serious consequences."

It seemed very early to talk about war with the newspapers still full of long descriptions of the Sarajevo murder and the removal of the Archduke's body and I remembered after with what astounding assurance our Secretary had spoken.

I must confess I was disappointed, because I had spent a very long time in England Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, establishing touch with good friends who, I felt, would work with advantage for me in the event of war. I had prepared my way by founding The Chinese News Bureau, a little concern that had an office in Fleet Street and was ostensibly engaged in collecting items of news concerning China and distributing them to the London and provincial press, and in forwarding a London letter to certain journals in Pekin, Tientsien and Shanghai.

Of course, the money was found by the Department, and it was not a financial success, but it was a good start in case one ever had to operate in London, since I was registered as a naturalised Chilean and it was extremely unlikely that Chile would be at war with any European Power.

On the 3rd August, 1914, I received a message from Washington in the Departmental code, telling me that war with England was inevitable and that I was to sail on the first boat and take up my duties in London in full control of the British Department.

I was overjoyed with the news and I know that men like Stohwasser, Wesser, and other men of my Department, looked at me with envy. They did not think they had an easy task because the American Secret Service is a very competent one; but they thought I was a lucky pig— as indeed I was— to be operating in a

country containing a population of forty millions, most of whom, as one of their writers said, were fools.

I landed at Liverpool on August 11th. My passport was in order and I immediately went forward to London. There was no trace of any excitement. I saw a lot of soldiers on their way to their depots; and arriving in London, I immediately received the reports of our innumerable agents.

With what pride did I contemplate the splendid smoothness of our system! When the Emperor pressed the button marked "Mobilise," he called, in addition to his soldiers, a thousand gallant hearts and brilliant minds in a score of countries all eager and happy to work for the aggrandisement of our beloved Fatherland.

Six of us met at a fashionable restaurant near Trafalgar Square. There were Emil Stein who called himself Robinson, Karl Besser— I need not give all their aliases— Heine von Wetzl, Fritz von Kahn and Alexander Koos.

Stein had arrived from Holland the night before and Fritz von Kahn had come down from Glasgow where he had been acting as a hotel porter. These men were, as I say, known to me, and to one another, but there were thousands of unknowns who had their secret instructions, which were only to be opened in case of war and with whom we had to get in touch.

I briefly explained the procedure and the method by which our agents would be identified. Every German agent would prove his bona fides by producing three used postage stamps of Nicaragua. It is a simple method of identification, for there is nothing treasonable or suspicious in a man carrying about in his pocket-book, a ten, twenty or a fifty centime stamp of a neutral country.

I sent Emil Stein away to Portsmouth and instructed him to make contact with sailors of the Fleet especially with officers. Besser was dispatched to a West Coast shipping centre to report on all the boats which left and entered. I sent Kahn and his family on a motor-car tour to the East Coast with instructions to find out what new coast defences were being instituted.

"You must exercise the greatest care," I said; "even though these English are very stupid, they may easily blunder into a discovery. Make the briefest notes on all you see and hear and only use the Number 3 code in case of urgent necessity." We finished our dinner and we drank to "The Day" and sang under our breath "*Deutschland über Alles*" and separated, Koos coming with me.

Koos was a staff officer of the Imperial Service, and though he was not noble he was held in the greatest respect. He was a fine, handsome fellow, very popular with the girls, and typically British in appearance. His English was as good as mine, and that is saying a great deal. I sent him to Woolwich because in his character as an American inventor— he had spent four years in the States— he was admirably fitted to pick up such facts as were of the greatest interest to the Government.

I did not see Koos for a few days and in the meantime I was very busy arranging with my couriers who were to carry the result of our discoveries through a neutral country to Germany. The system I adopted was a very simple one. My notes, written in Indian ink, were separately photographed by means of a camera. When I had finished the twelve exposures, I opened the camera in a dark room, carefully re-rolled the spool and sealed it, so that it had the appearance of being an unexposed pellicle. I argued that whilst the English military authorities would confiscate photographs which had obviously been taken, they might pass films which were apparently unused.

I had arranged to meet Koos on the night of August 17th, and made my way to the rendezvous, engaging a table for two. I had hardly seated myself when, to my surprise, Koos came in accompanied by a very pretty English girl. He walked past me, merely giving me the slightest side-glance, and, seated himself at the next table. I was amused. I knew the weakness of our good Koos for the ladies, but I knew also that he was an excellent investigator and that he was probably combining business with pleasure. In this I was right. The meal finished— and the innocent laughter of the girl made me smile again— and Koos walked out with the girl on his arm.

As he passed my table he dropped a slip of paper which I covered with my table-napkin. When I was sure I was not observed, I read the note.

Making excellent progress. Meet me at a quarter to eleven outside Piccadilly Tube.

I met him at the appointed time and we strolled into Jermyn Street.

"What do you think of her?" was Koos' first question.

"Very pretty, my friend," said I. "You have excellent taste."

He chuckled.

"I have also excellent luck, my dear Heine. That lady is the daughter of one of the chief gun-constructors at Woolwich."

He looked at me to note the effect of his words, and I must confess I was startled.

"Splendid, my dear fellow!" said I, warmly. "How did you come to meet her?"

"A little act of gallantry," he said airily; "a lady walking on Blackheath twists her ankle, what more natural than that I should offer her assistance to the nearest seat? Quite a babbling little person— typically English. She is a mine of information. An only daughter and a little spoilt, I am afraid, she knows no doubt secrets of construction of which the technical experts of the Government are ignorant. Can you imagine a German talking over military affairs with his daughter?"

"What have you learnt from her?" I asked.

Koos did not reply for a moment, then he said: "So far, very little. I am naturally anxious not to alarm her or arouse her suspicions. She is willing to talk and she has access to her father's study and, from what I gather, she practically keeps all the keys of the house. At present I am educating her to the necessity of preserving secrecy about our friendship and to do her justice, she is just as anxious that our clandestine meetings should not come to the ears of her father as I am."

We walked along in silence.

"This may be a very big thing," I said.

"Bigger than you imagine," replied Alexander; "there is certain to be an exchange of confidential views about artillery between the Allies, and though we have nothing to learn from the English it is possible that the French may send orders to Woolwich for armament. In that case our little friend may be a mine of information. I am working with my eyes a few months ahead," he said, "and for that reason I am allowing our friendship to develop slowly."

I did not see Koos again for a week, except that I caught a glimpse of him in the Cafe Riche with his fair companion. He did not see me, however, and as it was desirable that I should not intrude, I made no attempt to make my presence apparent.

At the end of the week we met by appointment, which we arranged through the agony column of a certain London newspaper. I was feeling very cheerful, for Stein, Besser, and Kahn had sent in most excellent reports, and it only needed Alexander's encouraging news to complete my sum of happiness.

"You remember the gun-lathe I spoke to you about," he said. "My friend— you may regard the blue prints as in your hands."

"How has this come about?"

"I just casually mentioned to my little girl that I was interested in inventions and that I had just put a new lathe upon the market in America and she was quite excited about it it. She asked me if I heard about the lathe at Woolwich, and I said that l had heard rumours that there was such a lathe. She was quite overjoyed at the opportunity of giving me information and asked me whether in the event of her showing me the prints I would keep the fact a great secret because," he laughed softly, "she did not think her father would like the print to leave his office!"

"You must be careful of this girl," I said, "she may be detected."

"There is no danger, my dear fellow," said Alexander. "She is the shrewdest little woman in the world. I am getting quite to like her if one can like these abominable people— she is such a child!"

I told him to keep in communication with me and sent him off feeling what the English call in "good form." I dispatched a courier by the morning train to the Continent, giving details of the British Expeditionary Force. Only two brigades

were in France— and that after three weeks of preparation! In Germany every man was mobilized and at his corps or army headquarters weeks ago— every regiment had moved up to its order of battle position. Two brigades! It would be amusing if it were not pathetic!

Besser came to me soon after lunch in a very excited state.

"The whole of the British Expeditionary Force of three Divisions is in France," he said, "and, what is more, it is in line."

I smiled at him.

"My poor dear fellow, who has been pulling your foot?" I asked.

"It is confidentially communicated to the Press, and will he public to-morrow," he said.

"Lies," said I calmly, "you are too credulous. The English are the most stupid liars in the world."

I was not so calm that night when I ran down in my car to Gorselton, where our very good friend, the Baron von Hertz-Missenger, had a nice little estate.

"Heine," he said, after he had taken me to his study and shut the door. "I have received a radio through my wireless from Kreigsministerium [*The Prussian Ministry of War*] to the effect that the whole of the British Expeditionary Force has landed and is in line."

"Impossible, Herr Baron," I said, but he shook his head.

"It is true— our Intelligence in Belgium is infallible. Now, I do not want to interfere with you, for I am but a humble volunteer in this great work, but I advise you to give a little more attention to the army. We may have underrated the military assistance which Britain can offer."

"The English Army, Herr Baron," said I firmly, "is almost as insignificant a factor as— as well— the American army, which only exists on paper! Nevertheless, I will take your advice."

I went back to town and dispatched another courier, for as yet the Torpington Varnish Factory (about which I will tell you later) had not been equipped with radio.

That night I again saw Alexander. It was at supper at the Fritz, and he looked a fine figure of a man. I felt proud of the country which could produce such a type. Where, I ask you, amongst the paunchy English and the scraggy Scotch, with their hairy knees and their sheep-shank legs, could you find a counterpart of that *beau sabreur*? Cower treacherous Albion, shiver in your kilt, hateful Scotch (it is not generally known that the Royal and High-Born Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria is rightful King of Scotland.), tremble, wild Wales, and unreliable Ireland, when you come in arms against a land which can produce such men as Alexander Koos!

I never saw a girl look more radiantly happy than did the young woman who was sitting vis-à-vis my friend. There was a light in her eye and a colour in her cheeks which were eloquent of her joy.

I saw Alexander afterwards. He came secretly to my room.

"Have you brought the blue print?" I asked.

He shook his head smilingly. "Tomorrow, my friend, not only the blue print of the lathe, not only the new gun-mounting model, but the lady herself will come to me. I want your permission to leave the day after to-morrow for home. I cannot afford to wait for what the future may bring."

"Can you smuggle the plans past the English police?" I asked, a little relieved that he had volunteered to act as courier on so dangerous a mission.

"Nothing easier."

"And the girl— have you her passport?"

He nodded.

"How far shall you take her?"

"To Rotterdam," he said promptly.

In a way I was sorry. Yes, I am sentimental, I fear, and "sentiment does not live in an agent's pocket" as the saying goes. I wish it could have been done without. I shrugged my shoulders and steeled my soul with the thought that she was English and that it was all for the Fatherland.

"You must come to the Café Riche tonight and witness our going," said Alexander; "you will observe that she will carry a leather case such as schoolgirls use for their books and exercises. In that, case, my friend, will be enough material to keep our friends in Berlin busy for a month."

I took leave of him giving him certain instructions as to the course he was to take after reporting at Headquarters, and spent the rest of the night coding a message for our Alexander to carry with him. The hour at which Alexander was to meet the girl was eight o'clock in the evening.

His table (already booked) was No. 47, which is near the window facing Piccadilly. I telephoned through to the cafe and booked No. 46, for I was anxious to witness the comedy.

All was now moving like clockwork— and let me say that the smoothness of the arrangements was due largely to the very thorough and painstaking organisation-work which I had carried out in the piping days of peace. We Germans have a passion for detail and for thoroughness and for this reason (apart from the inherent qualities of simplicity and honesty, apart from the superiority of our *kultur* and our lofty idealism) we have been unconquerable throughout the ages.

You must remember that I was in London as the representative of a Chinese News Bureau. I was also an agent for a firm of importers in Shanghai. It was

therefore only natural that I should be called up all hours of the day and night with offers of goods.

"I can let you have a hundred and twenty bales of Manchester goods at 125."

Now 120 and 125 added together make 245, and turning to my "simple code", to paragraph 245, I find the following:

"2nd Battalion of the Graniteshire Regiment entrained to-day for embarkation."

The minor agents carried this code (containing 1,400 simple sentences to covet all naval or military movements) in a small volume. The code is printed on one side of very thin paper leaves, and the leaves are as porous and absorbent as blotting paper.

One blot of ink dropped upon a sheet will obliterate a dozen— a fact which our careless agents have discovered. Clipped in. tho centre of the book (as a pencil is clipped in an ordinary book) is a tiny tube of the thinnest glass containing a quantity of black dye-stuff. The agent fearing detection has only to press the cover of the book sharply and the contents of the book are reduced to black sodden pulp. Need I say that this ingenious invention was German in its origin.*

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[**As a matter of fact, it was invented by the American Secret Service— EW.*]

My days were therefore very full. There came reports from all quarters and some the most unlikely. How, you may ask, did our agents make these discoveries?

There are many ways by which information is conveyed. The relations of soldiers are always willing to talk about their men and will tell you, if they know, when they are leaving the ships they are leaving by, and will sometimes give you other important facts, but particularly about ports and dates of embarkations are they useful.

Also officers will occasionally talk at lunch and dinner and will tell their women folk military secrets which a waiter can mentally note and convey to the proper quarters. Our best agents, however, were barbers, tailors, chiropodists, and dentists. English people will always discuss matters with a barber or with the man who is fitting them with their clothes, and as almost every tailor was making military uniforms and a very large number of the tailors in London were either German or Austrian, I had quite a wealth of news.

Tailors are useful because they work to time. Clothes have to be delivered by a certain date and generally the man who has the suit made will tell the fitter the date he expects to leave England. Other useful investigators are Turkish-

bath attendants and dentists. A man in a dentist's chair is always nervous and will try to make friends with the surgeon who is operating on him.

Of all agencies the waiter is in reality the least useful, because writers have been pointing out for so many years the fact that most waiters were German. But the truth is that most restaurant waiters are Italian, and it is amongst the bedroom waiters that you can find a preponderance of my fellow countrymen.

Prompt at eight o'clock, I took my place at the table and ordered an excellent dinner (my waiter was naturally a good German) and a bottle of Rhenish wine. A few minutes after I had given my order Alexander and the girl arrived. She was dressed in a long travelling coat of tussore silk, and carried— as I was careful to note— a shiny brown leather portfolio. This she placed carefully on be lap when she sat down and raised her veil.

She looked a little pale, but smiled readily enough at Alexander's jests. I watched her as she slowly peeled off her gloves and unbuttoned her coat. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy. Doubtless her conscience was pricking her.

Is it the thought of thy home, little maid from whence thou hast fled never to return? Is it the anguished picture of thy broken-hearted and ruined father bemoaning his daughter and his honour? Have no fear, little one, thy treason shall enrich the chosen of the German God, those World Encirclers, Foreordained and Destined to Imperial Grandeur!

So I thought, watching her and listening.

"Are you sure that everything will be all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Please trust me," smiled Alexander. (Oh, the deceiving rogue— how I admired his *sang-froid*!)

"You are ready to go— you have packed?" she asked.

"As ready as you, my dear Elsie. Come— let me question you," he bantered; "have you all those wonderful plans which are going to make our fortunes after we are married?

So he had promised that— what would the gracious Frau Koos-Mettleheim have said to this perfidy on the part of her husband?

"I have all the plans," she began, but he hushed her with a warning glance.

I watched the dinner proceed but heard very little more. All the time she seemed to be plying him with anxious questions to which he returned reassuring answers. They had reached the sweets when she began to fumble at her pocket. I guessed (rightly) that she was seeking a handkerchief and (wrongly) that she was crying.

Her search was fruitless and she beckoned the waiter.

"I left a little bag in the ladies' room— it has my handkerchief; will you ask the attendant to send the bag?"

The waiter departed and presently returned with two men in the livery of the hotel. I was sitting side by side and could see the faces both of the girl and

Alexander and I noticed the amusement in his face that two attendants must come to carry one small bag.

Then I heard the girl speak.

"Put your hands, palms upward, on the table," she said. I was still looking at Alexander's face. First amazement and then anger showed— then I saw his face go grey and into is eyes crept the fear of death. The girl was holding an automatic pistol and the barrel was pointing at Alexander's breast. She half turned her head to the attendants.

"Here is your man, sergeant she said briskly. "Alexander Roos, alias Ralph Burton-Smith. I charge him with espionage."

They snapped the steel handcuffs upon Alexander's wrists and led him out, the girl following. I rose unsteadily and followed. In the vestibule was quite a small crowd which had gathered at the first rumour of so remarkable a sensation. Here, for the first time, Alexander spoke, and it was curious how in his agitation his perfect English became broken and hoarse.

"Who are you? You have a mistake maken, my frient."

"I am an officer of the British Intelligence Department," said the girl.

"*Himmel*! Secret Service!" gasped Alexander, "I thought it was not!"

I saw them take him away and stole home.

They had trapped him. The girl with the sprained ankle had been waiting for him that day on Blackheath. She led him on by talking of the plans she could get until he had told her of the rough plans he already had. Whilst (as he thought) he was tightening the net about her, she was drawing the meshes tighter about him... Phew! It makes me hot to think of it!

Was there a secret service in England after all? For myself, my tracks were too well covered; for Alexander I could do nothing. He would not betray me. I was sure of that. Yet to be perfectly certain I left the next night for Dundee, and I was in Dundee when the news came that Alexander had been shot in the Tower of London.

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5: Unhallowed Ground

E. W. Hornung
1866-1921

Scribner's Magazine Feb 1912
Collected in: *Witching Hill*, Scribners, 1913

The first of 8 longish short stories of the seeming supernatural featuring Witching Hill estate, and the investigator Uno Delavoye.

THE Witching Hill Estate Office was as new as the Queen Anne houses it had to let, and about as worthy of its name. It was just a wooden box with a veneer of roughcast and a corrugated iron lid. Inside there was a vast of varnish on three of the walls; but the one opposite my counter consisted of plate-glass worth the rest of the structure put together. It afforded a fine prospect of Witching Hill Road, from the level crossing by the station to the second lamp-post round the curve.

Framed and glazed in the great window, this was not a picture calculated to inspire a very young man; and yet there was little to distract a brooding eye from its raw grass-plots and crude red bricks and tiles; for one's chief duties were making out orders to view the still empty houses, hearing the complaints of established tenants, and keeping such an eye on painters and paperhangers as was compatible with "being on the spot if anybody called." An elderly or a delicate man would have found it nice light work; but for a hulking youth fresh from the breeziest school in Great Britain, where they live in flannels and only work when it is wet or dark, the post seemed death in life. My one consolation was to watch the tenants hurrying to the same train every morning, in the same silk hat and blacks, and crawling home with the same evening paper every night. I at any rate enjoyed comparatively pure air all day. I had not married and settled down in a pretentious jerry-building where nothing interesting could possibly happen, and nothing worth doing be ever done. For that was one's first feeling about the Witching Hill Estate; it was a place for crabbed age and drab respectability, and a black coat every day of the week. Then young Uvo Delavoye dropped into the office from another hemisphere, in the white ducks and helmet of the tropics. And life began again.

"Are you the new clerk to the Estate?" he asked if he might ask, and I prepared myself for the usual grievance. I said I was, and he gave me his name in exchange for mine, with his number in Mulcaster Park, which was all but a continuation of Witching Hill Road. "There's an absolute hole in our lawn," he complained— "and I'd just marked out a court. I do wish you could come and have a look at it."

There was room for a full-size lawn-tennis court behind every house on the Estate. That was one of our advertised attractions. But it was not our business to keep the courts in order, and I rather itched to say so.

"It's early days," I ventured to suggest; "there's sure to be holes at first, and I'm afraid there'll be nothing for it but just to fill them in."

"Fill them in!" cried the other young man, getting quite excited. "You don't know what a hole this is; it would take a ton of earth to fill it in."

"You're not serious, Mr. Delavoye."

"Well, it would take a couple of barrow-loads. It's a regular depression in the ground, and the funny thing is that it's come almost while my back was turned. I finished marking out the court last night, and this morning there's this huge hole bang in the middle of one of my side-lines! If you filled it full of water it would take you over the ankles."

"Is the grass not broken at the edges?"

"Not a bit of it; the whole thing might have been done for years."

"And what like is this hole in shape?"

Delavoye met me eye to eye. "Well, I can only say I've seen the same sort of thing in a village churchyard, and nowhere else," he said. "It's like a churchyard starting to yawn!" he suddenly added, and looked in better humour for the phrase.

I pulled out my watch. "I'll come at one, when I knock off in any case, if you can wait till then."

"Rather!" he cried quite heartily; "and I'll wait here if you don't mind, Mr. Gillon. I've just seen my mother and sister off to town, so it fits in rather well. I don't want them to know if it's anything beastly. May we smoke in here? Then have one of mine."

And he perched himself on my counter, lighting the whole place up with his white suit and animated air; for he was a very pleasant fellow from the moment he appeared to find me one. Not much my senior, he had none of my rude health and strength, but was drawn and yellowed by some tropical trouble (as I rightly guessed) which had left but little of his outer youth beyond a vivid eye and tongue. Yet I would fain have added these to my own animal advantages. It is difficult to recapture a first impression; but I think I felt, from the beginning, that those twinkling, sunken eyes looked on me and all things in a light of their own.

"Not an interesting place?" cried young Delavoye, in astonishment at a chance remark of mine. "Why, it's one of the most interesting in England! None of these fine old crusted country houses are half so fascinating to me as the ones quite near London. Think of the varied life they've seen, the bucks and bloods galore, the powder and patches, the orgies begun in town and finished out here, the highwaymen waiting for 'em on Turnham Green! Of course you

know about the heinous Lord Mulcaster who owned this place in the high old days? He committed every crime in the *Newgate Calendar*, and now I'm just wondering whether you and I aren't by way of bringing a fresh one home to him."

I remember feeling sorry he should talk like that, though it argued a type of mind that rather reconciled me to my own. I was never one to jump to gimcrack conclusions, and I said as much with perhaps more candour than the occasion required. The statement was taken in such good part, however, that I could not but own I had never even heard the name of Mulcaster until the last few days, whereas Delavoye seemed to know all about the family. Thereupon he told me he was really connected with them, though not at all closely with the present peer. It had nothing to do with his living on an estate which had changed hands before it was broken up. But I modified my remark about the ancestral acres— and made a worse.

"I wasn't thinking of the place," I explained, "as it used to be before half of it was built over. I was only thinking of that half and its inhabitants— I mean— that is— the people who go up and down in top-hats and frock-coats!"

And I was left clinging with both eyes to my companion's cool attire.

"But that's my very point," he laughed and said. "These city fellows are the absolute salt of historic earth like this; they throw one back into the good old days by sheer force of contrast. I never see them in their office kit without thinking of that old rascal in his wig and ruffles, carrying a rapier instead of an umbrella; he'd have fallen on it like Brutus if he could have seen his grounds plastered with cheap red bricks and mortar, and crawling with Stock Exchange ants!"

"You've got an imagination," said I, chuckling. I nearly told him he had the gift of the gab as well.

"You must have something," he returned a little grimly, "when you're stuck on the shelf at my age. Besides, it isn't all imagination, and you needn't go back a hundred years for your romance. There's any amount kicking about this Estate at the present moment; it's in the soil. These business blokes are not all the dull dogs they look. There's a man up our road— but he can wait. The first mystery to solve is the one that's crying from our back garden."

I liked his way of putting things. It made one forget his yellow face, and the broken career that his looks and hints suggested, or it made one remember them and think the more of him. But the things themselves were interesting, and Witching Hill had more possibilities when we sallied forth together at one o'clock.

It was the height of such a June as the old century could produce up to the last. The bald red houses, too young to show a shoot of creeper, or a mellow tone from doorstep to chimney-pot, glowed like clowns' pokers in the ruthless

sun. The shade of some stately elms, on a bit of old road between the two new ones of the Estate, appealed sharply to my awakened sense of contrast. It was all familiar ground to me, of course, but I had been over it hitherto with my eyes on nothing else and my heart in the Lowlands. Now I found myself wondering what the elms had seen in their day, and what might not be going on in the red houses even now.

"I hope you know the proper name of our road," said Delavoye as we turned into it. "It's Mulcaster Park, as you see, and not Mulcaster Park Road, as it was when we came here in the spring. Our neighbours have risen in a body against the superfluous monosyllable, and it's been painted out for ever."

In spite of that precaution Mulcaster Park was still suspiciously like a road. It was very long and straight, and the desired illusion had not been promoted by the great names emblazoned on some of the little wooden gates. Thus there was Longleat, which had just been let for £70 on a three-year tenancy, and Chatsworth with a C. P. card in the drawing-room window. Plain No. 7, the Delavoyes' house, was near the far end on the left-hand side, which had the advantage of a strip of unspoilt woodland close behind the back gardens; and just through the wood was Witching Hill House, scene of immemorial excesses, according to this descendant of the soil.

"But now it's in very different hands," he remarked as we reached our destination. "Sir Christopher Stainsby is apparently all that my ignoble kinsman was not. They say he's no end of a saint. In winter we see his holy fane from our back windows."

It was not visible through the giant hedge of horse-chestnuts now heavily overhanging the split fence at the bottom of the garden. I had come out through the dining-room with a fresh sense of interest in these Delavoyes. Their furniture was at once too massive and too good for the house. It stood for some old home of very different type. Large oil-paintings and marble statuettes had not been acquired to receive the light of day through windows whose upper sashes were filled with cheap stained glass. A tigerskin with a man-eating head, over which I tripped, had not always been in the way before a cast-iron mantelpiece. I felt sorry, for the moment, that Mrs. and Miss Delavoye were not at home; but I was not so sorry when I beheld the hole in the lawn behind the house.

It had the ugly shape and appearance which had reminded young Delavoye himself of a churchyard. I was bound to admit its likeness to some sunken grave, and the white line bisecting it was not the only evidence that the subsidence was of recent occurrence; the grass was newly mown and as short inside the hole as it was all over. No machine could have made such a job of such a surface, said the son of the house, with a light in his eyes, but a drop in his voice, which made me wonder whether he desired or feared the worst.

"What do you want us to do, Mr. Delavoye?" I inquired in my official capacity.

"I want it dug up, if I can have it done now, while my mother's out of the way."

That was all very well, but I had only limited powers. My instructions were to attend promptly to the petty wants of tenants, but to refer any matter of importance to our Mr. Muskett, who lived on the Estate but spent his days at the London office. This appeared to me that kind of matter, and little as I might like my place I could ill afford to risk it by doing the wrong thing. I put all this as well as I could to my new friend, but not without chafing his impetuous spirit.

"Then I'll do the thing myself!" said he, and fetched from the yard some garden implements which struck me as further relics of more spacious days. In his absence I had come to the same conclusion about a couple of high-backed Dutch garden chairs and an umbrella tent; and the final bond of fallen fortunes made me all the sorrier to have put him out. He was not strong; no wonder he was irritable. He threw himself into his task with a kind of feeble fury; it was more than I could stand by and watch. He had not turned many sods when he paused to wipe his forehead, and I seized the spade.

"If one of us is going to do this job," I cried, "it sha'n't be the one who's unfit for it. You can take the responsibility, if you like, but that's all you do between now and two o'clock!"

I should date our actual friendship from that moment. There was some boyish bluster on his part, and on mine a dour display which he eventually countenanced on my promising to stay to lunch. Already the sweat was teeming off my face, but my ankles were buried in rich brown mould. A few days before there had been a thunder-storm accompanied by tropical rain, which had left the earth so moist underneath that one's muscles were not taxed as much as one's skin. And I was really very glad of the exercise, after the physical stagnation of office life.

Not that Delavoye left everything to me; he shifted the Dutch chairs and the umbrella tent so as to screen my operations alike from the backyard behind us and from the windows of the occupied house next door. Then he hovered over me, with protests and apologies, until the noble inspiration took him to inquire if I liked beer. I stood upright in my pit, and my mouth must have watered as visibly as the rest of my countenance. It appeared he was not allowed to touch it himself, but he would fetch some in a jug from the Mulcaster Arms, and blow the wives of the gentlemen who went to town!

I could no more dissuade him from this share of the proceedings than he had been able to restrain me from mine; perhaps I did not try very hard; but I did redouble my exertions when he was gone, burying my spade with the enthusiasm of a gold-digger working a rich claim, and yet depositing each

spadeful with some care under cover of the chairs. And I had hardly been a minute by myself when I struck indubitable wood at the depth of three or four feet. Decayed wood it was, too, which the first thrust of the spade crushed in; and at that I must say the perspiration cooled upon my skin. But I stood up and was a little comforted by the gay blue sky and the bottle-green horse-chestnuts, if I looked rather longer at the French window through which Delavoye had disappeared.

His wild idea had seemed to me the unwholesome fruit of a morbid imagination, but now I prepared to find it hateful fact. Down I went on my haunches, and groped with my hands in the mould, to learn the worst with least delay. The spade I had left sticking in the rotten wood, and now I ran reluctant fingers down its cold iron into the earth-warm splinters. They were at the extreme edge of the shaft that I was sinking, but I discovered more splinters at the same level on the opposite side. These were not of my making; neither were they part of any coffin, but rather of some buried floor or staging. My heart danced as I seized the spade again. I dug another foot quickly; that brought me to detached pieces of rotten wood of the same thickness as the jagged edges above; evidently a flooring of some kind had fallen in— but fallen upon what? Once more the spade struck wood, but sound wood this time. The last foot of earth was soon taken out, and an oblong trap-door disclosed, with a rusty ring-bolt at one end.

I tugged at the ring-bolt without stopping to think; but the trap-door would not budge. Then I got out of the hole for a pickaxe that Delavoye had produced with the spade, and with one point of the pick through the ring I was able to get a little leverage. It was more difficult to insert the spade where the old timbers had started, while still keeping them apart, but this once done I could ply both implements together. There was no key-hole to the trap, only the time-eaten ring and a pair of hinges like prison bars; it could but be bolted underneath; and yet how those old bolts and that wood of ages clung together! It was only by getting the pick into the gap made by the spade, and prizing with each in turn and both at once, that I eventually achieved my purpose. I heard the bolt tinkle on hard ground beneath, and next moment saw it lying at the bottom of a round bricked hole.

All this must have occupied far fewer minutes than it has taken to describe; for Delavoye had not returned to peer with me into a well which could never have been meant for water. It had neither the width nor the depth of ordinary wells; an old ladder stood against one side, and on the other the high sun shone clean down into the mouth of a palpable tunnel. It opened in the direction of the horse-chestnuts, and I was in it next moment. The air was intolerably stale without being actually foul; a match burnt well enough to reveal a horseshoe passage down which a man of medium stature might have walked upright. It

was bricked like the well, and spattered with some repulsive growth that gave me a clammy daub before I realised the dimensions. I had struck a second match on my trousers, and it had gone out as if by magic, when Delavoye hailed me in high excitement from the lawn above.

He was less excited than I expected on hearing my experience; and he only joined me for a minute before luncheon, which he insisted on our still taking, to keep the servants in the dark. But it was a very brilliant eye that he kept upon the Dutch chairs through the open window, and he was full enough of plans and explanations. Of course we must explore the passage, but we would give the bad air a chance of getting out first. He spoke of some Turkish summer-house, or pavilion, mentioned in certain annals of Witching Hill, that he had skimmed for his amusement in the local Free Library. There was no such structure to be seen from any point of vantage that he had discovered; possibly this was its site; and the floor which had fallen in might have been a false basement, purposely intended to conceal the trap-door, or else built over it by some unworthy successor of the great gay lord.

"He was just the sort of old sportsman to have a way of his own out of the house, Gillon! He might have wanted it at any moment; he must have been ready for the worst most nights of his life; for I may tell you they would have hanged him in the end if he hadn't been too quick for them with his own horse-pistol. You didn't know he was as bad as that? It's not a thing the family boasts about, and I don't suppose your Estate people would hold it out as an attraction. But I've read a thing or two about the bright old boy, and I do believe we've struck the site of some of his brightest moments!"

"I should like to have explored that tunnel."

"So you shall."

"But when?"

We had gobbled our luncheon, and I had drained the jug that my unconventional host had carried all the way from the Mulcaster Arms; but already I was late for a most unlucky appointment with prospective tenants, and it was only a last look that I could take at my not ignoble handiwork. It was really rather a good hole for a beginner, and a grave-digger could not have heaped his earth much more compactly. It came hard to leave the next stage of the adventure even to as nice a fellow as young Delavoye.

"When?" he repeated with an air of surprise. "Why to-night, of course; you don't suppose I'm going to explore it without you, do you?"

I had already promised not to mention the matter to my Mr. Muskett when he looked in at the office on his way from the station; but that was the only undertaking which had passed between us.

"I thought you said you didn't want Mrs. Delavoye to see the pit's mouth?"

It was his own expression, yet it made him smile, though it had not made me.

"I certainly don't mean either my mother or sister to see one end till we've seen the other," said he. "They might have a word too many to say about it. I must cover the place up somehow before they get back; but I'll tell them you're coming in this evening, and when they go aloft we shall very naturally come out here for a final pipe."

"Armed with a lantern?"

"No, a pocketful of candles. And don't you dress, Gillon, because I don't, even when I'm not bound for the bowels of the globe."

I ran to my appointment after that; but the prospective tenants broke theirs, and kept me waiting for nothing all that fiery afternoon. I can shut my eyes and go through it all again, and see every inch of my sticky little prison near the station. In the heat its copious varnish developed an adhesive quality as fatal to flies as bird-lime, and there they stuck in death to pay me out. It was not necessary to pin any notice to the walls; one merely laid them on the varnish; and that morning, when young Delavoye had leant against it in his whites, he had to peel himself off like a plaster. That morning! It seemed days ago, not because I had met with any great adventure yet, but the whole atmosphere of the place was changed by the discovery of a kindred spirit. Not that we were naturally akin in temperament, tastes, or anything else but our common youth and the want in each of a companion approaching his own type. We saw things at a different angle, and when he smiled I often wondered why. We might have met in town or at college and never sought each other again; but separate adversities had driven us both into the same dull haven— one from the Egyptian Civil, which had nearly been the death of him; the other on a sanguine voyage (before the mast) from the best school in Scotland to Land Agency. We were bound to make the most of each other, and I for one looked forward to renewing our acquaintance even more than to the sequel of our interrupted adventure.

But I was by no means anxious to meet my new friend's womankind; never anything of a lady's man, I was inclined rather to resent the existence of these good ladies, partly from something he had said about them with reference to our impending enterprise. Consequently it was rather late in the evening when I turned out of one of the nominally empty houses, where I had gone to lodge with a still humbler servant of the Estate, and went down to No. 7 with some hope that its mistress at all events might already have retired. Almost to my horror I learned that they were all three in the back garden, whither I was again conducted through the little dining-room with the massive furniture.

Mrs. Delavoye was a fragile woman with a kind but nervous manner; the daughter put me more at my ease, but I could scarcely see either of them by the

dim light from the French window outside which they sat. I was more eager, however, to see "the pit's mouth," and in the soft starlight of a velvet night I made out the two Dutch chairs lying face downward over the shaft.

"It's so tiresome of my brother," said Miss Delavoye, following my glance with disconcerting celerity: "just when we want our garden chairs he's varnished them, and there they lie unfit to use!"

I never had any difficulty in looking stolid, but for the moment I avoided the impostor's eyes. It was trying enough to hear his impudent defence.

"You've been at me about them all the summer, Amy, and I felt we were in for a spell of real hot weather at last."

"I can't think why you've put them out there, Uvo," remarked his mother. "They won't dry any better in the dew, my dear boy."

"They won't make a hopeless mess of the grass, at all events!" he retorted. "But why varnish our dirty chairs in public? Mr. Gillon won't be edified; he'd much rather listen to the nightingale, I'm sure."

Had they a nightingale? I had never heard one in my life. I was obliged to say something, and this happened to be the truth; it led to a little interchange about Scotland, in which the man Uvo assumed a Johnsonian pose, as though he had known me as long as I felt I had known him, and then prayed silence for the nightingale as if the suburban garden were a banqueting hall. It was a concert hall, at any rate, and never was sweeter solo than the invisible singer poured forth from the black and jagged wood between glimmering lawn and starry sky. I see the picture now, with the seated ladies dimly silhouetted against the French windows, and our two cigarettes waxing and waning like revolving lights seen leagues away. I hear the deep magic of those heavenly notes, as I was to hear them more summers than one from that wild wood within a few yards of our raw red bricks and mortar. It may be as the prelude of what was to follow that I recall it all so clearly, down to the couplet that Uvo could not quite remember and his sister did:

"The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown."

"That's what I meant!" he cried. "By emperor, clown, and old man Mulcaster in his cups! Think of him carrying on in there to such a tune, and think of pious Christopher holding family prayers to it now!"

And the bare thought dashed from my lips a magic potion compounded of milky lawn and ebony horse-chestnuts, of an amethyst sky twinkling with precious stars, and the low voice of a girl trying not to drown the one in the wood; the spell was broken, and I was glad when at last we had the garden to ourselves.

"There are two things I must tell you for your comfort," said the incorrigible Uvo as we lifted one Dutch chair from the hole it covered like a hatchway, but

left the other pressed down over the heap of earth. "In the first place, both my mother and sister have front rooms, so they won't hear or bother about us again. The other thing's only that I've been back to the Free Library in what the simple inhabitants still insist on calling the Village, and had another look into those annals of old Witching Hill. I can find no mention whatever of any subterranean passage. I shouldn't wonder if good Sir Chris had never heard of it in his life. In that case we shall rush in where neither man nor beast has trodden for a hundred and fifty years."

We lit our candles down the shaft, and then I drew the Dutch chair over the hole again on Delavoye's suggestion; he was certainly full of resource, and I was only too glad to play the practical man with my reach and strength. If he had been less impetuous and headstrong, we should have made a strong pair of adventurers. In the tunnel he would go first, for instance, much against my wish; but, as he put it, if the foul air knocked him down I could carry him out under one arm, whereas he would have to leave me to die in my tracks. So he chattered as we crept on and on, flinging monstrous shadows into the arch behind us, and lighting up every patch of filth ahead; for the long-drawn vault was bearded with stalactites of crusted slime; but no living creature fled before us; we alone breathed the impure air, encouraged by our candles, which lit us far beyond the place where my match had been extinguished and deeper and deeper yet without a flicker.

Then in the same second they both went out, at a point where the overhead excrescences made it difficult to stand upright. And there we were, like motes in a tube of lamp-black; for it was a darkness as palpable as fog. But my leader had a reassuring explanation on the tip of his sanguine tongue.

"It's because we stooped down," said he. "Strike a match on the roof if it's dry enough. There! What did I tell you? The dregs of the air settle down like other dregs. Hold on a bit! I believe we're under the house, and that's why the arch is dry."

We continued our advance with instinctive stealth, now blackening the roof with our candles as we went, and soon and sure enough the old tube ended in a wad of brick and timber.

In the brickwork was a recessed square, shrouded in cobwebs which perished at a sweep of Delavoye's candle; a wooden shutter closed the aperture, and I had just a glimpse of an oval knob, green with verdigris, when my companion gave it a twist and the shutter sprang open at the base. I held it up while he crept through with his candle, and then I followed him with mine into the queerest chamber I had ever seen.

It was some fifteen feet square, with a rough parquet floor and panelled walls and ceiling. All the woodwork seemed to me old oak, and reflected our naked lights on every side in a way that bespoke attention; and there was a tell-

tale set of folding steps under an ominous square in the ceiling, but no visible break in the four walls, nor yet another piece of movable furniture. In one corner, however, stood a great stack of cigar boxes whose agreeable aroma was musk and frankincense after the penetrating humours of the tunnel. This much we had noted when we made our first startling discovery. The panel by which we had entered had shut again behind us; the noise it must have made had escaped us in our excitement; there was nothing to show which panel it had been— no semblance of a knob on this side— and soon we were not even agreed as to the wall.

Uvo Delavoye had enough to say at most moments, but now he was a man of action only, and I copied his proceedings without a word. Panel after panel he rapped and sounded like any doctor, even through his fingers to make less noise! I took the next wall, and it was I who first detected a hollow note. I whispered my suspicion; he joined me, and was convinced; so there we stood cheek by jowl, each with a guttering candle in one hand, while the other felt the panel and pressed the knots. And a knot it was that yielded under my companion's thumb. But the panel that opened inwards was not our panel at all; instead of our earthy tunnel, we looked into a shallow cupboard, with a little old dirty bundle lying alone in the dust of ages. Delavoye picked it up gingerly, but at once I saw him weighing his handful in surprise, and with one accord we sat down to examine it, sticking our candles on the floor between us in their own grease.

"Lace," muttered Uvo, "and something in it."

The outer folds came to shreds in his fingers; a little deeper the lace grew firmer, and presently he was paying it out to me in fragile hanks. I believe it was a single flounce, though yards in length. Delavoye afterwards looked up the subject, characteristically, and declared it point de Venise; from what I can remember of its exquisite workmanship, in monogram, coronet, and imperial emblems, I can believe with him that the diamond buckle to which he came at last was less precious than its wrapping. But by that time we were not thinking of their value; we were screwing up our faces over a dark coagulation which caused the last yard or so to break off in bits.

"Lace and blood and diamonds!" said Delavoye, bending over the relics in grim absorption. "Could the priceless old sinner have left us a more delightful legacy?"

"What are you going to do with them?" I asked rather nervously at that. They had not been left to us. They ought surely to be delivered to their rightful owner.

"But who does own them?" asked Delavoye. "Is it the worthy plutocrat who's bought the show and all that in it is, or is it my own venerable kith and kin? They wouldn't thank us for taking these rather dirty coals to Newcastle.

They might refuse delivery, or this old boy might claim his mining rights, and where should we come in then? No, Gillon, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but as a twig of the old tree I mean to take the law into my own hands"— I held my breath— "and put these things back exactly where we found them. Then we'll leave everything in plumb order, and finish up by filling in that hole in our lawn— if ever we get out of this one."

But small doubt on the point was implied in his buoyant tone; the way through the panel just broached argued a similar catch in the one we sought; meanwhile we closed up the other with much relief on my side and an honest groan from Delavoye. It was sufficiently obvious that Sir Christopher Stainsby had discovered neither the secret subway nor the secret repository which we had penetrated by pure chance; on the other hand, he made use of the chamber leading to both as a cigar cellar, and had it kept in better order than such a purpose required. Sooner or later somebody would touch a spring, and one discovery would lead to another. So we consoled each other as we resumed our search, almost forgetting that we ourselves might be discovered first.

It was in a providential pause, broken only to my ear by our quiet movements, that Delavoye dabbed a quick hand on my candle and doused his own against the wall. Without a whisper he drew me downward, and there we cowered in throbbing darkness, but still not a sound that I could hear outside my skin. Then the floor above opened a lighted mouth with a gilded roof; black legs swung before our noses, found the step-ladder and came running down. The cigars were on the opposite side. The man knew all about them, found the right box without a light, and turned to go running up.

Now he must see us, as we saw him and his smooth, smug, flunkey's face to the whites of its upturned eyes! My fists were clenched— and often I wonder what I meant to do. What I did was to fall forward upon oozing palms as the trap-door was let down with a bang.

"Didn't he see us, Delavoye? Are you sure he didn't?" I chattered as he struck a match.

"Quite. I was watching his eyes— weren't you?"

"Yes— but they got all blurred at the finish."

"Well, pull yourself together; now's our time! It's an empty room overhead; it wasn't half lit up. But we haven't done anything, remember, if they do catch us."

He was on the steps already, but I had no desire to argue with him. I was as ripe for a risk as Delavoye, as anxious to escape after the one we had already run. The trap-door went up slowly, pushing something over it into a kind of tent.

"It's only the rug," purred Delavoye. "I heard him take it up— thank God— as well as put it down again. Now hold the candle; now the trap-door, till I hold it up for you."

And we squirmed up into a vast apartment, not only empty as predicted, but left in darkness made visible by the solitary light we carried now. The little stray flame was mirrored in a floor like black ice, then caught the sheen of the tumbled rug that Delavoye would stay to smooth, then twinkled in the diamond panes of book-cases like church windows, flickered over a high altar of a mantel-piece, and finally displayed our stealthy selves in the window by which we left the house.

"Thank God!" said Delavoye as he shut it down again. "That's something like a breath of air!"

"Hush!" I whispered with my back to him.

"What is it?"

"I thought I heard shouts of laughter."

"You're right. There they go again! I believe we've struck a heavy entertainment."

In a dell behind the house, a spreading cedar caught the light of windows that we could not see. Delavoye crept to the intermediate angle, turned round, and beckoned in silhouette against the tree.

"High jinks and junketings!" he chuckled when I joined him. "The old bloke must be away. Shall we risk a peep?"

My answer was to lead the way for once, and it was long before we exchanged another syllable. But in a few seconds, and for more minutes, we crouched together at an open window, seeing life with all our innocent eyes.

It was a billiard-room into which we gazed, but it was not being used for billiards. One end of the table was turned into a champagne bar; it bristled with bottles in all stages of depletion, with still an unopened magnum towering over pails of ice, silver dishes of bonbons, cut decanters of wine and spirits. At the other end a cluster of flushed faces hung over a spinning roulette wheel; nearly all young women and men, smoking fiercely in a silver haze, for the moment terribly intent; and as the ball ticked and rattled, the one pale face present, that of the melancholy croupier, showed a dry zest as he intoned the customary admonitions. They were new to me then; now I seem to recognise through the years the Anglo-French of his *"rien ne va plus"* and all the rest. There were notes and gold among the stakes. The old rogue raked in his share without emotion; one of the ladies embraced him for hers; and one had stuck a sprig of maidenhair in his venerable locks; but there he sat, with the deferential dignity of a bygone school, the only very sober member of the party it was his shame to serve.

The din they made before the next spin! It was worse when it died down into plainer speech; playful buffets were exchanged as freely; but one young blood left the table with a deadly dose of raw spirit, and sat glowering over it on a raised settee while the wheel went round again. I did not watch the play; the

wild, attentive faces were enough for me; and so it was that I saw a bedizened beauty go mad before my eyes. It was the madness of utter ecstasy— wails of laughter and happy maledictions— and then for that unopened magnum! By the neck she caught it, whirled it about her like an Indian club, then down on the table with all her might and the effect of a veritable shell. A ribbon of blood ran down her dress as she recoiled, and the champagne flooded the green board like bubbling ink; but the old croupier hardly looked up from the pile of notes and gold that he was counting out with his sly, wintry smile.

"You saw she had a fiver on the number? You may watch roulette many a long night without seeing that again!"

It was Delavoye whispering as he dragged me away. He was the cool one now. Too excitable for me in the early stages of our adventure, he was not only the very man for all the rest, but a living lesson in just that thing or two I felt at first I could have taught him. For I fear I should have felled that butler if he had seen us in the cigar cellar, and I know I shouted when the magnum burst; but fortunately so did everybody else except Delavoye and the aged croupier.

"I suppose he was the butler?" I said when we had skirted the shallow drive, avoiding a couple of hansoms that stood there with the cabmen snug inside.

"What! The old fogey? Not he!" cried Delavoye as we reached the road. "I say, don't those hansoms tell us all about his pals!"

"But who was he?"

"The man himself."

"Not Sir Christopher Stainsby?"

"I'm afraid so— the old sinner!"

"But you said he was an old saint?"

"So I thought he was; my lord warden of the Nonconformist conscience, I always heard."

"Then how do you account for it?"

"I can't. I haven't thought about it. Wait a bit!"

He stood still in the road. It was his own road. There was that hole to fill in before morning; meanwhile the sweet night air was sweeter far than we had left it hours ago; and the little new suburban houses surpassed all pleasures and palaces, behind their kindly lamps, with the clean stars watching over them and us.

"I don't want you think the worse of me," said Delavoye, slipping his arm through mine as he led me on: "but at this particular moment I should somehow think less of myself if I didn't tell you, after all we've been through together, that I was really quite severely tempted to take that lace and those diamonds!"

I knew it.

"Well," I said, with the due deliberation of my normal Northern self, "you'd have had a sort of right to them. But that's nothing! Why, man, I was as near as a toucher to laying yon butler dead at our feet!"

"Then we're all three in the same boat, Gillon."

"Which three?"

It was my turn to stand still, outside his house. And now there was excitement enough in his dark face to console me for all mine.

"You, and I, and poor old Sir Christopher."

"Poor old hypocrite! Didn't I hear that his wife died a while ago?"

"Only last year. That makes it sound worse. But in reality it's an excuse, because of course he would fall a victim all the more easily."

"A victim to what?"

"My good Gillon, don't you see that he's up to the very same games on the very same spot as my ignoble kinsman a hundred and fifty years ago? Blood, liquor, and ladies as before! We admit that between us even you and I had the makings of a thief and a murderer while we were under that haunted roof. Don't you believe in influences?"

"Not of that kind," said I heartily. "I never did, and I doubt I never shall."

Delavoye laughed in the starlight, but his lips were quivering, and his eyes were like stars themselves. But I held up my hand: the nightingale was singing in the wood exactly as when we plunged below the earth. Somehow it brought us together again, and there we stood listening till a clock struck twelve in the distant village.

" ' 'Tis now the very witching time of night,' " said Uvo Delavoye, "'when church-yards yawn'— like our back garden!" I might have guessed his favourite play, but his face lit up before my memory. "And shall I tell you, Gillon, the real name of this whole infernal Hill and Estate? It's Witching Hill, my man, it's Witching Hill from this night forth!"

And Witching Hill it still remains to me.

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6: The Story About the Anteater

Stephen Vincent Benét
1898-1943
The Century Magazine Oct 1928
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THE younger child sat bolt upright, her bedclothes wrapped around her.

"If you're going down to look at them," she whispered accusingly, "I'm coming, too! And Alice'll catch you."

"She won't catch me." Her elder sister's voice was scornful, "She's out in the pantry, helping. With the man from Gray's."

"All the same, I'm coming. I want to see if it's ice cream in little molds or just the smashed kind with strawberries. And, if Alice won't catch you, she won't catch me."

"It'll be molds," said the other, from the depths of experience, "Mother always has molds for the Whitehouses. And Mr. Whitehouse sort of clicks in his throat and talks about sweets to the sweet. You'd think he'd know that's dopey but he doesn't. And, anyhow, it isn't your turn."

"It never is my turn," mourned her junior, tugging at the bedclothes.

"All right," said the elder. "If you *want* to go! And make a noise. And then they hear us and somebody comes up—"

"Sometimes they bring you things, when they come up," said the younger dreamily. "The man with the pink face did. And he said I was a little angel."

"Was he dopey!" said her elder, blightingly, "and anyhow, you were sick afterwards and you know what Mother said about it."

The younger child sighed, a long sigh of defeat and resignation.

"All right," she said. "But next time it is my turn. And you tell me if it's in molds." Her elder nodded as she stole out of the door.

At the first turn of the stairs, a small landing offered an excellent observation post, provided one could get there unperceived. Jennifer Sharp reached it soundlessly and, curling herself up into the smallest possible space, stared eagerly down and across into the dining room.

She couldn't see the whole table. But she saw at once that Mrs. Whitehouse had a thing like a silver beetle in her hair, that Colonel Crandall looked more like a police dog than ever, and that there were little silver baskets of pink and white mints. That meant that it was really a grand dinner. She made a special note of the ice cream for Joan.

Talk and laughter drifted up to her— strange phrases and incomprehensible jests from another world, to be remembered, puzzled over, and analyzed for meaning or the lack of it, when she and Joan were alone. She hugged her knees, she was having a good time. Pretty soon, Father would light the little blue flame

under the mysterious glass machine that made the coffee. She liked to see him do that.

She looked at him now, appraisingly. Colonel Crandall had fought Germans in trenches and Mr. Whitehouse had a bank to keep his money in. But Father, on the whole, was nicer than either of them. She remembered, as if looking back across a vast plain, when Father and Mother had merely been Father and Mother— huge, natural phenomena, beloved but inexplicable as the weather— unique of their kind. Now she was older— she knew that other people's fathers and mothers were different. Even Joan knew that, though Joan was still a great deal of a baby. Jennifer felt very old and rather benevolent as she considered herself and her parents and the babyishness of Joan.

Mr. Whitehouse was talking, but Father wanted to talk, too— she knew that from the quick little gesture he made with his left hand. Now they all laughed and Father leaned forward.

"That reminds me," he was saying, "of one of our favorite stories—" How young and amused his face looked, suddenly!

His eldest daughter settled back in the shadow, a bored but tolerant smile on her lips. She knew what was coming.

WHEN Terry Farrell and Roger Sharp fell in love, the war to end war was just over, bobbed hair was still an issue, the movies did not talk and women's clothes couldn't be crazier. It was also generally admitted that the younger generation was wild but probably sound at heart and that, as soon as we got a businessman in the White House, things were going to be all right.

As for Terry and Roger, they were both wild and sophisticated. They would have told you so. Terry had been kissed by several men at several dances and Roger could remember the curious, grimy incident of the girl at Fort Worth. So that showed you. They were entirely emancipated and free. But they fell in love very simply and unexpectedly— and their marriage was going to be like no other marriage, because they knew all the right answers to all the questions, and had no intention of submitting to the commonplaces of life. At first, in fact, they were going to form a free union— they had read of that, in popular books of the period. But, somehow or other, as soon as Roger started to call, both families began to get interested. They had no idea of paying the slightest attention to their families. But, when your family happens to comment favorably on the man or girl that you are in love with, that is a hard thing to fight. Before they knew it, they were formally engaged, and liking it on the whole, though both of them agreed that a formal engagement was an outworn and ridiculous social custom.

They quarreled often enough, for they were young, and a trifle ferocious in the vehemence with which they expressed the views they knew to be right. These views had to do, in general, with freedom and personality, and were often

supported by quotations from *The Golden Bough*. Neither of them had read *The Golden Bough* all the way through, but both agreed that it was a great book. But the quarrels were about generalities and had no sting. And always, before and after, was the sense of discovering in each other previously unsuspected but delightful potentialities and likenesses and beliefs.

As a matter of fact, they were quite a well-suited couple— "made for each other," as the saying used to go; though they would have hooted at the idea. They had read the minor works of Havelock Ellis and knew the name of Freud. They didn't believe in people being "made for each other"— they were too advanced.

It was ten days before the date set for their marriage that their first real quarrel occurred. And then, unfortunately, it didn't stop at generalities.

They had got away for the day from the presents and their families, to take a long walk in the country, with a picnic lunch. Both, in spite of themselves, were a little solemn, a little nervous. The atmosphere of Approaching Wedding weighed on them both— when their hands touched, the current ran, but, when they looked at each other, they felt strange. Terry had been shopping the day before— she was tired, she began to wish that Roger would not walk so fast. Roger was wondering if the sixth usher— the one who had been in the marines— would really turn up. His mind also held dark suspicions as to the probable behavior of the best man, when it came to such outworn customs as rice and shoes. They were sure that they were in love, sure now, that they wanted to be married. But their conversation was curiously polite.

The lunch did something for them, so did the peace of being alone. But they had forgotten the salt and Terry had rubbed her heel. When Roger got out his pipe, there was only tobacco left for half a smoke. Still, [Pg 154]the wind was cool and the earth pleasant and, as they sat with their backs against a gray boulder in the middle of a green field, they began to think more naturally. The current between their linked hands ran stronger— in a moment or two, they would be the selves they had always known.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Roger should have selected that particular moment in which to tell the anteater story.

He knocked out his pipe and smiled, suddenly, at something in his mind. Terry felt a knock at her heart, a sudden sweetness on her tongue— how young and amused he always looked when he smiled! She smiled back at him, her whole face changing.

"What is it, darling?" she said.

He laughed. "Oh nothing," he said. "I just happened to remember. Did you ever hear the story about the anteater?"

She shook her head.

"Well," he began. "Oh, you must have heard it— sure you haven't? Well, anyway, there was a little town down South...

"And the coon said, 'Why, lady, that ain't no anteater— that's Edward!' " he finished, triumphantly, a few moments later. He couldn't help laughing when he had finished— the silly tale always amused him, old as it was. Then he looked at Terry and saw that she was not laughing.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said, mechanically. "Are you cold, dear, or—"

Her hand, which had been slowly stiffening in his clasp, now withdrew itself entirely from his.

"No," she said, staring ahead of her, "I'm all right. Thanks."

He looked at her. There was somebody there he had never seen before.

"Well," he said, confusedly, "well." Then his mouth set, his jaw stuck out, he also regarded the landscape.

Terry stole a glance at him. It was terrible and appalling to see him sitting there, looking bleak and estranged. She wanted to speak, to throw herself at him, to say: "Oh, it's all my fault— it's all my fault!" and know the luxury of saying it. Then she remembered the anteater and her heart hardened.

It was not even, she told herself sternly, as if it were a dirty story. It wasn't— and, if it had been, weren't they always going to be frank and emancipated with each other about things like that? But it was just the kind of story she'd always hated— cruel and— yes— vulgar. Not even healthily vulgar— vulgar with no redeeming adjective. He ought to have known she hated that kind of story. He ought to have known!

If love meant anything, according to the books, it meant understanding the other person, didn't it? And, if you didn't understand them, in such a little thing, why, what was life going to be afterwards? Love was like a new silver dollar— bright, untarnished and whole. There could be no possible compromises with love.

All these confused but vehement thoughts flashed through her mind. She also knew that she was tired and wind-blown and jumpy and that the rub on her heel was a little red spot of pain. And then Roger was speaking.

"I'm sorry you found my story so unamusing," he said in stiff tones of injury and accusation. "If I'd known about the way you felt, I'd have tried to tell a funnier one— even if we did say—"

He stopped, his frozen face turned toward her. She could feel the muscles of her own face tighten and freeze in answer.

"I wasn't in the *least* shocked, I assure you," she said in the same, stilled voice. "I just didn't think it was very funny. That's all."

"I get you. Well, pardon my glove," he said, and turned to the landscape.

A little pulse of anger began to beat in her wrist. Something was being hurt, something was being broken. If he'd only been Roger and kissed her instead of saying— well, it was his fault, now.

"No, I didn't think it was funny at all," she said, in a voice whose sharpness surprised her, "if you want to know. Just sort of cruel and common and— well, the poor Negro—"

"That's right!" he said, in a voice of bitter irritation, "pity the coon! Pity everybody but the person who's trying to amuse you! I think it's a damn funny story— always have— and—"

They were both on their feet and stabbing at each other, now.

"And it's vulgar," she was saying, hotly, "plain vulgar— not even dirty enough to be funny. Anteater indeed! Why, Roger Sharp, it's— "

"Where's that sense of humor you were always talking about?" he was shouting. "My God, what's happened to you, Terry? I always thought you were— and here you—"

"Well, we both of us certainly seem to have been mistaken about each other," she could hear her strange voice, saying. Then, even more dreadfully, came his unfamiliar accents, "Well, if that's the way you feel about it, we certainly have."

They looked at each other, aghast. "Here!" she was saying, "here! Oh, Lord, why won't it come off my finger?"

"You keep that on— do you hear, you damn little fool?" he roared at her, so unexpectedly that she started, tripped, caught her shoe in a cleft of rock, fell awkwardly, and, in spite of all her resolves, burst undignifiedly and conventionally into a passion of tears.

Then there was the reconciliation. It took place, no doubt, on entirely conventional lines, and was studded with "No, it was my fault! Say it was!" but, to them it was an event unique in history.

Terry thought it over remorsefully, that evening, waiting for Roger. Roger was right. She had been a little fool. She knew the inexplicable solace of feeling that she had been a little fool.

And yet, they had said those things to each other, and meant them. He had hurt her, she had actually meant to hurt him. She stared at these facts, solemnly. Love, the bright silver dollar. Not like the commonplace coins in other people's pockets. But something special, different— already a little, ever-so-faintly tarnished, as a pane is tarnished by breath?

She had been a little fool. But she couldn't quite forget the anteater.

Then she was in Roger's arms— and knew, with utter confidence, that she and Roger were different. They were always going to be different. Their marriage wouldn't ever be like any other marriage in the world.

THE SHARPS had been married for exactly six years and five hours and Terry, looking across the table at the clever, intelligent face of her affectionate and satisfactory husband, suddenly found herself most desolately alone.

It had been a mistake in the first place— going to the Lattimores for dinner on their own anniversary. Mr. Lattimore was the head of Roger's company— Mrs. Lattimore's invitation had almost the force of a royal command. They had talked it over, Roger and she, and decided, sensibly, that they couldn't get out of it. But, all the same, it had been a mistake.

They were rational, modern human beings, she assured herself ferociously. They weren't like the horrible married couples in the cartoons— the little woman asking her baffled mate if he remembered what date it was, and the rest of it. They thought better of life and love than to tie either of them to an artificial scheme of days. They were different. Nevertheless, there had been a time when they had said to each other, with foolish smiles, "We've been married a week— or a month— or a year! Just think of it!" This time now seemed to her, as she looked back on it coldly, a geologic age away.

She considered Roger with odd dispassionateness. Yes, there he was— an intelligent, rising young man in his first thirties. Not particularly handsome but indubitably attractive— charming, when he chose— a loyal friend, a good father, a husband one could take pride in. And it seemed to her that if he made that nervous little gesture with his left hand again— or told the anteater story— she would scream.

It was funny that the knowledge that you had lost everything that you had most counted upon should come to you at a formal dinner party, while you talked over the war days with a dark-haired officer whose voice had the honey of the South in it. Then she remembered that she and Roger had first discovered their love for each other, not upon a moon-swept lawn, but in the fly-specked waiting room of a minor railroad station— and the present event began to seem less funny. Life was like that. It gave, unexpectedly, abruptly, with no regard for stage setting or the properties of romance. And, as unexpectedly and abruptly, it took away.

While her mouth went on talking, a part of her mind searched numbly and painfully for the reasons which had brought this calamity about. They had loved each other in the beginning— even now, she was sure of that. They had tried to be wise, they had not broken faith, they had been frank and gay. No deep division of nature sundered them— no innate fault in either, spreading under pressure, to break the walls of their [Pg 160]house apart. She looked for a guilty party but she could find none. There was only a progression of days; a succession of tiny events that followed in each others' footsteps without haste or rest. That was all, but that seemed to have been enough. And Roger was

looking over at her— with that same odd, exploring glance she had used a moment ago.

What remained? A house with a little boy asleep in it, a custom of life, certain habits, certain memories, certain hardships lived through together. Enough for most people, perhaps? They had wanted more than that.

Something said to her, "Well and if— after all— the real thing hasn't even come?" She turned to her dinner partner, for the first time really seeing him. When you did see him, he was quite a charming person. His voice was delightful. There was nothing in him in the least like Roger Sharp.

She laughed and saw, at the laugh, something wake in his eyes. He, too, had not been really conscious of her, before. But he was, now. She was not thirty, yet— she had kept her looks. She felt old powers, old states of mind flow back to her; things she had thought forgotten, the glamor of first youth. Somewhere, on the curve of a dark lake, a boat was drifting— a man was talking to her— she could not see his face but she knew it was not Roger's—

She was roused from her waking dream by Mrs. Lattimore's voice.

"Why, I'd never have dreamt!" Mrs. Lattimore was saying "I had no idea!" She called down the table, "George! Do you know it's these people's anniversary— so sweet of them to come— and I positively had to worm it out of Mr. Sharp!"

Terry went hot and cold all over. She was sensible, she was brokenhearted, love was a myth, but she had particularly depended on Roger not to tell anybody that this was their anniversary. And Roger had told.

She lived through the congratulations and the customary jokes about "Well, this is your seventh year beginning— and you know what they say about the seventh year!" She even lived through Mrs. Lattimore's pensive "Six years! Why, my dear, I never would have believed it! You're children— positive children!"

She could have bitten Mrs. Lattimore. "Children!" she thought, indignantly, "When I— when we— when everything's in ruins!" She tried to freeze Roger, at long distance, but he was not looking her way. And then she caught her breath, for a worse fate was in store for her.

Someone, most unhappily, had brought up the subject of pet animals. She saw a light break slowly on Roger's face— she saw him lean forward. She prayed for the roof to fall, for time to stop, for Mrs. Lattimore to explode like a Roman candle into green and purple stars. But, even as she prayed, she knew that it was no use. Roger was going to tell the anteater story.

The story no longer seemed shocking to her, or even cruel. But it epitomized all the years of her life with Roger. In the course of those years, she calculated desperately, she had heard that story at least a hundred times.

Somehow— she never knew how— she managed to survive the hundred-and-first recital, from the hideously familiar, "Well, there was a little town down

South..." to the jubilant "That's Edward!" at the end. She even summoned up a fixed smile to meet the tempest of laughter that followed. And then, mercifully, Mrs. Lattimore was giving the signal to rise.

The men hung behind— the anteater story had been capped by another. Terry found herself, unexpectedly, tête-à-tête with Mrs. Lattimore.

"My dear," the great lady was saying, "I'd rather have asked you another night, of course, if I'd known. But I am very glad you could come tonight. George particularly wished Mr. Colden to meet your brilliant husband. They are going into that Western project together, you know, and Tom Colden leaves tomorrow. So we both appreciate your kindness in coming."

Terry found a sudden queer pulse of warmth through the cold fog that seemed to envelop her. "Oh," she stammered, "but Roger and I have been married for years— and we were delighted to come— " She looked at the older woman. "Tell me, though," she said, with an irrepressible burst of confidence, "doesn't it ever seem to you as if you couldn't bear to hear a certain story again— not if you *died*?"

A gleam of mirth appeared in Mrs. Lattimore's eyes.

"My dear," she said "has George ever told you about his trip to Peru?"

"No."

"Well, don't let him." She reflected, "or, no— do let him," she said. "Poor George— he does get such fun out of it. And you would be a new audience. But it happened fifteen years ago, my dear, and I think I could repeat every word after him verbatim, once he's started. Even so— I often feel as if he'd never stop."

"And then what do you do?" said Terry, breathlessly— far too interested now to remember tact.

The older woman smiled. "I think of the story I am going to tell about the guide in the Uffizi gallery," she said. "George must have heard that story ten thousand times. But he's still alive."

She put her hand on the younger woman's arm.

"We're all of us alike, my dear," she said. "When I'm an old lady in a wheel chair, George will still be telling me about Peru. But then, if he didn't, I wouldn't know he was George."

She turned away, leaving Terry to ponder over the words. Her anger was not appeased— her life still lay about her in ruins. But, when the dark young officer came into the room, she noticed that his face seemed rather commonplace and his voice was merely a pleasant voice.

Mr. Colden's car dropped the Sharps at their house. The two men stayed at the gate for a moment, talking— Terry ran in to see after the boy. He was sleeping peacefully with his fists tight shut; he looked like Roger in his sleep.

Suddenly, all around her were the familiar sights and sounds of home. She felt tired and as if she had come back from a long journey.

She went downstairs. Roger was just coming in. He looked tired, too, she noticed, but exultant as well.

"Colden had to run," he said at once. "Left good-by for you— hoped you wouldn't mind— said awfully nice things. He's really a great old boy, Terry. And, as for this new Western business—"

He noticed the grave look on her face and his own grew grave.

"I *am* sorry, darling," he said. "Did you mind it a lot? Well, I did— but it couldn't be helped. You bet your life that next time—"

"Oh, next time—" she said, and kissed him. "Of course I didn't mind. We're different, aren't we?"

THAT INTELLIGENT matron, Mrs. Roger Sharp, now seated at the foot of her own dinner table, from time to time made the appropriate interjections— the "Really?"s and "Yes indeed"s and "That's what I always tell Roger"s— which comprised the whole duty of a hostess in Colonel Crandall's case. Colonel Crandall was singularly restful— give him these few crumbs and he could be depended upon to talk indefinitely and yet without creating a conversational desert around him. Mrs. Sharp was very grateful to him at the moment. She wanted to retire to a secret place in her mind and observe her own dinner party, for an instant, as a spectator— and Colonel Crandall was giving her the chance.

It was going very well indeed. She had hoped for it from the first, but now she was sure of it and she gave a tiny, inaudible sigh of relief. Roger was at his best— the young Durwards had recovered from their initial shyness— Mr. Whitehouse had not yet started talking politics— the soufflé had been a success. She relaxed a little and let her mind drift off upon other things.

Tomorrow, Roger must remember about the light gray suit, she must make a dental appointment for Jennifer, Mrs. Quaritch must be dealt with tactfully in the matter of the committee. It was too early to decide about camp for the girls but Roger Junior must know they were proud of his marks, and if Mother intended to give up her trip just because of poor old Miss Tompkins— well, something would have to be done. There were also the questions of the new oil furnace, the School board and the Brewster wedding. But none of these really bothered her— her life was always busy— and, at the moment, she felt an unwonted desire to look back into Time.

Over twenty years since the Armistice. Twenty years. And Roger Junior was seventeen— and she and Roger had been married since nineteen-twenty. Pretty soon they would be celebrating their twentieth anniversary. It seemed incredible but it was true.

She looked back through those years, seeing an ever-younger creature with her own face, a creature that laughed or wept for forgotten reasons, ran wildly here, sat solemn as a young judge there. She felt a pang of sympathy for that young heedlessness, a pang of humor as well. She was not old but she had been so very young.

Roger and she— the beginning— the first years— Roger Junior's birth. The house on Edgehill Road, the one with the plate rail in the dining room, and crying when they left because they'd never be so happy again, but they had, and it was an inconvenient house. Being jealous of Milly Baldwin— and how foolish!— and the awful country-club dance where Roger got drunk; and it wasn't awful any more. The queer, piled years of the boom— the crash— the bad time— Roger coming home after Tom Colden's suicide and the look on his face. Jennifer. Joan. Houses. People. Events. And always the headlines in the papers, the voices on the radio, dinning, dinning "No security— trouble— disaster— no security." And yet, out of insecurity, they had loved and made children. Out of insecurity, for the space of breath, for an hour, they had built, and now and then found peace.

No, there's no guarantee, she thought. There's no guarantee. When you're young, you think there is, but there isn't. And yet I'd do it over. Pretty soon we'll have been married twenty years.

"Yes, that's what I always tell Roger," she said, automatically. Colonel Crandall smiled and proceeded. He was still quite handsome, she thought, in his dark way, but he was getting very bald. Roger's hair had a few gray threads in it but it was still thick and unruly. She liked men to keep their hair. She remembered, a long while ago, thinking something or other about Colonel Crandall's voice, but she could not remember what she had thought.

She noticed a small white speck on the curve of the stairway but said nothing. The wrapper was warm and, if Jennifer wasn't noticed, she would creep back to bed soon enough. It was different with Joan.

Suddenly, she was alert. Mrs. Durward, at Roger's end of the table, had mentioned the Zoo. She knew what that meant— Zoo— the new buildings— the new Housing Commissioner— and Mr. Whitehouse let loose on his favorite political grievance all through the end of dinner. She caught Roger's eye for a miraculous instant. Mr. Whitehouse was already clearing his throat. But Roger had the signal. Roger would save them. She saw his left hand tapping in its little gesture— felt him suddenly draw the party together. How young and amused his face looked, under the candlelight!

"That reminds me of one of our favorite stories," he was saying. She sank back in her chair. A deep content pervaded her. He was going to tell the anteater story— and, even if some of the people had heard it, they would have to laugh, he always told it so well. She smiled in anticipation of the triumphant

"That's Edward!" And, after that, if Mr. Whitehouse still threatened, she herself would tell the story about Joan and the watering pot.

JENNIFER crept back into the darkened room.

"Well?" said an eager whisper from the other bed.

Jennifer drew a long breath. The memory of the lighted dinner table rose before her, varicolored, glittering, portentous— a stately omen— a thing of splendor and mystery, to be pondered upon for days. How could she ever make Joan see it as she had seen it? And Joan was such a baby, anyway.

"Oh— nobody saw me," she said, in a bored voice. "But it was in molds, that's all— oh yes— and Father told the anteater story again."

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7: A Study in Green

Alice C. Tomholt

1887-1949

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 11 May 1918

"For the green-eyed demon is a monster that doth devour the meat on which it feeds."

THE DRAWING-ROOM, big, bizarre, of Mrs Fox-King, was alive with brilliant guests, laughter, music and song. And the shy breath of cut flowers, drooping beautiful heads in the heat, was lost in the bolder breath of perfumes that had been spilled from expensive bottles on to women's gowns.

But over in an alcove, shadowy with heavy curtains and palms, sat a small, foolish woman in a shell-pink frock. A flower-scented summer breeze drifted diffidently through the low windows from the big garden beyond. But she did not notice it. Her small, useless hands were clenched until the pointed nails seared the soft palms, and her eyes were watching, with the newly roused, primitive jealousy of a little wild animal, her husband and— the girl.

Like an Aphrodite risen from the waves, she was a wonderful being, that girl in green, with the peroxided, goldeny-brown hair, drawn low over her splendid forehead, and banded quaintly with a single row of small, palely-tinted shells which fairy hands may have gathered from the flotsam and jetsam of a wild sea-shore. It was no wonder, Rosa was forced to admit, that the men hovered about her like giant moths about a brilliant flame. Her colorless face, with its vivid eyes and scarlet, thin-lipped mouth, held a weird, irresistible lure— even for some of the women.

But she had thought that Rex was different. They had only been married a few months. Perhaps, she told herself bitterly, when they had been married as many years she would have become resigned to seeing her husband hovering about an alien flame, as those other calm-faced women in the room had evidently become resigned— or indifferent.

But now...?

With the green-eyed demon running loose within her, and sapping all joy from her petty, little untried soul, it sickened her, had sickened her all the evening, to see the attention that Rex had so willingly surrendered to the girl in the green frock, who had, apparently singled him out for the evening as splendid moth-creature worthy of the lure of her vivid flame. Sickened her to see the white arm, its warm beauty bared to the lovely shoulder, touching Rex's black-clad man sleeve far more often than was necessary as he sat sideways on the piano-stool beside her, turning her music while she sang blithely to her own accompaniment. And, looking angrily at the rapt faces in the crowded room, as the undeniably beautiful voice sang French love songs with such warmth and

foreign abandon, she realised that she was the only one who had not fallen in some measure beneath its passionate spell and charm.

Perhaps it was because the rendering of the dainty things was so seductively tender; perhaps it was because the slumberous, lovely eyes turned to Hex so often as she sang; but, watching it all, her foolish little mind magnifying everything tenfold. Rosa felt like a dumb creature of the wilds, ready to rend with her angry claws the other creature who was luring her mate with charms more vivid than her own. Yet the cloak of her inherent conventionality impeded her movements too effectually for her to give vent to her primitive instincts. She could only watch and hate and love, while the demon of the green-eyes, grinning, ate deeper into her quivering heart.

Fiercely she smothered a sob which would have broken the silence that fell over the room, when the girl had finished her singing. Then followed a stir of movement and approval; and she saw Rex move away as the men gathered delightedly about the brilliant green-clad figure. He passed among the chattering people, evidently in search of her. But she shrank closer into the shadows of her refuge, and, as he drew nearer, scrambled in a sudden panic through the low windows on to the verandah. She could not speak to him yet, she told herself, choking a sob in her slight throat. She did not feel strong enough to hide the passion of hurt and anger that raged within her.

The wide old verandah, over which roses clambered in joyous abandon, was lighted dimly here and there with a yellow lantern swaying weakly in the light night breeze. Rosa sought a darkened spot, far from the bright gleam of the drawing room windows, and finding it, sank down breathlessly into a big cane chair which had been set close to a great tub of African lilies of the Nile, whose green and yellow blooms were unfolded to the night, and giving gladly of their magic wonder of sweetness. The demon of jealousy had gnawed at, and weakened, the foundations of her world until it seemed nothing but a heap of ruins about her. And she sat among them, proof against the beauty of the cool, star-lit night, her fair, foolish head stiff against the high back of the chair, her small teeth gnawing helplessly at her lower lip.

When a man and a woman came out from the noisy heat of the big house to court the silence and freshness of the night-time, and sat on a lounge not far from her, she did not notice them. Hedged too closely within her own heaps of trouble to be concerned with the affairs of other world-people, she sat silent and still in the fragrant darkness.

But presently two men walked slowly along the flower-bordered path below the verandah, their lighted cigars, like fireflies in the gloom, gleaming now and then through the tangle of roses. And Fate, with a laugh in her sleeve, made them halt between Rosa and the two figures on the lounge to admire a giant

rhododendron whose splendid blooms were glowing, like the ghosts of young souls, in the shadows.

She recognised her husband's cool, level voice in one of the two that were appraising the beautiful plant. And as they stood, smoking, the scent of their cigars pungent on the air. the other man suddenly changed the conversation.

"What do you think of the Fox-King's new discovery— the siren lady of the sparkling eyes and green frocks?" he asked lightly. "She seemed to be rather taken with you... Some girl, isn't she?"

Rosa sat up quickly, her breath hurrying noiselessly as she waited to hear her husband's response.

"Yes," it came, presently, with the cool cynicism that was characteristic of him, "she's certainly brilliantly beautiful and all that kind of thing, but in a way that no decent fellow would look for in the choosing of a wife... Can you imagine that type of woman as the mother of children? She's all right, good company, for an idle hour or two. But for a lifetime—"

Rosa did not hear the smothered gasp that broke suddenly from one of the two silent figures on the lounge. And the voice of the man continued:

"Whenever I looked into that girl's eyes tonight, I felt grateful, somehow, for Rosa. My better part goes out completely to her. But to the other type— the type that girl represents— well—"

He paused with a gesture that was eloquent of contempt. And the other man laughed as they moved on.

Rosa sat erect and still, after they had gone, the green-eyed demon dead at her feet, the gladness of love and possession of her far from perfect mate singing in her heart, and rebuilding the foundations of the narrow, petty little world in which she lived and moved and had her being. Then a low, harsh sob of acute anguish marked her joy; and the girl on the lounge, the girl in the green frock, covered her face with her hands.

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8: The Jones's Enchanted Castle

Stephen Leacock

1869-1944

Collected in: *Happy Stories Just to Laugh At*, 1943

("*Behold, a cheerful heart can deny adversity and cast out fear.*"
—St. Paul, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Field Marshal Goebbels.)

...SO WHEN THE CHEQUE was made out, the other boys at the club said it was up to me to take it round to Jones. "Other boys" sounds funny, doesn't it? But you can't exactly write "other old men." You see, I'd known Jones about the longest, indeed ever since he and I were at school at the old Upper Canada on King St. Some of them had only known him about twenty years. So they said I'd have to take the cheque and give it either to Jones or to Bess.

I went round right away that same evening. It wasn't yet late.

Jones lives in an enchanted castle, but you wouldn't know it was enchanted if you didn't know Jones and the strange light that burns in him. You'd think the house just one of those old left-behind houses that stand in the old, left-behind streets of Toronto, with ragged palings and half-withered trees.

When I reached it in the half-darkness, there were Jones and Bess at the paling's gate, evidently just coming home. "Come on in," said Jones, cheerily; who wouldn't be proud to say come on in to a house like that...

Inside, it was the biggest, darkest, gloomiest house you ever saw— with no lights in it, till Jones took us up to the big "study" on the first floor and lit a lamp. He's burning coal oil this winter; it's a softer light, it appears, less trying to the eyes. And now that there are no maids in the house you need so few lights that Jones has cut the electricity clean out— he has, or someone has, anyway.

The "study" is just one of the rooms with enchanted names like that; beside it is "father's library" with more dust and fewer books than any I ever saw. And upstairs there is "mother's bedroom" and "Aunt Annie's room," though they're both dead these thirty years. Similarly on the ground floor there is still the "butler's pantry," with fifty niches for fifty bottles that are not there, nor any butler since the time when "father" gave a dinner to the prime minister, while Jones and I were still at Upper Canada. Jones said the prime minister shook hands with him and said some Latin. So!— a house like that— eh, what? With beautiful palings and lovely trees and a butler and a prime minister, and a library full of law books, who wouldn't be proud of it? No wonder it was enchanted. So it is for Bess, too— or at least, because of Jones and the others.

As a matter of fact the old room looked pretty cheery and comfortable when Jones got a good fire going in the grate. It seems he's burning some of the old law books from the cupboard under the library shelves. They're better than soft

coal, it seems, less dust and steadier heat. No coal has come to the house, in fact, since it stopped coming. The books are not the ones father valued. He's just burning the Appendix to the *Journals* of the Legislative Assembly of Canada. Father always meant to burn those anyway and Jones only kept them because he was sure they must be darned good reading if a feller ever got down to them. It seems that he never got down to them— or round to them— I forget which way you get at *Journals*. Anyway they burn well. Jones is still only at the year 1857 and they go clear to Confederation. How's that, eh? That'll last clean to April. And anyway "grandfather" got them all for nothing. Did Jones ever tell you (oh, yes, he must have) how his grandfather moved the second reading of the Pickerel Fisheries Bill and what Sir John A. said?

...Anyway it was pretty comfortable in front of the fire and when Jones said, "I'm sorry I haven't a drop of—," why, there! I had a whole flask of it that one of the boys had shoved into my pocket at the club for Jones. As to soda... it transpired at once that in "father's" time no one drank it; they said it spoiled good liquor... Well, here's luck, eh?

So, to begin talk, I asked Jones where they had been.

"Over at the University at a lecture," said Jones. "Wonderful stuff! Why weren't you there?"

"I didn't know there was one. Many people there?"

"Oh, yes," he said, "quite a good crowd. It's queer, you know, people don't seem to know about all these lectures over at the college... wonderful stuff, too... and free, mind you, nothing to pay to hear lectures that are mighty well worth it, and more. What was that one about that we were at last week, Bess?"

"Palaeontology," Bess said, looking up from her knitting in the lamplight— like that, just "palaeontology." Bess never wastes words. She lets Jones talk.

"Oh, yes, palaeontology; it means the science of fish; he showed one in a rock. And, do you know, there were only eleven people there, counting Bess; she wasn't exactly *there*, but she came right to the door and then, while I was in, she went over to Mrs. McGinnis's— the professor's wife. It's like that over there; it's funny; often quite a good crowd almost up to the door, and then a lot break away."

"And what about tonight?" I asked. "Oh, tonight was fine, let me see— counting Bess— she was at the Peterson's— there were twenty-six. Of course it was a subject that would draw, it was on Taxation, the Shifting of Taxation. It was wonderful stuff, a marvellous lecturer."

"A good delivery?" I asked.

"Fine," Jones said, "except his voice— but what I mean is, it was clear over my head, great stuff— in fact I couldn't follow it at all, except some stuff he put on the blackboard. He took a tax and turned it into a line, a curve— and you could watch it get closer and closer to a line and yet never touch it."

"Is that what shifted the tax?"

"I didn't quite catch on to the shifting," Jones said. "It seems, or at least the professor said, that all taxes keep shifting on to the consumer— they heap right up on him till he gets a marginal— now, what did he call it?— oh, yes, a marginal satisfaction, and stops consuming altogether. Wait till I get some more water."

Jones took the jug and started off down stairs with it, stumbling and half stubbing his toe on the worn carpet as he moved off. Everything is worn and everything is wearing out in the Jones's enchanted castle. You see, as Jones says, why bother to put things in shape in the house till the two boys come home. While they're over there, things can stay as they are. Especially as Jones has got the time of their return worked out with great certainty. Eddie, being in the Air, one month after war ends— they'll come first— and John, who is in the artillery, say, a month later. That will give at least a month to have the whole place done over.

So while Jones was down stairs I asked, "Are the taxes paid, Bessie?"

She shook her head.

"Any coal?"

"Another week, anyway."

"There!" said Jones, "fill it up, and let me stir that fire and get another appendix. Here we are, 1859, Vol. I."

I thought that the subject of taxes might give me a start towards the cheque.

"Talking of taxes," I said with an attempt at jocularity, "I suppose you're like the rest of us, right up against it?"

"Oh, no," Jones said, "I'm fine! Right up to date. You see on this house I've always paid, if you understand, just once a year, that is last year for the year before and pay it the next year; this year, I've slipped back a year, but that's only three. I had a notice about it, but all very nice, you know, just something formal about selling the house, etc. But all very nice."

"And the income tax?"

"Ah, that's different. I was getting short there, quite a bit, in fact, well, several years, but this new Ruml plan will clean all that up. Did I tell you?" Jones continued. "I've sent in a plan myself to Ottawa suggesting methods of throwing back taxes forward... in fact, that is what I wanted this shifting stuff for..."

"What have they done about it?" I inquired.

"Fine," Jones said. "Answered straight back, no delay... Referred to File XXOO46 in case I wanted to write further... think of the trouble they take, assigning me a personal number like that. And more than that— it seems that the department are going to give my plan every consideration; they said so; they shouldn't really do so much as that. However, if it goes through, it shifts my income tax clear away even without the new Ruml plan; so between the two, I'm in easy street."

"How about your own personal finance?" I said, still feeling for an opening.

"Don't owe a cent..."

"I thought you had a mortgage?" I said.

"Oh, yes," he answered, "there's the mortgage. You see, a house like this, as they all told me, carries a fine mortgage— they say, nearly as much as the place is worth. But I never count the mortgage as it is a fixed item. I meant that we have no debts."

"We owe the *bills*..." Bess said, still knitting.

"Ah, the bills," Jones answered. "I don't mean *bills*. I was talking of *debts*. The bills—"

"The grocer—" said Bess— "two years."

"You'd hardly count the grocer's account as a bill," said Jones. "Of course, I am not counting things like the grocer and the coal and that; and I must say they've all been awfully decent about it. Why, the coal man the other day, the head man, came right up himself to ask if there was anything I could suggest, and when I said I couldn't he said he couldn't... Then of course some of these bills are not new ones at all— they're old bills."

"The doctor's account," said Bess, "goes back to when the boys were at school."

"Exactly," said Jones. "You'd hardly count that, especially with the doctor an old friend. Just now, of course, things are a little muddled, I'm really just waiting till, well, till the boys are back. Everything will all come right then; won't it, Bess?"

"Everything," Bess said, and went on knitting.

"As a matter of fact," Jones continued, "I got, or rather Bess did, a most comfortable little windfall a month ago— money paid out of the remains of her mother's estate— you'd forgotten all about it, eh, Bess? But perhaps, you heard of it?"

"No," I answered. Nor had I, or not since I gave the cheque to Bess at the back door a month ago.

On a pretext of Jones's foot, I let Bess show me out. Down below at the door, I gave her the cheque.

"This," I said, "is from the estate."

She may even have believed me; after all, enchantment is enchantment.

9: The Sin of Witchcraft

Gilbert Frankau
1884-1952
The Story-Teller, Feb 1923

"RATHER a commonplace house, isn't it!"

"It's a very well-built house, Sir George."

"A bit big, too, for a bachelor."

"Let us hope you will not always remain a bachelor, Sir George;" and the aristocratic house-agent smiled at his aristocratic client across the mahogany desk of Messrs Graysworth's private office. He was confident, assured, with a comfortable sense of having achieved something in his day's work.

Sir George Grandison, you see, was not only a baronet and a rich baronet, but a baronet who happened, at thirty-five, to be the unmated lion of London's first real post-war Season. The newspapers were full of "New Guinea Grandison." Only that morning Mr. Graysworth had seen in the most prominent position of London's most prominent daily a photograph which reproduced with curious accuracy the lean countenance, the big nose, the close-cropped, slightly curly, slightly faded brown hair, the clean-shaven lips and the gray-green eyes whose unfathomable pupils were even now inspecting him. Only that morning Mr. Graysworth had read, half-scoffing and half-believing, some very strange tales of "New Guinea Grandison's" fifteen years of exile in those mysterious islands of the Arafura Sea, where apparently black magic still flourished and the witch-doctor led a prosperous if evil-smelling existence.

"I suppose the newspaper chaps made most of that up themselves," thought Mr. Graysworth; and, dismissing black magic from his mind, went on: "Perhaps you'd like to have another look over the place, Sir George. Honestly, it's one of the best little properties we have on our books at the present."

"Tell me again, how much did you say you wanted for it?"

"Our client," Mr. Graysworth toyed with his walrus moustache, "is asking eight thousand for the twenty-two years lease at three hundred and twenty per annum."

"That's rather stiff, isn't it?"

"I don't think so, Sir George. You must remember the state of the market. And then— there's not a penny needs spending on it. Believe me, Sir George," enthusiastically, "if you wanted to do those decorations and put in that panelling today, it would cost you—"

"Not quite eight thousand, surely?" Mr. Graysworth's client smiled, a slow enigmatic smile which told Mr. Graysworth little or nothing of his intentions towards 18a, Curzon Street. Yet after a little further persuasion, he consented to

inspect the property again, stipulating only that he should inspect it unaccompanied.

"I think I ought to tell you, Sir George," said Mr. Graysworth, handing over the key as they parted, "that we have already had an offer, quite a good offer, though unfortunately our client has not seen his way to accept it."

GEORGE Grandison, as he walked slowly through Berkeley Square and slowly along Lansdowne Passage into Curzon Street, felt more of a schoolboy back for the holidays than a Rip Van Winkle returned after fifteen years' exile. Much of London had changed (for the worse, it seemed to him) but Mayfair, thank the Lord, was still Mayfair. There was something solid, something eminently sane about Mayfair. And he, George Grandison, had need of the solid and the sane after all those fantastic and unbridled years when— as he now realized looking back on them— he had lived almost as a savage among the savages of Papua.

Thank the Lord he need never go back to Papua; never again risk his life and health in the pursuit of an orchid for a millionaire's hothouse or a butterfly for a collector-maniac's specimen-case. Since his cousin's unexpected death and his unexpected inheritance of a title and a fortune, all that and all those other uncannier experiences of which he had given but a hint to the news-greedy reporters, lay behind him. "I'll settle down," he thought. "I'll buy this house or some other. I'll marry a white woman and forget...."

Funny that the house-agent chap should have guessed his matrimonial intention. Somehow it reminded him— just when he least wanted to be reminded— of Ka-lu, the witch-doctor, of old, evil-smelling Ka-lu in whose hut he had learned the black magic of the Papuans....

"Pah!" scoffed George Grandison. "Pah! Black magic!" Yet even scoffing he shivered, as men recollecting nightmares shiver.

Then, deliberately, he put Papua and all that Papua stood for out of mind, and strode— a tall figure in his ultra-civilized garb— along Curzon Street till he came to the double brick-front and the mahogany door of No. 18a.

A full week had passed since his last inspection, but his memory of the place, despite all the other houses he had seen, remained accurate enough, so that, even before he entered, he could see, in his mind's eye, each bare room and each twist of the uncarpeted stairs.

"Thank God it's been modernized," he thought as he took the Yale key from his waistcoat pocket, and, letting himself into the square lounge hall, closed the mahogany front-door behind him. Compared with the gloomy, rat-infested residences he had visited during the past week, this well-plumbed, well-panelled, well-parquetried house satisfied, as Mayfair satisfied, his craving for the solid and the sane; and as he climbed the uncreaking staircase so as to begin his inspection in the pleasantly-papered servants' rooms and end it in the white-

tiled basement, Grandison felt himself more and more disposed to buy. Here, perhaps, one could wipe out the past; here, in the arms of some clear-eyed white woman, forget the unbridled years. Here, perhaps, the happy prattle of one's own children would banish from one's ears the cries of that other child— the brown baby whom old Ka-lu's knife....

SHIVERING again, George Grandison recovered his self-control. "The past's dead," he said to himself; "*dead*;" and continued his inspection.

"Ripping nurseries those three rooms would make," he decided descending to the third floor. "Good bathroom, too. Nothing like plenty of bathrooms."

There were more bathrooms, two of them, between the two luxurious bedrooms on the second floor; and on the first, a double drawing-room with embrasured windows through which the sunshine of a London May came streaming to dispel the momentary darkness which had clouded Grandison's mind.

A window-seat furnished each of the three embrasures, and seating himself in the centre one, he fell into a day-dream— that same day-dream which had been haunting him ever since the last vague blue of Port Moresby faded to nothingness beyond the steamer-wake, and he could thank God for his deliverance. He dreamed him a woman, a dark-haired, vivid, vital white woman. He dreamed her in that very room.

Still day-dreaming, Grandison rose from the window-seat and made his way downstairs. Oh, but it was good, good to know himself back in England, to know his oath as yet unbroken, to know himself safe, safe at last....

Day-dreaming no longer, yet sentient in every conscious fibre of him that this was the house of his dreams, he entered the dining-room and closed the door of it behind him.

Immediately, as though in confirmation of the secret hopes with which the place had inspired him, his nostrils grew conscious of a perfume, a vague indefinable perfume which hovered, like the wraith of his day-dream in the air. The perfume pleased him— as the red marble chimneypiece pleased, and the pale splendour of the figured cedar and the fretted ceiling and the low embrasured windows. "Jolly scent!" he thought. "I wonder if it's anything to do with the wood they've used for those panels." Then, smiling at his own obtuseness, he discovered the origin of the perfume— a tiny lace handkerchief which lay, obviously dropped from some feminine reticule, almost in the centre of the polished floor.

George Grandison picked up the handkerchief, and thrust it absent-mindedly into the lapel-pocket of his morning coat. Now, once more, day-dreams haunted him.

Till gradually day-dreams faded from his mind and he saw a vision.

Once more he was back in Papua. Once more he sat at the feet of Ka-lu, the witch-doctor. "Have no fear," said Ka-lu. "I, even I, will teach you that secret which the foolish gods of the white man withhold from their worshippers' eyes. You shall be even as the gods themselves— prescient of the future."

GRADUALLY as it had come, the vision faded. Yet the temptation of the vision, that same temptation to which Grandison had yielded once and only once in the dark unbridled years, remained. He yearned to look beyond the veil, to see what fate this house might hold for him.

Soon he was muttering to himself, muttering as old Ka-lu had taught him to mutter. "By the knife!" he muttered. "By the knife and the innocent blood."

Presently he became aware of the Power. The Power had not deserted him. He was wise still, wise with the black magic of the Papuans.

And now his eyes, inward-turning, saw Woman-with-a-Broom, who sweeps away the dust from mortal vision; and now he saw that Void-of-Thought which is Mirror-of-Life; and now the Specks, those protoplasmic Specks which have neither form nor shape nor colour, shewed in the Mirror; and now, slowly, Dance-of-the-Specks began; and now, slowly, the Specks took form; and now, slowly, they took colour, that first colour which is the colour of blood; and now, as the glass slides in the slowly-turned kaleidoscope, the Specks slid each in each, till the Picture, even that Picture which is forbidden, was complete.

There were two figures, a man's and a woman's, in the picture. The figures sat, obviously dining, at a small rectangular table; and though not even Grandison's inward eye could see their countenances— for the woman's head was averted and the man had his back to him, their bodies, the man's in his black dinner-jacket and the woman's in its low-bosomed scarlet frock, were sharper than any picture he had ever seen in Papua. Their hands, too, he could see— transparent flesh-colour against the dark of the Mirror— the woman's quiet on her knee, and the man's right hand moving.

Very slowly, very cautiously, the man's right hand moved— from his knee to the pocket of his dinner-jacket— from the pocket of his dinner-jacket to the level of the table. Then, more cautious than ever, it lifted from table-level . . . and horror took Grandison by the throat.

HE CALLED on Woman-with-a-Broom to clear Mirror-of-Life, but Woman-with-a-Broom would not come. The hand— the flat-thumbed hand with the sparse hairs shewing black on its lower finger-joints— moved on; till it seemed to Grandison as though he could actually visualize between its thumb and forefinger, a pinch of that powdered death whose secret he had learned of old Ka-lu. Then, as flat thumb and hairy forefinger hung suspended over the glass of blood-red wine whereto the woman in the blood-red frock had not yet set her

lips, he heard his own voice calling, calling desperately out of vast silences, on Woman-with-a-Broom that she should break Mirror-of-Life and give him back unbroken the oath he had sworn to God. But Woman-with-a-Broom would not break Mirror-of-Life, and shuddering as men shudder in ague, Grandison saw flat thumb and hairy forefinger open; saw the white of the powdered death dissolve to ruby in the blood-red of the wine.

The face of the man who, some five minutes later, tottered out into Curzon Street was no longer the face of the morning's photograph, but the face of one who, tottering down the bamboo ladder of Ka-lu's hut, had muttered to himself: "Sin! The sin of witchcraft! May God punish me if ever, even in thought, I spill the innocent blood again."

SOME fortnight later, Sir George Grandison, stepping into his new limousine at the Embankment entrance of the Savoy Hotel, said to his new chauffeur in his usual deliberate voice: "One hundred and thirteen Chesterfield Street. And there's no hurry."

He thought, as the car purred slowly up the Embankment— for the lion of the London Season, despite all Mr. Graysworth's endeavours, was still houseless— "I don't think I care for hotels. Even the best of them isn't a home;" and so thinking, remembered for the first time in three hectic over-social days the dining-room of No. 18a, Curzon Street. What a fool he had been not to have taken that place. As if the black magic ran in Mayfair! As if anything but self-hypnosis— most ordinary of mental processes to the imaginative— could have been cause of that curious picture he had seen.

The car purred on till it made Piccadilly, and, swinging right-handed out of Piccadilly along the wall of Lansdowne House, Curzon Street. Passing 18a, Sir George saw that Graysworth's "To Let" board still jutted above the mahogany door. "I'll go and see them tomorrow," he decided; and a few moments later, shaking hands with his mild-eyed, middle-aged, pearl-roped hostess, dismissed the matter temporarily from his thoughts.

"You're taking my most eligible girl down to dinner," murmured the hand-shaker. "Alix Lawley. Such a curious creature. You'll like her, though. Most men," Lady Marchmont grinned matchmakingly, "fall in love with her at first sight. But perhaps," Lady Marchmont grinned maliciously, "that's only because her grandmother's just left her another fortune."

Sir George Grandison, however, did not fall in love with Alix Lawley at first sight. If anything, she repelled him. He found her too tall, almost his own height; too Oriental, almost like a Jewish girl painted by Sargent. She was Jewish, too, in her lack of personal reticence.

All the same, her dinner-prattle amused him. He even experienced a certain vague disappointment when she told him over the fish that she was engaged,—

"at least practically engaged" to be married. He asked her chaffingly to tell him the name of the happy man; but before she could answer, his left-hand neighbour, the gray-haired principal of a famous girls' school, snatched at a conversational pause and started in to enlighten him about the personalities of their fellow-guests.

THE DINNER-PARTY, a round dozen, contained at least eight "celebrities;" all of whom Mrs. Winterton biographed at such length that Alix Lawley's, "It's unkind of you to monopolize Sir George, Auntie, when you know how I was looking forward to meeting him" came as a positive relief to Grandison.

"But why did you want to meet *me*, Miss Lawley?" he countered. "As far as I can gather from your aunt, I'm the least interesting person at the table by a long chalk."

"Not to *me*." The girl smiled enigmatically. "You see, *I* believe, really do believe— in the supernatural."

To Grandison, the words were a commonplace of his social existence. He had heard them in a hundred drawing-rooms. But the enigma of the girl's smile fascinated him. He began to see her as beautiful, most desirably beautiful. The shoulders under her white frock were exquisite, and her hand, as she reached forward to take an almond from the silver dish, thrilled him with its sensuous delicacy.

"There's nothing supernatural about orchid-coping or butterfly-coping," he smiled back. "It's a very ordinary business, I assure you."

"Never mind the butterflies and the orchids." She lowered her voice conspiratorially. "Tell me about the witch-doctors. I'm sure they're too wonderful for words."

The sensuous hand moved away from the almond-dish and down to the bag on the girl's lap. "I always steal Lady Marchmont's almonds when I come to dinner with her," she explained roguishly.

As the bag opened, George Grandison's keen nostrils were aware ever so faintly of its perfume. The perfume attracted him, even as the girl had begun to attract; but in that surcharged atmosphere of rich food and idle chatter, it stirred no recollection in his mind. He was aware of it only in connection with Alix— as a mere *nuance* which contributed its tiny quota to the sensuous appeal of her dark-haired, vivid, vital personality. "Do tell me about the witch-doctors," she pleaded again.

HE YIELDED, rather less against the grain than was usual with him, to her persuasions, and gave her, half in jest and half in earnest, a *resumé* of those few fairy-tales with which he had stalled off the reporters. Watching her while she listened— those eyes gray-green as his own, those red lips half-parted in

breathless expectation, those white shoulders and the hint of draped bosom thereunder— he felt the vague disappointment he had experienced when she first confided her engagement to him growing and growing... Till, subconsciously at first, then consciously, all the savage in him— all those instincts to which he had given rein during those fifteen years spent out of sight, almost out of thought of white women— leaped to new life.

"And do you really believe— " she began.

"In black magic? Of course not." Abruptly Grandison broke off his narrative and asked, in a voice which even in his own ears sounded strangely moved: "Tell me— this engagement of yours— is it definite?"

The girl, one eye on her aunt, who was once more plunged in informatory gossip, seemed to perpend his question for quite a while before answering, almost in a whisper: "Of course it's definite. Though my family," with another glance at Mrs. Winterton, "are terribly against it."

"Why?"

"Oh," casually, "various reasons. Charlie's a widower, you see, and his first wife—" She bit off the sentence and went on: "The family will *have* to give in now, because Charlie's bought a new house."

"AND YOU'RE going to marry a man because of his house?" Grandison's tone was still abrupt.

"Rather!" Was he deluding himself, or did the tiniest cloud of doubt in Alix's eyes belie the certainty in Alix's voice? "Rather!" The tiny cloud, if cloud it had been, passed from the gray-green pupils of her eyes as she met his abruptness with banter. "It's such a topping house, you see. The sort of house any woman would sell her soul for. Charlie spotted it nearly a month ago when it first came into the market. We went to see it together. The people were asking a frightful price— people do ask frightful prices for anything decent nowadays, don't they? However, I told Charlie if he wanted to marry me he must make an offer for it at once."

"And the people accepted his offer?"

"Oh, no. Apparently somebody else was after the place, and they thought they'd get a better price. Thank goodness, though, the other man went off. He must have gone off, because Charlie had a letter from the agents this morning. I'm tremendously bucked about it. Houses in Mayfair are so frightfully difficult to get, and I've always wanted to live in Curzon Street."

"Curzon Street?" queried Grandison, and his voice was abrupter than ever. "May I ask what number in Curzon street?"

"It's 18a," replied the girl. "I oughtn't to tell you, really, because Charlie hasn't paid his deposit yet, and you might go and steal it from him."

Before Grandison's astonishment could frame reply, Lady Marchmont rose from the table; and Alix, following her hostess' example, dropped her handbag. Stooping to recover it for her, his nostrils were again aware of the perfume.

"Thanks ever so much," she smiled, reaching out for the silk-and-tortoiseshell trinket.

Then their fingers touched, and recollection, like a flood long pent, submerged Grandison's social consciousness. For the perfume was the perfume of the Curzon Street dining-room; and the hand, the sensuous hand of Alix Lawley, was the hand of the woman in the Picture....

"BUT THAT'S impossible," said Grandison savagely to his savage mind. "That's utterly impossible. The perfume may be the same. It may even have been her handkerchief. Why not? She admitted she went to the house with her fiancé. But her hand... No. It couldn't have been her hand...." For many minutes— his manners and his fellow-men alike forgotten— he pulled furiously at the huge cigar which Lady Marchmont's butler had pressed on him. The cigar-smoke began to hypnotize him, as the smoke of Ka-lu's fires had once hypnotized. Vaguely, in the haze of it, hovered some personal premonition. Once more he grew conscious of power. Once more he saw Woman-with-a-Broom. But this time, remembering his oath, he bade Woman-with-a-Broom begone....

A dance was to be sequel to the dinner; and soon Lady Marchmont's butler reappears to remind the cigar-smokers that "Her Ladyship hoped they wouldn't be too long over their Port, as the ball was just beginning."

Moodily, that George Grandison who had once followed Ka-lu, the witch doctor, to where, in the depths of the jungle, the sorcerers of all Papua foregathered to dance that "Dance of Innocent Blood" which only one white man has ever seen, followed his fellow-guests up the great staircase. Moodily, he eluded his hostess. Moodily, he made his way to the far doorway of the ballroom.

The glare of the place blinded him. The thumping music deafened his ears. Through that thumping music he could hear himself saying to himself: "The whole thing's absurd. I'm not in Papua. The black magic of the Papuans doesn't run in London."

THE MUSIC stopped and with the comparative silence of its stopping, Grandison regained control of his brain. Not supernatural magic, but perfectly natural sequence of events had brought it about that he should make the acquaintance of the girl who had dropped her handkerchief in the dining-room of 18a, Curzon Street. Alix Lawley's sensuous hand could not be the same hand which he had seen in the auto-hypnotic Picture.

Curiously, he began to speculate about Alix Lawley— about her engagement. Engagements, in post-war London, meant little enough. There was the house though. No man in his senses would buy a house on the off-chance of a girl marrying him. And suddenly, mindful of his decision as he drove down Curzon Street, mindful of that sensuousness which was Alix Lawley's supreme attraction, he thought: "*My* house! *My* woman! Whoever the man is, he shan't have either of them." Now all the unreined instincts, furiously awake, drove him to prowl the ballroom in search of Alix.

The girl, however, had disappeared; and soon the music, recommencing, brought his prowling to a standstill. "What the devil can have happened to her?" he muttered, as his eyes, roaming vainly among the crowd, found only a bewilderment of fox-trotting figures.

Somehow, those fox-trotting figures fascinated Grandison. Somehow they reminded him of another dance— the "Death Dance" of the Papuans, wherefrom a man singled out the enemy who had robbed him of hut and woman....

Up and down the ballroom flickered the fox-trotting figures; up and down the ballroom, following their every movement, flickered the grey-green eyes of George Grandison; till at last, flickering no longer, they concentrated— concentrated on his enemy.

His enemy— Alix at his side— had just entered the ballroom. Grandison watched the girl yield herself to his enemy's arms; watched his enemy's gloveless hand spread-eagle below the glimmer of her shoulders as the dance took them.

"Looking on, Sir George?" commented a voice— Mrs. Winterton's— at his elbow.

"Yes. Looking on." Grandison's eyes never moved.

"One sees most of the game that way, doesn't one?"

"So they say."

"You're not a dancing man yourself?"

"No. I'm afraid I'm not civilized enough for this kind of dancing. Tell me,"— Grandison's tone was tense, for now his enemy drew closer and closer to where he stood— "who's the man dancing with your niece?"

"Oh, that," the biographer of celebrities burst to chatter; "that's Charlie Smallwood. Alix has been threatening to marry him for months. The family's against it, of course; and small wonder after the way he treated his wife. Poor Irene! Perhaps it was as well she died when she did. He treated her vilely, vilely—" But when— the beckoning Alix safely out of earshot— Mrs. Winterton turned to continue her gossip, Sir George Grandison had disappeared.

For the fingers of Sir George Grandison's enemy— those fingers spread-eagled below the glimmer of Alix Lawley's shoulders— were sparse-haired as

the fingers of that hand which had dropped the powdered death at 18a, Curzon Street!

AT TWENTY minutes past eleven on the night of Lady Marchmont's dinner-dance, Sir George Grandison, staggering like a drunken man, let himself into his sitting-room at the Savoy Hotel, and sank heavily to a chair. Mrs. Winterton's last words still rang in his ears. His eyes still saw Alix Lawley and those sparse-haired fingers spread-eagled below the glimmer of Alix Lawley's shoulders. "My God!" he muttered. "My God!" For a long while consecutive thought failed him. His brain felt dazed as though from the blow of the executioner's club. Escaping from Papua, he had thought to keep the oath sworn, to escape from the black magic, from sorcery, and witchcraft and from all those evil, abnormal things which God in His wisdom banishes to the far places of the earth. But for him, apparently, there was no escape. Once spilt, the Innocent Blood might not be unspilt. Once learned, the black magic of Papua remained with a man. "The sin of witchcraft," he muttered. "I broke my oath to the white man's God. In thought, I spilt me the Innocent Blood. I made me the Mirror. I looked upon the Picture, and the Picture has shewn me that Alix must die. That is my punishment— the punishment I asked of the white man's God if I broke faith with Him."

For now, definitely, George Grandison's dazed soul knew that every fibre in his body desired Alix Lawley for wife.

Still staggering, he rose to his feet and making for the bedroom, undressed. Sleep he knew, would be impossible. Yet the normal action of taking off clothes helped ever so little to clarify his dazed mind.

Gradually his brain, ousting superstition, began to reassert itself. There must be some explanation, some perfectly natural explanation of the auto-hypnotic picture he had seen in Curzon Street, of the strange events which had followed on that seeing. He argued with himself, desperately, savagely, that all men's hands were cast in more or less the same mould; that his own, for instance, though hairless, were almost as flat-thumbed as the hand in the Picture. The argument comforted him; and he began to search for the handkerchief. But the handkerchief, as is the habit of handkerchiefs, had disappeared, and strive as he might, Grandison could not find it. "It *must* have been hers, though," he muttered, returning in his pyjamas to the sitting-room.

But at that he seemed to smell the perfume again, and sheer desire for the girl's beauty took him in every fibre. Civilization and commonsense were torn from him. He saw red. All the unreined instincts of fifteen years blotted out the white man he was, leaving only the primitive he had been. This other, this enemy, must never possess that house of his coveting— must never possess Alix Lawley. Was it not fated— had not he, Ka-lu's pupil, seen it in the Mirror-of-Life

which cannot lie— that possessing Alix, this other, this enemy, would slay her with the powdered death?

And now, suddenly, as the girl's own words and the words of Mrs. Winterton echoed in his subconscious mind, it seemed to Grandison as though a great light shone upon the Future. Not for nothing had he spilt the Innocent Blood! Not for nothing had he dared the forbidden things! Not for nothing had the Woman-with-a-Broom swept away that dust with which the gods of the white men seek to blind their meat-fed eyes. Not for nothing had he seen in the Picture that Certainty which is forbidden.

Surely the meaning of the Picture was plain. Surely, it was clear that even as Ka-lu had promised he, George Grandison, was Master of the Days-to-Come. Surely his enemy, that enemy who had plotted to rob him of his hut and his woman would be foiled in his plotting. Surely, not the black magic of the Papuans but the white magic of an Infinite Wisdom had enabled him to foresee the Future...

HER LADYSHIP will be a quarter-of-an-hour late for dinner, Sir George. She says will you please wait?" Alix's maid, the message given, disappeared, leaving her master alone in the book-shelved library of 18a, Curzon Street. "Those ridiculous seances," he thought.

Though scarcely a year had gone by since those delirious weeks whose culmination had been Grandison's capture of the girl now his wife from his enemy, he already knew— as he sat there black-jacketed for the evening meal— that one day his passion for her would wane; foresaw, moreover, with the subconscious foreknowledge of jealousy, that when that day came, some other man would win her from him, even as he had won her from Smallwood....

Yet it was still good to remember that morning after Lady Marchmont's dance when he had sought out the actual owner of 18a, Curzon Street and persuaded him, cheque-book in hand, to break off negotiations with the man Smallwood— that afternoon in Mrs. Winterton's severely furnished sitting-room when he had dangled before Alix's covetous eyes his ownership of the house for which she had admitted she "would sell her soul"— that evening when, all her feigned reluctances to break faith with his enemy abandoned, she had yielded her body to his arms and her mouth to his kisses.

How it maddened him to press that first triumphant kiss on the scarlet of her mouth, and feel every unbridled instinct in him leap in anticipation of her possession. How it had satisfied his madness to know her his— this white woman for whose sake, spilling the Innocent Blood, he had learned him the Power which decreed, as surely as Ka-lu himself, that she should be saved from the powdered death to be mistress of his house and mother of his children...

God, forsooth! Who was God? In those delirious weeks, he, George Grandison, had been his own god, Master of the Days-to-Come.

How came it, then, that now— now when Days-to-Come were Days-that-Are— now when his subconscious foreknowledge of jealousy most craved the Power— now when he would have sold his soul for certainty of the Future— mastery should have gone out of him? How came it that Alix had never borne him a child? that sometimes, waking in the night, it would seem to him as though there rang from out of those empty nurseries above the room where they slept together, the cries of that other child— the brown baby whom old Ka-lu's knife...

Those were the times when George Grandison shuddered to see the woman sleeping so quietly beside him; when the white glimmer of her shoulders, the dark glimmer of her hair, inspired once more that repulsion of which he had been momentarily conscious at their first meeting. Those were the times when hate and fear and the foreknowledge of jealousy made chaos of his mind; when, passion no longer blinding him, he knew contempt for this faith-breaking woman he had married; for this brainless fool who dabbled with parlour-magic as she dabbled with life, whose chatter crackled endlessly, as thorns crackle under a pot, of "Spiritualism" and "ectoplasmic chords" and "soul-photographs" and all those futile tricks with which fee'd mediums titillate the literary drawing-rooms of London.

"Those ridiculous seances," he thought again. "I wonder why the devil she wastes her time over such balderdash."

THE DINNER-GONG rumbling without broke the trend of Grandison's thought; and as the door of the library opened to reveal Alix, he forgot, as he always did forget, in the delirious ecstasy of her physical presence, all fear, all hatred, all foreknowledge of jealousy. His eyes still saw her as that woman whom, a year since, every fibre of him had desired to madness. Even as then, that vivid, vital personality, those red lips half-parted, those pale shoulders and the hint of draped bosom thereunder, thrilled every savage instinct to which he had given rein during fifteen years spent out of sight, almost out of thought, of white women.

Alix's frock was white as her bridal frock had been, its whiteness faintly redolent with the remembered perfume. Passionately George Grandison kissed her half-parted lips.

AND that mood was still on Sir George Grandison as he followed his wife out of the library, across the hall, and through the door the footman held open for them into the pale-panelled, bracket-lit radiance of the dining-room. It seemed to him as though the whole apartment had been fashioned to be shrine to that

vivid, vital beauty which was Alix's; as though no flowers save those perfumeless purple orchids which decked the dinner table could have so enhanced the glimmer of her shoulders; no background save the red marble of that chimneypiece so thrown into significance the jewelless bridal-white of her dinner-frock. His lips yearned to tell her these things, but the constraint of a civilized meal-time was on him. He ate swiftly and in silence, his eyes turning sideways to seek hers.

Alix, too, was unusually silent that night, so that it appeared to him as though she, even as he, were passion-conscious; as though her lips, even as his own, were fearful of betraying her secret thoughts before their serving-men.

But as the meal drew to its end, Alix broke the silence; and began to chatter, half in jest and half in earnest, about the afternoon's seance. "Really, George, it was quite thrilling. We all sat in a circle, holding hands. No lights of any sort— that's forbidden, you know."

"Forbidden?" Grandison, his eyes still devouring her beauty, spoke almost without thought.

"Rather! All sorts of things are forbidden. Two women, for instance, mustn't sit together. You have to have a man next you. That's what makes it so exciting."

At that, for the fraction of an instant, the foreknowledge of jealousy turned to actual suspicion in Grandison's mind. Never before had Alix admitted that in those seances which he held in such contempt certain things were "forbidden"; never before had he realized that those afternoons which took her away from him set her beside some other man— set her hand, that sensuous hand which, seen against the dark of the mahogany, was even now thrilling him, in another's.

The last of their serving-men brought coffee; put the Port-filled decanter between them, and withdrew. Now there was neither foreknowledge of jealousy nor any suspicion but only the yearning that Alix should admit her passion for him, in Grandison's mind.

"I wish you'd give up these seances," he said; and his voice, as he poured the wine into her glass, was hoarse with suppressed emotion.

"Why?" Alix blushed ever so faintly, but Grandison's passion-blinded eyes did not see.

"Because I hate the very thought of any other man touching you."

"But, my dear, that's ridiculous." Alix laughed as she spoke, but Grandison's ears, grown suddenly acute, caught a hint of furtiveness in her laughter.

"Ridiculous or not," he said abruptly, "I hate it, and I forbid it."

"You mustn't be too jealous of me, George." Again Alix laughed; and now, though the furtiveness had gone out of her laughter, her words roused all the passionate savage in her husband.

"Jealous? Of course, I'm jealous. Who wouldn't be jealous at the thought of his wife sitting hand-in-hand with strange men listening to the infernal balderdash of a medium?"

"It isn't balderdash, George. And the men aren't strangers. They're all friends."

"FRIENDS!" snarled Grandison. "And who are these men friends of yours? It's the first I've heard of them."

She did not answer; and he repeated his question. "These friends of yours— these men friends— who are they?"

"Oh, all sorts of people." Again Alix blushed, and this time his eyes fastened on her blushes.

"Don't prevaricate," he shot at her. "And don't lie to me. You say these men aren't strangers. Who are they then? I want to know their names and more particularly I want to know the name of the man you were with," the words hissed in Grandison's throats, "this afternoon."

For a long while, the woman made no answer; for a long while, all his present passion for that which she had been and yet was to him fighting all his foreknowledged jealousy of that which she might some day be to some other man, Grandison watched her. Once more he yearned for the Power, for that Power to which he had won by the spilling of Innocent Blood. If only Woman-with-a-Broom would sweep the dust from his mortal eyes and shew him Enemy-of-the-Future as she had shewn him Enemy-of-the-Past. But the Power had gone out of him; and he could only grope, grope blindly after that Certainty which is forbidden.

At last Alix spoke. "And if I won't tell you?"

"You *must* tell me."

"Very well, then, I will tell you. Only,"— she laughed for the third time, and now it seemed to him there could be no doubt her laughter were cloak of some guilty secret— "you mustn't make a fuss about it. You see," she was chattering now, and her chatter maddened him, "it never happened before, and if you don't approve, it shan't ever happen again. As a matter of fact, when I went to the seance this afternoon, I didn't even know that Charles was going to be there—"

"Charles? Charles Smallwood?" The words were a wolf's growls between Grandison's teeth.

"Yes. Charles Smallwood. You're not going to be angry about it, are you, George?"

As she spoke, Alix, feigning nonchalance, lifted her glass to her lips, so that the candlelight, shimmering through the ruby of the wine, shewed the white of her bridal frock as blood-red to her husband's staring eyes. Then, as she set

down the empty glass and averted her countenance to hide the blushes which she could feel hot in all her veins, some Power, some Evil Power against which he dared not fight, drew Grandison's eyes from her hand, white and sensuous and unmoving, to his own— to the flat-thumbed hand whose fingers already shewed, under the clenched pallor of their skin, a hint of those sparse hairs which he had seen in the Picture.

AND AT THAT very moment, crouched red-eyed over the smouldering centre-fire of a pile-built Papuan hut, Ka-lu, son of Ka-lu, listened to the chuckling wisdom of his father.

"Thus," chuckled Ka-lu, father of Ka-lu, fingering the blood-stained knife at his belt, "thus by the spilling of blood art thou Master of the Days-to-Come. Yet remember, remember always— for this is the secret of secrets— that he who spills the Innocent Blood to look upon Mirror-of-Life, sees in that Mirror no man's future save his own."

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10: The Thing on the Roof

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

Weird Tales Feb 1932.

They lumber through the night
With their elephantine tread;
I shudder in affright
As I cower in my bed.

They lift colossal wings
On the high gable roofs
Which tremble to the trample
Of their mastodonic hoofs.

—Justin Geoffrey: *Out of the Old Land*.

LET ME BEGIN by saying that I was surprized when Tussmann called on me. We had never been close friends; the man's mercenary instincts repelled me; and since our bitter controversy of three years before, when he attempted to discredit my *Evidences of Nahua Culture in Yucatan*, which was the result of years of careful research, our relations had been anything but cordial. However, I received him and found his manner nasty and abrupt, but rather abstracted, as if his dislike for me had been thrust aside in some driving passion that had hold of him.

His errand was quickly stated. He wished my aid in obtaining a volume in the first edition of Von Junzt's *Nameless Cults*— the edition known as the *Black Book*, not from its color, but because of its dark contents. He might almost as well have asked me for the original Greek translation of the *Necronomicon*. Though since my return from Yucatan I had devoted practically all my time to my avocation of book collecting, I had not stumbled on to any hint that the book in the Düsseldorf edition was still in existence.

A word as to this rare work. Its extreme ambiguity in spots, coupled with its incredible subject matter, has caused it long to be regarded as the ravings of a maniac and the author was damned with the brand of insanity. But the fact remains that much of his assertions are unanswerable, and that he spent the full forty-five years of his life prying into strange places and discovering secret and abysmal things. Not a great many volumes were printed in the first edition and many of these were burned by their frightened owners when Von Junzt was found strangled in a mysterious manner, in his barred and bolted chamber one night in 1840, six months after he had returned from a mysterious journey to Mongolia.

Five years later a London printer, one Bridewall, pirated the work, and issued a cheap translation for sensational effect, full of grotesque wood-cuts, and riddled with misspellings, faulty translations and the usual errors of a cheap and unscholarly printing. This still further discredited the original work, and publishers and public forgot about the book until 1909 when the Golden Goblin Press of New York brought out an edition.

Their production was so carefully expurgated that fully a fourth of the original matter was cut out; the book was handsomely bound and decorated with the exquisite and weirdly imaginative illustrations of Diego Vasquez. The edition was intended for popular consumption but the artistic instinct of the publishers defeated that end, since the cost of issuing the book was so great that they were forced to cite it at a prohibitive price.

I was explaining all this to Tussmann when he interrupted bruskly to say that he was not utterly ignorant in such matters. One of the Golden Goblin books ornamented his library, he said, and it was in it that he found a certain line which aroused his interest. If I could procure him a copy of the original 1839 edition, he would make it worth my while; knowing, he added, that it would be useless to offer me money, he would, instead, in return for my trouble in his behalf, make a full retraction of his former accusations in regard to my Yucatan researches, and offer a complete apology in *The Scientific News*.

I will admit that I was astounded at this, and realized that if the matter meant so much to Tussmann that he was willing to make such concessions, it must indeed be of the utmost importance. I answered that I considered that I had sufficiently refuted his charges in the eyes of the world and had no desire to put him in a humiliating position, but that I would make the utmost efforts to procure him what he wanted.

He thanked me abruptly and took his leave, saying rather vaguely that he hoped to find a complete exposition of something in the *Black Book* which had evidently been slighted in the later edition.

I SET TO WORK, writing letters to friends, colleagues and book-dealers all over the world, and soon discovered that I had assumed a task of no small magnitude. Three months elapsed before my efforts were crowned with success, but at last, through the aid of Professor James Clement of Richmond, Virginia, I was able to obtain what I wished.

I notified Tussmann and he came to London by the next train. His eyes burned avidly as he gazed at the thick, dusty volume with its heavy leather covers and rusty iron hasps, and his fingers quivered with eagerness as he thumbed the time-yellowed pages.

And when he cried out fiercely and smashed his clenched fist down on the table I knew that he had found what he hunted.

"Listen!" he commanded, and he read to me a passage that spoke of an old, old temple in a Honduras jungle where a strange god was worshipped by an ancient tribe which became extinct before the coming of the Spaniards. And Tussmann read aloud of the mummy that had been, in life, the last high priest of that vanished people, and which now lay in a chamber hewn in the solid rock of the cliff against which the temple was built. About that mummy's withered neck was a copper chain, and on that chain a great red jewel carved in the form of a toad. This jewel was a key, Von Junzt went on to say, to the treasure of the temple which lay hidden in a subterranean crypt far below the temple's altar.

Tussmann's eyes blazed.

"I have seen that temple! I have stood before the altar. I have seen the sealed-up entrance of the chamber in which, the natives say, lies the mummy of the priest. It is a very curious temple, no more like the ruins of the prehistoric Indians than it is like the buildings of the modern Latin-Americans. The Indians in the vicinity disclaim any former connection with the place; they say that the people who built that temple were a different race from themselves, and were there when their own ancestors came into the country. I believe it to be a remnant of some long-vanished civilization which began to decay thousands of years before the Spaniards came.

"I would have liked to have broken into the sealed-up chamber, but I had neither the time nor the tools for the task. I was hurrying to the coast, having been wounded by an accidental gunshot in the foot, and I stumbled on to the place purely by chance.

"I have been planning to have another look at it, but circumstances have prevented— now I intend to let nothing stand in my way! By chance I came upon a passage in the Golden Goblin edition of this book, describing the temple. But that was all; the mummy was only briefly mentioned. Interested, I obtained one of Bridewall's translations but ran up against a blank wall of baffling blunders. By some irritating mischance the translator had even mistaken the location of the Temple of the Toad, as Von Junzt calls it, and has it in Guatemala instead of Honduras. The general description is faulty, but the jewel is mentioned and the fact that it is a 'key'. But a key to what, Bridewall's book does not state. I now felt that I was on the track of a real discovery, unless Von Junzt was, as many maintain, a madman. But that the man was actually in Honduras at one time is well attested, and no one could so vividly describe the temple— as he does in the *Black Book*— unless he had seen it himself. How he learned of the jewel is more than I can say. The Indians who told me of the mummy said nothing of any jewel. I can only believe that Von Junzt found his way into the sealed crypt somehow—the man had uncanny ways of learning hidden things.

"To the best of my knowledge only one other white man has seen the Temple of the Toad besides Von Junzt and myself— the Spanish traveller Juan

Gonzalles, who made a partial exploration of that country in 1793. He mentioned, briefly, a curious fane that differed from most Indian ruins, and spoke skeptically of a legend current among the natives that there was 'something unusual' hidden under the temple. I feel certain that he was referring to the Temple of the Toad.

"Tomorrow I sail for Central America. Keep the book; I have no more use for it. This time I am going fully prepared and I intend to find what is hidden in that temple, if I have to demolish it. It can be nothing less than a great store of gold! The Spaniards missed it, somehow; when they arrived in Central America, the Temple of the Toad was deserted; they were searching for living Indians from whom torture could wring gold; not for mummies of lost peoples. But I mean to have that treasure."

So saying Tussmann took his departure. I sat down and opened the book at the place where he had left off reading, and I sat until midnight, wrapt in Von Junzt's curious, wild and at times utterly vague expoundings. And I found pertaining to the Temple of the Toad certain things which disquieted me so much that the next morning I attempted to get in touch with Tussmann, only to find that he had already sailed.

SEVERAL MONTHS passed and then I received a letter from Tussmann, asking me to come and spend a few days with him at his estate in Sussex; he also requested me to bring the *Black Book* with me.

I arrived at Tussmann's rather isolated estate just after nightfall. He lived in almost feudal state, his great ivy-grown house and broad lawns surrounded by high stone walls. As I went up the hedge-bordered way from the gate to the house, I noted that the place had not been well kept in its master's absence. Weeds grew rank among the trees, almost choking out the grass. Among some unkempt bushes over against the outer wall, I heard what appeared to be a horse or an ox blundering and lumbering about. I distinctly heard the clink of its hoof on a stone.

A servant who eyed me suspiciously admitted me and I found Tussmann pacing to and fro in his study like a caged lion. His giant frame was leaner, harder than when I had last seen him; his face was bronzed by a tropic sun. There were more and harsher lines in his strong face and his eyes burned more intensely than ever. A smoldering, baffled anger seemed to underlie his manner.

"Well, Tussmann," I greeted him, "what success? Did you find the gold?"

"I found not an ounce of gold," he growled. "The whole thing was a hoax—well, not all of it. I broke into the sealed chamber and found the mummy—"

"And the jewel?" I exclaimed.

He drew something from his pocket and handed it to me.

I gazed curiously at the thing I held. It was a great jewel, clear and transparent as crystal, but of a sinister crimson, carved, as Von Junzt had declared, in the shape of a toad. I shuddered involuntarily; the image was peculiarly repulsive. I turned my attention to the heavy and curiously wrought copper chain which supported it.

"What are these characters carved on the chain?" I asked curiously.

"I can not say," Tussmann replied. "I had thought perhaps you might know. I find a faint resemblance between them and certain partly defaced hieroglyphics on a monolith known as the Black Stone in the mountains of Hungary. I have been unable to decipher them."

"Tell me of your trip," I urged, and over our whisky-and-sodas he began, as if with a strange reluctance.

"I found the temple again with no great difficulty, though it lies in a lonely and little-frequented region. The temple is built against a sheer stone cliff in a deserted valley unknown to maps and explorers. I would not endeavor to make an estimate of its antiquity, but it is built of a sort of unusually hard basalt, such as I have never seen anywhere else, and its extreme weathering suggests incredible age.

"Most of the columns which form its façade are in ruins, thrusting up shattered stumps from worn bases, like the scattered and broken teeth of some grinning hag. The outer walls are crumbling, but the inner walls and the columns which support such of the roof as remains intact, seem good for another thousand years, as well as the walls of the inner chamber.

"The main chamber is a large circular affair with a floor composed of great squares of stone. In the center stands the altar, merely a huge, round, curiously carved block of the same material. Directly behind the altar, in the solid stone cliff which forms the rear wall of the chamber, is the sealed and hewn-out chamber wherein lay the mummy of the temple's last priest.

"I broke into the crypt with not too much difficulty and found the mummy exactly as is stated in the *Black Book*. Though it was in a remarkable state of preservation, I was unable to classify it. The withered features and general contour of the skull suggested certain degraded and mongrel peoples of lower Egypt, and I feel certain that the priest was a member of a race more akin to the Caucasian than the Indian. Beyond this, I can not make any positive statement.

"But the jewel was there, the chain looped about the dried-up neck."

From this point Tussmann's narrative became so vague that I had some difficulty in following him and wondered if the tropic sun had affected his mind. He had opened a hidden door in the altar somehow with the jewel— just how, he did not plainly say, and it struck me that he did not clearly understand himself the action of the jewel-key. But the opening of the secret door had had a bad effect on the hardy rogues in his employ. They had refused point-blank to

follow him through that gaping black opening which had appeared so mysteriously when the gem was touched to the altar.

Tussmann entered alone with his pistol and electric torch, finding a narrow stone stair that wound down into the bowels of the earth, apparently. He followed this and presently came into a broad corridor, in the blackness of which his tiny beam of light was almost engulfed. As he told this he spoke with strange annoyance of a toad which hopped ahead of him, just beyond the circle of light, all the time he was below ground.

Making his way along dank tunnels and stairways that were wells of solid blackness, he at last came to a heavy door fantastically carved, which he felt must be the crypt wherein was secreted the gold of the ancient worshippers. He pressed the toad-jewel against it at several places and finally the door gaped wide.

"And the treasure?" I broke in eagerly.

He laughed in savage self-mockery.

"There was no gold there, no precious gems— nothing"— he hesitated— "nothing that I could bring away."

Again his tale lapsed into vagueness. I gathered that he had left the temple rather hurriedly without searching any further for the supposed treasure. He had intended bringing the mummy away with him, he said, to present to some museum, but when he came up out of the pits, it could not be found and he believed that his men, in superstitious aversion to having such a companion on their road to the coast, had thrown it into some well or cavern.

"And so," he concluded, "I am in England again no richer than when I left."

"You have the jewel," I reminded him. "Surely it is valuable."

He eyed it without favor, but with a sort of fierce avidness almost obsessional.

"Would you say that it is a ruby?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I am unable to classify it."

"And I. But let me see the book."

HE SLOWLY TURNED the heavy pages, his lips moving as he read. Sometimes he shook his head as if puzzled, and I noticed him dwell long over a certain line.

"This man dipped so deeply into forbidden things," said he, "I can not wonder that his fate was so strange and mysterious. He must have had some foreboding of his end— here he warns men not to disturb sleeping things."

Tussmann seemed lost in thought for some moments.

"Aye, sleeping things," he muttered, "that seem dead, but only lie waiting for some blind fool to awake them— I should have read further in the *Black Book*—and I should have shut the door when I left the crypt— but I have the key and I'll keep it in spite of hell."

He roused himself from his reveries and was about to speak when he stopped short. From somewhere upstairs had come a peculiar sound.

"What was that?" He glared at me. I shook my head and he ran to the door and shouted for a servant. The man entered a few moments later and he was rather pale.

"You were upstairs?" growled Tussmann.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear anything?" asked Tussmann harshly and in a manner almost threatening and accusing.

"I did, sir," the man answered with a puzzled look on his face.

"What did you hear?" The question was fairly snarled.

"Well, sir," the man laughed apologetically, "you'll say I'm a bit off, I fear, but to tell you the truth, sir, it sounded like a horse stamping around on the roof!"

A blaze of absolute madness leaped into Tussmann's eyes.

"You fool!" he screamed. "Get out of here!" The man shrank back in amazement and Tussmann snatched up the gleaming toad-carved jewel.

"I've been a fool!" he raved. "I didn't read far enough— and I should have shut the door— but by heaven, the key is mine and I'll keep it in spite of man or devil."

And with these strange words he turned and fled upstairs. A moment later his door slammed heavily and a servant, knocking timidly, brought forth only a blasphemous order to retire and a luridly worded threat to shoot any one who tried to obtain entrance into the room.

Had it not been so late I would have left the house, for I was certain that Tussmann was stark mad. As it was, I retired to the room a frightened servant showed me, but I did not go to bed. I opened the pages of the *Black Book* at the place where Tussmann had been reading.

This much was evident, unless the man was utterly insane: he had stumbled upon something unexpected in the Temple of the Toad. Something unnatural about the opening of the altar door had frightened his men, and in the subterraneous crypt Tussmann had found *something* that he had not thought to find. And I believed that he had been followed from Central America, and that the reason for his persecution was the jewel he called the Key.

Seeking some clue in Von Junzt's volume, I read again of the Temple of the Toad, of the strange pre-Indian people who worshipped there, and of the huge, tittering, tentacled, hoofed monstrosity that they worshipped.

Tussmann had said that he had not read far enough when he had first seen the book. Puzzling over this cryptic phrase I came upon the line he had pored over— marked by his thumb nail. It seemed to me to be another of Von Junzt's many ambiguities, for it merely stated that a temple's god was the temple's

treasure. Then the dark implication of the hint struck me and cold sweat beaded my forehead.

The Key to the Treasure! And the temple's treasure was the temple's god! And sleeping Things might awaken on the opening of their prison door! I sprang up, unnerved by the intolerable suggestion, and at that moment something crashed in the stillness and the death-scream of a human being burst upon my ears.

In an instant I was out of the room, and as I dashed up the stairs I heard sounds that have made me doubt my sanity ever since. At Tussmann's door I halted, essaying with shaking hand to turn the knob. The door was locked, and as I hesitated I heard from within a hideous high-pitched tittering and then the disgusting squashy sound as if a great, jelly-like bulk was being forced through the window. The sound ceased and I could have sworn I heard a faint swish of gigantic wings. Then silence.

Gathering my shattered nerves, I broke down the door. A foul and overpowering stench billowed out like a yellow mist. Gasping in nausea I entered. The room was in ruins, but nothing was missing except that crimson toad-carved jewel Tussmann called the Key, and that was never found. A foul, unspeakable slime smeared the window-sill, and in the center of the room lay Tussmann, his head crushed and flattened; and on the red ruin of skull and face, the plain print of an enormous hoof.

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11: Only a Rumor

Douglas Newton
1884-1951
World's News (Sydney) 27 Dec 1941

HUMPING the cord-tied fibre suit-cases that have taken the place of the old runnage bag, *Callacantra*'s deck-hands came in a body through the seamen's entrance of the docks.

There was something about them that held Minnix's glance—a quietness that was almost sullenness.

They kept oddly bunched, instead of straggling in their usual hearty way across the rail tracks towards Ocean Water Quay 7. Creedy, the walking delegate of their Union, had got the blight too. He was walking a little way behind them; his face was sour as he watched them, and his eyes anxious.

Minnix drifted into step as Creedy drew level and asked: "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, nothing this time," the Trade Union man exploded. "*Callacantra*'s going down with all hands this trip— that's all! Adjectival lot of sprat-wits!" He pulled himself together as he realised who he was with. "Now, don't you go printing that in your newspaper, Mr. Minnix."

There was more bitterness than contempt in his voice, because he was a seaman himself, and he knew— as Minnix knew— that there was something uncanny in these rumors that arose out of nothing, as it were, and yet could send a wave of sheer fear throughout a port.

It was no good telling the men that the *Callacantra* had just completed her Lloyds survey, and that she would sail as sound an A1 ship as ever left the docks. The seaworthiness of a ship mattered nothing— there was always Act of God.

But since the rumor touched her, every seaman who heard it would be sure she would drown that voyage and every man she carried with her.

"Who started the talk?" Minnix asked.

"That son of scum over there— Scotty Hale!" The walking delegate lifted his voice so that the lank young seaman could hear. "Because a half-wit gets sour with the booze an' loses his nerve—"

"I was cold sober when it came over me," the man jerked back, and from the lilt in his tone and the sombre dreaminess of his eyes Minnix saw he was the visionary type. "Cold sober, and without reason to see harm... But it took me strong, an' it's true. I feel the doom in me bones. There's no getting over It— it's the way to death I'm now stepping out on..."

"You'll get over it— I'll see to that!" Creedy rapped with a flame of oaths. "That goes for all of you. You've signed on, an' had your advance, and into court you'll go if you try any hanky. Nothing less. The dock police are ready for you.

And I've got a full complement standing by ready to take your places if needs be."

"THAT'LL nail 'em," he muttered aside to Minnix. "They might risk gaol, but they'll not stummock giving away their pay to other hands."

"Or you're hoping it?" Minnix grinned, having seen whole crews from deck ratings to black squad, leave a ship in a body on the point of sailing for less reason.

"Oh, don't wallow in trouble till it's here," Creedy snarled. "Only— heck!— I wish it hadn't been Scotty as started it:"

"They believe him?"

"He's got the gift— they say," Creedy said reluctantly. And then with a rasp: "But it's all rubbish, of course."

"Of course," Minnix grinned. "I wonder if the *Callacantra* will sink this trip?"

"Oh, stow it! You're as bad as him!" the walking delegate snapped. "An', anyhow, whatever happens he'll go with her. I'll make sure of that."

"You think he won't jump the ship?"

"He'll want to, maybe, but he won't. They'll be watching him aboard there."

Minnix gathered that as he stood on dockside watching the big liner getting ready for the sea.

Just after the Ocean Ferry Express, with its glinting line of Pullmans, slid into the great freight shed, and silken and be-furred passengers came tripping to the hooded canvas tunnels of the gangway ramps, he heard a scuffle and an outcry from the fore-deck of the liner. Looking up. he caught a glimpse of men heading off a lank, running figure sprinting for the service gangway.

Scotty Hale was pulled up by a swaying knot of men and, under,the command of a sturdy quartermaster, was hustled towards the fo'c'sle.

Minnix knew what had happened. Foreboding of the ship's doom, had been growing so steadily within Scotty Hale since he went aboard that it had broken both his fatalistic courage and his fear of the consequences, and he had made a dash for the dock.

Minnix craned his neck to see if any of the others had reacted to Scotty's panic. Even now it was possible for men to come ashore and hold up the sailing.

He did sense a certain hesistance. but it ended almost Immediately as sharp orders brought the men to their senses.

Creedy's warnings and the prompt way Scotty had been dealt with had stopped the panic.

The loading went on without hitch until the slings deposited the last of the passengers' luggage aboard, and the whistles began to pipe hands to cast off.

It was then that Scotty jumped the ship. He must have pretended docility or waited his moment cannily. For suddenly, as the warps were being cast off, his

lean figure came leaping at the rail. His legs flicked over, clasped one of the warps not yet freed from its bollard and, like a flash, he slid to the quay.

Though the dock police had been warned, they had thought things so safe in this last moment that they had allowed themselves to be distracted by the hustle of sailing.

At a shout from the deck one policeman did turn and sprint along the dock after Scotty. But the seaman had both the legs and the lead, and nipping into and out of freight sheds and between and through lines of trucks, was soon out of sight.

In fact, he made a clean getaway.

MINNIX, naturally, followed the voyage of the *Callacantra* with interest.

When she returned quite safely to port, without even having met dangerous weather, and without any man on her going seriously sick, Minnix made a point of meeting her— and also having a word with the walking delegate about Scotty Hale's worth as a vehicle for omens.

"Yeh, he got that one wrong." Creedy grunted. "No— she didn't sink."

"So another deep-sea superstition is proved false," Minnix grinned.

"Maybe," Creedy said strangely. "Only he wasn't so wrong about feeling doom in his bones ... He was knocked out by a lorry as he ran away from the *Callacantra*."

"You mean— the death he saw ahead was his own?"

"Rubbish of course, all of it—but he did say 'It's the way to death I'm now stepping out on'— an' it was..."

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12: Murderer at Large

Douglas Newton

World's News (Sydney) 19 Sep 1942

ACROSS the lane the news paper placards in front of Mrs. Welland's shop still blared at them through the downpour:

THE ESCAPED MURDERER
DANGEROUS HOMICIDAL MANIAC
STILL AT LARGE

But now the heated opinions those placards had aroused among the group sheltering under the church lych-gate were abruptly stifled, and a deadly silence reigned instead.

It was a commonplace group. Three women caught by the storm while shopping, two children, and five men— Wells, the burly publican; Thwaites, the hardware merchant and local athlete; Cotton, the hefty navvy; little Huggett, the draper— and the man who had just joined them.

It was he who had cut short their contemptuous criticisms of the police for allowing one man, even a murderer, to terrorise a whole district. He was a short man, but as broad and muscular as a bull. He was shabby, unshaven, bedraggled— just a tramp. Only there was that about him that told them he was no tramp. There was an ugly, lowering, animal-like thrust of the head, a quick, furtive alertness in his bloodshot and ever-rolling eyes, an air of wild strangeness that bred fear.

They did not have to— did not want to look at his face again to know who he was. The papers that advertised him so clamorously had printed unmistakable photographs of "The Escaped Murderer."

They had all known him the moment he had shambled under the lych-gate out of the rain. That was why they had been struck dumb. They had realised instantly how lonely they were. Apart from Mrs. Welland's little shop opposite, there wasn't another house in the lane for five hundred yards either way, while Mrs. Welland, herself, was a feeble old body who always sat in the parlor behind her shop until disturbed by the door bell.

This torrential rain forbade all wayfaring, too. They were pinned there as effectively as in a locked room with a homicidal maniac.

TIMID Mrs. Quinn, who had her children with her, twittered, went green and looked like screaming, but Mr. Wells frowned her to silence with a sharp look. If she started anything it was all up.

This murderer would run amok, as he had before, at the slightest hint of danger to himself. Mrs. Quinn knew that as well as the rest. Hadn't they talked over that very point?

It was awful. They could feel the sick fright of danger in the very air. It was so plain that the killer himself was not easy about them. His bloodshot eyes rolled from one to the other suspiciously. He rocked a little on his feet, like a man ready to leap into instant action.

His gaze fixed itself for a moment on Huggett, who plainly had the jumps, and the fool shifted like a scared hare and stuck his head out into the rain.

The rest held their breath. If the little coward went out into that downpour the murderer would know they knew him, for no sane man would leave shelter in such a downfall. The., brute would attack and slay them all at once.... Little Huggett hung hesitant, caught Wells' glare, shifted back into shelter with a watery grin on his face.

"Bucketsful," he simpered. "Looks like lasting all day, too."

Sturdy Mrs. Wooding gave a strangled croak of terror at that inanity, and as the murderer pivoted sharply at the sound, their insides seemed suddenly flat-empty in fear. Thwaites managed to babble something about it being bad for the big match, and Wells, with an effort you could hear in his voice, snapped up the cue, saying it mightn't be so bad, after all, for a wet pitch would give England a chance.

The awful tension eased just a little. But only a little. They were all too conscious of the deadly silence of the murderer, the alertness of his rolling eyes.... He was there, poised, ready to strike at any moment. They could feel death hanging in the air about them.

Old Miss Framley even felt more; she could not take her eyes off the killer's right arm.

Cotton, the navvy, glared at her, trying to distract her. But she could not tear her eyes away. She stared at that arm as though mesmerised by it. Cotton— all of them— knew why. The hand of that arm was in the man's trouser pocket, and from what the papers said, there was a great, sharp butcher's knife down that trouser leg, through a hole in the pocket... the knife he used in all his killings.

It made Cotton sick to think of that knife, especially as they had all scoffed a bit at the chap's ability to "whip it out like lightning, as the papers had it, and slash throats before men knew he was striking. He himself had been hugely scornful, declaring that he guaranteed to get a good, knock-down swipe to the feller's jaw before he could get the knife half out.

He looked sidelong at the murderer now and felt sick at his boast. With the man three feet away, he might strike just too late, while the mere act of raising the man's anger... it'd be horrible!

Yet they ought to do something... those others, definitely, ought to. They'd bragged enough of what they'd do, how their strength and swiftness would make short work of this very chap. Wells and Thwaites had been so certain sure just now that they anyhow would never let a murderer get away with it as this killer had. They'd bragged loud and confident that they only needed to get handy to the chap to settle his hash for ever....

Well, there they were, only an arm's length away, and Thwaites, for all his sporting record, was green, saggy mouthed and scared paralysed, while Wells' purple face looked as though he was about to get a stroke from sheer funk. Three strong men— and one murderer had them goofy with fear. Three strong men unable to do a thing, too terrified to act.

Couldn't count little Huggett, of course. He hadn't bragged, and he didn't mean anything, muscularly speaking... except as a danger. Gosh! Hadn't the little fool any sense?

Little Huggett was fumbling in his pockets. They could feel the murderer tense and crouch. The sense of peril was so intense that it choked even the women's instinct to scream. In a minute the knife would be leaping and red

LITTLE Huggett dragged out a packet of cigarettes.

"Mus' pass time somehow," he mumbled, and put a fag into his mouth. Then he seemed to think of the others and held out the packet to Cotton. Sheer need of doing something made the navvy take one, and the others dared not refuse because of the tension. Even the murderer took one.

Wells fumbled shakily with his matches, but Huggett saved him by clicking on his petrol lighter. He lit Thwaites' cigarette, too— held the flame towards the killer.

The murderer leered stupidly and leant forward to draw— and little Huggett jabbed the flame straight into his eyes.

In a moment the lych-gate was a rave of oaths and screaming women. But it was old Miss Framley who brought them to action by screeching:

"His right arm!... Hold it! Hold him! Huggett's given you your chance— take it... you three big fools..."

They realised that little Huggett's foolishness had made the murderer take his hand from his pocket and the knife. Almost mad with relief they dashed in and grappled the killer.

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132: The Last of Sherlock Holmes

The Mystery of the Governor's Message and the Missing—

A. B. "Banjo" Paterson

1864-1941

The Evening News, Sydney, 28 Jan 1905

Oh no! No another Sherlock Holmes parody....

THOSE WHO have followed the career of the marvellous detective Sherlock Holmes, and his assistant, Dr Watson, will remember that the final exploit of the great Sherlock, as recorded by Conan Doyle, was the recovery of a missing despatch box lost by the Prime Minister of England. This adventure is supposed to have closed the history of the great detective so far as English readers are concerned; but such a master mind could not remain long unoccupied; such a genius must find an outlet for its energies; and there are indications that various mysteries now puzzling Australians— such as why Pye was left out of the Australian eleven, and the Missing Diamonds, or the Mystery of the Mont de Piétè, will before long engage the attention of his giant intellect. In other words, Sherlock Holmes is in Australia.

If any confirmation were wanted of this statement, it would be found in the solution recently worked out of a labyrinthic mystery which Sherlock Holmes and Company alone could have successfully solved.

Suppressing, for obvious reasons, the real names of the parties, let us proceed to narrate how Sherlock Holmes unravelled the mysterious telegram sent by one whom, for the purposes of the story, we shall call Sir Tarry Hawser, the Governor of New South Carolina.

It was midnight of a sweltering Sydney summer night. The streets were quiet, except for the usual crowds round the betting shops, and Sherlock Holmes, disguised as an Officer of Detective Police, paced restlessly up and down his official sitting-room, holding in his hand a telegram. From time to time he glanced restlessly at the door. A step was heard without, and three knocks were given. The door slid noiselessly into a groove in the wall, admitting Sherlock's old and true friend, Dr Watson, now disguised as a policeman. Without looking round, Sherlock motioned him to a chair, saying, "Sit down, Watson. I have a small matter in hand."

"How did you know it was me?" said Watson, gazing admiringly at the back view of the greatest detective the world has ever known. "I never spoke, nor gave my name to a soul."

"My dear fellow", said Sherlock, with calm superiority, "I knew it was you the moment that you started to come up the stairs. I knew it was you by the heavy way you put your feet down. When I heard the sound on the stairs, I said, 'This is

either Watson, or a draught horse,' and as no draught horse could get round the angle in the first landing, I knew it was you the moment you had passed that point. But there is a small matter, a mere official trifle, which is likely to afford us a little work. It is a matter which, as a rule, I would hand over to the traffic constables, with instructions to inquire whether any strangers had been seen in town lately; but as our old friend, Sir Tarry Hawser is concerned in it we must attend to the matter ourselves." So saying, he tossed to Watson a telegram timed 11 p.m. and bearing the Hoss Valley telegraph stamp.

Watson held it up to the light, and read it aloud.

"Hawser, Hoss Valley, to Sherlock, Sydney. Have just come home from the amateur races. Very hot. Have lost— what's this he has lost— 'exiguous co-ordinate'?"

"That's where the difficulty is," said Sherlock. "That part is in cipher, and we have lost the key. It is evident he has lost something. I deduce that from the fact of his sending the telegram, and from the further fact that he goes on: 'Send two detectives at once.'"

"And what do you think he has lost?" said Watson.

Sherlock smiled his inscrutable smile, and threw himself into an easy chair. "I think I recognise the hand of Moriarty in this," he said.

"Do you mean Moriarty, the Crown Prosecu—"

"No, I mean Moriarty, the great chief of crime, the Napoleon of iniquity. See here, Watson", he went on, stepping over to the window, and drawing aside the curtain; "look out, and tell me what you see."

"I see Phillip Street, and a cab at the corner, and a man over the way going into a pub, after hours."

"What does he look like?"

"He looks like a beer fighter."

Sherlock smiled his slow smile of satisfaction.

"Watch that man," he said, "and tell me if he looks round as he goes into the bar."

"Yes, he does."

"Does he beckon with his hand, and is he joined by another man?"

"Yes, he is."

"I thought so. Moriarty, at every turn! This is no ordinary emergency. I would go myself, but— " And here he paused, lost in thought.

"Why not telegraph Sir Tarry, and see—"

"What, and have the telegram intercepted by Moriarty? Watson, you surprise me. Oblige me by pressing the bell."

A velvet-footed official came to the door.

"Are all arrangements made?" said Sherlock sharply.

"They are, sir."

"Have you rung up the press, and told them at what time the detectives leave, and where they are going, and by whom they are wanted?"

"We have, sir."

"Have they been photographed, and their descriptions circulated among the criminal classes?"

"They have, sir."

"Have they got a banner, and masks for their faces, and a bloodhound to follow the tracks?"

"They have, sir."

"Excellent, excellent," said Sherlock Holmes. "It is a great aid to detective work, Watson, to notify beforehand what you are going to do. It lowers the number of convictions, and enables Neitenstein to effect a saving in gaol expenditure. And now let us snatch a few hours' sleep. We can do nothing till the morning. Good night, Watson. Mind the step."

Next morning there was a great to-do. People were asking: "What had the Governor of New South Carolina lost? Had the miscreants been arrested? Had Roshdestvensky's fleet appeared on the Upper Murrumbidgee, and begun to shell the Barren Jack Reservoir? Was a Russian emissary disguised as a commerical traveller trying to sell fire-extinguishers to the burnt-out settlers?" The public mind was all unrest, and all looked to the great detective to know what had been done.

Meanwhile, the detectives had started for the railway station with the utmost secrecy, accompanied by a German band, a banner, and a bloodhound. The time and place of their departure and the object of their visit were all chronicled in the society columns among the fashionable intelligence, and were read with interest by the criminal classes.

They followed up the bloodstained trail. "A Russian spy has passed along here," they said. But the desperado was found to be only an ordinary swagman, and the sleuth hounds of the law were puzzled. "Strange!" they said, "that the criminals are not here to meet us after our departure was so extensively advertised." They returned as unobtrusively and secretly as they set out, and were met by four hundred people at the railway station, who cheered them heartily.

Public excitement ran higher than ever. The mysterious message— what was it about? Had the detectives arrested anyone?

It was then that the genius of our friend Holmes shone out more brightly, with more lustre and luminosity than on any occasion in his history. He rigidly refused to give any information. "We have told the criminals what we were going to do," he said, "but it would never do to tell the public what the affair was all about. Enough for them to know that the criminals, whoever they were, were taken no unfair advantage of. Let it never be said that Sherlock Holmes

descended to the low expedient of surprising a burglar. Any officer giving any information whatever will be sacked."

Later on in the day, the Prime Minister, by one of those singular lapses of which even the greatest minds are capable, actually made public the details of the affair. There was nothing to make a fuss about, he said. There had been no crime committed, and he didn't see why the public should be kept in a state of unrest. He said that Sir Tarry Hawser had merely wanted two detectives to look after some unsaleable bonds that the Carruthers Government were trying to palm off on the British moneylender; but the public would not believe this story at all. "Why," they said, "should he wait till the middle of the night to remember about the bonds? No; there was a mystery in it, and Sherlock Holmes is the only man who can tell us."

When this was reported to Sherlock, he again smiled his deep, enigmatical smile.

"To the ordinary superficial observer, Watson," he said, "there was nothing in it. But the trained, deductive intellect discards all the theories of guarding bonds. The great master mind of crime was at work in this."

"And what was it then that Sir Tarry Hawser wished the detectives to do? What did he wish them to guard?"

Sherlock Holmes looked round furtively, and drew his questioner close to him.

"The family washing," he hissed. "He didn't like sending it down, considering the people that were about. Look out, Watson, and tell me what you see in the street."

"I see the same pub, and I think the same man going in to have a drink."

Sherlock Holmes gave his usual chuckle of triumph. "There you are, Watson," he said, "that proves that my suspicions were correct. Moriarty is yet at large."

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14: The Last Journey of Andy Warde

Edward Dyson (as by "Eddyson")

1865-1931

The Bulletin, 1 Jan 1914

A "short-short" story, published without a title. I invented one.

THEY FOUND HIM lying by the old pack track from Eagles to the Whim. His swag was under his head, his camp fire still smoked feebly, but he was now beyond all need of the tea in the blackened billy at his elbow. The name *Andy Warde* was inked on a belt about his swag but no other evidence of identification could be found.

Woodruffe and Crotty took up the body and its simple belongings, and deposited the lot with Jim Wimble at the Sluicers' Arms, Amazon Flat, taking a receipt for the same, and passed on, promising to acquaint the police up at the Whim. But at Billy's Grid Woodruffe and Crotty got into holts with Summerton's home-made sea-green whisky (patent applied for), and were pinned to the mat after a fierce resistance, so that James Wimble, worthy host of the Sluicers' Arms, had protracted possession of deceased, and suffered some agonies of mind awaiting official intervention and the order for interment.

Meanwhile Mrs. Steve O'Brien and Mrs. Horace Hogan did what the latter called their "Kristchin juty" by the late lamented, and Andrew Warde, well washed and brushed, carefully swathed in a sheet, his jaw decorously secured in a sling, and his eyes obscured with twin coppers, reposed in great apparent comfort on a bench in the hotel shed. Jimmy Wimble felt the responsibility of the deceased heavy upon him.

Twenty times in the course of the day following the arrival of the corpse he drifted up the hill to scan the distance for a glimpse of mounted-constable Clarke, of the Whim; 50 times he stole to the shed door and peeped in at the body lying so stark and still in the dim light.

"He's ez amiable a lookin' body ez ever I seen,' said Wimble a hundred times, seeking to reassure himself; for Wimble was a widower and "slep' lone," and it would have been a great consolation to him to know for certain that the man could be relied upon to behave himself "decent and orderly" while the silence of the long night was on Amazon Flat.

Unhappily Wimble's customers were inspired by the presence of the corpse to an eerie fancy in ghost stories and yarns of uncanny doings on the part of the restless dead, with the result that Jimmy saw his last reeling customer depart at midnight with infinite regret.

The third night came, and there was still no sign of constable Clarke. Wimble's last peep at Andy Warde, if not reassuring, added nothing much to the landlord's native terror.

"I never come across a corpse what kep' better," whispered Wimble to himself. "That, I sez, shows a kinder natural disposition on his part to behave hisself. He's as well-meanin' a body ez a man could wish t' meet. But why don't Clarke come, or someone?"

It must have been half-past two in the morning when the sluicers in the camp by the creek were awakened by the arrival in their midst of a clamorous man in his shirt. The sudden comer was desperately white, his eyes were full of madness, and he yelled continuously. Fighting his way into the midst of the men, he crouched upon the ground, clinging to their knees.

The inopportune visitor was J. Wimble, of the Sluicers' Arms.

It took nearly half a pint of whisky and five buckets of water to restore Jimmy's mind to something like order.

"Don't leave me!" said Wimble. "Keep close round me. My God, I seen , his ghost! He come to me! I was shook up in the night! O Lord, it was awful! He was standin' over me. The light o' the moon was on him like the breath of Hell. He had the white grave-clothes round him, and the wrap holdin' up his jaw. He took hold of me again, and he shook me, and sez he, 'That's a fine bed you put me in!'"

Wimble ceased, gasping convulsively.

"And what then?" asked Weston.

"I came through the winder then," Jimmy continued. "I thought he was after me."

Twelve men went to the Sluicers' Arms. They disbelieved, but remained in a body. They looked in at the shed, and deceased was missing. Very quietly, with beating hearts, and here and there chattering teeth, they went through the hotel. At Jimmy's door there was an anxious pause. Weston led them in. The moonlight from a window flooded Jimmy's bunk, and 12 stout miners backed solidly into the corner furthest away from the fearsome vision. In Wimble's bed lay Andrew Warde, deceased. In the right hand of the body was a bottle of whisky, in the left hand a bottle of brandy, and between the uplifted knees of the corpse was wedged a bottle of square face. When constable

Clarke arrived he ventured the opinion that Warde was one of "thim catleptics," and admitted that "catlepsy" was no offence within the meaning of the act. He offered to arrest deceased for the larceny of the two coppers off his eyes, but pointed out that Wimble would have to proceed to recover the money by summons in the Small Debts Court, so complainant abandoned his case.

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15: The Black Star of Narrapore

Clarence Herbert New (as by "Stephen Hopkins Orcutt")
1862-1933
The Blue Book Magazine, Nov 1926

IT was at tea one afternoon in the drawing-room of the Governor's wife at Delhi that a little group of four men— His Excellency among them— reached a decision in regard to a certain commission for the Government. Then the group broke up, Major Carstairs of the Staff being asked to submit the matter to Lady Follansbee at once, and see if she cared to undertake it. He crossed to where she was sitting with some other ladies, just inside one of the terrace windows— and when the other women left them tete-a-tete, broached the subject to her.

"We've considered three or four men for this mission, Lady Follansbee— but there is obviously more risk in a man's undertaking it than a woman, particularly if he were known to be in any way associated with the Indian Government. Finally some one mentioned to His Excellency that you were leaving almost immediately for a year's stay at home— visiting your children, he tells me, who are at school in England, and recuperating from this beastly climate. Tne fact that you've previously helped us out upon occasion, in a few instances, would appear to suggest you as the ideal person to carry this out if you can do so without inconveniencing yourself."

"The inconvenience is not so much, Major— though I presume you would wish to alter my traveling arrangements somewhat. I'm booked on the P. & O. from Bombay, you know. But there is certainly more or less personal risk about anything of this sort—"

"But— how could anybody suspect you? It is generally understood that some one of the Secret Service will handle it!"

"Oh— how does anyone suspect things in the Orient? The atmosphere is saturated with intrigue! Then— again— suppose you insist upon my shifting to some other boat? That sets tongues wagging. It is commented upon in the bazaars— who knows by how many!"

"There's a simple explanation for that— one which should satisfy even the most suspicious ones. Your physician considers that a longer time at sea, going home, will be much more beneficial for you— say, one of the half-and-half boats— a new cargoboat with fine but very limited passenger accommodation and not over fifteen knots at the most. He thinks the social gayety, the incessant activity on a P. & O. liner, too much of a strain on your nerves when what you most need is all the rest and quiet you can get. Eh?"

"As far as that goes, I'm feeling really quite fit— considering this climate; my ayahs and all the rest of them know it, too. Still— one might be upon the verge

of a break-down, of course. But you're asking me to accept a heavy responsibility— "

"For which I fancy Governm'nt will stand most liberal compensation, if you consent to undertake it. I fancy you magnify the risk a great deal— because the master of the steamer will have private Governm'nt orders to look after you carefully— though he'll not know why. An' two of the Secret Service will be in touch until you're on board."

"That would be a mistake! No matter how well disguised, some of the Hindus might suspect their identity; then, if they seem to be following me, I'm either being shadowed for some crime— or else entrusted by the Government with some commission which renders guarding me advisable. No, I'd best go down from here on my own, as if nobody had any interest in my movements. Had you any particular boat in mind?"

"Until you asked— no. But one just occurs tcyme as being what you might pick out from a news-sheet interest in her, because of the ship's recent adventures— book passage to be entertained on the home voyage by the officers' description of what happened."

"Oh-h-h— you mean the *Argentine Liberator*— one of Sir Jason Brock's boats? Why— I fancy it might be an int'resting trip on such a boat! Aye! But I couldn't possibly make Singapore in time to catch her— she'll be leaving there in two or three days. Which means I'd have to go ashore at Aden and wait for her. That, I'll certainly not do! Much too hot! "

"We'll arrange to have her put in at Colombo for an hour or two."

"She's not stopping there."

"According to the news-sheets, she's not quite full-up with cargo. I fancy a Governm'nt hint would secure a small shipment of tea from Ceylon— no harm tryin' it, at all events. Your bookin' passage with the tea is merely incidental, d'ye see. Your inquiries for the sort of boat your physician ordered turned up the information that this particular one was puttin' in for a few tons of tea— suited your book exactly."

MAJOR CARSTAIRS, before getting down to anything confidential with the lady, had taken the precaution of stepping out through the window and looking down the length of the terrace. He was quite positive that no human being had been near enough to catch a word of what he had been saying to her— and in this, he was right. But rumor has many devious ways of getting itself started. Lieutenant Joe Cheddars, for example, who had been chatting with two women at the other side of the drawing-room, was not in the Governor's confidence nor that of the Staff; but as one of the minor attaches, he had heard, of course, occasional bits of the inside talk which any man of intelligence could put together very close to the mark. So he knew enough of the matter under

consideration to be quite sure that His Excellency and the Staff men were probably discussing it at the moment. He saw all four of them covertly glance toward where Lady Follansbee was sitting with her two friends. Then he saw the nods of agreement— saw the Major casually make his way down the room to her. Watching them closely, he could tell from the facial expression that some request was being made— and that the lady was finally consenting.

By keeping close tab on Carstairs during the rest of that afternoon and the following day, he knew that the Major was communicating with certain shipping agents in Delhi and Singapore— then with other agents in Colombo. If his surmises were correct, he worked out a line of probable action very close to the truth. And then he spent two hours coding a message which he cabled to a crony who happened to be in Singapore at the moment. Cheddars was in an almost desperate position— heavily in debt, not knowing where to turn for sums that he needed— in short, in the sort of mental condition where most men look out for Number One and become thoroughly unscrupulous.

The man in Singapore had resigned from the Army a short time before rather than risk the chance of dismissal if some of his activities became known. By the merest fluke nobody had suspected them up to this time, and his reputation was as good as ever it had been in Army circles— but hav ing thrown overboard personal honor in his struggle to get clear of the entanglements, he also was now unscrupulous— ready for any shady adventure which promised big money. Cheddars' message read, decoded:

Have positive information who will be entrusted with the Maharajah's proposition— the route and boat to London. Cable me one thousand pounds which I must have at once for urgent needs— agree to five thdusand more if you are successful— and I will cable you full data on receipt of it. Suggest that you impersonate Saltoun of the I. S. S. on the boat. Resemblance is striking. Govt. Agt. will recognize you as him and suppose you are detailed as extra precaution. That will make you positive you're on right track. Saltoun supposed to be somewhere up Peninsula. Use another name but make resemblance perfect.

CO much for the leak from Lieutenant Cheddars' intuition. In another case, one of the Hindu servants who was serving tea in the drawing-room worked out an almost identical hypothesis along the same lines— and communicated with two of his own caste in Singapore. All, mind you, without anyone having actually overheard a single word connecting Lady Follansbee with the affair. And this, by way of preliminary, brings the threads of the story together at Singapore on the afternoon when Captain Connyngsby put in with the Argentine Liberator, on his voyage to London, to coal at Tanjong Pagar— to pick up whatever passengers and more recent orders his agents might have for him.

As coaling is a messy job at the best, all the passengers had gone ashore for a round of the shops in the commercial quarter and dinner at the Raffles. By the

next evening, with bunkers full, the boat was about to pull out from the coal-pier when one of the agents came hurrying aboard with a request that Connyngsby anchor off the P. & O. wharf in Keppel Harbor until later advices came in from Liverpool. There was a prospect of picking up a small shipment of tea at Colombo which would fill the Number Three Hold and be worth putting in for. The shipment wasn't definitely fixed, but the agent expected advices next day that it had been— and the Captain knew it was good business to wait for them, though he was by this time fed up with delays and detours— would have much preferred going straight through without another stop except for coal at Port Said.

As it proved, he also picked up three more passengers by waiting— two Babus, who spoke better English than the average and seemed to be men of means, and a tanned Englishman of thirty-five or forty who had about him the suggestion of Army training— the usual reserve of the Britisher who never speaks of his own affairs, and a superimposed ability to mix in anywhere that made him rather liked from the start. He was on the list as C. Leffingwell Gardner, had served during the German War, of course, and was vaguely supposed to be traveling for one of the Oriental exporting houses. Two young women also had been added to the saloon-list while the boat was coaling— the Misses Weymouth and Torrance, going home to visit relatives in England after three years with their parents in the East. Of the former passengers, some of whom had been on the boat since she left New York several months before, there were Miss Betty Stevens, traveling for her health; a Mr. Fernshaw, of London; Mrs. Bently, a wealthy and handsome widow; two Hongkong merchants and a married couple.

As the boat lay anchored out in the harbor next morning— most of the passengers in their deck-chairs under the khaki awning of the boat-deck, where they could get all the breeze which happened to be stirring— Flo Weymouth and Amy Torrance were giving Betty Stevens bits of the Singapore gossip and amusing her with their admiration for the boat's officers.

"What a perfectly ripping lot of men you have on board, Miss Stevens! I'm jolly well pleased we booked on this boat instead of one of the liners! Of course one rather expected that Mr. Coffin would be something out of the ordin'ry, after the things he's done. But Captain Connyngsby is perfectly fine! Doctor Thayer is good enough lookin' to attract any girlMr. Swain another of the same sort, though he can't possibly know as much— and McTavish is a jolly old dear. Mr. Jennings and Mr. Fowler are much better bred than officers you'll find on boats of the northern owners. Amy and I like them all— and four aren't married. If you'll tell us which you've picked out for yourself, Miss Stevens, we'll see if we can't get a little attention from the others— though Mrs. Bently'll not make it

too easy for us. It's hardly fair, you know! She must be years older than any of the four! One fancies she might rob a cradle if there were nothing else in sight!"

"Oh, come now, Miss Weymouth! Give the lady her due! She really isn't over thirty. She's pretty, and she's clever, with money enough to make her independent. You wouldn't want the sort of man who'd be willing to live on a rich wife— would you? No self-respecting man would do it— and that's more of a handicap to Mrs. Bently than you might think. And if she's too old for these nice men, I am too— because we're not so far apart in age. Here comes Mr. Fernshaw! You'll like him a lot, even if he is married."

The introductions were casual— they really were not needed on shipboard— and Fernshaw made his customary good impression. He was entirely at ease anywhere he found himself,— in a moment or two, indeed, he was asking the girls what they knew of an occurrence which had been filling the news-sheets in all of the Oriental ports— the finding of a great and apparently flawless black diamond somewhere in India, by an English engineer who had been traveling pretty much all over the country with two Pathan bearers. It was supposed that he had been prospecting for mineral outcrop of various sorts, because he had a Government permit for that sort of thing; but he seemed to have had no connection with any syndicate, and apparently had been aimlessly wandering through one province after another according to the whim of the moment. It was not even certain that he had found the wonderful stone in India at all, but eventually he had turned up in the Chandni Chowk at Delhi, asking the jewel-merchants if they or any of the maharajahs whom they represented cared to make a bid for the stone. Several of the jewelers had measured and examined it most carefully— the unanimous opinion being that no such black diamond ever had been seen before in any part of the world. Before there was any risk of murder or theft, the engineer had sealed it up in a box and placed it in the up-to-date vaults of the strongest bank in Delhi. By the merest chance Amy Torrance, whose father was in the Government service, supplied additional data which, up to then, hadn't gotten into the newspapers.

"It is known in official circles that Harding, the engineer, was around the old mines of Raolconda and Golconda— which haven't been worked for a hundred years or more. As I understand it, the Nizam reserves the right to purchase at a nominal valuation any great stone found in his province. This was told to Harding by one of the I. S. S. men, but he laughed at him— said they would have to prove that the stone came from Hyderabad or in fact from India at all."

"Aye— he had them there! No black diamond above a few carats ever has been found outside of Borneo. That's not to say, however, that none ever will be."

"At all events they made nothing out of Harding with that sort of talk. But one of the dealers in the Chandni Chowk, who represents His Highness the

Maharajah of Narrapore, had a conference with him in which he pointed out that it would be very difficult for Harding, alone, to get the stone as far as Europe without having it stolen and perhaps losing his life— that when it was sold, there possibly would be litigation with various native princes in India claiming the stone was found in their own provinces— and that he would better take a reasonable sum then and there. Narrapore offered, he said, a couple of lakhs for the stone— no questions asked, all further responsibility assumed by him. After considering this for a day or two, Harding accepted the offer— got the two lakhs in certified checks— had nothing further to do with the diamond. Then Narrapore offered it as a gift to the British Crown on condition that Government would have it cut in Amsterdam to the largest brilliant obtainable from the stone, and call it the Black Star of Narrapore. The home Governm'nt accepted through the Governor of India, who is sending it to England almost immediately, insured by Lloyd's— probably through the special service of the Royal Mails."

"Do you happen to know, Miss Torrance, what the stone weighs in the rough?"

"As I recall it, three hundred and fifteen carats and nine sixty-fourths is the accepted weight. At least half a dozen of the Chandni Chowk dealers figured it very carefully."

Fernshaw's lips puckered in a whistle.

"Gad! I mean to see that thing at first opportunity. It must be absolutely unique— superb! Did you hear anything about its shape?"

"Somewhat like a small potato, they say— very much like the Cullinan before it was cut, though of course much smaller."

"H-m-m— if there are no faults in the cleavage, such a stone might be cut to a brilliant of around two hundred carats. But when they come to splitting along the grain they may have to make two or three smaller gems of it, as was done with the Cullinan. At all events, they'll get one brilliant of somewhere between one hundred fifty and two hundred— and an estimated value of half a million sterling would be merely tentative, because there is nothing like it in the whole world. I couldn't understand the inducement for Narrapore to present it to the Crown, at first, but if they name it after him, he will get far more personal advertising than if he kept an' wore it himself— not such a bad political move, either, considering the conditions throughout India.

"What I don't see is why Harding left it go for any such sum as two lakhs! Two hundred thousand rupees would be around fourteen thousand pounds— or sixty-seven thousand American dollars. Supposing he got that stone as far as the Bank of England vaults in London, or some bank in New York, and it were not tied up by the courts,— which I consider a remote contingency,— he quite easily could have found a purchaser who would have paid a hundred thousand pounds

for it— possibly double that. His taking the two lakhs is a confession of weakness somewhere. It's a tidy enough bit of money to pocket with no questions asked and no come-back that can implicate him in any way, but everyone who knows anything about the history of precious stones would be practically convinced that the thing never was found in India.

"That means Borneo— with the restrictions which all of the Malay sultans put upon any jewels found in their states. The Dutch Governm'nt itself wouldn't put forward any claim, but the sultans might through the Dutch courts if they got a clue as to Harding's wanderings— and when the Dutch courts start anything, they usually go through with it. Harding is in a vastly diff'rent position from the Maharajah, because he'd go broke fighting any sort of litigation— while Narrapore, with millions in his bank accounts, can sit back and say: 'Prove where the Black Star was found! I know— you don't! The stone is mine, and I'll do what I please with it!' The point which seems regrettable is that after all his wanderings and the constant risk he ran, Harding should have to be satisfied with a trifling fourteen thousand pounds."

SEVERAL times during the first dinner, as the boat steamed up Malacca Strait after leaving Singapore, Captain Connyngsby shot a puzzled glance at the passenger who had booked as C. Leffingwell Gardner. Being rather keen at remembering faces, he was positive the man was really Major Harry Saltoun of the Indian Secret Service, who had sailed with him upon two or three former occasions and who had the reputation of being able to spend days in the bazaars as a Hindu or Pathan or Parsee without detection. If Saltoun were detailed on special service, it seemed almost certain that he would have changed his appearance to some extent. But merely to book under another name when he was likely to be recognized in any of the Oriental ports seemed an odd thing to do, to say the least. He gave no indication of ever having seen the Captain before— which prevented Connyngsby from making the slightest advance lest he crab the other man's game, whatever it was. But the thing stuck in his mind.

The younger women on board had started without delay a campaign of feminine bedevilment against the attractive officers and were getting their full share of attention, even from the master himselt— but in some of their councils of war— stateroom conferences— they were forced to admit that when Betty Stevens had some reason of her own for wishing to monopolize any particular man, none of the other women stood a ghost of a show— not even Mrs. Bently with her wealth and fascination. It was finally concluded that this was due more to Miss Stevens being almost one of the ship's crew because of her several months on board since leaving New York than to any superior quality of attraction about herself— but in this belief they were very far out. Betty Stevens had gone through some rather trying situations with the Argentine and her

officers— who knew her to be a dead game sport in any emergency and had more solid admiration for the girl herself than for any other woman of their acquaintance. She probably could have married any unattached man on board if he had the slightest idea that she would consider it.

A ship at sea is a little world by itself— which is why so many lifelong friendships ripen in the few days or weeks of the voyage. Each new arrival at the ports of call is studied for indications of his or her breed and type before getting fairly up the gangplank— and is absorbed in a few hours without a ripple. At Colombo, Lady Follansbee was recognized as a personage before she and one of the Ceylon Government officials got as far as the Captain— though she was booked without title, merely as Mrs. Hortensia Follansbee, and appeared to be traveling with a single maid, who was berthed in a separate stateroom. The Government man seemed to have come down to see her off merely as an old personal friend,— he wasn't even in uniform,— but when there was nobody else within hearing, he told Connyngsby that Government expected him to look after Her Ladyship very closely— that because of her views upon certain Indian questions she had received a number of threatening letters which, finally, had begun to get on her nerves until her physician had sent her home to recuperate. The official said it was scarcely possible that any of her enemies could be aboard the Argentine Liberator, inasmuch as nobody knew she was sailing until she came aboard, but there might be somebody at Aden or Port Said. Connyngsby, who had met Her Ladyship before, assured him that she would be taken care of— and when he went ashore, turned to her with a low question:

"It's to be *Mrs*. Follansbee— not? Aye?"

"Er— quite so, Captain. I'm delighted to find you in command— we must have some good long chats. And if I drop a hint, you wont question it until afterward, will you? There's a man farther along the gangway who may take it upon himself to presume a little— but I don't mean to recognize him at all. Sorry he's aboard— can't be helped, I fancy."

IT must not be inferred that Lady Follans* bee was a bluestocking or the aggressive club-woman type, because she occasionally read papers before women's societies and had a gift for politics under the rose. She was unobtrusive, good-looking, a thoroughbred from head to foot, a woman sure of herself in any circumstances. It was a fair sample of her intuition when she picked Betty Stevens for her first steamer-friendship on board. The two were temperamentally congenial.

Snaith, as "C. Leffingwell Gardner," didn't approach Lady Follansbee until he had managed to hear her addressed without her title and picked up a few little details which convinced him that Cheddars' information was well-founded. But after a while he strolled along to where she and Betty Stevens were chatting in

their deckchairs, removed his sun hat as Betty introduced them, and smilingly remarked:

"Mrs. Follansbee and I have met before, I believe?"

Unfolding her lorgnette, Her Ladyship calmly looked him over before speaking.

"That is quite possible, Mr.— er— Gardner. One is constantly meeting all sorts of people, everywhere. I'll not contradict you, of course— it's a matter of no conse-qu'nce on shipboard. •— Er— you were saying, Miss Stevens?"

It could have been taken as a rebuff or not, as he pleased. With Miss Stevens' introduction, he could have remained standing there and would have been included in their conversation, more or less, when he seemed disposed to stay on that basis. But if Lady Follansbee had recognized the man for the impostor he was, studied out a remark and manner that would puzzle him the most concerning her, she couldn't have hit upon anything more effective. Snaith was completely jarred from his self-possession and acted as if he had been caught either in a brazen attempt to claim acquaintance with no grounds whatever, or had received a most unjust and insulting facer. With merely a courteous bow, he strolled away to chat with some of the girls who .liked him.

From Her Ladyship's point of view, it appeared self-evident that in spite of her distinct objection to having any of the I. S. S. men accompany her as a matter of extra precaution, Major Carstairs had insisted upon sending one after all— though by getting him aboard at Singapore, he probably thought it impossible for anybody to associate the man with the mission she had undertaken. But she had lived in the East long enough to know that she had been absolutely right in refusing an official guard, that the presence of such an official on board easily might bring suspicion upon herself at some unexpected moment. Had it not been for one vague doubt in her mind, she would have sent a radio to Carstairs that she would place the matter in Major Saltoun's hands at once and leave the boat at Port Said— she was that provoked. This doubt was a something about the masquerading Gardner which didn't ring quite true. If Saltoun really were on special service which had no connection with her affair, he was sufficiently clever in his character-impersonations to fool anybody who knew him well without altering his facial appearance. It easily might be that— in which case, her annoyance at Carstairs was unfounded. On the other hand, if the man actually was traveling under his own name and merely bore a close resemblance to the I. S. S. officer, she didn't see how he could suspect her own mission. His claiming former acquaintance with her might have been done in perfect good faith by some man who had been introduced with a crowd of others, but she could recall nobody who so closely resembled Saltoun, and finally decided that he must be on detached service for the Indian Government and had taken that means of warning her not to address him by his own name.

In that case he could have asked for nothing better than her manner toward him. They had been introduced as strangers and could be courteous to each other as shipmates without implying previous acquaintance in any way.

TO Betty Stevens, however, the incident was sufficiently odd to arouse a speculative interest in her mind. Lady Follansbee had given every indication of being considerate to everyone, so that her action was surprising if she had no grounds for it. But the supposed Mr. Gardner had given a favorable impression from the moment he came aboard; it seemed impossible that he would chance any such rebuff unless he supposed that she would recognize him as a former acquaintance. So after a moment or two Betty asked:

"What's wrong about Mr. Gardner? We've quite liked him since he came aboard at Singapore."

"I think I may tell you something in confidence, Miss Stevens— because you've sense enough to see the trouble you might be making if you blabbed. Mr. Gardner is really Major Somebody Else of the I. S. S. I fancy he claimed acquaintance as he did merely as a warning that I must not address him by his own name— which would imply that he's on detached service of some sort. He is somehow vaguely diff 'rent from the man I know, in his little mannerisms— but he's so frightfully good at all sorts of characterizations that he may have been trying to make me do just what I did— fail to recognize him. If he's not the Governm'nt man, then I can't recall any occasion upon which we ever met, because the resemblance is so close that I certainly would have spoken of it at the time."

"H-m-m— that accounts for something in the Captain's manner. I've caught an occasional glance at Gardner— whom he must think he knew on some other boat, though the man doesn't seem to know Connyngsby."

As for the supposed Gardner, he was completely up in the air until he'd had a chance to reason out something approximately close to the real situation. As Charlie Snaith of the— th Rifles, he had met Lady Follansbee upon several occasions, and knew that she was even better acquainted with Major Saltoun, but with his black mustache, and in uniform, the resemblance between them was scarcely noticeable. In this impersonation of the Major, he knew beyond question that she must suppose him to be the I. S. S. man— indeed he had been addressed as Saltoun on the streets in Singapore before coming aboard. He could vaguely understand that she might suppose him to be on detached service and think it suited his book to consider him a stranger— but, again, she could hardly do that after he had claimed previous acquaintance. If she were engaged by the Governor to carry out the mission Cheddars had seemed so positive about, it seemed to him that she must welcome having assistance close at hand in case of emergency. Her whole manner seemed to indicate that Cheddars,

somehow, had been mistaken and had led him on a fruitless chase. But— Cheddars needed money too urgently to make a mistake of that sort. Conceivably, he must have known what he was talking about. If he was right, Snaith's impersonation of Saltoun didn't seem to be getting him anywhere. If she took him for Saltoun, there was a strong inference either that she didn't trust him,— hardly a supposable theory,:— that she was not carrying out any Government mission, or that, if so, she was determined to play a lone hand and take nobody into her confidence. He didn't know what to think. But he was playing a lone hand himself— and it presently seemed to him that her attitude might be turned to his advantage. As for Connyngsby— Snaith, of course, had no knowledge of any former acquaintance between him and the Major, so had no idea that the Captain considered him a Government officer. Like Snaith, the two Babus didn't consider it possible that such information as had come to them could have been obtained by anyone else in Singapore in time to book on the Argentine. They had no suspicion that he might be in the game; it never occurred to him that they had sailed with the same object. Each was concentrating only upon Lady Follansbee, and each was fully as much in doubt about their information having been correct. Ordinarily the Babus would have had the advantage over any European from their skill in hypnotism and ability completely to disappear when one had been speaking to them a second before— but the Ceylon official's hint to Connyngsby had just about spiked any effort they could make. The Captain had understood that she was being threatened by Orientals, hence his first orders in her case had been to Swain, (chief steward and acting purser) to have his stewards maintain the closest possible watch upon the two Babus, as they were the only Orientals on the boat at the time, except the Lascars of their own crew, who were known to be intensely loyal. The result was that they had no opportunity for getting anywhere near her or her stateroom— one of the stewards invariably turning up with some perfectly courteous message which prevented even a word with her. It afterward came out that they had attempted to bribe some of the Lascars and were nearly stabbed for their pains. After that, the Lascars helped the stewards in keeping track of them— but neither, of course, made the slightest attempt to interfere with Snaith's movements or consider them suspicious. It had gotten about the ship, in the way nobody ever satisfactorily explains, that he belonged to the Raj— which gave him pretty much carte blanche. Had he known to what extent this went, he might have been more careless than he was.

WE have now in hand all of the different threads leading up to what occurred on the second night out from Colombo. Lady Follansbee was too clever to invite comment by cutting the supposed Mr. Gardner after he had been introduced to her— particularly when she saw that he was popular. So she

permitted the usual steamer-acquaintance with him, finding the man an interesting conversationalist, as, of course, she had known from previous occasions ashore. After dinner on this particular night— one of the loveliest she ever had seen on the Sea of Arabia— she had gone up to her deck-chair with the other passengers, and Gardner had dropped into one next her while he finished his cigar. There was enough of a roll so that the chairs would have shifted, now and then, had it not been for the marline which lashed them to the rail, and, as always in a bit of a sea, the usual noises, creakings, rumblings of the boat herself as a subdued undertone. Presently, during a more pronounced list to starboard, Lady Follansbee stopped what she was saying, with a slight exclamation of pain. Gardner was on his feet instantly with extended hand.

"Er— beg pardon— but— are you hurt?"

"It's nothing, I fancy! Just a bit of a stab in my thigh— possibly a nail, or a splinter from my chair."

"If you'll permit me, we'd best examine the chair and find out which! A rusty nail, you know, calls for antiseptic at once! "

He helped her out of the chair and ran his fingers along the edge of the wood— hard maple, and in the deep shadow cast by one of the power-launches swinging from its heavy davits. In a few seconds he held up a sharp splinter in the moonlight— having loosened it with his pocket-knife when everyone was below at dinner.

"Fancy it must have been this, Mrs. Follansbee! I can feel no trace of a nail. Most of the fastenings on these deck-chairs are screws, you know. The end is quite sharp, as you see— hardwood."

"Oh, it was that, undoubtedly! .... Thanks, a lot! Let's see— where were we?"

Continuing the chat for another few minutes, she presently got out of her chair again— said she was going below to her stateroom.

"Fancy I must have eaten too much at dinner— that pudding was unusually good! When I overindulge, I get sleepy. No— don't bother, please! I'm a good sailor. Good night!"

In thinking it over next day, it seemed to her that by the time she reached her stateroom she was so sleepy she could scarcely keep her eyes open— it was an effort to strip off her clothes, get into pajamas and tumble into her berth. As her maid would be along presently, she didn't lock - the door, for it was her habit to wake instinctively at the slightest unusual sound. According to the maid's account, she opened the door not over ten minutes later— she was accustomed to putting the room in order for the night before her mistress appeared, then wait to brush and braid her hair. But finding the lady so sound asleep that no question wakened her, she braided the hair as best she could— straightened the clothes and the room and then went out, supposing that Lady Follansbee would wake from her nap in a little while and bolt the door as usual.

Before the bugle sounded for breakfast, a much frightened maid ran below to Swain, in the purser's office, and told him she feared her mistress was dead— lying against the door. Going up with her at once, after sending a steward along for Doctor Thayer, he found the door unlocked but held by what he feared was Her Ladyship's body. Pushing it back with the door as gently as he could, he squeezed inside and lifted her upon the berth— finding to his amazement that she was fully conscious, but gagged and bound. Promptly releasing her, he and the maid were bathing face and neck with cold water when Thayer came in. The Doctor found in a few moments that she was apparently little the worse for her experience and thought her quite able to come below for breakfast when she rather weakly suggested it.

"My room has been completely overhauled, as you see, Doctor— everything turned inside-out— steamer-trunk pulled from under the berth, ransacked and then shoved back again! I've no idea what has been taken, and I'll not bother with it until after breakfast. When I find out, I'll have a talk with the Captain, of course— but meanwhile you and Mr. Swain will please void mentioning this to anybody! Mary '11 not blab— she's been with me too long. Now run along, please, and let me dress. My word! How that gag made my jaws ache! Thank you both— so much!"

DURING breakfast there was one man in the saloon who casually glanced at Lady Follansbee and addressed an occasional remark to her as usual— he was very much on his guard to do this in exactly the manner he had used before, and not to betray that he was more than ordinarily interested in her appearance at the moment. But an uneasy feeling, almost fear Of something unexpected, seeped through him as he noted that she seemed none the worse for her night's experience and gave no evidence of being worried about anything. Better than anyone else on board, he knew that she should be fairly sick with worry, and the unconcerned manner in which she chatted and ate her breakfast, with apparently good appetite, made him wonder if by any possibility he could have been recognized by a seemingly unconscious woman. After breakfast she went in a leisurely way up to the Captain's cabin— shutting the door when he would have left it open.

"Captain— something occurred last night which makes it necessary to ask for your assistance at once. You've read the newssheets accounts of the wonderful black diamond known as the Black Star of Narrapore? In fact, I heard you discussing it with some of the ladies. It was accepted from the Maharajah by the Governor of India on behalf of the Crown— and the sending of any great jewel such a distance is always a serious matter involving some risk. A few have been sent through the registered mails without mishap— but this stone is unique. The Governor's first decision was to send it by two of the I. S. S. men,

traveling as merchants or tourists, but there was the risk of their being spotted. I had successfully carried out missions for the Government upon former occasions, and it was thought that I would be less likely to be suspected than any man would be— so I was entrusted with the stone, which I've been carrying in a chamois pouch strapped next to my skin in a position where it wouldn't be noticeable through my clothes. Last night, I fancy I must have been drugged in some way, my room was turned upside-down— and evidently I was handled rather unscrupulously while unconscious. The stone is gone. Nobody knows -of this except my maid, Mr. Swain. Doctor Thayer— and yourself. I suppose you may feel it necess'ry to enlist the services of two or three of your officers in trying to recover the diamond— but I fancy you'd best limit the knowledge to as few as possible. Of course, on a boat of this size, one might conceal such a thing where it wouldn't be found for years. But at least you can prevent anybody from going ashore without a thorough search of person and luggage. There was some talk of your stopping for passengers at Aden, but I understand that was left optional with you to some extent— you can easily find a reason for not doing it. That would give us from now until we coal at Port Said. If we don't find it by then, it might be tossed ashore through one of the ports when we're tied up at the coal-wharves. Now— what -do you suggest?"

CONNYNGSBY was, for a moment, very much upset— realizing the unpleasant notoriety resulting from anything of the sort on his boat, even though no responsibility could attach to him or his officers. For a second or two, indeed, he wondered if he were quite sure as to that. Reaching into a drawer of his desk for an exceptionally good cigar, he lighted it— puffed for a minute before answering:

"I'd say, I fancy, that we'd best put the very best brains we've got aboard on this job— have a conference up here where we may question you upon points which you" may not have considered important. Seems to me we'll get ahead faster, much more certainly, by sitting down an' thinking this matter out than attempting to ransack the whole ship. What?"

"My idea precisely, Captain! I've heard it said that you've a good head— and I'm sure of it now. Who do you suggest?"

"Ned Coffin— whom you'll know from the press accounts is a top-side man in the mate line. Doctor Thayer, Swain, McTavish, who'll be able to spot anything suspicious in the engine-room an' stokehold gangs— an' I fancy we may get valuable assistance from Miss Stevens. She's by way of being personal secretary to one of the big American railway magnates, accustomed to handling all sorts of problems— an' she thinks a good bit faster than I do. Been on this boat so long that she's almost one of us. So has Fernshaw— who's a confidential

agent for Lloyd's an' vitally interested in this particular stone, inasmuch as they've insured it for a staggering price."

"I'd rather bring him into the matter at some later time if we are unsuccessful. Miss Stevens and the others I approve without reservation— but I fancy that will be enough to find the stone if it's to be done in a quiet way, and we may rely upon their being close-mouthed."

One by one, watching their chance to slip up the port ladder to the bridge unobserved, and then along to Connyngsby's cabin, the others dropped in— after which the door was locked. Ned Coffin's first question was as to whether Lady Follansbee suspected any one person.

"No. I looked about my room very carefully for any little object which might have been dropped— for noticeable finger-marks— but I couldn't find a clue of any sort. I must have been in a very heavy sleep from the time I tumbled into my berth until sometime after sunrise when I found myself gagged and bound— tried to get up— and fell against the door. There's no doubt that I was drugged. Have you any Lascars, Malays or Hindus in the galley, Mr. Swain?"

"Not one! French, Scotch and Irish."

"Have you any stewards who might, conceivably, attempt anything like this?"

"Fancy not. Some of our stewards were bribed in a case of attempted piracy on the way up from Batavia to Manila— but we got rid of every one and overhauled the new ones very thoroughly before taking them on— looked up the references of each man. Our Lascars, for'ard, have been tested a dozen times— an unusually fine picked lot. In fact, I'd say rather positively that one of the passengers got the stone!"

Coffin nodded emphatically— he felt pretty certain as to the thief.

"My idea exactly, Tommy! And you'll find the two Babus have the stone! They may be in the pay of some maharajah, or acting on their own, but any Oriental could dispose of that diamond for a higher price than a white man, with no questions asked. Such a stone would be what they're always looking for to stick on the Number One idol in some temple— "

"Well— that's true enough. But those two Babus have been watched more closely than anyone else from the moment they stepped aboard, on the chance that they might have some intention of murdering Her Ladyship. The tip from that Governm'nt chap at Colombo led us to suspect something of the sort— though of course we know now that the object was a diff'rent one entirely. Well, those two Hindus were playing chess in the smoke-room an' drinking their everlawsting sherbets from the time Lady Follansbee went below until the lights were turned off. They went directly to their room, taking the chess-board with them— kept their light burning until fourbells in the morning, and smoke coming through the blind. From two until six the night-shift of the saloon

stewards didn't see either one come out— though I fancy they might have climbed out of their window without being seen. One of the Lascars was on watch along that gangway, but he might have gone for'ard for a couple of minutes. I'd say there'll be scarcely a chance of their bein' mixed up in this."

SWAIN'S data was disappointing to most of them, because they had jumped to the conclusion that the only Oriental passengers on board were most probably the thieves, and fully half stuck to that belief. But an idea occurred to the Captain:

"I say! We've an I. S. S. man aboard, you know— though I've respected his incognito on the chance that he's on special service. Seems to me we should bring him into this— he'd have a lot of native data that would never occur to us. What?"

There were two immediate protests.

"No! I object to that very strongly, Captain!" This from Mrs. Follansbee.

"I think it might prove a serious mistake, Captain," said Betty Stevens. "You're referring of course to Mr. Gardner. We all like him more or less— he seems to be as straight as a string, and yet there's something about him which has been puzzling me for the last two days. I don't know a thing against the man, but he's about the last one I'd bring into this!"

"What's Your Ladyship's objection?"

"I'm reasonably sure, as you are, that Gardner is really Major Saltoun— but at times I'm by no means positive."

"Hmph! It just occurs to me that there'll be a way of testing that. Saltoun was in the war, of course— struck by shellfragment at second Ypres— inside of right leg above the knee— never healed properly. If anything whacks him in just that spot, he's almost crazy with pain for a moment or two. Well— I'll stumble against him before long an' manage to whack it. Then we'll know— positively!"

"He's not claiming to be Saltoun, on board. If you find he's not, you prove nothing more than a case of strong resemblance— nothing in the least against the man, who may not even know of it."

"Your Ladyship says that you were unquestionably drugged— because you never slept like that before? Now— unless it's some particular dish you've asked for, something the chef knows you particularly like, nobody in the galley would know who was getting any one dish or cup of coffee. Your saloon-steward is the Captain's man Bobbs— been on the Line seven years, with a top-side record. I'll swear he didn't drug you or would even accept any special dish from the galley without mentioning it. If drugged, it must have been somewhere else. Can you think of any circumst'nce when such a thing might have happened?"

"Not unless a splinter from a maple deck-chair would put me into such a sleep as that! Mr. Gardner and I were chatting on the boat-deck when I shifted

about in my chair and ran the splinter into my thigh. He helped me up, then found the thing— broke it off and showed it to me. Dare say it may be down there in the scuppers yet— "

"When was this?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes before I went below, last night."

A soundless whistle puckered Miss Stevens' lips. She casually asked:

"Who has the corner room, for'ard— next to Mr. Gardner's?"

"Vacant. That and its adjoining bath form one of the two de-luxe staterooms— usually reserved for owners' friends or some personage like the Sultan of Bungi-Trelak. Her Ladyship has the corresponding one on the starboard side," replied Swain.

"Could the bath be used by Mr. Gardner —from his room?"

"If he wished to pay four bob a day more for it. The bath communicates with both staterooms through doors which maybe bolted on either side. Of course, if .Gardner had been using the bath, it would have been reported by his room-steward— but he's not. Saves his money by havin' a regular hour in one of the public baths."

Betty changed the subject as if it no longer interested her.

"It seems to me we'll get on faster, from here, if we try to figure it out by deduction. Doctor, you've been on the boat long enough to know the whole crew pretty well, and you'll admit that whoever figured out the plan to steal the diamond as it was stolen must have a more clever brain than the average person— not? Well, can you think of any Lascar, stoker, greaser, or steward, whose brains are in that class?"

Doctor Thayer shook his head.

"I can't think of a single one— and I've talked with or prescribed for all of them The Lascars are more or less psychic, like all Orientals, intuition cultivated to a surprising degree, but they lack the initiative to do things on their own. The stokers are mostly animals, or they wouldn't take that sort of a job. Greasers a notch or two more intelligent— they have to be if they keep fingers and limbs from being crushed by machinery in motion. Stewards— well, you occasionally meet one with a first-class head, but he doesn't ship as steward more than one or two voyages. Ours are of average intelligence, but they lack both the nerve and the initiative to figure out anything like this and get away with it."

"Then, as Lady Follansbee was the only passenger who came aboard at Colombo, and as there was no thought of sending the stone by her until two days before we left Singapore, that would seem to eliminate everybody on board except the two Babus, Gardner, Flo Weymouth and Amy Torrance, who came aboard there. On fairly strong circumstantial evidence, there's no other conclusion to be reached than that —is there?"

"H-m-m— now that you've put it in that clean-cut way, Miss Betty, I think I'd agree with you. On any logical basis, the rest of us must take the same view. And I'd point out that if you eliminate all of the crew upon the ground of insufficient brains, you must leave out the two girls as well— not? Nice attractive girls, good company, read the popular novels and some of the gazettes— but most certainly not with the sort of brains this calls for."

"All right! I wont push this to a snap conclusion just now— overconfidence makes as many mistakes as ignorance. Let's ge^ another slant. Assuming that you, personally, have brains enough for this,— and I guess nobody here will dispute that,— what would be your probable course, if your plan worked out successfully and you'd actually gotten the stone into your possession? What you figure on as the safest disposition you could make of it— at once?"

"That requires a little thought. You see, up to this time, I've never stolen a jewel of that size. I would know instinctively that I and my baggage would be searched, sooner or later— every cranny of my stateroom also. I'd try to think of a place where it could be safely concealed until the boat was entering the Thames, if necessary— some place where it wouldn't occur to anyone else to look for it, and yet where I could recover it within an hour or so. Might even leave it until the boat sailed on her next voyage and then book on her, no matter which way she was going."

"Precisely! Nine men out of ten would follow that line of reasoning after getting the stone! Well, our problem is to find that place within the next seven days, before we reach Port Said. It looks to me as if that's all there is to it."

Connyngsby grinned— then the troubled look came back into his face.

"Hmph! That 'all' will take some doing, Miss Betty— on a boat of this size!"

"Not if we do it with our heads, Captain— instead of trying to find the needle in the haystack with our hands and feet. The man who did find it dug down into the hay with a flash-light at just the one spot where it was lost, you know— he wasted no time on the rest of the stack."

WHEN the conference broke up, Miss Stevens went below with the mate and Thayer to Coffin's room on the main-deck, where she closed the door— and then asked them who stole the diamond. Ned Coffin, with a gesture of impatience, said: "The two Babus, of course!" Betty smiled at him in a slightly maternal way.

"Neddie, boy— you've done so many big things on this boat that I've been expecting you to blow up and show a streak of poor judgment somewhere. Now if you weren't frightfully upset over the probable effect of this on the boat and all of you, when it gets out, you wouldn't be so apt to jump at conclusions— you'd use your bean to better advantage. What do yon say, Doctor?"

"Gardner! Without much question. He jabbed a hypodermic into Her Ladyship's thigh, in the deep shadow behind that launch— and didn't even have to pick the lock of her door! He figured that she'd be too far gone to get out of her berth after Mary left the room."

"After that splinter story, it's pretty nearly a cinch, isn't it? All right! Now let's go up and get that stone while the getting's good! One of you pass the word to Lady Follansbee and the Captain to keep Gardner on the boat-deck, aft, for a good hour and a half, if possible. Then get a big screw-driver, a small one, a goodsized gimlet— and a pocket flash-light— wrapped up in a parcel, so that nobody will know what you're carrying. One by one, we'll sneak into that big for'ard room when nobody is looking. One of you get the key from Tommy and tell him to keep mum. Come along, now! No telling how long it may take us!"

The walls of the officers' rooms on the main-deck were simply the ship's plating covered with two coats of white enamel, but the passengers' staterooms on the boatdeck were sheathed in yellow pine as far as the ceiling and painted with the same enamel, so that between the cushioned transoms and the outer plating of the deckhouse there was a space with a depth of four inches providing a pocket for the windows and their blinds.

When they were in the room, Betty's first action was to go down on her knees with the flash-light and closely examine the wooden sheathing under the lower berth and under the transom, opposite. In a moment or two she reached up for the little screw-driver and commenced scraping at the cracks where one of the yellow pine strips joined the others on either side— for the light showed that it had been sawed through, close to the deck and the under side of the transom. In the third strip from it, she also noticed the point of a wood-screw which had been driven in from the space back of it. Loosening and prying out the strip with the big screw-driver, she reached her arm through the opening and felt around for the head of that screw. As she expected, her fingers touched a steel wire suspended from a round screw-eye— and hanging from that wire, was a tightly wrapped package which she pulled out. In it they found the chamois pouch, with its straps, and a malevolently sparkling chunk which gleamed and flashed in the sunlight that came through the forward port.

They were so fascinated with the wonderful thing that they wasted precious time examining it, until Betty realized this and set to work putting back the strip under the transom and filling the cracks with bread-crumbs as she had found it. Locking and bolting the bathroom door on Gardner's side, they managed to leave the room without being seen, then went below to the purser's office, where, after seeing what they had, Tommy Swain immediately sent for Lady Follansbee. When she joined them, he suggested her doing up the stone in a waterproof package and sealing it with her ring— then permitting him to place it in the boat's strong-room just under where he was standing, assuring her it was

the latest thing in steel safety-vaults installed upon any ship. This she consented to do.

"I considered it when I came aboard, but there is the risk of collision at sea, running foul of a derelict and foundering— in which case there'd be no time to get it. If we were on deep-water, it would be lost forever, you know. But I fear I must take that chance, now. By the way, the Captain accidentally knocked Gardner's leg with a camp-stool— and apologized. Gardner merely grinned— said he scarcely noticed it. But that merely proves he's not Saltoun— which he never has claimed."

"Hmph! I'll prove a darned sight more than that in a few days, I guess! Just wait until he wants Tommy Swain to shift him into that corner room!"

HALFWAY up the Red Sea, after having found the steward had locked him out of the bath and corner room, as he supposed— Gardner made this request upon the ground that it was better ventilated and that he wasn't feeling quite fit. He made no demur over the extra price for that room, but didn't care to pay for the bath— which was then locked against the corner room. And the first hour that he spent in his new quarters he was closely watched by five people through the bathroom bulkhead by means of tiny gimlet-holes. As Miss Stevens had foreseen, one of his first acts was to get down and pry out that strip under the transom. He was cursing when he stood up again.

Connyngsby had all the evidence he needed to put the man in the brig for the remainder of the voyage and turn him over to the London authorities, but there seemed nothing to be gained by it. If Gardner brazened it out, the case against him wasn't any too good— supposing, for example, that he swore he'd been merely groping under the transom for a missing cuff -button. (Gimlet-holes are pretty small.) The fellow was punished enough in his disappointment over losing the stone after actually having it in his possession— but the main consideration was the advisability of suppressing all evidence that the diamond was or had been on the boat at any time.

At Tilbury a launch with two King's Messengers and several Secret Service men -from the Foreign Office took Lady Follansbee off, while her maid went in a car to the Savoy with the luggage— and they didn't leave her until the Black Star of Narrapore was safely in the Bank of England vaults!

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16: The Shadow over Innsmouth

H. P. Lovecraft

1890-1937

Weird Tales, Jan 1942

DURING THE WINTER of 1927-28 Federal government officials made a strange and secret investigation of certain conditions in the ancient Massachusetts seaport of Innsmouth. The public first learned of it in February, when a vast series of raids and arrests occurred, followed by the deliberate burning and dynamiting— under suitable precautions— of an enormous number of crumbling, worm-eaten, and supposedly empty houses along the abandoned waterfront. Uninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor.

Keener news-followers, however, wondered at the prodigious number of arrests, the abnormally large force of men used in making them, and the secrecy surrounding the disposal of the prisoners. No trials, or even definite charges, were reported; nor were any of the captives seen thereafter in the regular jails of the nation. There were vague statements about disease and concentration camps, and later about dispersal in various naval and military prisons, but nothing positive ever developed.

Complaints from many liberal organizations were met with long confidential discussions, and representatives were taken on trips to certain camps and prisons. As a result, these societies became surprisingly passive and reticent. Newspaper men were harder to manage, but seemed largely to cooperate with the government in the end. Only one paper— a tabloid always discounted because of its wild policy— mentioned the deep-diving submarine that discharged torpedoes downward in the marine abyss just beyond Devil Reef. That item, gathered by chance in a haunt of sailors, seemed indeed rather far-fetched; since the low, black reef lies a full mile and a half out from Innsmouth Harbor.

But at last I am going to defy the ban on speech about this thing. Results, I am certain, are so thorough that no public harm save a shock of repulsion could ever accrue from a hinting of what was found by those horrified raiders at Innsmouth. For my contact with this affair has been closer than that of any other layman, and I have carried away impressions which are yet to drive me to drastic measures.

It was I who fled frantically out of Innsmouth in the early morning hours of July 16, 1927, and whose frightened appeals for government inquiry and action brought on the whole reported episode. I was willing enough to stay mute while the affair was fresh and uncertain; but now that it is an old story, with public interest and curiosity gone, I have an odd craving to whisper about those few

frightful hours in that ill-rumored and evilly-shadowed seaport of death and blasphemous abnormality.

I never heard of Innsmouth till the day before I saw it for the first and— so far— last time. I was celebrating my coming of age by a tour of New England— sightseeing, antiquarian, and genealogical— and had planned to go directly from ancient Newburyport to Arkham, whence my mother's family was derived. I had no car, but was traveling by train, trolley, and motor-coach, always seeking the cheapest possible route. In Newburyport they told me that the steam train was the thing to take to Arkham; and it was only at the station ticket-office, when I demurred at the high fare, that I learned about Innsmouth. The stout, shrewd-faced agent, whose speech showed him to be no local man, seemed sympathetic toward my efforts at economy, and made a suggestion that none of my other informants had offered.

"You *could* take that old bus, I suppose," he said with a certain hesitation, "but it ain't thought much of hereabouts. It goes through Innsmouth— you may have heard about that— and so the people don't like it. Run by an Innsmouth fellow— Joe Sargent— but never gets any custom from here, or Arkham either, I guess. Leaves the Square— front of Hammond's Drug Store— at 10 A.M. and 7 P.M. unless they've changed lately. Looks like a terrible rattletrap— I've never been on it."

That was the first I ever heard of shadowed Innsmouth. Any reference to a town not shown on common maps or listed in recent guidebooks would have interested me, and the agent's old manner of allusion roused something like real curiosity. So I asked the agent to tell me something about it.

He was very deliberate, and spoke with an air of feeling slightly superior to what he said.

"Innsmouth? Well, it's a queer kind of town down at the mouth of the Manuxet. Used to be almost a city— quite a port before the War of 1812— but all gone to pieces in the last hundred years or so. No railroad now— B. & M. never went through, and the branch line from Rowley was given up years ago.

"More empty houses than there are people, I guess, and no business to speak of except fishing and lobstering. Everybody trades mostly either here or in Arkham or Ipswich. Once they had quite a few mills, but nothing's left now except one gold refinery running on the leanest kind of part time.

"That refinery, though, used to be a big thing, and Old Man Marsh, who owns it, must be richer'n Croesus. Queer old duck, though, and sticks mighty close in his home. He's supposed to have developed some skin disease or deformity late in life that makes him keep out of sight. Grandson of Captain Obed Marsh, who founded the business. His mother seems to've been some kind of foreigner— they say a South Sea islander— so everybody raised Cain when he married an Ipswich girl fifty years ago. They always do that about

Innsmouth people, and folks here and hereabouts always try to cover up any Innsmouth blood they have in 'em. But Marsh's children and grandchildren look just like anybody else so far's I can see. I've had 'em pointed out to me here— though, come to think of it, the elder children don't seem to be around lately. Never saw the old man.

"And why is everybody so down on Innsmouth? Well, young fellow, you mustn't take too much stock in what people around here say. They're hard to get started, but once they do get started they never let up. They've been telling things about Innsmouth— whispering 'em, mostly— for the last hundred years, I guess, and I gather they're more scared than anything else. Some of the stories would make you laugh— about old Captain Marsh driving bargains with the devil and bringing imps out of hell to live in Innsmouth, or about some kind of devil-worship and awful sacrifices in some place near the wharves that people stumbled on around 1845 or there-abouts— but I come from Panton, Vermont, and that kind of story don't go down with me.

"You ought to hear, though, what some of the old-timers tell about the black reef off the coast— Devil Reef, they call it. It's well above water a good part of the time, and never much below it, but at that you could hardly call it an island. The story is that there's a whole legion of devils seen sometimes on that reef— sprawled about, or darting in and out of some kind of caves near the top. It's a rugged, uneven thing, a good bit over a mile out, and toward the end of shipping days sailors used to make big detours just to avoid it.

"That is, sailors that didn't hail from Innsmouth. One of the things they had against old Captain Marsh was that he was supposed to land on it sometimes at night when the tide was right. Maybe he did, for I dare say the rock formation was interesting, and it's just barely possible he was looking for pirate loot and maybe finding it; but there was talk of his dealing with demons there. Fact is, I guess on the whole it was really the captain that gave the bad reputation to the reef.

"That was before the big epidemic of 1846, when over half the folks in Innsmouth was carried off. They never did quite figure out what the trouble was, but it was probably some foreign kind of disease brought from China or somewhere by the shipping. It surely was bad enough— there was riots over it, and all sorts of ghastly doings that I don't believe ever got outside of town— and it left the place in awful shape. Never came back— there can't be more'n 300 or 400 people living there now.

"But the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice— and I don't say I'm blaming those that hold it. I hate those Innsmouth folks myself, and I wouldn't care to go to their town. I s'pose you know— though I can see you're a Westerner by your talk— what a lot our New England ships used to have to do with queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else,

and what queer kinds of people they sometimes brought back with 'em. You've probably heard about the Salem man that came home with a Chinese wife, and maybe you know there's still a bunch of Fiji Islanders somewhere around Cape Cod.

"Well, there must be something like that back of the Innsmouth people. The place always was badly cut off from the rest of the country by marshes and creeks, and we can't be sure about the ins and outs of the matter; but it's pretty clear that old Captain Marsh must have brought home some odd specimens when he had all three of his ships in commission back in the twenties and thirties. There certainly is a strange kind of a streak in the Innsmouth folks today— I don't know how to explain it, but it sort of makes you crawl. You'll notice a little in Sargent if you take his bus. Some of 'em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starey eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain't quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shriveled or creased up. Get bald, too, very young. The older fellows look the worst— fact is, I don't believe I've ever seen a very old chap of that kind. Guess they must die of looking in the glass! Animals hate 'em— they used to have lots of horse trouble before autos came in.

"Nobody can ever keep track of those people, and state school officials and census men have a devil of a time. You can bet that prying strangers ain't welcome around Innsmouth. I've heard personally of more'n one business or government man that's disappeared there, and there's loose talk of one who went crazy and is out at Danvers now. They must have fixed up some awful scare for that fellow.

"That's why I wouldn't go at night if I was you. I've never been there and have no wish to go, but I guess a daytime trip couldn't hurt you— even though the people hereabouts will advise you not to make it. If you're just sightseeing, and looking for old-time stuff, Innsmouth ought to be quite a place for you."

And so I spent part of that evening at the Newburyport Public Library looking up data about Innsmouth. The Essex County histories on the library shelves had very little to say, except that the town was founded in 1643, noted for shipbuilding before the Revolution, a seat of great marine prosperity in the early 19th century, and later a minor factory center using the Manuxet as power. The epidemic and riots of 1846 were very sparsely treated, as if they formed a discredit to the country.

References to decline were few, though the significance of the later record was unmistakable. After the Civil War all industrial life was confined to the Marsh Refining Company, and the marketing of gold ingots formed the only remaining bit of major commerce aside from the eternal fishing.

Most interesting of all was a glancing reference to the strange jewelry vaguely associated with Innsmouth. It had evidently impressed the whole

countryside more than a little, for mention was made of specimens in the museum of Miskatonic University at Arkham, and in the display room of the Newburyport Historical Society. I resolved to see the local sample— said to be a large, queerly-proportioned thing evidently meant for a tiara— if it could possibly be arranged.

The librarian gave me a note of introduction to the curator of the Society, a Miss Anna Tilton, who lived nearby, and after a brief explanation that ancient gentlewoman was kind enough to pilot me into the closed building, since the hour was not outrageously late. The collection was a notable one indeed, but in my present mood I had eyes for nothing but the bizarre object which glistened in a corner cupboard under the electric lights.

It took no excessive sensitiveness to beauty to make me literally gasp at the strange, unearthly splendor of the alien, opulent phantasy that rested there on a purple velvet cushion. The longer I looked, the more the thing fascinated me; and in this fascination there was a curiously disturbing element hardly to be classified or accounted for. I decided that it was the queer other-worldly quality of the art which made me uneasy. It was as if the workmanship were that of another planet.

The patterns all hinted of remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space, and the monotonously aquatic nature of the reliefs became almost sinister. Among these reliefs were fabulous monsters of abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity— wholly primal and awesomely ancestral.

At times I fancied that every contour of these blasphemous fish-frogs was overflowing with the ultimate quintessence of unknown and inhuman evil.

In odd contrast to the tiara's aspect was its brief and prosy history as related by Miss Tilton. It had been pawned for a ridiculous sum at a shop in State Street in 1873, by a drunken Innsmouth man shortly afterward killed in a brawl.

Miss Tilton was inclined to believe that it formed part of some exotic pirate hoard discovered by old Captain Obed Marsh. This view was surely not weakened by the insistent offers of purchase at a high price which the Marshes began to make as soon as they knew of its presence, and which they repeated to this day despite the Society's unvarying determination not to sell.

As the good lady showed me out of the building, she assured me that the rumors of devil-worship were partly justified by a peculiar secret cult which had gained force there and engulfed all the orthodox churches.

It was called, she said, "The Esoteric Order of Dagon," and was undoubtedly a debased, quasi-pagan thing imported from the East a century before, at a time when Innsmouth fisheries seemed to be going barren. Its persistence among a simple people was quite natural in view of the sudden and permanent return of abundantly fine fishing, and it soon came to be the greatest influence on the town.

All this, to the pious Miss Tilton, formed an excellent reason for shunning the ancient town of decay and desolation; but to me it was merely a fresh incentive; and I could scarcely sleep in my small room at the "Y" as the night wore away.

ii

SHORTLY BEFORE ten the next morning I stood with my one small valise in front of Hammond's Drug Store in old Market Square waiting for the Innsmouth bus. In a few moments a small motor-coach of extreme decrepitude and dirty gray color rattled down State Street, made a turn, and drew up at the curb beside me. I felt immediately that it was the right one; a guess which the half-illegible sign on the windshield— "*Arkham-Innsmouth-Newb'port*"— soon verified.

There were only three passengers— dark, unkempt men of sullen visage and somewhat youthful cast— and when the vehicle stopped they clumsily shambled out and began walking up State Street in a silent, almost furtive fashion. The driver also alighted. This, I reflected, must be the Joe Sargent mentioned by the ticket-agent; and even before I had noticed any details there spread over me a wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained.

He was a thin, stoop-shouldered man not much under six feet tall, dressed in shabby blue civilian clothes and wearing a frayed gray golf cap. His age was perhaps thirty-five, but the odd, deep creases in the sides of his neck made him seem older when one did not study his dull, expressionless face. He had a narrow head, bulging, watery blue eyes that seemed never to wink, a flat nose, a receding forehead and chin, and singularly undeveloped ears. As he walked toward the bus I observed his peculiarly shambling gait and saw that his feet were inordinately immense. The more I studied them the more I wondered how he could buy any shoes to fit them.

A certain greasiness about the fellow increased my dislike. He was evidently given to working or lounging around the fish docks, and carried with him much of their characteristic smell. Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess.

I was sorry when I saw that there would be no other passengers on the bus. Somehow I did not like the idea of riding alone with this driver. But as the leaving time obviously approached I conquered my qualms and followed the man aboard, extending him a dollar bill and murmuring the single word "Innsmouth."

At length the decrepit vehicle started with a jerk, and rattled noisily past the old brick buildings of State Street amidst a cloud of vapor from the exhaust.

The day was warm and sunny, but the landscape of sand, sedge-grass, and stunted shrubbery became more and more desolate as we proceeded. Out the window I could see the blue water and the sandy line of Plum Island, and we presently drew very near the beach as our narrow road veered off from the main highway to Rowley and Ipswich.

At last we lost sight of Plum Island and saw the vast expanse of the open Atlantic on our left. Our narrow course began to climb steeply, and I felt a singular sense of disquiet in looking at the lonely crest ahead where the rutted roadway met the sky. It was as if the bus were about to keep on its ascent leaving the sane earth altogether and merging with the unknown arcana of upper air and cryptical sky. The smell of the sea took on ominous implications, and the silent driver's bent, rigid back and narrow head became more and more hateful. As I looked at him I saw that the back of his head was almost as hairless as his face, having only a few straggling yellow strands upon a gray scabrous surface.

Then we reached the crest and beheld the outspread valley beyond, where the Manuxet joins the sea just north of the long line of cliffs that culminate in Kingsport Head; all my attention was captured by the nearer panorama just below me. I had, I realized, come face to face with rumor-shadowed Innsmouth.

It was a town of wide extent and dense construction, yet one with a portentous dearth of visible life. The vast huddle of sagging gambrel roofs and peaked gables conveyed with offensive clearness the idea of wormy decay, and as we approached along the now descending road I could see that many roofs had wholly caved in. Stretching inland I saw the rusted, grass-grown line of the abandoned railway, with leaning telegraph-poles now devoid of wires.

Here and there the ruins of wharves jutted out from the shore to end in indeterminate rottenness, those farthest south seeming the most decayed. And far out at sea, despite a high tide, I glimpsed a long, black line scarcely rising above the water yet carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy. This, I knew, must be Devil Reef. As I looked, a subtle, curious sense of beckoning seemed superadded to the grim repulsion; and oddly enough, I found this overtone more disturbing than the primary impression.

As the bus reached a lower level I began to catch the steady note of a waterfall through the unnatural stillness. The leaning, unpainted houses grew thicker, lined both sides of the road, and displayed more urban tendencies than did those we were leaving behind. The panorama ahead had contracted to a street scene, and in spots I could see where a cobblestone pavement and stretches of brick sidewalk had formerly existed. All the houses were apparently deserted, and there were occasional gaps where tumbledown chimneys and cellar walls told of buildings that had collapsed. Pervading everything was the most nauseous fishy odor imaginable.

And I was not to reach my destination without one other very strong impression of poignantly disagreeable quality. The bus had come to a sort of open concourse or radial point with churches on two sides and the bedraggled remains of a circular green in the center, and I was looking at a large pillared hall on the right-hand junction ahead. The structure's once white paint was now gray and peeling, and the black and gold sign on the pediment was so faded that I could only with difficulty make out the words "Esoteric Order of Dagon."

The door of the church basement was open, revealing a rectangle of blackness inside. And as I looked, a certain object crossed or seemed to cross that dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more maddening because analysis could not show a single nightmarish quality in it.

It was a living object— the first except the driver that I had seen since entering the compact part of the town— and had I been in a steadier mood I would have found nothing whatever of terror in it. Clearly, as I realized a moment later, it was the pastor; clad in some peculiar vestments doubtless introduced since the Order of Dagon had modified the ritual of the local churches. The thing which had probably caught my first subconscious glance and supplied the touch of bizarre horror was the tall tiara he wore; an almost exact duplicate of the one Miss Tilton had shown me the previous evening. This, acting on my imagination, had supplied namelessly sinister qualities to the indeterminate face and robed, shambling form beneath it.

A very thin sprinkling of repellent-looking youngish people now became visible on the sidewalks— lone individuals, and silent knots of two or three. The lower floors of the crumbling houses sometimes harbored small shops with dingy signs, and I noticed a parked truck or two as we rattled along. The sound of waterfalls became more and more distinct, and presently I saw a fairly deep river-gorge ahead, spanned by a wide, iron-railed highway bridge beyond which a large square opened out. Then we rolled into the large semicircular square across the river and drew up on the right-hand side in front of a tall, cupola-crowned building with remnants of yellow paint and with a half-effaced sign proclaiming it to be the Gilman House.

I was glad to get out of that bus, and at once proceeded to check my valise in the shabby hotel lobby. There was only one person in sight— an elderly man without what I had come to call the "Innsmouth look"— and I decided not to ask him any of the questions which bothered me; remembering that odd things had been noticed in this hotel. Instead, I strolled out on the square, from which the bus had already gone, and studied the scene minutely and appraisingly.

For some reason or other I chose to make my first inquiries at the chain grocery, whose personnel was not likely to be native to Innsmouth. I found a solitary boy of about seventeen in charge, and was pleased to note the

brightness and affability which promised cheerful information. He seemed exceptionally eager to talk, and I soon gathered that he did not like the place, its fishy smell, or its furtive people. His family did not like him to work in Innsmouth, but the chain had transferred him there and he did not wish to give up his job.

There was, he said, no public library or chamber of commerce in Innsmouth, but I could probably find my way about. The street I had come down was Federal. West of that were the fine old residence streets— Broad, Washington, Lafayette, and Adams— and east of it were the shoreward slums.

Certain spots were almost forbidden territory, as he had learned at considerable cost. One must not, for example, linger much around the Marsh refinery, or around any of the still used churches, or around the pillared Order of Dagon Hall at New Church Green. Those churches were very odd— all violently disavowed by their respective denominations elsewhere, and apparently using the queerest kind of ceremonials and clerical vestments.

As for the Innsmouth people— the youth hardly knew what to make of them. Their appearance— especially those staring, unwinking eyes which one never saw shut— was certainly shocking enough— and their voices were disgusting. It was awful to hear them chanting in their churches at night, and especially during their main festivals or revivals, which fell twice a year on April 30 and October 31.

They were very fond of the water, and swam a great deal in both river and harbor. Swimming races out to Devil Reef were very common, and everyone in sight seemed well able to share in this arduous sport.

It would be of no use, my informant said, to ask the natives anything about the place. The only one who would talk was a very aged but normal-looking man who lived at the poorhouse on the north rim of the town and spent his time walking about or lounging around the fire station. This hoary character, Zadok Allen, was 96 years old and somewhat touched in the head, besides being the town drunkard. He was a strange, furtive creature who constantly looked over his shoulder as if afraid of something, and when sober could not be persuaded to talk at all with strangers. He was, however, unable to resist any offer of his favorite poison; and once drunk would furnish the most astonishing fragments of whispered reminiscence.

After all, though, little useful data could be gained from him; since his stories were all insane, incomplete hints of impossible marvels and horrors which could have no source save in his own distorted fancy. Nobody ever believed him, but the natives did not like him to drink and talk with any strangers; and it was not always safe to be seen questioning him. It was probably from him that some of the wildest popular whispers and delusions were derived.

The Marshes, together with the other three gently bred families of the town— the Waites, the Gilmans, and the Eliots— were all very retiring. They lived in immense houses along Washington Street, and several were reputed to harbor in concealment certain kinsfolk whose personal aspect forbade public view, and whose deaths had been reported and recorded.

Warning me that most of the street signs were down, the youth drew for my benefit a rough but ample and painstaking sketch map of the town's salient features. After a moment's study I felt sure that it would be of great help, and pocketed it with profuse thanks.

Thus began my systematic though half-bewildered tour of Innsmouth's narrow, shadow-blighted ways. Crossing the bridge and turning toward the roar of the lower falls, I passed close to the Marsh refinery, which seemed oddly free from the noise of industry. This building stood on the steep river bluff near a bridge and an open confluence of streets which I took to be the earliest civic center, displaced after the Revolution by the present Town Square.

Re-crossing the gorge on the Main Street bridge, I struck a region of utter desertion which somehow made me shudder. Collapsing huddles of gambrel roofs formed a jagged and fantastic skyline, above which rose the ghoulish, decapitated steeple of an ancient church.

Fish Street was as deserted as Main, though it differed in having many brick and stone warehouses still in excellent shape. Water Street was almost its duplicate, save that there were great seaward gaps where wharves had been. Not a living thing did I see, except for the scattered fishermen on the distant breakwater, and not a sound did I hear save the lapping of the harbor tides and the roar of the falls in the Manuxet.

I kept north along Main to Martin, then turning inland, crossing Federal Street safely north of the Green, and entering the decayed patrician neighborhood of northern Broad, Washington, Lafayette, and Adams Streets. Following Washington Street toward the river, I now faced a zone of former industry and commerce; noting the ruins of a factory ahead, and seeing others, with the traces of an old railway station and covered railway bridge beyond up the gorge on my right.

The uncertain bridge now before me was posted with a warning sign, but I took the risk and crossed again to the south bank where traces of life reappeared. Furtive, shambling creatures stared cryptically in my direction, and more normal faces eyed me coldly and curiously. Innsmouth was rapidly becoming intolerable, and I turned down Paine Street toward the Square in the hope of getting some vehicle to take me to Arkham before the still-distant starting time of that sinister bus.

It was then that I saw the tumbledown fire station on my left, and noticed the red-faced, bushy-bearded, watery-eyed old man in nondescript rags who sat

on a bench in front of it talking with a pair of unkempt but not abnormal-looking firemen. This, of course, must be Zadok Allen, the half-crazed, liquorish non-agenarian whose tales of old Innsmouth and its shadow were so hideous and incredible.

iii

I HAD BEEN assured that the old man could do nothing but hint at wild, disjointed, and incredible legends, and I had been warned that the natives made it unsafe to be seen talking with him; yet the thought of this aged witness to the town's decay, with memories going back to the early days of ships and factories, was a *lure* that no amount of reason could make me resist. Curiosity flared up beyond sense and caution, and in my youthful egotism I fancied I might be able to sift a nucleus of real history from the confused, extravagant outpouring I would probably extract with the aid of whiskey.

A quart bottle of such was easily, though not cheaply, obtained in the rear of a dingy variety-store just off the Square in Eliot Street.

Re-entering the Square I saw that luck was with me; for— shuffling out of Paine Street around the corner of the Gilman House— I glimpsed nothing less than the tall, lean, tattered form of old Zadok Allen himself. In accordance with my plan, I attracted his attention by brandishing my newly-purchased bottle; and soon realized that he had begun to shuffle wistfully after me as I turned into Waite Street on my way to the most deserted region I could think of. Before I reached Main Street I could hear a faint and wheezy "Hey, Mister!" behind me, and I presently allowed the old man to catch up and take copious pulls from the quart bottle.

I began putting out feelers as we walked along to Water Street and turned southward amidst the omnipresent desolation and crazily tilted ruins, but found that the aged tongue did not loosen as quickly as I had expected. At length I saw a grass-grown opening toward the sea between crumbling brick walls, with the weedy length of an earth-and-masonry wharf projecting beyond. Piles of moss-covered stones near the water promised tolerable seats, and the scene was sheltered from all possible view by a ruined warehouse on the north.

About four hours remained for conversation if I were to catch the eight o'clock coach for Arkham, and I began to dole out more liquor to the ancient tippler; meanwhile eating my own frugal lunch. In my donations I was careful not to overshoot the mark, for I did not wish Zadok's vinous garrulousness to pass into a stupor. After an hour his furtive taciturnity showed signs of disappearing, and something or other had caused his wandering gaze to light on the low, distant line of Devil Reef, then showing plainly and almost fascinatingly

above the waves. He bent toward me, took hold of my coat lapel, and hissed out some hints that could not be mistaken.

"Thar's whar it all begun— that cursed place of all wickedness whar the deep water starts. Gate o' hell— sheer drop daown to a bottom no saoundin'-line kin tech. Ol' Cap'n Obed done it— him that faound aout more'n was good fer him in the Saouth Sea islands.

"Never was nobody like Cap'n Obed— old limb o' Satan! Heh, heh! I kin mind him a-tellin' abaout furren parts, an' callin' all the folks stupid fer goin' to Christian meetin' an' bearin' their burdens meek an' lowly. Says they'd orter git better gods like some o' the folks in the Injies— gods as ud bring 'em good fishin' in return fer their sacrifices, an' ud reely answer folks's prayers.

"Matt Eliot, his fust mate, talked a lot, too, only he was agin' folks's doin' any heathen things. Told abaout an island east of Othaheite whar they was a lot o' stone ruins older'n anybody knew anything abaout, kind o' like them on Ponape, in the Carolines, but with carvin's of faces that looked like the big statues on Easter Island. They was a little volcanic island near thar, too, whar they was other ruins with diff'rent carvin's— ruins all wore away like they'd ben under the sea onct, an' with picters of awful monsters all over 'em.

"Wal, Sir, Matt he says the natives araound thar had all the fish they cud ketch, an' sported bracelets an' armlets an' head rigs made aout of a queer kind o' gold an' covered with picters o' monsters jest like the ones carved over the ruins on the little island— sorter fishlike frogs or froglike fishes that was drawed in all kinds o' positions like they was human bein's. Nobody cud git aout o' them whar they got all the stuff, an' all the other natives wondered haow they managed to find fish in plenty even when the very next islands had lean pickin's. Matt he got to wonderin' too, an' so did Cap'n Obed. Obed, he notices, besides, that lots of the han'some young folks ud drop aout o' sight fer good from year to year, an' that they wan't many old folk araound. Also, he thinks some of the folks looks durned queer even fer Kanakys.

"It took Obed to git the truth aout o' them heathens. I dun't know haow he done it, but he begun by tradin' fer the gold-like things they wore. Ast 'em whar they come from, an' ef they cud git more, an' finally wormed the story aout o' the old chief— Walakea, they called him. Nobody but Obed ud ever a believed the old yeller devil, but the Cap'n cud read folks like they was books. Heh, heh! Nobody never believes me naow when I tell 'em, an I dun't s'pose you will, young feller— though come to look at ye, ye hev kind o' got them sharp-readin' eyes like Obed had."

The old man's whisper grew fainter, and I found myself shuddering at the terrible and sincere portentousness of his intonation, even though I knew his tale could be nothing but drunken phantasy.

"Wal, Sir, Obed he larnt that they's things on this arth as most folks never heard abaout— an' wouldn't believe ef they did hear. It seems these Kanakys was sacrificin' heaps o' their young men an' maidens to some kind o' god-things that lived under the sea, an' gittin' all kinds o' favors in return. They met the things on the little islet with the queer ruins, an' it seems them awful picters o' frog-fish monsters was supposed to be picters o' these things. Mebbe they was the kind o' critters as got all the mermaids stories an' sech started. They had all kinds o' cities on the sea-bottom, an' this island was heaved up from thar. Seems they was some of the things alive in the stone buildin's when the island come up sudden to the surface. That's haow the Kanakys got wind they was daown thar. Made sign-talk as soon as they got over bein' skeert, an' pieced up a bargain afore long.

"Them things liked human sacrifices. Had had 'em ages afore, but lost track o' the upper world arter a time. What they done to the victims it ain't fer me to say, an' I guess Obed wa'n't none too sharp abaout askin'. But it was all right with the heathens, because they'd ben havin' a hard time an' was desp'rate abaout everything. They give a sarten number o' young folks to the sea-things twict every year— May-Eve an' Hallowe'en— reg'lar as cud be. Also give some o' the carved knick-knacks they made. What the things agreed to give in return was a plenty o' fish— they druv 'em in from all over the sea— an' a few gold-like things naow an' then.

"When it come to matin' with them toad-lookin' fishes, the Kanakys kind o' balked, but finally they larnt something as put a new face on the matter. Seems that human folks has got a kind o' relation to sech water-beasts— that everything alive come aout o' the water onct, an' only needs a little change to go back agin. Them things told the Kanakys that ef they mixed bloods there'd be children as ud look human at fust, but later turn more'n more like the things, till finally they'd take to the water an' jine the main lot o' things daown thar. An' this is the important part, young feller— them as turned into fish things an' went into the water *wouldn't never die*. Them things never died excep' they was kilt violent.

"Wal, Sir, it seems by the time Obed knowed them islanders they was all full o' fish blood from them deep-water things. When they got old an' begun to show it, they was kep' hid until they felt like takin' to the water an' quittin' the place. Some was more teched than others, an' some never did change quite enough to take to the water; but mostly they turned aout jest the way them things said. Them as was born more like the things changed arly, but them as was nearly human sometimes stayed on the island till they was past seventy, though they'd usually go daown under fer trial trips afore that. Folks as had took to the water, gen'rally come back a good deal to visit, so's a man ud often be a-

talkin' to his own five-times-great-grandfather, who'd left the dry land a couple o' hundred years or so afore.

"Everybody got aout o' the idee o' dyin'— excep' in canoe wars with the other islanders, or as sacrifices to the sea-gods daown below, or from snake-bite or plague or sharp gallopin' ailments or somethin' afore they cud take to the water— but simply looked forrad to a kind o' change that wa'n't a bit horrible arter a while. They thought what they'd got was well wuth all they'd had to give up— an' I guess Obed kind o' come to think the same hisself when he'd chewed over old Walakea's story a bit. Walakea, though, was one of the few as hadn't got none of the fish blood— bein' of a royal line that intermarried with royal lines on other islands.

"Walakea give him a funny kind o' thingumajig made aout o' lead or something, that he said ud bring up the fish things from any place in the water whar they might be a nest of 'em. The idee was to drop it daown with the right kind o' prayers an' sech. Walakea allaowed as was the things was scattered all over the world, so's anybody that looked abaout cud find a nest an' bring 'em up ef they was wanted.

"Matt he didn't like this business at all, an' wanted Obed shud keep away from the island; but the Cap'n was sharp fer gain, an' faound he cud git them gold-like things so cheap it ud pay him to make a specialty of 'em.

"Things went on that way fer years, an' Obed got enough o' that gold-like stuff to make him start the refinery in Waite's old run-daown fullin' mill.

"Wall, come abaout 'thutty-eight— when I was seven year' old— Obed he faound the island people all wiped aout between v'yages. Seems the other islanders had got wind o' what was goin' on, an' had took matters into their own hands. S'pose they must a had, arter all, them old magic signs as the sea things says was the only things they was afeard of. No tellin' what any o' them Kanakys will chance to git a holt of when the sea-bottom throws up some island with ruins older'n the deluge. Pious cusses, these was— they didn't leave nothin' standin' on either the main island or the little volcanic islet excep' what parts of the ruins was too big to knock daown.

"That naturally hit Obed pretty hard, seein' as his normal trade was doin' very poor. It hit the whole of Innsmouth, too, because in seafarin' days what profited the master of a ship gen'lly profited the crew proportionate. Most o' the folks araound the taown took the hard times kind o' sheeplike an' resigned, but they was in bad shape because the fishin' was peterin' aout an' the mills wa'n't doin' none too well.

"Then's the time Obed he begun a-cursin' at the folks fer bein' dull sheep an' prayin' to a Christian heaven as didn't help 'em none. He told 'em he'd knowed of folks as prayed to gods that give somethin' ye reely need, an' says ef a good

bunch o' men ud stand by him, he cud mebbe git a holt o' sarten paowers as ud bring plenty o' fish an' quite a bit o' gold."

Here the old man faltered, mumbled, and lapsed into a moody and apprehensive silence; glancing nervously over his shoulder and then turning back to stare fascinatedly at the distant black reef. When I spoke to him he did not answer, so I knew I would have to let him finish the bottle. He licked its nose and slipped it into his pocket, then beginning to nod and whisper softly to himself. I bent close to catch any articulate words he might utter, and thought I saw a sardonic smile behind the stained, bushy whiskers. Yes— he was really forming words, and I could grasp a fair proportion of them.

"Poor Matt— Matt he allus was agin it— tried to line up the folks on his side, an' had long talks with the preachers— no use— they run the Congregational parson aout o' taown, an' the Methodist feller quit— never did see Resolved Babcock, the Baptist parson, agin— Wrath o' Jehovy— I was a mighty little critter, but I heerd what I heerd an' seen what I seen— Dagon an' Ashtoreth— Belial an' Beëlzebub— Golden Caff an' the idols o' Canaan an' the Philistines— Babylonish abominations— *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*— "

He stopped again, and from the look in his watery blue eyes I feared he was close to a stupor after all. But when I gently shook his shoulder he turned on me with astonishing alertness and snapped out some more obscure phrases.

"Dun't believe me, hey? Heh, heh, heh— then just tell me, young feller, why Cap'n Obed an' twenty odd other folks used to row aout to Devil Reef in the dead o' night an' chant things so laoud ye cud hear 'em all over taown when the wind was right? Tell me that, hey? An' tell me why Obed was allus droppin' heavy things daown into the deep water t'other side o' the reef whar the bottom shoots daown like a cliff lower'n ye kin saound? Tell me what he done with that funny-shaped lead thingumajig as Walakea give him? Hey, boy?"

The watery blue eyes were almost savage and maniacal now, and the dirty white beard bristled electrically. Old Zadok probably saw me shrink back, for he began to cackle evilly.

"Heh, heh, heh, heh! Beginnin' to see, hey? Haow abaout the night I took my pa's ship's glass up to a cupalo an' seed the reef a-bristlin' thick with shapes that dove off quick soon's the moon riz? Obed an' the folks was in a dory, but them shapes dove off the far side into the deep water an' never come up.... Haow'd ye like to be a little shaver alone up in a cupalo a-watchin' shapes *as wa'n't human shapes*?... Hey?... Heh, heh, heh, heh...."

The old man was getting hysterical, and I began to shiver with a nameless alarm. He laid a gnarled claw on my shoulder, and it seemed to me that its shaking was not altogether that of mirth.

"S'pose one night ye seed somethin' heavy heaved offen Obed's dory beyond the reef, an' then larned nex' day a young feller was missin' from home? Hey? Did anybody ever see hide or hair o' Hiram Gilman agin? Did they? An' Nick Pierce, an' Luelly Waite, an' Adoniram Saouthwick, an' Henry Garrison? Hey? Heh, heh....

"Wal, Sir, that was the time Obed begun to git on his feet agin. Folks see his three darters a-wearin' gold-like things as nobody'd never see on 'em afore, an' smoke started comin' aout o' the refin'ry chimbly. Other folks was prosp'rin', too— fish began to swarm into the harbor fit to kill, an' heaven knows what sized cargoes we begun to ship aout to Newb'ryport, Arkham, an' Boston. 'Twas then Obed got the ol' branch railrud put through.

"Remember, I ain't sayin' Obed was set on hevin' things jest like they was on that Kanaky isle. I dun't think he aimed at fust to do no mixin', nor raise no young-uns to take to the water an' turn into fishes with etarnal life. He wanted them gold things, an' was willin' to pay heavy, an' I guess the *others* was satisfied fer a while....

"Come in 'forty-six the taown done some lookin' an' thinkin' fer itself. Too many folks missin'— too much wild preachin' at meetin' of a Sunday— too much talk abaout that reef. I guess I done a bit by tellin' Selectman Mowry what I see from the cupalo. They was a party one night as follered Obed's craowd aout to the reef, an' I heerd shots betwixt the dories. Nex' day Obed an' thutty-two others was in jail, with everybody a-wonderin' jest what was afoot an' jest what charge agin 'em cud be got to holt. God, ef anybody'd looked ahead ... a couple o' weeks later, when nothin' had ben throwed into the sea fer that long...."

Zadok was showing signs of fright and exhaustion, and I let him keep silence for a while, though glancing apprehensively at my watch. The tide had turned and was coming in now, and the sound of the waves seemed to arouse him.

"That awful night.... I seed 'em.... I was up in the cupalo ... hordes of 'em ... swarms of 'em ... all over the reef an' swimmin' up the harbor into the Manuxet.... God, what happened in the streets of Innsmouth that night ... they rattled our door, but pa wouldn't open ... then he clumb aout the kitchen winder with his musket to find Selectman Mowry an' see what he cud do.... Maounds o' the dead an' the dyin' ... shots an' screams ... shaoutin' in Ol' Squar an' Taown Squar an' New Church Green ... jail throwed open ... proclamation ... treason ... called it the plague when folks come in an' faound haff our people missin' ... nobody left but them as ud jine in with Obed an' them things or else keep quiet ... never heerd o' my pa no more...."

The old man was panting, and perspiring profusely. His grip on my shoulder tightened.

"Everything cleaned up in the mornin'— but they was *traces*.... Obed he kinder takes charge an' says things is goin' to be changed ... *others'll* worship

with us at meetin'-time, an' sarten haouses hez got to entertain *guests* ... *they* wanted to mix like they done with the Kanakys, an' he fer one didn't feel baound to stop 'em. Far gone, was Obed ... jest like a crazy man on the subjeck. He says they brung us fish an' treasure, an' shud hev what they hankered arter....

"Nothin' was to be diff'runt on the aoutside, only we was to keep shy o' strangers ef we knowed what was good fer us. We all hed to take the Oath o' Dagon, an' later on they was secon' an' third Oaths that some of us took. Them as ud help special, ud git special rewards— gold an' sech. No use balkin', fer they was millions of 'em daown thar. They'd ruther not start risin' an' wipin' aout humankind, but ef they was gave away an' forced to, they cud do a lot toward jest that.

"Yield up enough sacrifices an' savage knick-knacks an' harborage in the taown when they wanted it, an' they'd let well enough alone. All in the band of the faithful— Order o' Dagon— an' the children shud never die, but go back to the Mother Hydra an' Father Dagon what we all come from onct— *Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgahnagl fhtagn*— "

Old Zadok began to moan now, and tears were coursing down his channelled cheeks into the depths of his beard.

"God, what I seen senct I was fifteen year' old— *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!*— the folks as was missin', an' them as kilt theirselves— them as told things in Arkham or Ipswich or sech places was all called crazy, like you're a-callin' me right naow— but God, what I seen— they'd a kilt me long ago fer what I know, only I'd took the fust an' secon' Oaths o' Dagon offen Obed, so was pertected unlessen a jury of 'em proved I told things knowin' an' delib'rit ... but I wudn't take the third Oath— I'd a died ruther'n take that—

"It got wuss araound Civil War time, *when children born senct 'forty-six begun to grow up*— some of 'em, that is. I was afeard— never did no pryin' arter that awful night, an' never see one o'— *them*— clost to in all my life. That is, never no full-blooded one. Barnabas Marsh that runs the refin'ry naow is Obed's grandson by his fust wife— son of Onesiphorus, his eldest son, *but his mother was another o' them as wa'n't never seed aoutdoors*.

"Right naow Barnabas is abaout changed. Can't shet his eyes no more, an' is all aout o' shape. They say he still wears clothes, but he'll take to the water soon." ...

The sound of the incoming tide was now very insistent, and little by little it seemed to change the old man's mood from maudlin tearfulness to watchful fear. He would pause now and then to renew those nervous glances over his shoulder or out toward the reef, and despite the wild absurdity of his tale, I could not help beginning to share his vague apprehensiveness. Zadok now grew shriller, and seemed to be trying to whip up his courage with louder speech.

"Hey, yew, why dun't ye say somethin'? Haow'd ye like to be livin' in a taown like this, with everything a-rottin' an' a-dyin', an' boarded-up monsters crawlin' an' bleatin' an' barkin' an' hoppin' araoun' black cellars an' attics every way ye turn? Hey? Wal, Sir, *let me tell ye that aint the wust*!"

Zadok was really screaming now, and the mad frenzy of his voice disturbed me more than I care to own.

"Curse ye, dun't set thar a-starin' at me with them eyes— I tell Obed Marsh he's in hell, an' hez got to stay thar! Heh, heh ... in hell, I says! Can't git me— I hain't done nothin' nor told nobody nothin'—

"Oh, you, young feller? Wal, even ef I hain't told nobody nothin' yet, I'm a-goin' to naow! Yew jest set still an' listen to me, boy— this is what I ain't never told nobody.... I says I didn't get to do no pryin' arter that night— *but I found things aout jest the same*!

"Yew want to know what the reel horror is, hey? Wal, it's this— it ain't what them fish devils *hez done, but what they're a-goin' to do*! They're a-bringin' things up aout o' whar they come from into the taown— ben doin' it fer years, an' slackenin' up lately. Them haouses north o' the river betwixt Water an' Main Streets is full of 'em— them devils *an' what they brung*— an' when they git ready ... I say, *when they git ready* ... ever hear tell of a *shoggoth*?....

"Hey, d'ye hear me? I tell ye I *know what them things be— I seen 'em one night when*.... EH-AHHHH— AH! E'YAAHHHH...."

The hideous suddenness and inhuman frightfulness of the old man's shriek almost made me faint. His eyes, looking past me toward the malodorous sea, were positively starting from his head; while his face was a mask of fear worthy of Greek tragedy. His bony claw dug monstrously into my shoulder, and he made no motion as I turned my head to look at whatever he had glimpsed.

There was nothing that I could see. Only the incoming tide, with perhaps one set of ripples more local than the long-flung line of breakers. But now Zadok was shaking me, and I turned back to watch the melting of that fear-frozen face into a chaos of twitching eyelids and mumbling gums. Presently his voice came back— albeit as a trembling whisper.

"*Git aout o' here!* Git aout o' here! *They seen us*— git aout fer your life! Dun't wait fer nothin'— *they know naow*— Run fer it— quick— *aout o' this taown*— "

Another heavy wave dashed against the loosening masonry of the bygone wharf, and changed the mad ancient's whisper to another inhuman and blood-curdling scream.

"E-YAAAHHHH!...

"YHAAAAAAAA!..."

Before I could recover my scattered wits he had relaxed his clutch on my shoulder and dashed wildly inland toward the street, reeling northward around the ruined warehouse wall.

I glanced back at the sea, but there was nothing there. And when I reached Water Street and looked along it toward the north there was no remaining trace of Zadok Allen.

iv

I CAN hardly describe the mood in which I was left by this harrowing episode— an episode at once mad and pitiful, grotesque and terrifying. The grocery boy had prepared me for it, yet the reality left me none the less bewildered and disturbed. Puerile though the story was, old Zadok's insane earnestness and horror had communicated to me a mounting unrest which joined with my earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow.

The hour had grown perilously late— my watch said 7:15, and the Arkham bus left Town Square at eight— so I tried to give my thoughts as neutral and practical a cast as possible, meanwhile walking rapidly through the deserted streets of gaping roofs and leaning houses toward the hotel where I had checked my valise and would find my bus.

Studying the grocery youth's map and seeking a route I had not traversed before, I chose Marsh Street instead of State for my approach to Town Square. Near the corner of Fall Street I began to see scattered groups of furtive whisperers, and when I finally reached the Square I saw that almost all the loiterers were congregated around the door of the Gilman House. It seemed as if many bulging, watery, unwinking eyes looked oddly at me as I claimed my valise in the lobby, and I hoped that none of these unpleasant creatures would be my fellow-passengers on the coach.

The bus, rather early, rattled in with three passengers somewhat before eight, and an evil-looking fellow on the sidewalk muttered a few indistinguishable words to the driver. I was, it appeared, in very bad luck. There had been something wrong with the engine, despite the excellent time made from Newburyport, and the bus could not complete the journey to Arkham. No, it could not possibly be repaired that night, nor was there any other way of getting transportation out of Innsmouth, either to Arkham or elsewhere. Sargent was sorry, but I would have to stop over at the Gilman. Probably the clerk would make the price easy for me, but there was nothing else to do. Almost dazed by this sudden obstacle, and violently dreading the fall of night in this decaying and half-unlighted town, I left the bus and reentered the hotel lobby; where the sullen, queer-looking night clerk told me I could have Room 428 on next the top floor— large, but without running water— for a dollar.

Despite what I had heard of this hotel in Newburyport, I signed the register, paid my dollar, let the clerk take my valise, and followed that sour, solitary

attendant up three creaking flights of stairs past dusty corridors which seemed wholly devoid of life. My room, a dismal rear one with two windows and bare, cheap furnishings, over-looked a dingy courtyard otherwise hemmed in by low, deserted brick blocks, and commanded a view of decrepit westward-stretching roofs with a marshy countryside beyond. At the end of the corridor was a bathroom— a discouraging relique with ancient marble bowl, tin tub, faint electric light, and musty wooden panelling around all the plumbing fixtures.

As twilight deepened I turned on the one feeble electric bulb over the cheap, iron-framed bed, and tried as best I could to read. I felt it advisable to keep my mind wholesomely occupied, for it would not do to brood over the abnormalities of this ancient, blight-shadowed town while I was still within its borders. The insane yarn I had heard from the aged drunkard did not promise very pleasant dreams, and I felt I must keep the image of his wild, watery eyes as far as possible from my imagination.

Another thing that disturbed me was the absence of a bolt on the door of my room. One had been there, as marks clearly showed, but there were signs of recent removal. No doubt it had become out of order, like so many other things in this decrepit edifice. In my nervousness I looked around and discovered a bolt on the clothespress which seemed to be of the same size, judging from the marks, as the one formerly on the door. To gain a partial relief from the general tension I busied myself by transferring this hardware to the vacant place with the aid of a handy three-in-one device including a screw-driver which I kept on my keyring. The bolt fitted perfectly, and I was somewhat relieved when I knew that I could shoot it firmly upon retiring. There were adequate bolts on the two lateral doors to connecting rooms, and these I proceeded to fasten.

I did not undress, but decided to read till I was sleepy and then lie down with only my coat, collar, and shoes off. Taking a pocket flashlight from my valise, I placed it in my trousers, so that I could read my watch if I woke up later in the dark. Drowsiness, however, did not come; and when I stopped to analyze my thoughts I found to my disquiet that I was really unconsciously listening for something— listening for something which I dreaded but could not name.

At length, feeling a fatigue which had nothing of drowsiness in it, I bolted the newly outfitted hall door, turned off the light, and threw myself down on the hard, uneven bed— coat, collar, shoes, and all. In the darkness every faint noise of the night seemed magnified, and a flood of doubly unpleasant thoughts swept over me. I was sorry I had put out the light, yet was too tired to rise and turn it on again. Then, after a long, dreary interval, and prefaced by a fresh creaking of stairs and corridor, there came that soft, damnably unmistakable sound which seemed like a malign fulfilment of all my apprehensions. Without the least shadow of a doubt, the lock on my hall door was being tried— cautiously, furtively, tentatively— with a key.

The change in the menace from vague premonition to immediate reality was a profound shock, and fell upon me with the force of a genuine blow. It never once occurred to me that the fumbling might be a mere mistake. Malign purpose was all I could think of, and I kept deathly quiet, awaiting the would-be intruder's next move.

After a time the cautious rattling ceased, and I heard the room to the north entered with a pass key. Then the lock of the connecting door to my room was softly tried. The bolt held, of course, and I heard the floor creak as the prowler left the room. After a moment there came another soft rattling, and I knew that the room to the south of me was being entered. Again a furtive trying of a bolted connecting door, and again a receding creaking. This time the creaking went along the hall and down the stairs, so I knew that the prowler had realized the bolted condition of my doors and was giving up his attempt for a time.

The one thing to do was to get out of that hotel alive as quickly as I could, and through some channel other than the front stairs and lobby!

Rising softly and throwing my flashlight on the switch, I sought to light the bulb over my bed in order to choose and pocket some belongings for a swift, valiseless flight. Nothing, however, happened; and I saw that the power had been cut off. So, filling my pockets with the flashlight's aid, I put on my hat and tiptoed to the windows to consider chances of descent. Despite the state's safety regulations there was no fire escape on this side of the hotel, and I saw that my windows commanded only a sheer three-story drop to the cobbled courtyard. On the right and left, however, some ancient brick business blocks abutted on the hotel; their slant roofs coming up to a reasonable jumping distance from my fourth-story level. To reach either of these lines of buildings I would have to be in a room two doors from my own— in one case on the north and in the other case on the south— and my mind instantly set to work calculating what chances I had of making the transfer.

First, I reinforced my own outer door by pushing the bureau against it— little by little, in order to make a minimum of sound. Then, gathering from the grocery boy's map that the best route out of town was southward, I glanced first at the connecting door on the south side of the room. It was designed to open in my direction, hence I saw— after drawing the bolt and finding other fastenings in place— it was not a favorable one for forcing. Accordingly abandoning it as a route, I cautiously moved the bedstead against it to hamper any attack which might be made on it later from the next room. The door on the north was hung to open away from me, and this— though a test proved it to be locked or bolted from the other side— I knew must be my route. If I could gain the roofs of the buildings in Paine Street and descend successfully to the ground level, I might perhaps dart through the courtyard and the adjacent or opposite buildings to Washington or Bates— or else emerge in Paine and edge around southward into

Washington. In any case, I would aim to strike Washington somehow and get quickly out of the Town Square region. My preference would be to avoid Paine, since the fire station there might be open all night.

I was irresolutely speculating on when I had better attack the northward door, and on how I could least audibly manage it, when I noticed that the vague noises underfoot had given place to a fresh and heavier creaking of the stairs. A wavering flicker of light showed through my transom, and the boards of the corridor began to groan with a ponderous load. Muffled sounds of possible vocal origin approached, and at length a firm knock came at my outer door.

For a moment I simply held my breath and waited. Eternities seemed to elapse, and the nauseous fishy odor of my environment seemed to mount suddenly and spectacularly. Then the knocking was repeated— continuously, and with growing insistence. I knew that the time for action had come, and forthwith drew the bolt of the northward connecting door, bracing myself for the task of battering it open. The knocking waxed louder, and I hoped that its volume would cover the sound of my efforts. At last beginning my attempt, I lunged again and again at the thin panelling with my left shoulder, heedless of shock or pain.

Finally the connecting door gave, but with such a crash that I knew those outside must have heard. Instantly the outside knocking became a violent battering, while keys sounded ominously in the hall doors of the rooms on both sides of me. Rushing through the newly opened connection, I succeeded in bolting the northerly hall door before the lock could be turned; but even as I did so I heard the hall door of the third room— the one from whose window I had hoped to reach the roof below— being tried with a pass key.

For an instant I felt absolute despair, since my trapping in a chamber with no window egress seemed complete. Then, with a dazed automatism, I made for the next connecting door and performed the blind motion of pushing at it in an effort to get through!

Sheer fortunate chance gave me my reprieve— for the connecting door before me was not only unlocked but actually ajar. In a second I was through, and had my right knee and shoulder against a hall door which was visibly opening inward. My pressure took the opener off guard, for the thing shut as I pushed, so that I could slip the well-conditioned bolt as I had done with the other door. As I gained this respite I heard the battering at the two other doors abate, while a confused clatter came from the connecting door I had shielded with the bedstead. Evidently the bulk of my assailants had entered the southerly room and were massing in a lateral attack. But at the same moment a pass key sounded in the next door to the north, and I knew that a nearer peril was at hand.

The northward connecting door was wide open, but there was no time to think about checking the already turning lock in the hall. All I could do was to shut and bolt the open connecting door, as well as its mate on the opposite side— pushing a bedstead against the one and a bureau against the other, and moving a washstand in front of the hall door. I must, I saw, trust to such makeshift barriers to shield me till I could get out the window and on the roof of the Paine Street block. But even in this acute moment my chief horror was something apart from the immediate weakness of my defenses. I was shuddering because not one of my pursuers, despite some hideous pantings, gruntings, and subdued barkings at odd intervals, was uttering an intelligible vocal sound!

As I moved the furniture and rushed toward the windows I heard a frightful scurrying along the corridor toward the room north of me, and perceived that the southward battering had ceased. Plainly, most of my opponents were about to concentrate against the feeble connecting door which they knew must open directly on me. Outside, the moon played on the ridge-pole of the block below, and I saw that the jump would be desperately hazardous because of the steep surface on which I must land.

The clatter at the northerly connecting door was now terrific, and I saw that the weak panelling was beginning to splinter. Obviously, the besiegers had brought some ponderous object into play as a battering-ram. The bedstead, however, still held firm; so that I had at least a faint chance of making good my escape. As I opened the window I noticed that it was flanked by heavy velour draperies suspended from a pole by brass rings, and also that there was a large projecting catch for the shutters on the exterior. Seeing a possible means of avoiding the dangerous jump, I yanked at the hangings and brought them down, pole and all; then quickly hooking two of the rings in the shutter catch and flinging the drapery outside. The heavy folds reached fully to the abutting roof, and I saw that the rings and catch would be likely to bear my weight. So, climbing out of the window and down the improvised rope ladder, I left behind me forever the morbid and horror-infested fabric of the Gilman House.

I landed safely on the loose slates of the steep roof, and succeeded in gaining the gaping black skylight without a slip. The place inside was ghoulish-looking, but I was past minding such impressions and made at once for the staircase revealed by my flashlight— after a hasty glance at my watch, which showed the hour to be 2 A.M. The steps creaked, but seemed tolerably sound; and I raced down past a barnlike second story to the ground floor. The desolation was complete, and only echoes answered my footfalls.

The hallway inside was black, and when I reached the opposite end I saw that the street door was wedged immovably shut. Resolved to try another

building, I groped my way toward the courtyard, but stopped short when close to the doorway.

For out of an opened door in the Gilman House a large crowd of doubtful shapes was pouring— lanterns bobbing in the darkness, and horrible croaking voices exchanging low cries in what was certainly not English. Their features were indistinguishable, but their crouching, shambling gait was abominably repellent. And worst of all, I perceived that one figure was strangely robed, and unmistakably surmounted by a tall tiara of a design altogether too familiar. Again groping toward the street, I opened a door off the hall and came upon an empty room with closely shuttered but sashless windows. Fumbling in the rays of my flashlight, I found I could open the shutters; and in another moment had climbed outside and was carefully closing the aperture in its original manner.

I walked rapidly, softly, and close to the ruined houses. At Bates Street I drew into a yawning vestibule while two shambling figures crossed in front of me, but was soon on my way again and approaching the open space where Eliot Street obliquely crosses Washington at the intersection of South. Though I had never seen this space, it had looked dangerous to me on the grocery youth's map; since the moonlight would have free play there. There was no use trying to evade it, for any alternative course would involve detours of possibly disastrous visibility and delaying effect. The only thing to do was to cross it boldly and openly; imitating the typical shamble of the Innsmouth folk as best I could, and trusting that no one— or at least no pursuer of mine— would be there.

Just how fully the pursuit was organized— and indeed, just what its purpose might be— I could form no idea. There seemed to be unusual activity in the town, but I judged that the news of my escape from the Gilman had not yet spread. The open space was, as I had expected, strongly moonlit. But my progress was unimpeded, and no fresh sound arose to hint that I had been spied. Glancing about me, I involuntarily let my pace slacken for a second to take in the sight of the sea, gorgeous in the burning moonlight at the street's end. Far out beyond the breakwater was the dim, dark line of Devil Reef.

Then, without warning, I saw the intermittent flashes of light on the distant reef. My muscles tightened for panic flight, held in only by a certain unconscious caution and half-hypnotic fascination. And to make matters worse, there now flashed forth from the lofty cupola of the Gilman House, which loomed up to the northeast behind me, a series of analogous though differently spaced gleams which could be nothing less than an answering signal.

I now bent to the left around the ruinous green; still gazing toward the ocean as it blazed in the spectral summer moonlight, and watching the cryptical flashing of those nameless, unexplainable beacons.

It was then that the most horrible impression of all was borne in upon me— the impression which destroyed my last vestige of self-control and sent me

running frantically southward past the yawning black doorways and fishily staring windows of that deserted nightmare street. For at a closer glance I saw that the moonlit waters between the reef and the shore were far from empty. They were alive with a teeming horde of shapes swimming inward toward the town!

My frantic running ceased before I had covered a block, for at my left I began to hear something like the hue and cry of organized pursuit. There were footsteps and guttural sounds, and a rattling motor wheezed south along Federal Street. In a second all my plans were utterly changed— for if the southward highway were blocked ahead of me, I must clearly find another egress from Innsmouth. I paused and drew into a gaping doorway, reflecting how lucky I was to have left the moonlit open space before these pursuers came down the parallel street.

Then I thought of the abandoned railway to Rowley, whose solid line of ballasted, weed-grown earth still stretched off to the northwest from the crumbling station on the edge of the river gorge. There was just a chance that the townsfolk would not think of that!

Drawing inside the hall of my deserted shelter, I once more consulted the grocery boy's map with the aid of the flashlight. The immediate problem was how to reach the ancient railway; and I now saw that the safest course was ahead to Babson Street, then west to Lafayette— there edging around but not crossing an open space homologous to the one I had traversed— and subsequently back northward and westward in zigzagging line through Lafayette, Bates, Adams, and Banks Streets— the latter skirting the river gorge— to the abandoned and dilapidated station I had seen from my window. My reason for going ahead to Babson was that I wished neither to re-cross the earlier open space nor to begin my westward course along a cross street as broad as South. I crossed the street to the right-hand side in order to edge around into Babson as inconspicuously as possible.

In Babson Street I clung as closely as possible to the sagging, uneven buildings; twice pausing in a doorway as the noises behind me momentarily increased. The open space ahead shone wide and desolate under the moon, but my route would not force me to cross it. During my second pause I began to detect a fresh distribution of the vague sounds; and upon looking cautiously out from cover beheld a motor car darting across the open space, bound outward along Eliot Street.

As I watched— choked by a sudden rise in the fishy odor after a short abatement— I saw a band of uncouth, crouching shapes loping and shambling in the same direction; and knew that this must be the party guarding the Ipswich road, since that highway forms an extension of Eliot Street. Two of the figures I glimpsed were in voluminous robes, and one wore a peaked diadem which

glistened whitely in the moonlight. The gait of this figure was so odd that it sent a chill through me— for it seemed to me the creature was almost *hopping*.

When the last of the band was out of sight I resumed my progress; darting around the corner into Lafayette Street, and crossing Eliot very hurriedly lest stragglers of the party be still advancing along that thoroughfare. I did hear some croaking and clattering sounds far off toward Town Square, but accomplished the passage without disaster. My greatest dread was in re-crossing broad and moonlit South Street— with its seaward view— and I had to nerve myself for the ordeal. Someone might easily be looking, and possible Eliot Street stragglers could not fail to glimpse me from either of two points. At the last moment I decided I had better slacken my trot and make the crossing as before in the shambling gait of an average Innsmouth native.

I had not quite crossed the street when I heard a muttering band advancing along Washington from the north. As they reached the broad open space where I had had my first disquieting glimpse of the moonlit water I could see them plainly only a block away— and was horrified by the bestial abnormality of their faces and the dog-like sub-humanness of their crouching gait. One man moved in a positively simian way, with long arms frequently touching the ground; while another figure— robed and tiaraed— seemed to progress in an almost hopping fashion. I judged this party to be the one I had seen in the Gilman's courtyard— the one, therefore, most closely on my trail. As some of the figures turned to look in my direction I was transfixed with fright, yet managed to preserve the casual, shambling gait I had assumed. To this day I do not know whether they saw me or not. If they did, my stratagem must have deceived them, for they passed on across the moonlit space without varying their course— meanwhile croaking and jabbering in some hateful guttural patois I could not identify.

Once more in shadow, I resumed my former dog-trot past the leaning and decrepit houses that stared blankly into the night. Having crossed to the western sidewalk I rounded the nearest corner into Bates Street, where I kept close to the buildings on the southern side. At last I saw the ancient arcaded station— or what was left of it— and made directly for the tracks that started from its farther end.

The rails were rusty but mainly intact, and not more than half the ties had rotted away. Walking or running on such a surface was very difficult; but I did my best, and on the whole made very fair time. For some distance the line kept on along the gorge's brink, but at length I reached the long covered bridge where it crossed the chasm at a dizzy height. The condition of this bridge would determine my next step. If humanly possible, I would use it; if not, I would have to risk more street wandering and take the nearest intact highway bridge.

The vast, barnlike length of the old bridge gleamed spectrally in the moonlight and I saw that the ties were safe for at least a few feet within.

Entering, I began to use my flashlight, and was almost knocked down by the cloud of bats that flapped past me. About halfway across there was a perilous gap in the ties which I feared for a moment would halt me; but in the end I risked a desperate jump which fortunately succeeded.

I was glad to see the moonlight again when I emerged from that macabre tunnel. The old tracks crossed River Street at a grade, and at once veered off into a region increasingly rural and with less and less of Innsmouth's abhorrent fishy odor. Here the dense growth of weeds and briers hindered me and cruelly tore my clothes, but I was none the less glad that they were there to give me concealment in case of peril. I knew that much of my route must be visible from the Rowley road.

The marshy region began very shortly, with the single track on a low, grassy embankment. Then came a sort of island of higher ground, where the line passed through a shallow open cut choked with bushes and brambles. I was very glad of this partial shelter, since at this point the Rowley road was uncomfortably near according to my window view.

Just before entering the cut I glanced behind me, but saw no pursuer. The ancient spires and roofs of decaying Innsmouth gleamed lovely and ethereal in the magic yellow moonlight, and I thought of how they must have looked in the old days before the shadow fell. Then, as my gaze circled inland from the town, something less tranquil arrested my notice and held me immobile for a second.

What I saw— or fancied I saw— was a disturbing suggestion of undulant motion far to the south; a suggestion which made me conclude that a very large horde must be pouring out of the city along the level Ipswich road. The distance was great, and I could distinguish nothing in detail; but I did not at all like the look of that moving column.

All sorts of unpleasant conjectures crossed my mind. I thought of those very extreme Innsmouth types said to be hidden in crumbling, centuried warrens near the waterfront. I thought, too, of those nameless swimmers I had seen. Counting the parties so far glimpsed, as well as those presumably covering other roads, the number of my pursuers must be strangely large for a town as depopulated as Innsmouth.

Who were they? Why were they here? And if such a column of them was scouring the Ipswich road, would the patrols on the other roads be likewise augmented?

I had entered the brush-grown cut and was struggling along at a very slow pace when that damnable fishy odor again waxed dominant. There were sounds, too— a kind of wholesale, colossal flopping or pattering which somehow called up images of the most detestable sort.

And then both stench and sounds grew stronger, so that I paused shivering and grateful for the cut's protection. It was here, I recalled, that the Rowley road

drew so close to the old railway before crossing westward and diverging. Something was coming along that road, and I must lie low till its passage and vanishment in the distance. Crouched in the bushes of that sandy cleft I felt reasonably safe, even though I knew the searchers would have to cross the track in front of me not much more than a hundred yards away. I would be able to see them, but they could not, except by a malign miracle, see me.

All at once I began dreading to look at them as they passed. I saw the close moonlit space where they would surge by, and had curious thoughts about the irredeemable pollution of that space. They would perhaps be the worst of all Innsmouth types— something one would not care to remember.

The stench waxed overpowering, and the noises swelled to a bestial babel of croaking, baying, and barking, without the least suggestion of human speech. Were these indeed the voices of my pursuers? That flopping or pattering was monstrous— I could not look upon the degenerate creatures responsible for it. I would keep my eyes shut till the sounds receded toward the west. The horde was very close now— the air foul with their hoarse snarlings, and the ground almost shaking with their alien-rhythmed footfalls. My breath nearly ceased to come, and I put every ounce of will-power into the task of holding my eyelids down.

I am not even yet willing to say whether what followed was a hideous actuality or only a nightmare hallucination. The later action of the government, after my frantic appeals, would tend to confirm it as a monstrous truth; but could not an hallucination have been repeated under the quasi-hypnotic spell of that ancient, haunted, and shadowed town?

But I must try to tell what I thought I saw that night under the mocking yellow moon— saw surging and hopping down the Rowley road in plain sight in front of me as I crouched among the wild brambles of that desolate railway cut. Of course my resolution to keep my eyes shut had failed. It was foredoomed to failure— for who could crouch blindly while a legion of croaking, baying entities of unknown source flopped noisomely past, scarcely more than a hundred yards away?

For I knew that a long section of them must be plainly in sight where the sides of the cut flattened out and the road crossed the track— and I could no longer keep myself from sampling whatever horror that leering yellow moon might have to show.

It was the end, for whatever remains to me of life on the surface of this earth, of every vestige of mental peace and confidence in the integrity of nature and of the human mind. Can it be possible that this planet has actually spawned such things; that human eyes have truly seen, as objective flesh, what man has hitherto known only in febrile phantasy and tenuous legend?

And yet I saw them in a limitless stream— flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating— surging inhumanly through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic nightmare. And some of them had tall tiaras of that nameless whitish-gold metal ... and some were strangely robed ... and one, who led the way, was clad in a ghoulishly humped black coat and striped trousers, and had a man's felt hat perched on the shapeless thing that answered for a head....

I think their predominant color was a grayish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked.

But for all of their monstrousness they were not unfamiliar to me. I knew too well what they must be— for was not the memory of that evil tiara at Newburyport still fresh? They were the blasphemous fish-frogs of the nameless design— living and horrible— and as I saw them I knew also of what that humped, tiaraed priest in the black church basement had so fearsomely reminded me. Their number was past guessing. It seemed to me that there were limitless swarms of them— and certainly my momentary glimpse could have shown only the least fraction. In another instant everything was blotted out by a merciful fit of fainting; the first I had ever had.

v

IT WAS a gentle daylight rain that awaked me from my stupor in the brush-grown railway cut, and when I staggered out to the roadway ahead I saw no trace of any prints in the fresh mud. Innsmouth's ruined roofs and toppling steeples loomed up grayly toward the southeast, but not a living creature did I spy in all the desolate salt marshes around. My watch was still going, and told me that the hour was past noon.

The reality of what I had been through was highly uncertain in my mind, but I felt that something hideous lay in the background. I must get away from evil-shadowed Innsmouth— and accordingly I began to test my cramped, wearied powers of locomotion. Despite weakness, hunger, horror, and bewilderment I found myself after a time able to walk; so started slowly along the muddy road to Rowley. Before evening I was in the village, getting a meal and providing myself with presentable clothes. I caught the night train to Arkham, and the next

day talked long and earnestly with government officials there; a process I later repeated in Boston. With the main result of these colloquies the public is now familiar— and I wish, for normality's sake, there were nothing more to tell. Perhaps it is madness that is overtaking me— yet perhaps a greater horror— or a greater marvel— is reaching out.

I dared not look for that piece of strange jewelry said to be in the Miskatonic University Museum. I did, however, improve my stay in Arkham by collecting some genealogical notes I had long wished to possess; very rough and hasty data, it is true, but capable of good use later on when I might have time to collate and codify them. The curator of the historical society there— Mr. E. Lapham Peabody— was very courteous about assisting me, and expressed unusual interest when I told him I was a grandson of Eliza Orne of Arkham, who was born in 1867 and had married James Williamson of Ohio at the age of seventeen.

It seemed that a maternal uncle of mine had been there many years before on a quest much like my own; and that my grandmother's family was a topic of some local curiosity. There had, Mr. Peabody said, been considerable discussion about the marriage of her father, Benjamin Orne, just after the Civil War; since the ancestry of the bride was peculiarly puzzling. That bride was understood to have been an orphaned Marsh of New Hampshire— a cousin of the Essex County Marshes— but her education had been in France and she knew very little of her family. A guardian had deposited funds in a Boston bank to maintain her and her French governess; but that guardian's name was unfamiliar to Arkham people, and in time he dropped out of sight, so that the governess assumed his role by court appointment. The French-woman— now long dead— was very taciturn, and there were those who said she could have told more than she did.

But the most baffling thing was the inability of anyone to place the recorded parents of the young woman— Enoch and Lydia (Meserve) Marsh— among the known families of New Hampshire. Possibly, many suggested, she was the natural daughter of some Marsh of prominence— she certainly had the true Marsh eyes. Most of the puzzling was done after her early death, which took place at the birth of my grandmother— her only child. Having formed some disagreeable impressions connected with the name of Marsh, I did not welcome the news that it belonged on my own ancestral tree; nor was I pleased by Mr. Peabody's suggestion that I had the true Marsh eyes myself. However, I was grateful for data which I knew would prove valuable; and took copious notes and lists of book references regarding the well-documented Orne family.

I went directly home to Toledo from Boston, and later spent a month at Maumee recuperating from my ordeal. In September I entered Oberlin for my final year, and from then till the next June was busy with studies and other

wholesome activities— reminded of the bygone terror only by occasional official visits from government men in connection with the campaign which my pleas and evidence had started. Around the middle of July— just a year after the Innsmouth experience— I spent a week with my late mother's family in Cleveland; checking some of my new genealogical data with the various notes, traditions, and bits of heirloom material in existence there, and seeing what kind of a connected chart I could construct.

I did not exactly relish this task, for the atmosphere of the Williamson home had always depressed me. There was a strain of morbidity there, and my mother had never encouraged my visiting her parents as a child, although she always welcomed her father when he came to Toledo. My Arkham-born grandmother had seemed strange and almost terrifying to me, and I do not think I grieved when she disappeared. I was eight years old then, and it was said that she had wandered off in grief after the suicide of my uncle Douglas, her eldest son. He had shot himself after a trip to New England— the same trip, no doubt, which had caused him to be recalled at the Arkham Historical Society.

This uncle had resembled her, and I had never liked him either. Something about the staring, unwinking expression of both of them had given me a vague, unaccountable uneasiness. My mother and uncle Walter had not looked like that. They were like their father, though poor little cousin Lawrence— Walter's son— had been an almost perfect duplicate of his grandmother before his condition took him to the permanent seclusion of a sanitarium at Canton. I had not seen him in four years, but my uncle once implied that his state, both mental and physical, was very bad. This worry had probably been a major cause of his mother's death two years before.

My grandfather and his widowered son Walter now comprised the Cleveland household, but the memory of older times hung thickly over it. I still disliked the place, and tried to get my researches done as quickly as possible. Williamson records and traditions were supplied in abundance by my grandfather; though for Orne material I had to depend on my uncle Walter, who put at my disposal the contents of all his files, including notes, letters, cuttings, heirlooms, photographs, and miniatures.

It was in going over the letters and pictures on the Orne side that I began to acquire a kind of terror of my own ancestry. As I have said, my grandmother and uncle Douglas had always disturbed me. Now, years after their passing, I gazed at their pictured faces with a measurably heightened feeling of repulsion and alienation. I could not at first understand the change, but gradually a horrible sort of *comparison* began to obtrude itself on my unconscious mind despite the steady refusal of my consciousness to admit even the least suspicion of it. It was clear that the typical expression of these faces now suggested something it had

not suggested before— something which would bring stark panic if too openly thought of.

But the worst shock came when my uncle showed me the Orne jewelry in a downtown safe-deposit vault. Some of the items were delicate and inspiring enough, but there was one box of strange old pieces descended from my mysterious great-grandmother which my uncle was almost reluctant to produce. They were, he said, of very grotesque and almost repulsive design.

As my uncle began slowly and grudgingly to unwrap the things, he urged me not to be shocked by the strangeness and frequent hideousness of the designs. There were two armlets, a tiara, and a kind of pectoral; the latter having in high relief certain figures of almost unbearable extravagance.

He seemed to expect some demonstration when the first piece— the tiara— became visible, but I doubt if he expected quite what actually happened. I did not expect it, either, for I thought I was thoroughly forewarned regarding what the jewelry would turn out to be. What I did was to faint silently away just as I had done in that brier-choked railway cut a year before.

From that day on my life has been a nightmare of brooding and apprehension, nor do I know how much is hideous truth and how much madness. My great-grandmother had been a Marsh of unknown source whose husband lived in Arkham— and did not old Zadok say that the daughter of Obed Marsh by a monstrous mother was married to an Arkham man through a trick? What was it the ancient toper had muttered about the likeness of my eyes to Captain Obed's? In Arkham, too, the curator had told me I had the true Marsh eyes. Was Obed Marsh my own great-great-grandfather? Who— or *what*— then, was my great-great-grandmother? But perhaps this was all madness. Those whitish-gold ornaments might easily have been bought from some Innsmouth sailor by the father of my great-grandmother, whoever he was. And that look in the staring-eyed faces of my grandmother and self-slain uncle might be sheer fancy, bolstered up by the Innsmouth shadow which had so darkly colored my imagination. But why had my uncle killed himself after an ancestral quest in New England?

For more than two years I fought off these reflections with partial success. My father secured me a place in an insurance office, and I buried myself in routine as deeply as possible. In the winter of 1930-31, however, the dreams began. They were very sparse and insidious at first, but increased in frequency and vividness as the weeks went by. Great watery spaces opened out before me, and I seemed to wander through titanic sunken porticos and labyrinths of weedy cyclopean walls and grotesque fishes as my companions. Then the *other shapes* began to appear, filling me with nameless horror the moment I awoke. But during the dreams they did not horrify me at all— I was one with them;

wearing their unhuman trappings, treading their aqueous ways, and praying monstrously at their evil sea-bottom temples.

There was much more than I could remember, but even what I did remember each morning would be enough to stamp me as a madman or a genius if ever I dared write it down. Some frightful influence, I felt, was seeking gradually to drag me out of the sane world of wholesome life into unnameable abysses of blackness and alienage; and the process told heavily on me. My health and appearance grew steadily worse, till finally I was forced to give up my position and adopt the static, secluded life of an invalid. Some odd nervous affliction had me in its grip, and I found myself at times almost unable to shut my eyes.

It was then that I began to study the mirror with mounting alarm. The slow ravages of disease are not pleasant to watch, but in my case there was something subtler and more puzzling in the background. My father seemed to notice it, too, for he began looking at me curiously and almost affrightedly. What was taking place in me? Could it be that I was coming to resemble my grandmother and uncle Douglas?

One night I had a frightful dream in which I met my grandmother under the sea. She lived in a phosphorescent palace of many terraces, with gardens of strange leprous corals and grotesque brachiate efflorescences, and welcomed me with a warmth that may have been sardonic. She had changed— as those who take to the water change— and told me she had never died. Instead, she had gone to a spot her dead son had learned about, and had leaped to a realm whose wonders— destined for him as well— he had spurned with a smoking pistol. This was to be my realm, too— I could not escape it. I would never die, but would live with those who had lived since before man ever walked the earth.

I met also that which had been her grandmother. For eighty thousand years Pth'thya-l'yi had lived in Y'ha-nthlei, and thither she had gone back after Obed Marsh was dead. Y'ha-nthlei was not destroyed when the upper-earth men shot death into the sea. It was hurt, but not destroyed. The Deep Ones could never be destroyed, even though the palaeogean magic of the forgotten Old Ones might sometimes check them. For the present they would rest; but some day, if they remembered, they would rise again for the tribute Great Cthulhu craved. It would be a city greater than Innsmouth next time. They had planned to spread, and had brought up that which would help them, but now they must wait once more. For bringing the upper-earth men's death I must do a penance, but that would not be heavy. This was the dream in which I saw a *shoggoth* for the first time, and the sight set me awake in a frenzy of screaming. That morning the mirror definitely told me I had acquired *the Innsmouth look*.

So far I have not shot myself as my uncle Douglas did. I bought an automatic and almost took the step, but certain dreams deterred me. The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror. I do not believe I need to wait for the full change as most have waited. If I did, my father would probably shut me up in a sanitarium as my poor little cousin is shut up. Stupendous and unheard-of splendors await me below, and I shall seek them soon. *Iā-R'lyeh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iā! Iā!* No, I shall not shoot myself— I cannot be made to shoot myself!

I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton madhouse, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever.

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17: The Reason

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 5 Mar 1937

IT WAS shortly before curtain time of an evening performance. Tom glanced at his ticket rack and stifled a yawn. At least a third of the orchestra remained unsold. He had spotted the house very nicely.

He knew just how the theatre would look when he stepped inside. The customers were seated so that very few of them would realise how poor business really was. In a corner of the cage, the treasurer was poring over some figures. Tom, the assistant treasurer, looked in his direction.

"Pretty punk, Joe," he observed. "This show started out like a whirlwind, but it's certainly dropped off the last two weeks. There aren't 20 people in the balcony."

The treasurer nodded. "Same old story, Tom," he murmured. "Good notices and bad business."

Tom glanced at his watch.

"Five to nine," he observed. "Might as well get ready to close up."

The lobby door opened, and a young woman stepped in. A very pretty young woman. She walked to the window, and smiled at Tom.

"I don't suppose you'll have what I want," she said, "but it won't do any harm to try. Would it do any good to ask for two seats in front of the fourth row on the left side of the house?"

The assistant treasurer could have given her twenty seats in that particular section. But he didn't tell her that. Instead, he looked at his rack, ran his fingers through some tickets, and finally nodded.

"Yes, madam," he replied. "It certainly would. I have two here in the third row on the left side. Here you are."

The pretty little lady handed Tom a 20-dollar bill, and that young gentleman promptly returned the correct change to her.

"Thank you," she said. And then, instead of going to the ticket-taker, she hesitated for a moment.

"I wonder," she murmured, "if I might make a very unusual request of you?"

The assistant treasurer grinned affably.

"Why not, madam?" he said. "After all, I'm a box office man."

"Well," continued the woman, "if I gave you one of these tickets would you consent to sit next to me during the play?"

Tom gulped. This was something new.

"I— I—" he stammered.

"I know you'll think me very strange," she went on," but I really do want some company. Wouldn't you do me that favor?"

By this time, the treasurer was standing next to Tom. He took one look at the charming damsel and kicked his assistant very swiftly.

"Tell her yes, you dope," he whispered. "She's a pip."

So Tom nodded. "All right, madam," he chirped. "You leave the other seat here and I'll join you as soon as I've cleaned up my work."

Once more that sweet, soft smile from the lady. "Thank you so much. I'll be waiting for you."

As soon as she was through the door, Tom looked at the, treasurer in amazement.

"What the devil do you make of that, Joe?" he asked. The treasurer shrugged his shoulders.

"Trouble with you, Tom," he replied, "is that you're a little too innocent for this racket. You're a good looking guy. That dame probably saw you somewhere and took a liking to you."

"She figured a way to meet you. And this is the method she adopted. It's all a cinch and you're in luck. I'll finish up around here. You go ahead inside and be very nice to your new mamma."

A few minutes later Tom slipped into his seat. She sat close but said no word. In the first intermission, they strolled to the lobby together.

"Might I ask—" he began.

"My name?" she finished. "Just call me Muriel. I'd like you to call me by my first name, anyhow."

The second intermission was pretty much the same as the first. Muriel, it seemed, couldn't do quite enough for Tom. The boy couldn't quite figure the whole thing out. There was Joe's theory, of course, and it sounded pretty logical. But the girl seemed so sweet and so real—

"It's wonderful of you to keep me company," she was saying. "After the next act is over would you mind if I made you a little present?" Tom wrinkled his brow.

"Present?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I don't want to embarrass you, but would you take 50 dollars from me?"

The boy shook his head.

"No," he asserted. "I've enjoyed your company, too. Please don't mention anything about money."

"Well, then," the girl continued, "would you drop into my apartment after the show and have a drink with me? I'm sure you'd enjoy it."

It was then that Tom realised the treasurer had been right. The girl was exactly as Joe had stated. So what the devil! She was extremely pretty. Why not take advantage of the opportunity?

"All right, Muriel," he responded. "It's a go."

When the show was over Tom hailed a cab.

But Muriel stopped him. "Don't bother," she said. "I have my car here."

Up to the curb rolled a beautiful Minerva. She stepped in. So did Tom. The chauffeur tucked them beneath a costly robe. And they were driven to Muriel's home on Park Avenue.

Tom had never seen such a beautiful apartment. The closest he had ever been to such magnificence was in the Music Hall. And this place seemed almost as big to him. A butler took Tom's coat and hat. Another one served his drink. Muriel sat down beside him and they began to chat. They spoke of this and that. Tom had another drink. They spoke of that and this. Tom had another drink. An hour passed. Tom reached for Muriel's hand and attempted to draw her to him. She pulled her hand away.

"Don't be silly," she said. "Please remain a gentleman."

Tom had another drink. He was more puzzled now than ever.

"I guess I'd better go," he observed.

"I'd like you to wait just a few moments more," cried Muriel. "My husband will be coming in any minute."

"Husband?" muttered Tom. "I don't understand? What's the big idea of this whole thing? What's—"

"It's all very simple," explained the charming lady. "My husband took another woman to your theatre tonight. I wanted to make him jealous— so I sat right in front of him with you. When he comes home and finds you here, he'll be more jealous than ever! See?"

It happened about six weeks ago. But Tom, I think, is still running.

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18: The Café Régal, the Mistral and the Lady

E Phillips Oppenheim
1866-1946
Collier's Weekly, Jan 17, 1931
Collected in: *Sinners Beware*, 1931

PETER HAMES, who had pushed open the door of the café and made abrupt entrance, paused within a yard or two of the threshold to shake the rain from his dripping mackintosh, and gazed about him with indifferent curiosity. The interior of the place was like the interior of many of the other Beausoleil bars. The staging, however, was unusual. For some reason or other, the electric supply in the immediate vicinity had failed. The lights were dim and inconstant, and, to amplify them, some one had lit an oil lamp which stood upon the edge of the counter. In the whole place there were only four people. Toby, the popular barman, was seated on the low stool onto which he sometimes subsided when waiting for clients, completely out of sight, except for the top of his head. Old man Delous, the crazy saddler from across the way, coatless and collarless, sat in a distant corner, mumbling to himself. A drunken man sprawled upon a bench on the opposite side, and on a high stool at the end of the bar remote from Toby, was perched a girl whose too lavish use of cosmetics and lipstick disguised her so effectually that one could only say she was young and had good features. She wore a hat which was between a beret and a jockey's cap, slouched low over her forehead, and she was smoking Caporal cigarettes from a holder of unusual length. She scrutinised the newcomer wearily and apparently without interest.

"Wake up, Toby!" the latter enjoined, advancing a step or two nearer the bar. "My car is broken down at the bottom of the hill and I am wet through tinkering with it. A glass of the best brandy, quickly!"

Toby, who appeared to be sleeping, made no reply, nor did he attempt to rise to his feet. From the old man in the corner came a long, mirthless chuckle. Peter Hames, who had recovered his breath, took even closer note of his surroundings. The place was like some horrible study in still life. Someone had recently spilt liquor across the boarded floor; a chair was overturned; the sickly and indistinct illumination of the place became absolutely ghastly with the glimmering of a steely twilight, which found its way in through the uncurtained window, precursor of the leaden dawn.

"What's wrong with this place to-night?" the newcomer demanded. "Wake up, Toby! I want some brandy, I tell you."

The young man made no movement. He seemed to have fallen asleep, leaning forward on his stool. The girl knocked the ash from her cigarette and gazed down the length of the counter in insolent silence. Peter Hames lifted the

lamp above his head with one hand and with the other shook the recumbent figure. Again the old man in the distant corner chuckled.

"What's the matter with you, Toby?" customer enquired sharply. "Are you drunk, or what?"

Almost as he spoke, Peter Hames was conscious of that queer sensation about his fingers. He snatched his hand away and held it under the lamp. The blood was dripping from his fingers on to the counter. He stood staring at it, the horror sealing his lips, paralysing even his nerves. The lamp slipped from his grasp and fell crashing on to the floor.

"Fool!" the girl exclaimed, as she flung a mat upon the thin flames. "Have you never seen a dead man before?"

A spiral of thick, black smoke was mounting to the low ceiling. With the extinction of the lamp, the sole illumination now was the streak of grey, forbidding light from that parting between the lowering clouds. The drunken man, snoring on his bench, old man Delous chuckling hideously in his corner, and the girl, back again on her stool with the cigarette holder once more between her lips, were all alike grotesque and vaguely-realised figures, phantasies in some foul nightmare. The smoke recoiling from the ceiling filled the place with an evil-smelling vapour. Through it, Peter Hames stepped swiftly to the door, re-crossed the threshold, and vanished into the lampless night.

A VERY DIGNIFIED-LOOKING manservant, of Franco-Italian extraction, entered his master's studio one afternoon a few days later, with an announcement upon his lips. Peter Hames, in blue jean overalls, and the flowing tie of his professional confrères, was standing with his back to the window, painting rapidly in oils upon a small canvas.

"A young lady desires to see Monsieur."

Peter Hames went on painting.

"You know very well, Vittorio," he said reproachfully, "that I do not see strange young ladies."

Vittorio was apologetic and fluent.

"The young lady is not of the type of Monsieur's undesired visitors," he declared. "She is chic and a young lady of the world. I will undertake to promise Monsieur that she is not a model."

"Is she by chance possessed of a name?" Peter asked, still painting.

"It is to be expected, Monsieur," the man agreed, "but not knowing that I was Monsieur's servant of many years, and a person of discretion, she preferred to keep it to herself."

His master, after stepping a little way back to inspect his work, continued to paint.

"I am intrigued, Vittorio," he admitted, "but I do not wish to see the young lady. Use all your arts of diplomacy and get rid of her for me."

Vittorio's cheerful face became clouded.

"It will be a difficult matter, Monsieur," he confessed.

"It will be impossible," a very lazy, but pleasant feminine voice intervened. "I owe you all the apologies in the world, Mr. Hames, for this intrusion. Still, I had to see you, and I thought it might save time to follow your servant."

She came slowly forward across the rush-carpeted studio with its simple, almost primitive furnishings. Peter Hames stood for a moment watching her in silence— a slim, elegant figure in severely cut coat and skirt of some dark material. She was fair, with grey eyes, which, from the moment of her entrance, held his, and the faint insolence of which marched with the lines of her mouth. Her complexion was innocent of all cosmetics; her lips were untouched. Even the fierce sunlight which surrounded her, streaming through the high windows, could show her no disfavour save for the slightest lines of fatigue or sleeplessness under her eyes. Peter Hames accepted fate, but first he wheeled his canvas around and turned it to the wall.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, Mademoiselle?" he asked, pushing a chair into an adjacent corner of the studio, where the light was a little less penetrating. "Will you sit down?"

Vittorio, in response to a gesture from his master, left the room, his head high and full of the beatific consciousness of having done the right thing. The young lady sank into the chair and smiled up at her host.

"Well, to begin with," she said, "you can tell me why you left the Café Régal so abruptly the other morning?"

He looked at her in puzzled fashion.

"The Café Régal?" he repeated. "I was afraid when I was informed of your visit, Mademoiselle, that you were making some mistake. I know of no such place."

She nodded slowly.

"And I thought," she murmured, "that Anglo-Saxons only lied— forgive the melodramatic touch— for the honour or the safety of their lady friends."

"Are you so far removed from the Anglo-Saxon race?" he asked.

"*Touché*," she admitted. "You can fence with me just as long as you wish, though. I like your studio and I am quite content to pay you a long visit. May I smoke?"

"By all means," he assented. "I am afraid I can't offer you anything very choice in the way of tobacco," he added, producing a case.

She shook her head.

"Please don't trouble," she begged, "I smoke my own."

From a plain suede bag, with a very beautiful clasp, she drew out a holder of exceptional length, fitted a cigarette into it, accepted a light from her host's briquet, and leaned a little farther back in her chair.

"So you did not call for a glass of brandy at the Café Régal that night," she murmured, "and stumble upon a tragedy? I rather envied you your entrance. An almost Rembrandtesque interior, wasn't it?"

"Some day, when you have discovered your mistake," lie suggested, "I shall ask you to take me there. Then I may be able to answer your question."

She studied him pensively. Then an idea seemed to strike her and she leaned towards the wall. Easily anticipating his attempt at interference, with a swift turn of the wrist, she swung around the easel. They both looked at the picture together— at the sordid café, with its sombre, melancholy lighting effects, the girl, typical *cocotte* of the region, sprawling on her stool, the drunken man in his corner a shape only, old Père Delous, with his idiot but terrible face, showing his yellow fangs in that meaningless laugh. Behind the counter— nothing.

"A marvellous effort, from memory only," she declared. "Did I really look like that?"

"Worse," he answered tersely. "For all I know, you are. Appearances either way are deceitful. In any case what do you want with me?"

She sighed.

"You are annoyed," she complained, "and that is unreasonable. I was quite content to leave you out of it until it became impossible. Why did you steal away from that place? Didn't your chivalry prompt you to stay and see me through it?"

"It certainly did not," he assured her. "When I recognised you, I knew that you had the case in hand and I probably wasn't wanted."

"A certain amount of common sense in that," she admitted, with uplifted eyebrows. "But are you sure that you recognised me?"

"Perfectly. You looked like a vulgarly attractive little *cocotte* of the poorer regions— as you intended, I suppose. Your real name, I believe, is Miss Sybil Christian, once of Daly's Theatre, London, later a very important personage for a brief period at that sinister building upon the Embankment, from which I think you— er— disappeared, for a short time, to do your duty by society; and now a free lance, with a taste for interfering in other people's business."

"Not so bad," she acknowledged. "Miss Sybil Christian."

"That is your correct name, except that, as the younger daughter of a peer, I presume that you could claim to be addressed as the Honourable Sybil Christian if it afforded you any satisfaction."

She knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"What a horrible disillusion," she sighed. "I thought that I was a creature of mystery to you. In fact, I rather hoped for overtures the other night, connected with my bogus profession."

"I couldn't have looked at you for five minutes without wanting to wash your face," he rejoined.

She laughed almost naturally.

"You have always hated the sound of my name," she remarked, "and I don't know why. I have never interfered with you in any way. Now for my retaliation. Your name is Peter J. Hames. You are an American, born in New York, educated at Harvard and Oxford, and swallowed up in the War. You emerged penniless. Your people were ruined, weren't they?"

He nodded. "Amazingly correct."

"You had to earn your own living and you didn't know how," she went on. "Your only friend was the then Police Commissioner of New York, and he gave you a job. You were transferred almost at once to the detective service, where you did remarkably well, until the Fraser fiasco."

"Don't," he begged.

"I shall finish," she insisted ruthlessly. "You worked that out all right on the facts that you had. The trouble arose because your subordinates had deceived you. They wanted to see Fraser in the chair and there was a certain amount of 'framing' the case against turn, of which you had no knowledge. The man escaped by a miracle, and the rumour is that you very nearly killed one of the detectives who committed perjury. At any rate, you threw up your job, marched out of the place, and woke up the next morning to find that you had inherited a million dollars. Some people have that kind of luck. I haven't."

He was intensely interested now. His eyes were eagerly questioning her.

"This is marvellous," he declared. "Go on, please."

"You were temporarily fed up with your country," she continued, fitting another cigarette into her tube, "and you came over here. You painted a little, you gambled a little, you explored this country as I should think it has never been explored before, and you probably flirted a little, although of that I know nothing. Then the old passion reasserted itself. Two undiscovered crimes were elucidated by you and the results handed over to the local police on condition that you remained anonymous. I know you, though. The thing is in your blood. You follow crime like a bloodhound, just because you can't help it. You don't want any credit; you are regardless of money. You just love the work. The call was in your blood when you swung open the door of the Café Régal that night and found that murder had been done. You were very harsh, though, to the poor little *cocotte* who sat upon the stool, waiting for your favours."

There was a long and pregnant silence— to Peter Hames, the silence of humiliation.

"Mademoiselle—" he began at last, and his tone was almost humble.

"Please don't," she interrupted impatiently. "We are in a foreign country, but you are American and I am English. Don't let's forget it. And please don't bear me any ill will because I really have the knack of finding out about things—what you call the detective instinct, I suppose."

"I think you are wonderful," he confessed. "I have heard of you, of course. I had never dreamed, though, that you had such sources of information or could use them so intelligently. Having admitted that, do you mind telling me why you came to visit me?"

"I want your help," she confided.

"My answer to that is quickly given," he replied, with a certain almost passionate stiffness. "Do you mind going away, as soon as you have finished that cigarette?"

It was many a long day before she looked at him again as she looked at him at that moment. Her eyes wore soft with the tears which never came.

"You will think that I am showing off," she observed. "Indeed, I know why you say that. You say it because the people who were responsible for your failure on the Fraser case, and who nearly brought that poor fellow to the chair, were women— two women— vampires. I know all about them. You have been a woman-hater ever since. In your heart, I know that you have sworn that you would never work again with a woman. Very well, keep your word. Only help me this time. I want to save a man's life and it is better done through you."

He looked at her steadfastly. Somehow or other, sheer amazement had creased out the lines of his face. He was almost a boy again, full of wonder and repressed admiration.

"You were right in what you said just now," he declared. "Women are the callous, arch-liars of the World. I have sworn—"

"It is to save a man's life," she pleaded— "an old man."

It was then he yielded.

IT WAS AN HOUR before dawn and a stormy night. Rain streamed down the mountainous streets of Beausoleil and here and there fell hissing on the still warm pavements. The darkness was intense, wayfarers few. A short, stout man, wrapped from head to foot in a black cloak, with his feet encased in galoshes, and holding a capacious umbrella over his head, mounted one of the most precipitous of the side alleys and pushed open the swing door of that café of dubious repute— the Café Régal. He shook the rain from his clothes and glanced around with an affectation of carelessness. Behind the bar was Toby, the popular young nephew of the proprietress, Madame Hauser. Somnolent in a chair against the window was Père Delous, the saddler from over the way.

Mademoiselle Anna, sprawling upon a stool at the bar, broke off in her conversation with Toby to stare insolently at the newcomer.

"A terrible night," the latter remarked amiably, as he approached.

"Terrible indeed," the girl assented. "One comes out only of necessity. I am waiting for the brave gentleman who will escort me home."

"That will arrive, my dear; that will arrive," the stout little man chuckled.

He leaned over the counter.

"You wish to speak to me privately, Toby," he said, in a low tone. "Well, I have come. It is inconvenient. What have you to say?"

At Toby's first eager words, the stranger stopped him.

"Be careful," he enjoined. "Père Delous there counts for nothing, but the young woman— send her away."

"She is always here," Toby expostulated. "She is a customer."

"She knows nothing of me," was the acid comment. "Do as I bid or keep silent."

Toby disappeared through a low door into the rear premises. Simultaneously with his return, a bent old woman, with unkempt grey hair, which seemed to have spread all over her face, untidily dressed in a soiled black gown, pushed her way through the side door. She looked at the stranger at the bar, whom she had known for fifty years, but she took no notice of him.

"Mademoiselle," she croaked, "you are wanted on the telephone. Bring your drink. We will have a cordial together."

Mademoiselle slipped from her stool and, without remark, obeyed the summons. With the closing of the door, Toby became eloquent. A stream of words broke from his lips. Now and then he banged the counter. He pointed to the street outside and the ceiling above. The stranger listened, and his face, which one might have judged to be rubicund and cheerful, became as hard as granite. He did not once interrupt; he waited until words melted into sobs.

"I have finished!" was the boy's last coherent utterance.

His auditor stroked his chin and reflected.

"You may lose your place, Toby," he warned him.

"I would give my soul to lose it," was the passionate reply.

"One must consider," the stranger murmured. "Give me a *fine*, Toby, and another for Père Delous."

Toby obeyed, and, with both glasses in his hand, his customer crossed the floor. Père Delous chuckled.

"For me!" he exclaimed, holding out his shaking hand. "Ah, it is the medicine I need, but work is scarce and cognac is dear."

"Wait!" his visitor admonished good-naturedly. "Let me feel your pulse. Are you strong enough for cognac, I ask myself?"

"It is strength I need," Père Delous gasped.

The man in the long cape felt his pulse and nodded gravely.

"I will give you free medicine, Père Delous," he promised, "for I know that you will never pay for it."

His prospective patient mumbled. With greedy eyes he watched the pastille dropped into the glass of brandy; with greedy fingers he raised it to his lips and drained its contents. He sank back in his chair, crooning to himself, and closed his eyes.

His benefactor sipped his own brandy and, re-crossing the room, shook the apparently drunken man, and whispered in his ear. Then he returned to the bar.

"I will have another *fine*, Toby," he ordered. "After all, you are perhaps right. You are scarcely old enough for such an important affair. Why do the lights burn so ill to-night?"

"The storm. Soon I think they will be out altogether. Monsieur is not angry with me?"

"Not I," was the genial reply. "Fetch an oil lamp before darkness comes."

The young man obeyed with alacrity. It was a great joy that this noble patron was not angry. The latter moved over to examine the switch. By the time Toby returned with the lamp, he was back in his place, however. One by one, the electric lamps failed. A thin pencil of light, creeping through the window from outside, seemed to wake the drunken man. He staggered to his feet and lurched over to the counter, leering at Mademoiselle, who had just made her reappearance and was climbing on to her stool.

"A good sleep!" he declared. "It is excellent!"

"Go and sleep some more then," she advised him. "You're still drunk."

He held on to the counter with one hand; with the other he drew a handful of hundred-franc notes from his pocket.

"Who would not be drunk!" he exclaimed. "I have made wonderful business. I will walk with thee to thy door, little one."

She laughed at him scornfully.

"What an invitation!" she mocked.

He thrust five hundred francs into her hand. She looked at the notes with meticulous curiosity, opened her bag, and dropped them in. Then she finished her drink and slipped from her stool.

"To the door," she warned him.

The man grinned.

"There are more of the notes," he whispered, as they left the place together.

THE DAWN WAS late in coming and little was to be seen by the feeble light of the lamp. The stranger felt in his pocket and produced a folding black case.

"Another brandy from the large bottle, Toby," he ordered.

The boy turned around to the shelf. His patron leaned over, and, even in that weird light, the thread of steel in his hand glittered. He knew exactly where to strike, and Toby sank on to his low stool with scarcely a moan.... Then, for a few minutes, his assailant was very busy indeed. First he bent over Toby, drew keys from his pocket, and emptied several drawers. Afterwards he listened attentively to the stertorous breathing of Père Delous in his corner, and finally passed through the swing doors. For a few minutes the place was empty except for Père Delous, who woke up once to gaze with surprise at an unexpected stain upon his coat sleeve. Then the door swung open. The drunken man lurched in, stumbled to his bench, and lay there. The silence of the cafe was re-established. Outside, the rain had lessened, but the wind was moaning down the narrow streets. Again the door was opened. Mademoiselle Anna swaggered in. She looked across at the drunken man and laughed, made her way to her favourite stool at the bar, climbed on to it, and glanced downwards. Toby, in that uncertain light, might seem to have been sleeping, but perhaps she guessed. Once again, and for the last time that night, a customer pushed open the door, letting in a faint streak of leaden daylight and a gust of the wet storm. Peter Hames paused to shake the rain from his dripping mackintosh.

"Wake up, Toby," he enjoined, advancing a step or two nearer the bar. "My car is broken down at the bottom of the hill and I am wet through tinkering with it. A glass of the best brandy, quickly!"

AFTERNOON tea was served in the studio of the villa upon the slopes of La Turbie and seven o'clock cocktails followed. The footsteps of Peter Hames' temperamental butler fell upon the air. Undoubtedly he had done well to admit the importunate lady.

The mistral had passed, and Beausoleil was justifying its very beautiful name. Down the sunlit thoroughfare walked Monsieur Charles Dutroyen, the prosperous and enterprising chemist, the fame of whose business had carried so far that visitors even from the most aristocratic parts of the Principality climbed the hill to buy his wares. Beausoleil is the poor relation of Monte Carlo, and very few of its tradespeople could afford that daily promenade of Monsieur Charles Dutroyen. Every morning, with the midday closing of his ever-increasing establishment, he discarded the overall which protected his sombre professional clothes, accepted a well-brushed hat from the hands of his housekeeper, selected a cane, and made his way down to the Café de Paris. Every morning he took his aperitif in the closed Brasserie, or out in the sunshine, according to the weather, and nearly every morning he ordered his luncheon from an attentive *maître d'hôtel*, and, in due course, was to be found seated at a corner table in the restaurant, doing full justice to it.

On this particular morning his St. Rafael Quinquina had never tasted better, and the menu was to his liking— a delicious *truite bleue*, ribs of veal cooked in the Italian fashion, a trifle of cheese, and a pint of Turpin Monopole. It was the luncheon of an epicure! Monsieur Charles Dutroyen glanced impatiently at the clock. It wanted still five minutes of the hour at which he was accustomed to seat himself. This morning, he decided, rising to his feet, he would anticipate a little. There was to be an interruption, however. The *vestiaire* came hurrying through to him.

"There is one who wishes to speak to Monsieur on the telephone," he announced. "It is from the establishment."

The chemist frowned. The circumstance was unusual, but not unprecedented. He made his way to the box and held the receiver to his ear. The agitated voice of his chief assistant answered his call.

"Monsieur," he confided, "things are happening here which one cannot explain. Monsieur had better return at once."

Monsieur Dutroyen was, to use a phrase which has no existence in the French language, flabbergasted.

"But, my good Henri," he protested, "I have this moment ordered my luncheon."

"It is a disaster," the anxious voice acknowledged, "but no one save yourself can deal with the situation."

Monsieur Dutroyen postponed his lunch, received his hat from the *vestiaire*, mounted into a little *voiture*, and climbed the hill. He was a man of easy conscience and still no thought of misfortune haunted his way. When he arrived, however, at that famous establishment, so well known far beyond the limits of Beausoleil, the shock arrived. Three motor cars were drawn up by the side of the curb and a gendarme stood at attention at his door. It speaks well for the courage and presence of mind of Monsieur Charles Dutroyen that he descended promptly from the little carriage and manfully crossed the threshold of his emporium. Worse things, however, awaited him. There were more gendarmes guarding a number of packets laid out upon the counter, and his friend, the Commissaire of Police, who turned a very grave face upon him.

"What ails the world this morning, friend?" the chemist demanded, advancing with outstretched hand.

The commissaire shook his head.

"A great deal ails the world, Friend Charles," he replied, pointing to the long rows of packages upon the counter. "Here is cocaine enough to stupefy every human being in the Principality and heroin sufficient to poison a city. These have been discovered upon your premises. It is a disaster!"

"My assistants must have trafficked in them without my knowledge," Monsieur Dutroyen declared bravely.

"The statements of your assistants have already been taken down," the commissaire deplored. "Prepare yourself, Dutroyen, for that which comes is more serious still. I have to arrest you for the murder, last Thursday, of Toby Dachener, barman at the Café Régal."

Imagination sometimes plays strange pranks with a man. For a moment, Dutroyen's thoughts flashed regretfully backwards to that succulent, but never-to-be-eaten lunch. Then he leaned across the counter, and it was very much to the discredit of the commissaire himself, and the surrounding gendarmes, that they let his hand tamper with the drawer on the other side and reappear, clutching a very formidable-looking revolver.

"Paul Levadour," he said, addressing his friend the commissaire, "I have always been a man who is fond of company. My tastes have leaned that way in life. They follow suit in death. To die alone is to me an aggravated misery."

The commissaire dodged behind a portly gendarme, but his erstwhile friend shook his head reprovingly.

"Have no fear, Paul," he concluded. "You are a married man, with a charming wife. I should know, for she has been my mistress for the last ten years. A family too! Have no fear. This journey I shall adventure alone."

Monsieur Charles Dutroyen blew out his brains with the neatness of an artist, and, though it was his business in life to cure, he succeeded even better in destruction.

IN A TUCKED-AWAY cafe at the top of one of the most crooked streets in Beausoleil, where manicurists of the virtuous variety, who pay for their own luncheons, chauffeurs, coiffeurs and shop assistants form the principal clientèle, Peter Hames and Sybil Christian dined together one evening at a corner table. Chemist Charles Dutroyen was buried, his business disposed of, and that vast stock of drugs bad disappeared— no one knew exactly where. Père Delous was at liberty and drinks were free for him at every café within reach. Old Mother Hauser, the proprietress of the Café Régal, had died of heart failure, but as she was reputed to be ninety-three years old, the incident was not to be considered of importance. Several hundreds of exceedingly well-informed people knew the whole story of Chemist Dutroyen's traffic in drugs and his suicide, and of the tragedy in the Café Régal, and were telling their story at every bar between Beausoleil and Nice. To Peter Hames, however, until the night of that dinner, there remained an atmosphere of mystery about the whole business.

"Tell me," he begged, leaning towards his companion, "you weren't in the place at the time— why were you so certain that Dutroyen had killed Toby?"

She smiled.

"I suppose even in that very prolonged visitation I paid you, I couldn't tell you everything," she said—"especially as you kept on interrupting. Listen! I

knew that Dutroyen was supplying certain bars, including the Régal, with drugs which the barmen were selling. I knew that Toby had made up his mind to be quit of the whole business and that he had sent for Dutroyen to tell him so. I knew that that man who pretended to be drunk was an accomplice of Dutroyen, there to watch who came and went, and I knew, when he made his clumsy effort to get me out of the way, it was at Dutroyen's instigation. The next morning, I purchased, at Dutroyen's shop, a second-hand leather roll of surgical instruments for home use. One, a long, dagger-like implement, corresponding exactly with the weapon with which Toby was stabbed, was missing. Added to all this, I knew that Dutroyen, whose drug traffic I was out to stop, was a bad man, a murderer at heart more than once. In a court of law, perhaps, it might have been difficult to obtain a verdict against him, but there was quite enough anyhow to warrant an arrest."

"Why did you drag me into it?" he asked bluntly.

"Because," she answered, "for reasons which I may tell you some day, I did not wish to go to the Commissaire of Police myself."

The restaurant was almost deserted. Peter Hames paid the bill and they strolled outside together. A little *voiture* came lumbering up, with the waiter, who had been sent to fetch it, inside.

"You will let me drive you home?" he begged.

She shook her head.

"I will tell you a strange thing," she confided. "There is not a soul in the Principality who knows where I live, or how."

"Then, am I never to see you again?" he asked.

She smiled at him pleasantly enough, but there was no response in her eyes to his own eagerness.

"I have a conviction," she confessed, "that when either of us has need of the other, something will happen."

She waved her hand. The *voiture*, in obedience to her gesture, drove off along the crooked street. Peter Hames lit a cigarette and went on his no longer untroubled way.

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19: Three Wise Men of the East Side

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

Cosmopolitan, July 1926

WHILE HE WAS in the death-house, Tony Scarra did a lot of thinking. You couldn't imagine a better place for thinking; it goes on practically all the time there and intensively. But no matter where the thoughts range and no matter what elements enter into them— hope or despair, rebellion or resignation, or whatever— sooner or later they fly back, like dark homing pigeons, to a small iron door opening upon a room in which, bolted to the floor, there is a chair with straps dangling from its arms and from its legs and its head-rest— in short, the Chair. This picture is the beginning and the end of all the thinking that is done in the death-house.

Such were the facts with regard to Tony Scarra. As nearly as might be judged, he felt no remorse for the murdering which had brought him to his present trapped estate. But he did have a deep regret for the entanglement of circumstances responsible for his capture and conviction. And constantly he had a profound sense of injustice. It seemed to him that in his case the law had been most terribly unreasonable. Statistics showed that for every seventy-four homicides committed in this state only one person actually went to the Chair. He'd read that in a paper during the trial. It had been of some comfort to him. Now he brooded on these figures. Over and over and over again, brooding on them, he asked himself about it.

Why should he have to be the unlucky one of seventy-four? Was it fair to let seventy-three other guys go free or let them off with prison sentences and then shoot the whole works to him? Was that a square deal? Why did it have to be that way, anyhow? What was the sense of it? Why pick on him? Why must he go through with it? Why— that was just it— why? The question-marks were so many sharp fishhooks all pricking down into his brain and hanging on.

His calling had made a sort of fatalist out of Tony Scarra. His present position was in a fair way to make a sort of anarchist out of him.

All the way through, his lawyer kept trying to explain to him touching on the lamentable rule of averages. He was not concerned with averages though. He was concerned with the great central idea of saving his life. To that extent his mind had become a lop-sided mind. Its slants all ran the same way, like shingles on a roof that slopes.

At length there came a morning when the death-house seemed to close in on him, tighter and tighter. It no longer was a steel box to enclose him; it became a steel vise and pinched him. This Scarra was not what you would call an emotional animal, nor a particularly imaginative one. Even so, and suddenly, he

saw those bolt-heads in the ironwork as staring unmerciful eyes all vigilantly cocked to see how he took the news. And his thinking, instead of being scattered, now came to a focus upon a contingency which through weeks past he had carried in the back lobe.

"I'm just as sore about this as you are, Tony," the lawyer said. "It hurts me almost as much as it hurts you. Why, look here, yours is the first case I ever lost— the first capital case, I mean. All the others, I got 'em off somehow— acquittal or a hung jury or a mistrial or a retrial or, if it looked bad, we took a plea in the second degree and the fellow went up the road for a stretch. It's my reputation that's at stake in this thing; this thing is bound to hurt my record— the conviction standing and all. So naturally, not only on my own account but on yours, I've done everything I could— claiming reversible errors and taking an appeal and now this last scheme of asking the judges to reopen the case on the ground of newly discovered evidence. We've fought it along with stays and delays for nearly eight months now, going all the way up to the highest court in the state, and here today I have to come and tell you we've been turned down there. It's hard on me, don't forget that, Tony. It'll hurt me in New York. You know what your crowd call me there— the Technicality Kid?"

"You was recommended to me as one swell mouthpiece and I sent for you and you came up and I hired you," answered Scarra in a recapitulation of vain grievances, "and you took my jack and you kept on taking it till you milked me clean, pretty near it, and now you stand there and tell me you're through!"

"No, I'm not through either," the lawyer made haste to say. "There's still the chance the governor might commute the sentence. You know how often that happens— men being reprieved right at the very last minute, as you might say. Oh, I'm going to the governor next. We've still got nearly a month left, Tony, and a lot could happen in a month."

"Swell chance I've got with this governor, and you know it. He's a politician, ain't he? Can't you see these here rube papers riding him if he should let off the 'Big City Gunman'? Ain't that their gentlest name for me? No, you quit stalling and listen to me a minute."

There was a tight iron grille between them; they talked with each other through the meshes, and as they talked a keeper watched them, keeping beyond earshot, though. Even in the death-house the sanctity of the professional relation as between a convicted man and his legal adviser was preserved. So the sentry must watch but he might not listen; the meeting partook of the nature of a confessional. All the same, Scarra followed the quite unnecessary precaution of sinking his voice before saying what next he had to say. Saying it, he kept shifting his eyes away from Attorney Finburg's face to look this way and that— first this way, toward the heedful but unhearing keeper,

then that way toward the part of the building where, behind soundproof walls, the Chair stood.

"Finburg," he whispered, "I ain't going to let these guys cook me. I'm going to beat their game yet— and you're going to help me." He twisted his mouth into the stiffened shape of a grin; the embalmed corpse of a grin. "Get that? You're going to help me."

Counselor Finburg had eloquent shoulders. Often in debate he used those shoulders of his to help out his pleading hands. He lifted both of them in a shrug of confessed helplessness. Nevertheless his expression invited further confidences. It was as much as to say that this was a poor unfortunate friend who, having a delusion, must be humored in it.

"Don't start that stuff with me," went on Scarra, correctly interpreting the look; "not till you've heard what I got to tell you. Finburg, if I got to croak, I got to croak, that's all. I took plenty chances in my time on getting bumped off and I've seen more'n one guy getting his— what I mean, more'n one besides that hick cop that I fixed his clock for him. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't been here. But that ain't the thing. The thing is that I ain't going to let 'em make cold meat out of me in that kitchen of theirs out there. They ain't going to fry me on one side like an egg. I'll beat 'em to it, that's all. I couldn't stand it, that's all."

"They say it's absolutely— you know"— Mr. Finburg's lips were reluctant to form the word— "well, painless— and, of course, instantaneous."

"Who says so? A bunch of wise-cracking doctors, that's who. What do they know about it? Any of them ever try it to find out? Finburg, I had a brother and he knew about electricity— was a lineman for a high-tension power company. I've heard him tell about being caught in them currents, heard him tell what other guys went through that took a big jolt of the juice. The first shock don't always put a guy out. He may look to be dead but he ain't— he's stuck there waiting for the next shot— waiting, waiting. Well, not for me— I'm going to do my own croaking— with a little help from outside. That's where you figure in."

Involuntarily, Finburg made as if to back away. His body shrank back but his feet rooted him fast. A fascination held him.

"You ain't going to lose anything by it," maintained the caged man, pressing his point. "You're going to make by it."

"No, no, no!" Finburg strove to make his dissent emphatic. "Oh, no, Scarra, I'd like to do you any favor in my power but I couldn't do that. Why, man, it's against the law. It's conniving at a suicide. It makes the man who does it an accessory."

"Swell law that wants to croak a poor guy and yet calls it a crime if somebody helps him croak himself!" commented Scarra. "Still, I know about that part of it already. What if I tell you you ain't running any risk? And what if you

clean up on the deal yourself? You've been knocking holes in the law ever since you got your license. Why're you weakening now?"

"But— but if you're determined to go this way, why not use something in your cell— some utensil, say?" suggested the nervous Finburg. Already he felt guilty. His cautious voice had a guilty quaver in it.

"With them bringing me my grub already cut up and only a spoon to eat it with— huh!" The murderer grunted. "Why, even the tooth-brush they gave me has got a limber handle on it. And if they let me have a lead-pencil to write with, there's a keeper standing alongside to see I don't try to shove the sharp end of it down my throat. Don't they search my coop every little while? You know they do. Anyhow, I ain't craving to make a messy job of it and probably be caught before it's done, besides. I'm going clean and I'm going quick. What I want is just a nice little jolt of this here cyanide of potassium. You know about that stuff? You swallow it and it's all over in a minute. That's what I want— one little shot of that cyanide stuff. I ain't going to take it till the last hope's gone— a miracle might happen with that governor yet. But when they come to take me out to be juiced in that chair, why, down goes the little pill and out goes Tony, laughing in their foolish faces. I ain't scared to go my way, you understand, but"— he sucked in his breath— "but I'm scared to go their way and I might as well admit it."

Still on the defensive and the negative, Finburg had been shaking his head through this, but his next speech belied his attitude. Being rent between two crossed emotions— a sinking fear for his own safety and a climbing, growing avarice, he said in a soft, wheedling tone: "You mentioned just now about my making something out of— this? Not that I'd even consider such a dangerous proposition," he added hastily. "I— I just wanted to know what you had on your mind, that's all?"

"I thought that'd interest you! Listen, Finburg. All along, I've been holding out on you. I been keeping an ace in the hole in case we should lose out on the appeal. You thought you'd taken the last cent of fall-money I could dig up for fighting my case for me, didn't you? Well, kid, you guessed wrong there. You remember the big Bergen Trust Company hold-up down in New Jersey early last spring, don't you?"

"Yes." Finburg's jaws relaxed the least bit to let a greedy tongue lick out.

"Then you remember, probably, that quite a chunk of negotiable securities— bonds and things— wasn't never recovered?"

"Yes, I recall." Finburg suggested a furtive jackal, tense with a mounting hunger and smelling afar off a bait of rich but forbidden food.

"And that the trust company people offered a reward of ten thousand for the return of that stuff and no questions asked?"

"Yes, go on."

"Well, Finburg, you're smart but here's something you never knew before. I was in on that hold-up— I engineered it. And inside of three weeks afterwards, while I was waiting for the squawk over that job to die down, I came up here and got in this jam and had to plug this cop and they nailed me. But, Finburg, I've got a safe-deposit box in a bank on Third Avenue and I've got a key to it stuck away in another place where a pal's keeping it for me— a pal I can trust. I'll leave you guess what's in that safe-deposit box. Or, if you want me to, I'll tell—"

"No, don't tell me— that would be illegal," said the lawyer very uneasily and yet very eagerly. "It would be more regular, you understand, if I didn't actually have knowledge of what the contents were— that is, beforehand. I've been double-crossed before by some of you hard-boiled people. There was the time when I almost worked my head off defending Roxie McGill and her mob for shoving phony money, and every time I think of how that McGill skirt slipped it over on me, when it came time to settle up"— he winced on what plainly was a most painful recollection— "well, it's made me careful, Tony, awfully careful. Not that I'm doubting you, understand. If a man can't trust a—" He broke off, looking, for him, a trifle embarrassed.

"Say it!" prompted Scarra grimly. "If you can't trust a dying man you can't trust nobody— that's what you had in your mind, wasn't it? Well, I'm as good as dead right now and you won't never regret it, playing my game. It could be fixed up, according to law, couldn't it, like a will, that me not having any kinfolks, I was leaving you what was in that safe-deposit box on account of you having been my lawyer and having worked so hard for me?"

"Oh, yes, I'd know how to phrase the instrument properly. There'd be no trouble about that, none whatever, Tony."

"All right, then, you fix up the paper and I'll sign it right here any day it's ready. And I'll give you a written order on that pal of mine for the key, telling him to hand it over to you the day after I'm gone. You ain't got a thing to worry about. And in payment all you got to do for me is just the one little favor of getting that little pill made up and—"

"I'm telling you there's entirely too much risk," interrupted Finburg, in a timorous sweat of almost over-powering temptation, but still clinging to safety. "I wouldn't dare risk trying to slip you poison, Tony— I couldn't."

"Nobody's asking you to."

"What? What's that you're saying, Tony?" The lawyer shoved his peaked nose between two wattles of the steel.

"I say, nobody's asking you to. Knowing you, I've doped out that part of it so you won't have to take a chance. Listen, Finburg— there's a guard here named Isgrid— a Swede or something. And he comes from down on the East Side, the same as you and me. I've been working on him. We've got friendly. Maybe him

and me both having been born on the same block over there beyond the Bowery was what made him sort of mushy towards me— he's one of those big thick slobs. But it ain't for friendship only that he's willing to help. He wants his bit out of it. He's aiming to quit this job he's got here and he wants to take a piece of money with him when he quits. Now, here's what he tells me: He'll be on the death-watch on me. That last night he'll slip me the pill, see? Nobody ain't going to suspect him, he says, and even if anybody does, they ain't going to be able to hang it on him, let alone get you mixed in with the plant."

"I suppose I'll have to see this man," conceded Finburg; "not that that means I'm committing myself to this undertaking."

"I thought of that too. Day after tomorrow is Sunday, and Sunday is his day off. He'll run down to New York and meet you in your office or at your flat, and you can size him up and talk it over with him."

"It can't do any harm to see the man, I suppose." It was plain that the lawyer was convincing himself. "Tell him— only, mind you, this is just an accommodation to you— tell him the address of my rooms and tell him to be there at ten o'clock."

"One thing more," stated the killer. "Isgrid wants one grand for his cut."

"One grand— a thousand dollars!"

"That's his lowest price. I had to work on him to cut it down to that. And, Finburg, you'll have to dig up the thou'. He wants it in advance, see? You can pay yourself back— afterwards. That's up to you."

"That makes it still more complicated," lamented the wavering Finburg. "I don't know— I don't know." Figuratively he wrung his hands in an anguish born of desire and doubt.

"Well, I'll give you till over Sunday to make up your mind, then," said Scarra, he secretly being well content with the progress that had been made. "If by Monday you've decided to go through with your share of the deal, you can come back here and bring that will with you and I'll sign it. If you don't show up on Monday I'll know you're too chicken-hearted for your own good. Remember this, though, Finburg— one way or another I'm going to get that pill. If you don't want to help, that's your lookout— you'll only be kissing good-by to what's down in them safe-deposit vaults on Third Avenue. And if you do— well, I guess you're wise enough to protect yourself at every angle. It's easy pickings for you, Finburg— easy pickings. So think it over before you decide to say no. Well, so long, see you Monday."

He fell back from the grating and to the keeper at the farther end of the corridor motioned to indicate that his interview with his counsel was ended and that he was ready to be returned to his cell.

MONDAY MORNING, good and early, Mr. Finburg was back again. His mind had been made up for many hours. In fact it was made up before he left on Friday afternoon. Only, at the time, he had not cared to say so or to look so. To wear a mask was one part of Mr. Finburg's professional attitude. To do things deviously was another. For him always, the longest way round was the shortest way across. His mind was a maze of detours, excepting when he was collecting his retainers or pressing for his principal fees. Then he could be straightforward enough to satisfy anybody. The practice of the criminal law does this to some of its practitioners.

It was because of this trait of Mr. Finburg's that certain preliminary steps in the working-out of his share in the plot were elaborated and made intricate. Since Friday evening when his train landed him at the Grand Central, he had been a reasonably busy young man. From the station he went directly to the Public Library and there, at a table well apart from any other reader, he consulted a work on toxicology, with particular reference to the effects of the more deadly poisons. Before midnight he was in touch with a chemist of his acquaintance who served as laboratory sharp and chief mixer for a bootlegging combine specializing in synthetic goods with bogus labels on them. His real purpose in this inquiry was, of course, carefully cloaked; the explanation he gave— it referred to experiments which a purely supposititious client was making with precious metals— apparently satisfied the expert, who gave information fully.

By virtue of a finely involved ramification of underworld connections, Mr. Finburg was enabled next to operate through agents. Three separate individuals figured in the transaction. But no one of the three beheld more than his particular link in a winding chain and only one of the three had direct dealings with the principal, and this one remained in complete ignorance of what really was afoot. All he knew, all he cared to know, was that, having been dispatched on a mission which seemed to start nowhere and lead nowhere, he had performed what was expected of him and had been paid for it and was through. By such deft windings in and out, Mr. Finburg satisfied himself the trail was so broken that no investigator ever could piece it together. There were too many footprints in the trace; and too many of them pointing in seemingly opposite and contrary directions.

He was quite ready for the man Isgrid when that person came to his apartment on Sunday morning. Whether Isgrid studied Finburg is of no consequence to this narrative, but we may be quite assured that Finburg studied Isgrid, seeing the latter as a stolid, dull person, probably of Scandinavian ancestry and undoubtedly of a cheap order of mentality. About Isgrid as interpreted by Finburg, there was nothing to suggest any personal initiative. He appeared close-mouthed and secretive, though— in short, a man who being

committed to a venture would go through it with a sort of intent and whole-hearted determination. This greatly pleased the little lawyer. For the rôle of an unthinking middleman Isgrid seemed an admirable choice. He had such a dependable dumb look about him. Nevertheless it suited Mr. Finburg's book that his conspirings with this man should be marked by crafty play-acting. There sat the two of them, entirely alone, yet Mr. Finburg behaved as though a cloud of witnesses hovered to menace him.

He asked Isgrid various questions— leading questions, they would be called in court— but so phrased that they might pass for the most unsuspicious of inquiries. Then, being well satisfied by the results of such cross-examination, the lawyer came to business.

"Look here," he said, pointing, "on this table is a little box with the lid off. See it? Well, in it are twelve five-grain capsules same as you'd get from any drug-store if you had a touch of grippe and the doctor gave you a prescription to be filled. Between ourselves we'll just say it is a grippe cure that we've got here. Well, one of these capsules is stronger than the others are. If I'm not mistaken, it's this one here"— his finger pointed again— "the last one in the bottom row, the one with a little spot of red ink on it. It's marked that way so a fellow will be wised up to handling it pretty carefully.

"Now then, I'm going into the next room. I've got a wall safe there where I keep some of my private papers and other valuables, including money. I'm going to get a bill— a nice new United States Treasury certificate for one thousand dollars— out of my safe. It may take me two or three minutes to work the combination and find the bill. When I come back, if one or two of those capsules should happen to be missing, why I'll just say to myself that somebody with a touch of grippe, or somebody who's got a friend laid up somewhere with the grippe, saw this medicine here and helped himself to a dose or so without saying anything about it. It won't stick in my mind; what difference does a measly little drug-store pill or two mean to me or to anybody else, for that matter? Inside of ten minutes I'll have forgotten all about it.

"Make yourself at home, please— I'll be back in a jiffy."

He entered the inner room of the two-room flat, closing and snapping shut the connecting door behind him. When he came back, which was quite soon, he glanced at the open box. The twelfth capsule, that one which was red-dotted, and one neighboring capsule had disappeared. Isgrid was sitting where he had been seated before Finburg's temporary withdrawal.

"See this?" resumed Finburg, and he held up what he was holding in his hands. "It's a nice slick new one that's never been in circulation. Well, I've about made up my mind to slip this bill to you. You've been kind to a party that's in trouble— a party that I've had considerable dealings with. He's grateful and naturally I'm grateful, too. As I understand it, you're going to keep on being

good to this party. He's in a bad way— may not live very long, in fact— and we'll both appreciate any little attentions you might continue to show him. But this is a hard world— people get careless sometimes; you can't always depend on them. Not knocking you or anything, but still I'd like to make certain that you won't go back on any little promise you might have made to him lately. You get me, I think— just a precaution on my part. See what I'm going to do next?"

From his desk he took up a pair of scissors and with one swift clip of their blades sheared the yellow-back squarely in two across the middle. Isgrid said nothing to this but kept eying him intently.

"Now, then, I put one-half of this bill into my pocket," proceeded Finburg; "and the other half I'm handing over to you"— doing so. "Separated this way, these halves are no use to anybody— none to me, none to you. But paste them together again and you've got a thousand-dollar bill that's just as good as it ever was. For the time being, you keep your half and I'll keep my half. I'll have it right here handy on my person and ready to slip it over to you when the contract that I've been speaking of is completed.

"Now, I expect to be seeing our sick friend tomorrow. Tonight I'll be fixing up a document or two for him to sign and I'm going to take them up to where he is in the morning. I'll tell him of this little arrangement between us and I'm certain he'll endorse it. I may not see him again until the twenty-seventh of this month." He dwelt meaningly upon the date. "It looks as though he couldn't last much longer than that— not more than a few hours. And on the twenty-seventh, if the prospects are that he'll pass out within the next twenty-four hours— which, as I say, is the present outlook— I'll pay him a farewell visit. If everything has worked out right— if you've done him any little last favor that he's counting on— why, he'll tip me the word while we're alone together. You won't have to wait much longer than that for what's coming to you. Just as soon as he gives me the word I'll meet you in some private corner that we'll decide on, and hand you over the other half of your bill. Is everything understood— everything agreeable to you?"

Still mute, Isgrid nodded. They shook hands on it after Isgrid had named a suitable place for their rendezvous on the twenty-seventh; then the silent caller took himself away. All told, he had not contributed a hundred words, counting in grunts as words, to the dialogue.

BEING LEFT ALONE, Mr. Finburg mentally hugged himself before he set to the task of drawing up the papers for his client's signature. This same Sunday he decided not to go to the governor of that near-by state with any futile plea for executive clemency. He'd tell Scarra, of course, that he was going; would pretend he had gone. But what was the use of a man wasting his breath on a quest so absolutely hopeless? He salved his conscience— or the place where his

conscience had been before he wore it out— with this reflection, and by an effort of the will put from him any prolonged consideration of the real underlying reason. It resolved itself into this: Why should a man trifle with his luck? With Scarra wiped out— and certainly Scarra deserved wiping out, if ever a red-handed brute did— the ends of justice would be satisfied and the case might serve as a warning to other criminals. But if that governor should turn mush-headed and withhold from Scarra his just punishment, where would Scarra's lawyer be? He'd be missing a delectable chunk of jack by a hair— that's where he would be.

Let the law take its course!

The law did. It took its racking course at quarter past one o'clock on the morning of the twenty-eighth.

Those who kept ward on Tony Scarra, considering him as scientists might consider an inoculated guinea-pig waiting patiently for this or that expected symptom of organic disorder to show itself, marveled more and more as the night wore on at the bearing of the condemned man. His, they dispassionately decided among themselves, was not the rehearsed but transparent bravado of the ordinary thug. That sort of thing they had observed before; they could bear testimony that very often toward the finish this make-believe fortitude melted beneath the lifting floods of a mortal terror and a mortal anguish, so that the subject lost the use of his members and the smoothness of his tongue, and babbled wild meaningless prayers and flapped with his legs and must be half-dragged, half-borne along on that first, last, short journey of his through the painted iron door to what awaited him beyond.

Or, fifty-fifty, it might be that imminent dread acted upon him as a merciful drug which soothed him into a sort of obedient coma wherein he yielded with a pitiful docility to the wishes of his executioners and mechanically did as they bid him, and went forth from his cell meek as a lamb, thereby simplifying and easing for them their not altogether agreeable duties. These experienced observers had come to count on one or the other of these manifestations. In Scarra neither of them was developed.

He seemed defiantly insulated against collapse by some indefinable power derived from within; it was as though a hidden secret reservoir of strength sustained him. He gibed the death-watch and he made a joke of the prison chaplain coming in the face of repeated rebuffs to offer the sustaining comfort of his Gospels. He betrayed no signs whatsoever of weakening— and this, to those who officiated at those offices, seemed most remarkable of all— when they clipped the hair off the top of his skull for the pad of the electrodes and again, later in the evening, when they brought him the black trousers with the left leg split up the inside seam.

All at once though, at the beginning of the second hour after midnight, when the witnesses were assembled and waiting in the lethal chamber, his jaunty confidence— if so, for lack of a better description, it might be termed— drained from him in a single gush. He had called, a minute or two before, for a drink of water, complaining of a parched throat. A filled cup was brought to him. Sitting on a stool in his cell he turned his back upon the bringer and took the draft down at a gulp, then rose and stood looking through the bars at the keepers, with a mocking, puzzling grin on his lips and over all his face and in his eyes a look of expectancy. The grin vanished, the look changed to one of enormous bewilderment, then to one of the intensest chagrin, and next he was mouthing with shocking vile words toward the eternity waiting for him. He resisted them when they went in then to fetch him out, and fought with them and screamed out and altogether upset the decorum of the death-house, so that the surviving inmates became excessively nervous and unhappy.

He did not curse those whose task it was now to subdue and, if possible, to calm him. He cursed somebody or other— person or persons unknown— for having deceived him in a vital matter, crying out that he had been imposed on, that he had been double-crossed. He raved of a pill— whatever that might mean— but so frightful a state was he in, so nearly incoherent in his frenzy of rage and distress and disappointment, that the meaning of what he spoke was swallowed up and lost.

Anyhow, his sweating handlers had no time to listen. Their task was to muffle his blasphemy and get him to the chair, which they did. Practically, they had to gag him with their hands, and one of the men had a finger bitten to the bone.

Since he continued to struggle in the presence of the audience, the proceedings from this point on were hurried along more than is common. His last understandable words, coming from beneath the mask clamped over the upper part of his distorted face, had reference to this mysterious double-crossing of which plainly, even in that extremity, he regarded himself the victim, and on which, as was equally plain, his final bitter thoughts dwelt. The jolt of the current cut him off in a panted, choking mid-speech, and the jaw dropped and the body strained up against the stout breast-harness, and the breath wheezed and rasped out across the teeth and past the lips, which instantly had turned purple, and there was a lesser sound, a curious hissing, whispering, slightly unpleasant sound as though the life were so eager to escape from this flesh that it came bursting through the pores of the darkening skin. Also, there was a wisp of rising blue smoke and a faint, a very faint smell of something burning. There nearly always is; a feature which apparently cannot be avoided. Still, after all, that's but a detail.

For absolute certainty of result, they gave Scarra's body a second shock, and the physicians present observed with interest how certain of the muscles, notably certain of the neck muscles, twitched in response to the throb and flow of the fluid through the tissues. But of course the man was dead. It merely was a simple galvanic reaction— like eel-meat twisting on a hot griddle, or severed frogs' legs jumping when you sprinkle salt on them— interesting, perhaps, but without significance. Except for Scarra's unseemly behavior immediately after drinking the water, this execution, as executions go, and they nearly always go so, was an entire success.

CONCEDED that as to its chief purpose, the plan unaccountably had gone amiss, Mr. Finburg nevertheless felt no concern over the outcome. Privately he preferred that it should have been thus— there being no reason for any official inquiry, naturally there would be no official inquiry. Happy anticipations uplifted him as, sundry legal formulas having been complied with, he went as Scarra's heir to Scarra's bank on Third Avenue and opened Scarra's safe-deposit box.

It would seem that he, also, had been double-crossed. All the box contained was a neat small kit of burglars' tools. It was indeed a severe disappointment to Mr. Finburg, a blow to his faith in human nature. We may well feel for Mr. Finburg.

Of that triumvirate of East Side connivers, there remains the third and least important member, Isgrid, he who, scheming on his own account and in his own protection, had played for safety by smuggling to the late Scarra not number twelve, the poisonous capsule, but number eleven, the harmless one. Let us not spend all our sympathy upon Mr. Finburg but rather let us reserve some portion of it for Isgrid. For this one, he too suffered a grievous disappointment. It befell when, having patched the parted halves of his thousand-dollar bill, he undertook to pass it. It was refused, not because it was pasted together but because it was counterfeit.

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20: Blood Pressure

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

The Saturday Evening Post 5 April 1930

IT IS MAYBE eleven-thirty of a Wednesday night, and I am standing at the corner of Forty-eighth Street and Seventh Avenue, thinking about my blood pressure, which is a proposition I never before think much about.

In fact, I never hear of my blood pressure before this Wednesday afternoon when I go around to see Doc Brennan about my stomach, and he puts a gag on my arm and tells me that my blood pressure is higher than a cat's back, and the idea is for me to be careful about what I eat, and to avoid excitement, or I may pop off all of a sudden when I am least expecting it.

'A nervous man such as you with a blood pressure away up in the paint cards must live quietly,' Doc Brennan says. 'Ten bucks, please,' he says.

Well, I am standing there thinking it is not going to be so tough to avoid excitement the way things are around this town right now, and wishing I have my ten bucks back to bet it on Sun Beau in the fourth race at Pimlico the next day, when all of a sudden I look up, and who is in front of me but Rusty Charley.

Now if I have any idea Rusty Charley is coming my way, you can go and bet all the coffee in Java I will be somewhere else at once, for Rusty Charley is not a guy I wish to have any truck with whatever. In fact, I wish no part of him. Furthermore, nobody else in this town wishes to have any part of Rusty Charley, for he is a hard guy indeed. In fact, there is no harder guy anywhere in the world. He is a big wide guy with two large hard hands and a great deal of very bad disposition, and he thinks nothing of knocking people down and stepping on their kissers if he feels like it.

In fact, this Rusty Charley is what is called a gorill, because he is known to often carry a gun in his pants pocket, and sometimes to shoot people down as dead as door-nails with it if he does not like the way they wear their hats— and Rusty Charley is very critical of hats. The chances are Rusty Charley shoots many a guy in this man's town, and those he does not shoot he sticks with his shiv— which is a knife— and the only reason he is not in jail is because he just gets out of it, and the law does not have time to think up something to put him back in again for.

Anyway, the first thing I know about Rusty Charley being in my neighbourhood is when I hear him saying: 'Well, well, well, here we are!'

Then he grabs me by the collar, so it is no use of me thinking of taking it on the lam away from there, although I greatly wish to do so.

'Hello, Rusty,' I say, very pleasant. 'What is the score?'

'Everything is about even,' Rusty says. 'I am glad to see you, because I am looking for company. I am over in Philadelphia for three days on business.'

'I hope and trust that you do all right for yourself in Philly, Rusty,' I say; but his news makes me very nervous, because I am a great hand for reading the papers and I have a pretty good idea what Rusty's business in Philly is. It is only the day before that I see a little item from Philly in the papers about how Gloomy Gus Smallwood, who is a very large operator in the alcohol business there, is guzzled right at his front door.

Of course, I do not know that Rusty Charley is the party who guzzles Gloomy Gus Smallwood, but Rusty Charley is in Philly when Gus is guzzled, and I can put two and two together as well as anybody. It is the same thing as if there is a bank robbery in Cleveland, Ohio, and Rusty Charley is in Cleveland, Ohio, or near there. So I am very nervous, and I figure it is a sure thing my blood pressure is going up every second.

'How much dough do you have on you?' Rusty says. 'I am plumb broke.'

'I do not have more than a couple of bobs, Rusty,' I say. 'I pay a doctor ten bucks to-day to find out my blood pressure is very bad. But of course you are welcome to what I have.'

'Well, a couple of bobs is no good to high-class guys like you and me.' Rusty says. 'Let us go to Nathan Detroit's crap game and win some money.'

Now, of course, I do not wish to go to Nathan Detroit's crap game; and if I do wish to go there I do not wish to go with Rusty Charley, because a guy is sometimes judged by the company he keeps, especially around crap games, and Rusty Charley is apt to be considered bad company. Anyway, I do not have any dough to shoot craps with, and if I do have dough to shoot craps with, I will not shoot craps with it at all, but will bet it on Sun Beau, or maybe take it home and pay off some of the overhead around my joint, such as rent.

Furthermore, I remember what Doc Brennan tells me about avoiding excitement, and I know there is apt to be excitement around Nathan Detroit's crap game if Rusty Charley goes there, and maybe run my blood pressure up and cause me to pop off very unexpected. In fact, I already feel my blood jumping more than somewhat inside me, but naturally I am not going to give Rusty Charley any argument, so we go to Nathan Detroit's crap game.

This crap game is over a garage in Fifty-second Street this particular night, though sometimes it is over a restaurant in Forty-seventh Street, or in back of a cigar store in Forty-fourth Street. In fact, Nathan Detroit's crap game is apt to be anywhere, because it moves around every night, as there is no sense in a crap game staying in one spot until the coppers find out where it is.

So Nathan Detroit moves his crap game from spot to spot, and citizens wishing to do business with him have to ask where he is every night; and of course almost everybody on Broadway knows this, as Nathan Detroit has guys

walking up and down, and around and about, telling the public his address, and giving out the password for the evening.

Well, Jack the Beefer is sitting in an automobile outside the garage in Fifty-second Street when Rusty Charley and I come along, and he says 'Kansas City,' very low, as we pass, this being the password for the evening; but we do not have to use any password whatever when we climb the stairs over the garage, because the minute Solid John, the doorman, peeks out through his peep-hole when we knock, and sees Rusty Charley with me, he opens up very quick indeed, and gives us a big castor-oil smile, for nobody in this town is keeping doors shut on Rusty Charley very long.

It is a very dirty room over the garage, and full of smoke, and the crap game is on an old pool table; and around the table, and packed in so close you cannot get a knitting-needle between any two guys with a mawl, are all the high shots in town, for there is plenty of money around at this time, and many citizens are very prosperous. Furthermore, I wish to say there are some very tough guys around the table, too, including guys who will shoot you in the head, or maybe the stomach, and think nothing whatever about the matter.

In fact, when I see such guys as Harry the Horse, from Brooklyn, and Sleepout Sam Levinsky, and Lone Louie, from Harlem, I know this is a bad place for my blood pressure, for these are very tough guys indeed, and are known as such to one and all in this town.

But there they are wedged up against the table with Nick the Greek, Big Nig, Grey John, Okay Okun, and many other high shots, and they all have big coarse G notes in their hands which they are tossing around back and forth as if these G notes are nothing but pieces of waste paper.

On the outside of the mob at the table are a lot of small operators who are trying to cram their fists in between the high shots now and then to get down a bet, and there are also guys present who are called Shylocks, because they will lend you dough when you go broke at the table, on watches or rings, or maybe cuff-links, at very good interest.

Well, as I say, there is no room at the table for as many as one more very thin guy when we walk into the joint, but Rusty Charley lets out a big hello as we enter, and the guys all look around, and the next minute there is space at the table big enough not only for Rusty Charley but for me, too. It really is quite magical the way there is suddenly room for us when there is no room whatever for anybody when we come in.

'Who is the gunner?' Rusty Charley asks, looking all around.

'Why, you are, Charley,' Big Nig, the stick man in the game, says very quick, handing Charley a pair of dice, although afterward I hear that his pal is right in the middle of a roll trying to make nine when we step up to the table. Everybody is very quiet, just looking at Charley. Nobody pays any attention to me, because I

am known to one and all as a guy who is just around, and nobody figures me in on any part of Charley, although Harry the Horse looks at me once in a way that I know is no good for my blood pressure, or for anybody else's blood pressure as far as this goes.

Well, Charley takes the dice and turns to a little guy in a derby hat who is standing next to him, scrooching back so Charley will not notice him, and Charley lifts the derby hat off the little guy's head, and rattles the dice in his hand and chucks them into the hat and goes 'Hah!' like crap shooters always do when they are rolling the dice. Then Charley peeks into the hat and says 'Ten,' although he does not let anybody else look in the hat, not even me, so nobody knows if Charley throws a ten, or what.

But, of course, nobody around is going to up and doubt that Rusty Charley throws a ten, because Charley may figure it is the same thing as calling him a liar, and Charley is such a guy as is apt to hate being called a liar.

Now Nathan Detroit's crap game is what is called a head-and-head game, although some guys call it a fading game, because the guys bet against each other rather than against the bank, or house. It is just the same kind of game as when two guys get together and start shooting craps against each other, and Nathan Detroit does not have to bother with a regular crap table and layout such as they have in gambling houses. In fact, about all Nathan Detroit has to do with the game is to find a spot, furnish the dice and take his percentage, which is by no means bad.

In such a game as this there is no real action until a guy is out on a point, and then the guys around commence to bet he makes this point, or that he does not make this point, and the odds in any country in the world that a guy does not make a ten with a pair of dice before he rolls seven, is 2 to 1.

Well, when Charley says he rolls ten in the derby hat nobody opens their trap, and Charley looks all around the table, and all of a sudden he sees Jew Louie at one end, although Jew Louie seems to be trying to shrink himself up when Charley's eyes light on him.

'I will take the odds for five C's,' Charley says, 'and Louie, you get it'—meaning he is letting Louie bet him $1000 to $500 that he does not make his ten.

Now Jew Louie is a small operator at all times and more of a Shylock than he is a player, and the only reason he is up there against the table at all at this moment is because he moves up to lend Nick the Greek some dough; and ordinarily there is no more chance of Jew Louie betting a thousand to five hundred on any proposition whatever than there is of him giving his dough to the Salvation Army, which is no chance at all. It is a sure thing he will never think of betting a thousand to five hundred a guy will not make ten with the dice, and when Rusty Charley tells Louie he has such a bet, Louie starts trembling all over.

The others around the table do not say a word, and so Charley rattles the dice again in his duke, blows on them, and chucks them into the derby hat and says 'Hah!' But, of course, nobody can see in the derby hat except Charley, and he peeks in at the dice and says 'Five.' He rattles the dice once more and chucks them into the derby and says 'Hah!' and then after peeking into the hat at the dice he says 'Eight.' I am commencing to sweat for fear he may heave a seven in the hat and blow his bet, and I know Charley has no five C's to payoff with, although, of course, I also know Charley has no idea of paying off, no matter what he heaves.

On the next chuck, Charley yells 'Money!'— meaning he finally makes his ten, although nobody sees it but him; and he reaches out his hand to Jew Louie, and Jew Louie hands him a big fat G note, very, very slow. In all my life I never see a sadder-looking guy than Louie when he is parting with his dough. If Louie has any idea of asking Charley to let him see the dice in the hat to make sure about the ten, he does not speak about the matter, and as Charley does not seem to wish to show the ten around, nobody else says anything either, probably figuring Rusty Charley isn't a guy who is apt to let anybody question his word, especially over such a small matter as a ten.

'Well,' Charley says, putting Louie's G note in his pocket, 'I think this is enough for me to-night,' and he hands the derby hat back to the little guy who owns it and motions me to come on, which I am glad to do, as the silence in the joint is making my stomach go up and down inside me, and I know this is bad for my blood pressure. Nobody as much as opens his face from the time we go in until we start out, and you will be surprised how nervous it makes you to be in a big crowd with everybody dead still, especially when you figure it a spot that is liable to get hot any minute. It is only just as we get to the door that anybody speaks, and who is it but Jew Louie, who pipes up and says to Rusty Charley like this:

'Charley,' he says, 'do you make it the hard way?'

Well, everybody laughs, and we go on out, but I never hear myself whether Charley makes his ten with a six and a four, or with two fives— which is the hard way to make a ten with the dice— although I often wonder about the matter afterward.

I am hoping that I can now get away from Rusty Charley and go on home, because I can see he is the last guy in the world to have around a blood pressure, and, furthermore, that people may get the wrong idea of me if I stick around with him, but when I suggest going to Charley, he seems to be hurt.

'Why,' Charley says, 'you are a fine guy to be talking of quitting a pal just as we are starting out. You will certainly stay with me because I like company, and we will go down to Ikey the Pig's and play stuss. Ikey is an old friend of mine, and I owe him a complimentary play.'

Now, of course, I do not wish to go to Ikey the Pig's, because it is a place away downtown, and I do not wish to play stuss, because this is a game which I am never able to figure out myself, and, furthermore, I remember Doc Brennan says I ought to get a little sleep now and then; but I see no use in hurting Charley's feelings, especially as he is apt to do something drastic to me if I do not go.

So he calls a taxi, and we start downtown for Ikey the Pig's, and the jockey who is driving the short goes so fast that it makes my blood pressure go up a foot to a foot and a half from the way I feel inside, although Rusty Charley pays no attention to the speed. Finally I stick my head out of the window and ask the jockey to please take it a little easy, as I wish to get where I am going all in one piece, but the guy only keeps busting along.

We are at the corner of Nineteenth and Broadway when all of a sudden Rusty Charley yells at the jockey to pull up a minute, which the guy does. Then Charley steps out of the cab and says to the jockey like this:

'When a customer asks you to take it easy, why do you not be nice and take it easy? Now see what you get.'

And Rusty Charley hauls off and clips the jockey a punch on the chin that knocks the poor guy right off the seat into the street, and then Charley climbs into the seat himself and away we go with Charley driving, leaving the guy stretched out as stiff as a board. Now Rusty Charley once drives a short for a living himself, until the coppers get an idea that he is not always delivering his customers to the right address, especially such as may happen to be drunk when he gets them, and he is a pretty fair driver, but he only looks one way, which is straight ahead.

Personally, I never wish to ride with Charley in a taxicab under any circumstances, especially if he is driving, because he certainly drives very fast. He pulls up a block from Ikey the Pig's, and says we will leave the short there until somebody finds it and turns it in, but just as we are walking away from the short up steps a copper in uniform and claims we cannot park the short in this spot without a driver.

Well, Rusty Charley just naturally hates to have coppers give him any advice, so what does he do but peek up and down the street to see if anybody is looking, and then haul off and clout the copper on the chin, knocking him bow-legged. I wish to say I never see a more accurate puncher than Rusty Charley, because he always connects with that old button. As the copper tumbles, Rusty Charley grabs me by the arm and starts me running up a side street, and after we go about a block we dodge into Ikey the Pig's.

It is what is called a stuss house, and many prominent citizens of the neighbourhood are present playing stuss. Nobody seems any too glad to see Rusty Charley, although Ikey the Pig lets on he is tickled half to death. This Ikey

the Pig is a short fat-necked guy who will look very natural at New Year's, undressed, and with an apple in his mouth, but it seems he and Rusty Charley are really old-time friends, and think fairly well of each other in spots.

But I can see that Ikey the Pig is not so tickled when he finds Charley is there to gamble, although Charley flashes his G note at once, and says he does not mind losing a little dough to Ikey just for old time's sake. But I judge Ikey the Pig knows he is never going to handle Charley's G note, because Charley puts it back in his pocket and it never comes out again even though Charley gets off loser playing stuss right away.

Well, at five o'clock in the morning, Charley is stuck one hundred and thirty G's, which is plenty of money even when a guy is playing on his muscle, and of course Ikey the Pig knows there is no chance of getting one hundred and thirty cents off of Rusty Charley, let alone that many thousands. Everybody else is gone by this time and Ikey wishes to close up. He is willing to take Charley's marker for a million if necessary to get Charley out, but the trouble is in stuss a guy is entitled to get back a percentage of what he loses, and Ikey figures Charley is sure to wish this percentage even if he gives a marker, and the percentage will wreck Ikey's joint.

Furthermore, Rusty Charley says he will not quit: loser under such circumstances because Ikey is his friend, so what happens but Ikey finally sends out and hires a cheater by the name of Dopey Goldberg, who takes to dealing the game and in no time he has Rusty Charley even by cheating in Rusty Charley's favour.

Personally, I do not pay much attention to the play, but grab myself a few winks of sleep in a chair in a corner, and the rest seems to help my blood pressure no little. In fact, I am not noticing my blood pressure at all when Rusty Charley and I get out of Ikey the Pig's, because I figure Charley will let me go home and I can go to bed. But although it is six o'clock, and coming on broad daylight when we leave Ikey's, Charley is still full of zing, and nothing will do him but we must go to a joint that is called the Bohemian Club.

Well, this idea starts my blood pressure going again, because the Bohemian Club is nothing but a deadfall where guys and dolls go when there is positively no other place in town open, and it is run by a guy by the name of Knife O'Halloran, who comes from down around Greenwich Village and is considered a very bad character. It is well known to one and all that a guy is apt to lose his life in Knife O'Halloran's any night, even if he does nothing more than drink Knife O'Halloran's liquor.

But Rusty Charley insists on going there, so naturally I go with him; and at first everything is very quiet and peaceful, except that a lot of guys and dolls in evening clothes, who wind up there after being in night clubs all night, are yelling in one corner of the joint. Rusty Charley and Knife O'Halloran are having

a drink together out of a bottle which Knife carries in his pocket, so as not to get it mixed up with the liquor he sells his customers, and are cutting up old touches of the time when they run with the Hudson Dusters together, when all of a sudden in comes four coppers in plain clothes.

Now these coppers are off duty and are meaning no harm to anybody, and are only wishing to have a dram or two before going home, and the chances are they will pay no attention to Rusty Charley if he minds his own business, although of course they know who he is very well indeed and will take great pleasure in putting the old sleeve on him if they only have a few charges against him, which they do not. So they do not give him a tumble. But if there is one thing Rusty Charley hates it is a copper, and he starts eyeing them from the minute they sit down at a table, and by and by I hear him say to Knife O'Halloran like this:

'Knife,' Charley says, 'what is the most beautiful sight in the world?' 'I do not know, Charley,' Knife says. 'What is the most beautiful sight in the world?' 'Four dead coppers in a row,' Charley says.

Well, at this I personally ease myself over toward the door, because I never wish to have any trouble with coppers and especially with four coppers, so I do not see everything that comes off. All I see is Rusty Charley grabbing at the big foot which one of the coppers kicks at him, and then everybody seems to go into a huddle, and the guys and dolls in evening dress start squawking, and my blood pressure goes up to maybe a million.

I get outside the door, but I do not go away at once as anybody with any sense will do, but stand there listening to what is going on inside, which seems to be nothing more than a loud noise like ker-bump, ker-bump, ker-bump. I am not afraid there will be any shooting, because as far as Rusty Charley is concerned he is too smart to shoot any coppers, which is the worst thing a guy can do in this town, and the coppers are not likely to start any blasting because they will not wish it to come out that they are in a joint such as the Bohemian Club off duty. So I figure they will all just take it out in pulling and hauling.

Finally the noise inside dies down, and by and by the door opens and out comes Rusty Charley, dusting himself off here and there with his hands and looking very much pleased indeed, and through the door before it flies shut again I catch a glimpse of a lot of guys stretched out on the floor. Furthermore, I can still hear guys and dolls hollering.

'Well, well,' Rusty Charley says, 'I am commencing to think you take the wind on me, and am just about to get mad at you, but here you are. Let us go away from this joint, because they are making so much noise inside you cannot hear yourself think. Let us go to my joint and make my old woman cook us up some breakfast, and then we can catch some sleep. A little ham and eggs will not be bad to take right now.'

Well, naturally ham and eggs are appealing to me no little at this time, but I do not care to go to Rusty Charley's joint. As far as I am personally concerned, I have enough of Rusty Charley to do me a long, long time, and I do not care to enter into his home life to any extent whatever, although to tell the truth I am somewhat surprised to learn he has any such life. I believe I do once hear that Rusty Charley marries one of the neighbours' children, and that he lives somewhere over on Tenth Avenue in the Forties, but nobody really knows much about this, and everybody figures if it is true his wife must lead a terrible dog's life.

But while I do not wish to go to Charley's joint, I cannot very well refuse a civil invitation to eat ham and eggs, especially as Charley is looking at me in a very much surprised way because I do not seem so glad, and I can see that it is not everyone that he invites to his joint. So I thank him, and say there is nothing I will enjoy more than ham and eggs such as his old woman will cook for us, and by and by we are walking along Tenth Avenue up around Forty-fifth Street.

It is still fairly early in the morning, and business guys are opening up their joints for the day, and little children are skipping along the sidewalks going to school and laughing tee-hee, and old dolls are shaking bedclothes and one thing and another out of the windows of the tenement houses, but when they spot Rusty Charley and me everybody becomes very quiet indeed, and I can see that Charley is greatly respected in his own neighbourhood. The business guys hurry into their joints, and the little children stop skipping and tee-heeing and go tip-toeing along, and the old dolls yank in their noodles, and a great quiet comes to the street. In fact, about all you can hear is the heels of Rusty Charley and me hitting on the sidewalk.

There is an ice wagon with a couple of horses hitched to it standing in front of a store, and when he sees the horses Rusty Charley seems to get a big idea. He stops and looks the horses over very carefully, although as far as I can see they are nothing but horses, and big and fat, and sleepy-looking horses, at that. Finally Rusty Charley says to me like this:

'When I am a young guy,' he says, 'I am a very good puncher with my right hand, and often I hit a horse on the skull with my fist and knock it down. I wonder,' he says, 'if I lose my punch. The last copper I hit back there gets up twice on me.'

Then he steps up to one of the ice-wagon horses and hauls off and biffs it right between the eyes with a right-hand smack that does not travel more than four inches, and down goes old Mister Horse to his knees looking very much surprised indeed. I see many a hard puncher in my day including Dempsey when he really can punch, but I never see a harder punch than Rusty Charley gives this horse.

Well, the ice-wagon driver comes busting out of the store all heated up over what happens to his horse, but he cools out the minute he sees Rusty Charley, and goes on back into the store leaving the horse still taking a count, while Rusty Charley and I keep walking. Finally we come to the entrance of a tenement house that Rusty Charley says is where he lives, and in front of this house is a wop with a push-cart loaded with fruit and vegetables and one thing and another, which Rusty Charley tips over as we go— into the house, leaving the wop yelling very loud, and maybe cussing us in wop for all I know. I am very glad, personally, we finally get somewhere, because I can feel that my blood pressure is getting worse every minute I am with Rusty Charley.

We climb two flights of stairs, and then Charley opens a door and we step into a room where there is a pretty little red-headed doll about knee high to a flivver, who looks as if she may just get out of the hay, because her red hair is flying around every which way on her head, and her eyes seem still gummed up with sleep. At first I think she is a very cute sight indeed, and then I see something in her eyes that tells me this doll, whoever she is, is feeling very hostile to one and all.

'Hello, tootsie,' Rusty Charley says. 'How about some ham and eggs for me and my pal here? We are all tired out going around and about.'

Well, the little red-headed doll just looks at him without saying a word. She is standing in the middle of the floor with one hand behind her, and all of a sudden she brings this hand around, and what does she have in it but a young baseball bat, such as kids play ball with, and which cost maybe two bits; and the next thing I know I hear something go ker-bap, and I can see she smacks Rusty Charley on the side of the noggin with the bat.

Naturally I am greatly horrified at this business, and figure Rusty Charley will kill her at once, and then I will be in a jam for witnessing the murder and will be held in jail several years like all witnesses to anything in this man's town; but Rusty Charley only falls into a big rocking-chair in a corner of the room and sits there with one hand to his head, saying, 'Now hold on, tootsie,' and 'Wait a minute there, honey.' I recollect hearing him say, 'We have company for breakfast,' and then the little red-headed doll turns on me and gives me a look such as I will always remember, although I smile at her very pleasant and mention it is a nice morning.

Finally she says to me like this: 'So you are the trambo who keeps my husband out all night, are you, you trambo?' she says, and with this she starts for me, and I start for the door; and by this time my blood pressure is all out of whack, because I can see Mrs. Rusty Charley is excited more than somewhat. I get my hand on the knob and just then something hits me alongside the noggin, which I afterward figure must be the baseball bat, although I remember having a sneaking idea the roof caves in on me.

How I get the door open I do not know, because I am very dizzy in the head and my legs are wobbling, but when I think back over the situation I remember going down a lot of steps very fast, and by and by the fresh air strikes me, and I figure I am in the clear. But all of a sudden I feel another strange sensation back of my head and something goes plop against my noggin, and I figure at first that maybe my blood pressure runs up so high that it squirts out the top of my bean. Then I peek around over my shoulder just once to see that Mrs. Rusty Charley is standing beside the wop peddler's cart snatching fruit and vegetables of one kind and another off the cart and chucking them at me.

But what she hits me with back of the head is not an apple, or a peach, or a rutabaga, or a cabbage, or even a casaba melon, but a brickbat that the wop has on his cart to weight down the paper sacks in which he sells his goods. It is this brickbat which makes a lump on the back of my head so big that Doc Brennan thinks it is a tumour when I go to him the next day about my stomach, and I never tell him any different.

'But,' Doc Brennan says, when he takes my blood pressure again, 'your pressure is down below normal now, and as far as it is concerned you are in no danger whatever. It only goes to show what just a little bit of quiet living will do for a guy,' Doc Brennan says. 'Ten bucks, please,' he says.

21: Mostly Providence

H. Bedford-Jones
1887-1949
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SOME men believe in chance. Some in Providence. Some, not always believe in themselves. Some believe quite certain in what they believe, take what comes and make the best of it, usually with a laugh. Of this last type was Jim Morris.

The dinghy, badly smashed up and barely floating, drifted to the heave of long, swinging seas, amid a welter of fog. Morris had been in her two days, without food or water, since the schooner went down. Now he lay outstretched in the bow— a thin, gaunt figure of youth, nearly naked, his red-bronze hair matted with brine, his quick blue eyes a little dimmed but struggling with vitality.

"It's land," he muttered thickly, "but what land is it? Borneo? Then I'm a goner."

He could smell the mangroves through the fog, the odor of decaying fish and twisted sliminess of mangroves and reek of jungle. Nothing was in sight. Slowly and imperceptibly the dinghy was floating in with the tide.

As he strained to see through the fog, an object grew directly ahead of him. He blinked at it, rubbed his eyes, blinked again. No, it was real, rocking on the swells! His hand went to the knife at his waist. An insane, incredulous laugh broke from his lips.

There, under his hand, was a tiny float of rattans, and lashed to the float was a tiny red skull. It was a perfect skull, yet only a span across, painted a glittering scarlet.

Impulsively, Morris reached down with his knife. He slashed the float free, and with a great effort raised it to the gunnel. He stared at it a moment, realized that the skull must be that of a monkey; another laugh broke on his dry, split lips. With a slash of the knife, he cut the float free and tossed it overboard. The skull he placed on the little bow thwart just ahead of him. Then, weakened, he fell back and lay quiet, senseless and too feeble to move.

SUNRISE came and broke the fog. Morris tried to rise, and failed. He twisted about and saw the skull, and laughed.

"The Dyaks will get two heads instead of one," he thought.

Then, after a little, he made another effort. This time he drew himself up to the thwart and stared. The boat had come in, almost to land; ten feet away rose the dark trees, the tangled cluster of mangrove roots! And to his left was a creek— fresh water!

A hoarse, throaty sound came from his swollen throat. Morris rose to his feet, swaying. As though echoing the sound he had uttered, he caught another sound from behind him, and turned. To his consternation, he saw a Dyak fishing-craft plunging through the rifted fog, heard a loud yell, knew himself lost.

Weakly he clutched at his sheath-knife, his blue eyes flaming up in a last effort of will and energy. The Dyaks came alongside, three of them in the craft—then they seemed paralyzed. They stared past Morris, their eyes fastened on the red skull. A burst of speech leaped from them; Morris could make no answer, for he was past speech. He opened his lips, and they saw his swollen tongue.

One of them leaped forward, grinned, held a water-bottle to his lips.

That was all Morris remembered, for the shock of this friendly action left him nerveless, and his weakened body gave way. He wakened again, some time later, to find himself lying between mat partitions, in a long-house, and beside him the most glorious woman he had ever seen. He thought himself dreaming, and went to sleep again.

The woman was real, however.

He discovered the fact later on, that night, by the flicker of a flame in the mud fireplace. She fed him carefully, smiling down upon him, a golden woman, of fine aureate skin and blue eyes like stars and red-gold hair gleaming low across her brow. So, despite the clothes upon her, Morris knew that she was white, and a mere girl, and beautiful.

He could not talk to her. He could not talk with any of the Dyaks, for he knew neither their tongue nor Low Malay. He found that they respected him and considered him a great man, because of that little red skull which had lain in his boat, and which they carefully preserved.

He could love the golden girl, however, and he did so, and she loved him—and it

was the innocent love of children. For one day Morris surprised a Spanish word upon her lips; she knew not its meaning, uttered it as a memory of childhood. So he learned that she was Spanish, and he wondered much how she came to be here, among Dyaks.

Of that he was fated to learn soon enough, and terribly enough.

THE dirty little schooner slowly slipping in under the point of land was not the spick-and-span schooner of romance. The dirt clustering about her was no honest dirt; it was the squalid filth of careless men. Anyone half a mile to leeward could catch the stench of rotten copra, unboiled shell and rank bilge that emanated from her putrid hold. Even her canvas was patched and scarred and streaked with pitch.

Three men were visible on her littered, untidy deck. A Moro lay in the bows; another stood at the wheel, chewing betel and expectorating redly anywhere.

By her rail stood an erect old man clad in scarlet silks, glittering with gold and gems, incrusted with dirt. From his chin jutted a small pointed gray beard. His rough upper lip showed a thin and bitterly voracious mouth. His nose, once a proudly jutting beak, now lay broken and askew. One eye was dead; the other was black and terrible beneath jutting gray brow. The whole face was thin, malicious, powerful. In his hand he held a stick of ebony.

Such was the schooner of Rais Hamed ben Yusuf, he who stood at the rail.

Slowly, under a falling breeze of sunrise, she rippled through the water, slipped imperceptibly under the lee of the promontory, and floated on. Rais Hamed searched the trees, the unbroken stretch of green jungle along the shore.

Nothing there appeared worth the search. Only trees and jungle, stretching away in unbroken curves, an occasional creek-mouth barbed and masked by the mangroves. No sign of man's presence appeared anywhere. No trail of smoke floated up. The monotony of this shore-line was unspeakable and terrifying.

Rais Hamed, as the schooner swung around to parallel the shore, came over beside the helmsman. His one eye sparkled venomously; an astonishing fury contorted his wrinkled face.

"It is gone!" he said. His voice was melodious, rich, soft as a woman's.

"*W'Allakh alim*!" said the helmsman. "Allah alone knoweth! If it is gone, it is gone by God's will, and who are we to question Him, the Ineffable?"

Rais Hamed met this mechanical patter with a grunt. A positive man, this old raider and pirate of the islands, son of an Arab father and a Chinese mother.

"*Iblis* swallow you! Here is the place, although I have not seen it in four years. Yonder creek, ahead, leads to the longhouses. With the tide thus, there should be five fathom off the creek."

"Yet it is gone, Rais," repeated the helmsman.

"And may Allah blast me if I do not flay the taker of it!" swore the old Arab. "Ho, Kalil! Drop anchor."

Joe Moro up forward stirred himself negligently. He stooped above a small bower, idly laid on the deck. He picked up the bower and dropped it over the side. This display of prodigious strength caused him no effort, passed without comment. Slowly, her gray canvas flapping, the schooner swung around to the cable.

"Five fathom, Rais!" floated the soft voice of the Moro.

"A boat, six men, arms!" snapped Rais Hamed. He strode to the companionway and went below, the echo of his sweetly cadenced voice flinging back from the wall of trees.

The Moro went forward and called. To the deck came a number of yawning men, all brown or yellow men, but of mixed races, They had one thing in

common: no man could become a member of Rais Hamed's crew unless he had at least two actual crimes to his credit.

This Moro was the mate. He was unusually large for a Moro, nearly naked, and his strength was tremendous. Kalil was his name, and he had a large share, almost a half-interest, men said, in this schooner and her proceeds of smuggling and piracy. In the old days this Kalil had been a famous blackbirder, but the Christians had stopped all that. He was older than he looked, this Moro. It was he who had originated the red skull which was known all through the islands as the symbol of Rais Hamed. If he obeyed the Arab, it was because the latter could navigate and was a very wily old man, worthy obedience.

Kalil picked four men to row the boat which was lowered from the protesting slings. In a socket at the bow of this boat, he stuck a short pole to which was affixed a tiny red skull. Then he turned to the men at the rail above, and issued orders.

"In two days we return. Wait here. We bring hard camphor and women. If any Christian boat comes, let yourself be searched, for there is nothing aboard— but send up a smoke-signal to us."

Good sense in this last, since hard camphor means death— in the wrong hands. The Borneo Company allowed no infringement of their monopoly.

From the cabin came Rais Hamed, in one hand his ebony stick, in the other a duffel-bag which was filled with presents for the Dyaks, his friends. This he handed down very carefully, then got into the boat and seated himself on faded scarlet cushions in the stern, taking the tiller. Kalil took place in the bow. Rifles under the thwarts, close to hand but hidden, the four oarsmen dipped blades.

The boat darted into the creek-mouth and was gone from sight.

Almost instantly the sea was shut out and forgotten. From the surf-resounding turmoil of the coast, the boat entered upon peace— a narrow lane of water inclosed by jungle. This creek was one of many mouths of a river whose delta was all tangled mangrove swamp. After twenty minutes of hard pulling the creek widened out, and the boat was driving up against the sluggish current of a wide and yellow river.

From among the trees throbbed a sound. Hearing it, the men paused on their oars, their eyes going fearfully to the grim face of Rais Hamed. The sound came again, and again; a deep and booming clang! as though some brazen throat had yelled up at the heavens. It drifted away over the trees and was gone— three heavy notes, then a pause, then five more in succession,

"We have been recognized," said Rais Hamed. "Forward, in the name of Allah!"

JIM MORRIS was not unwarned of how Fate was drawing in upon him. Two days before the booming gongs announced the coming of Rais Hamed, there

slipped into the village a grinning Negrito, escorted by some Kapit Ai Dyaks. He was met with respect, and was given a room in the same long-house that Morris occupied. This Negrito, a genial and friendly scoundrel, heard with some astonishment the story of the white man. Then he came in and sat down by Morris, and offered the latter a cigaret.

"You speak Spanish, señor? Good! You are English?"

Morris felt like clasping the dark little native to his bosom, but refrained.

"American," he responded, lighting the proffered cigaret. "Thanks!"

"English or American, what difference?" The Negrito waved his hand and chuckled. "Now tell me the truth, señor! How came you by that object, and what means it?"

His finger pointed to the red skull in the corner.

MORRIS told him. The two men were alone in the chamber, although behind the mat partitions other men were crowded, listening to the words they did not understand. Morris was astounded to see his friendly interrogator break into an irrepressible flood of laughter, as the tale of the red skull was unfolded. At length, wiping his eyes, the Negrito spoke.

"*Hola*, señor! Do you know what these men think? That you are a friend of Rais Hamed! That skull is his private signal, his trademark! It showed to close-searching eyes the channel by which this river and village might be gained. A lorcha or prau comes along the coast with its cargo. It sees that float. It turns into the creek, displaying the proper signal, and here at the village leaves its cargo. You understand? This village is a depot, a gathering place, for camphor and other smuggled goods! Rais Hamed has many such. Once or twice a year, perhaps, he sends a ship and takes away the stuff; this time he is to come in person— "

"Who the devil is Rais Hamed?" asked Morris, bewildered, yet half comprehending.

The Negrito puffed at his cigaret. "A pirate, a smuggler, a what you like! For many years he has been allied with these Sea Dyaks. He hates all Christians, and tortures them in strange ways aboard his schooner. I am sorry for you."

"Why?" demanded Morris.

"Because I like Englishmen. One of them saved my life once. Therefore I am paying back the good turn by telling you all this."

"Yes, but why do you feel sorry for me? Will not Rais Hamed rescue me?"

The Negrito's lips twitched. "Yes— only to torture you himself. He enjoys it. Besides, you removed his float and saved your head by means of the red skull. He will not forgive that fact. He is a cruel man, but Allah loves him, and he prospers. Look!"

From his breast the Negrito took a joint of bamboo, a foot long and three inches in diameter, sealed at each end with gum.

"One of these long-houses," he said, "is crammed to bursting with hard camphor. It also contains many sacks of gold dust. And this tube"— he tapped the bamboo— "is filled with diamonds. To deal in these things unlawfully is death— but Rais Hamed deals in them and dies not. Allah favors him!"

"How the devil do you know so much?" asked Morris.

"Because I am Rais Hamed's agent in this district." The Negrito grinned. "Come, I like you, señor! Let us eat dinner together."

It was true that they liked each other. Morris found the brown man to be merry, brave, cheerful and upright. The Negrito, in turn, liked Morris and felt genuinely sorry for him. He could do nothing to save Morris— in fact he would do nothing, for he was devoted to Rais Hamed. But his complex personality was frank enough.

"You are helpless, señor. Make the best of it! You cannot run away."

THAT afternoon Morris went up river to a little island with the golden girl. There on the island they pretended to fish, but tried to talk and exchanged the few words each had taught the other, and Morris knew that he loved this girl-woman. Also, he respected her and stood in reverence of her. Lucky for her that Morris was the straight, clean man 'he was, since her heart had no secrets from him. Isabel, he had named her, loving the name.

Although he could talk with her only in the language of love, he had talking and to spare that evening, for the Negrito had been discovering a few things and was waiting for him. Also, the brown man's smile had unexpectedly turned into an ominous scowl.

"Come with me and talk, señor," said the Negrito after the evening meal.

Darkness had fallen. Together the two men went up the notched log that brought them to the *tanju* or veranda of their longhouse. In this and the other houses Dyaks were squatted about the fireplaces, over which wood and shrunken heads dried in the smoke; the many *bilik* or sleeping apartments in each house were being made ready for the night. The unmarried girls, Isabel among them, had gone up above into the big lofts where paddy was stored.

The two men sat on the veranda, the floor of ironwood poles swaying a little under them as men and women moved about inside. Then the Negrito opened up.

"I hear that you are the lover of the Spanish girl, señor. Is it true?"

"If we can get away safely, I hope to marry her," said Morris, frankly enough.

The other man sighed, laughed under his breath, sighed again.

"I am sorry for you, but I must do what is my duty," he said thoughtfully. "Listen! Four years ago Rais Hamed was at this place. He deals much in flesh,

that man. He brought with him a young white girl, a Spanish girl whom he had stolen somewhere. He had found her in the north, among other people who had stolen her as a child. Well! He gave her to these Dyaks and told them to rear her to womanhood, that in four years he would come again for her. She is his slave— "

From Morris broke an astounded, incredulous oath.

"Nay, señor, doubt me not!" said the Negrito. "Tomorrow or the next day Rais Hamed comes. He will take her. He will slay you. You understand? I am very sorry for you, because I like you; but I must do my duty— "

Before Morris knew what was happening, the Negrito made a signal. Out of the darkness Morris felt naked shapes hurtle upon him. In the twinkling of an eye he was seized and bound with strong cords.

"I am sorry for you," repeated the Negrito, regretfully. 'But my duty, you understand— "

IT WAS early afternoon when Rais Hamed arrived at the village, met and escorted by a number of boats.

A great feast had been made ready, pig and fowl and game and arrack; his reception was regal. And in his faded scarlet silks, with Kalil looming at his shoulder, his was a proud and regal and barbaric figure. His men scattered. He, with Kalil, took position beneath a sunshade of mats out in the open. The wise old men of the Dyaks gathered around him, the warriors squatted in a semicircle, the women hastened the feast. And the one eye of the old Arab roved ceaselessly, cruelly, proudly.

Gifts were exchanged. The Negrito came forward, swaggering, greeted Rais Hamed in Arab fashion, squatted down and lighted a cigaret. He made report, and the Dyaks confirmed this report, pointing to the storehouse. Rais Hamed turned to Kalil.

"Go and inspect the goods."

Kalil departed, accompanied by certain of the Dyaks. The Negrito agent stayed where he was. When the mate was gone, the agent produced his bamboo tube and handed it to Rais Hamed.

"Here, Rais, beloved of Allah, are certain things for thy hand alone. Also, there are certain sacks of gold— "

The old Arab clutched at the bamboo and thrust it out of sight.

"The gold goes into the general cargo," he said. 'You have done well, friend! Trading-goods shall be landed to settle our accounts. Now, there is another matter— "

"Wait!" The Negrito spoke in bastard Arabic, which the Dyaks did not understand. "I have another matter to lay before you— "

HE spoke swiftly, told of Morris and of how the latter had come here, told of the girl and of what he had himself done. The gray features of the old Arab became hard and stony; his black eye glittered with rage and a fury of delight. Presently he turned to the old men and addressed them.

"Four years ago I left a girl with you to be raised. I have come to take her. Let me be shown how you have conducted this matter!"

Two of the old men made haste to obey. They brought Isabel, her golden body covered with a sarong of rich golden silk, and she stood facing Rais Hamed.

"Here is thy master, girl," they said to her.

At this instant Kalil -returned. He stopped short at sight of the girl, stared at her, his eyes all ablaze with her beauty. Then, panting, he hurried to the side of Rais Hamed.

"The goods are correct, Rais!" he said rapidly. "In the name of Allah, speak a word with me concerning this girl!"

Rais Hamed smiled thinly, and waved his hand to the Dyaks.

"Take her away and hold her ready to accompany me. Now, Kalil!"

The Moro drew himself up. Seldom did he assert himself before this Arab, but now he spoke eye to eye, man to man.

"Rais Hamed, well I know that not for yourself do you desire this woman, since you deal with women only for the sake of gain. I have seen her, and I desire her. Sell her to me."

The old Arab fondled his jutting gray beard.

"I design her for the harem of the sultan at Sibuko," he said slowly. "I have promised her to the sultan. The price is arranged. By the names of God, who am I to go back upon my word?"

"By the ninety-and-nine ineffable names of Allah," spoke out Kalil, a kindling flame in his lowering eyes, '""who am I to be denied?"

"You are my mate," said Rais Hamed, with a cackling laugh.

"I am your pardner also. Look, now! I will offer you the price that the sultan would pay. Let it be withdrawn from our accounts. Besides, one of these Dyaks told me there was a white man here, who has looked on the girl with eyes of love. That will be a fine tale to reach the ears of the sultan, after you have sold the girl to him!"

"You threaten me?" asked the musical voice of the old Arab.

"By Allah, I threaten you!" cried the Moro passionately. "Look to it!"

"I do not yield to threats, Kalil."

"Then yield to friendship."

Rais Hamed laughed and held out his hand.

"Done! The girl is yours. The sale shall be consummated after we return to the schooner. Until then, hands off! Also, we take the white man with us. He

goes with the girl— I give him to you. Hands off, however, until we have settled matters with these Dyaks!"

The eyes of the Moro flashed.

A little later the Negrito came to Jim Morris, who lay bound hand and foot in a corner of a long-house, and told him of all these things.

"I am sorry for you, señor," he concluded with a sigh, "for I like you. They will start back sometime tonight, after the feast. I shall not see you again. Farewell!"

Morris, perceiving that the man was quite sincere in his words, could not restrain a laugh at the oddness of it all.

IN the dawn-darkness Rais Hamed returned to the schooner, whose triangle of red riding-lights signaled that all was clear. With him came a string of Dyak boats, bearing the hard camphor and other things— half a dozen captive girls among them. Morris was brought to the deck, and the cords were cut from his numbed wrists and ankles. The cords were replaced by manacles. He was flung to the deck, and the manacles were made fast to ringbolts in the decks, so that he lay spread-eagled, looking up at the sky.

The girls were locked below in a cabin. The cargo was stowed away swiftly in the hold. Rais Hamed and Kalil and the Negrito went to the Arab's cabin, lighted by a red lantern slung inside a skull; certain of the Dyaks went with them, and there was much casting up of accounts, which lasted well into the morning. Then, with goods and presents aboard, the Dyaks and the Negrito agent departed; the schooner's bower was dragged up, and under a listless land-breeze she headed slowly out to sea.

Five of her crew disappeared below. The other five, lounging about the deck, sampled arrack that had come aboard and regarded the manacled white man with interest. Rais Hamed beckoned his mate, and both went below to the cabin.

SEATED across the table from each other, they bargained for half an hour, while Kalil steadily emptied the rum-bottle at his elbow. Rais Hamed, who touched no liquor as became his faith, craftily delayed matters until the keen wit of the Moro was numbed by the rum; then he proceeded to cheat his pardner deftly and accurately. He drew up a bill of sale which Kalil signed with stumbling fingers. Then:

"Bring the girl here," said Rais Hamed, plucking at his beard. "I will speak to her."

Kalil grinned and departed, his naked brown torso gleaming with sweat, for it was very hot here in the cabin, and he had drunk deeply. Presently he came back, dragging by one wrist the shrinking Isabel. He thrust her forward, facing Rais Hamed, and waited.

The golden girl drew herself up. She knew why she had been brought aboard, knew what fate awaited her, and had learned also what fate awaited Morris, chained to the deck above. Traces of tears marred her face. Under the golden silk, her bosom rose and fell with swift breaths; her starry eyes blazed with passionate grief and anger.

"My child," said the old Arab, in the Dyak tongue that she understood, "I have been as a father to you. I have paid the Dyaks well to care for you. Among them you have been as a goddess, a cherished and reverenced guest. Now I shall hand you over to this man yonder, whose name is Kalil. He is a great man, a wealthy man, and you shall be the light of his harem and make him happy. Forget that white man of yours, who will soon be dead— "

"Ai, you are a sea-devil!" broke out the girl hotly. She gave Kalil one contemptuous, fiery look. "And this— this wood devil— thinks to marry me! He will not."

"Then," said Rais Hamed gently, musically, "he will burn your white man with hot irons. He will make him die very slowly. I have given your white man to Kalil."

HER eyes went from one to the other, in questioning, in appeal, in terror. She read only desire and cruelty in the two faces. A pallor crept into her cheeks.

"No, no!" she said slowly. "Spare him — you must spare him— "

Rais Hamed chuckled. "I have given him to Kalil."

Swiftly, impulsively, the girl turned to the Moro. "Spare him!" she cried, fright in her voice and eyes. "You are devils— do not torture him! Let him go free!"

Kalil grinned into her eyes. 'Well, girl? You will love me a little? You will not call me a devil?"

She flinched before his bestial look, before the frank hunger of his mien. Still paler became her face; her tortured eyes closed for an instant, then opened.

"Yes," she said, with a weakly assenting gesture.

"Bah!" observed Rais Hamed. "By the prophet, Kalil, I was beginning to regret my bargain— but she has no spirit after all. Why spare the Christian? Break her to your will."

Kalil leaned forward, poured himself another drink, gulped it.

"Not so," he said, and wiped his lips. "Better willing than unwilling, Rais! I shall let the man go. She will love me."

"Will you throw him overboard, then?" asked Rais Hamid with a cynical smile.

"I will give him a boat and let him go as he came."

"Who will pay me for my boat?"

"I will pay, by Allah!"

"The men will not let him go. They expect amusement."

"I will give them rum," and Kalil grinned, "and more arrack."

"But who will pay for this liquor?"

"I, by Allah!" shouted the Moro in sudden anger. "Am I a beggar?"

Rais Hamed shrugged, drew brush and ink toward him across the table. "Give me the bill of sale. I will add to it the price of the boat and the liquor."

For a little the two men bargained further, Rais Hamed cunningly cheating his pardner and making much gain. Then they came to terms. The girl watched, quivering, trembling.

"Set down the sums," said Kalil. "I will go and have the boat lowered and pass out the arrack."

He turned and left the cabin.

Rais Hamed, brush in hand, paused and looked up at the girl, his one eye glowing. Then he reached out a hand and poured rum into the glass before him. He pushed it over the table.

"Drink, girl! So you will go happily to your husband."

The girl's fingers closed on the glass, lifted it. Suddenly, swift as the flirt of a snake across a jungled glade, she moved her hand. The rum leaped into the one glittering eye of Rais Hamed, spread across his face. Before he could move, the girl caught the bottle and brought it crashing against his head.

Rais Hamed fell forward across the table and lay quiet.

Terrified, desperate, Isabel stood staring down at him. He groaned, then lay quiet once more. She lifted the bottle as though to strike again, but could not. With a shudder, she dropped it on the table and leaned forward.

Swiftly she searched the unconscious man. Her hand found an *illang*, a long, curved blade of finest Malay steel, inlaid with gold; she found a tube of bamboo, which puzzled her; she found a pistol, of whose use she was ignorant. Taking the knife and the bamboo, which was heavy and sealed at each end, she darted from the cabin, slamming the door behind her. The catch of the door slipped into place. It could only be opened from the inside.

JIM MORRIS sat up, staring in wonder, and rubbing at his skinned wrists. Why he had been released he had no idea. The mate had stooped, unlocked the shackles and gone on. Not a word had been spoken to him.

The breeze had freshened. The land was fast falling away into a purple line on the western horizon. The schooner, her sails carelessly tended, was beginning to heel sharply over, and little by little Morris slid down the inclined deck as he rubbed his wrists. The helmsman had slipped a loop over the wheel and was seated, drinking from a pottery wine-jar.

Afar on the southeastern rim of the ocean was a tiny smudge of smoke, as yet unseen by any. This tiny smudge caught the eye of Jim Morris alone. He did not guess, however, that it was a signpost of Fate, or luck, or Providence.

He wondered that he was unguarded, that the Moro mate had called the watch aft. They were clustered there at the stern, and Morris perceived that they were getting into the water a boat that had lain chocked up by the stern rail. One of the men ran forward to the galley, pausing to snatch a drink from a bottle of squareface, and reappeared soon with a bag of biscuit and a breaker of water in his arms. He carried these aft. They were got into the boat. The mate and the four men were getting the little craft into the water safely.

MORRIS, staring aft, saw the head of Isabel emerge from the companionway, saw her glance quickly about, saw her look at him. Then, with a leap, she gained the deck and came running toward him, unseen by any others. She waved her arm, and Morris saw the glitter of a knife. An instant later she ducked under the starboard counter boat and was hidden. Along the deck, where she had flung it, slithered the curved knife, stopping almost at the feet of Morris. He swiftly bent over, picked it up, straightened himself.

"By gad!" His eyes flashed. He carefully stowed the knife under his waistband. "There'll be a fighting chance— "

The boat was in the water, trailing astern. The mate came forward, flung Morris a black scowl, and turned down the companionway. The four men, drinking from bottles, grinning, jesting, surrounded Morris, fingering their knives. Then, after a moment, one of them uttered a cry and pointed to the shagreen handle of the knife protruding from his waistband.

From below, at this instant, came a bellow of rage— a wild and furious roar of anger. Not knowing what was going on below, yet swift to play the golden girl's game, Morris drove out with his knee, caught the man in front of him, and snapped home his fist as the brown man doubled up in agony. One was gone.

DOWN at the door of the cabin Kalil was pounding, bellowing, hurling himself furiously. He thought that Rais Hamed had locked him out, had locked Isabel in. He began to smash down the door.

The three natives closed in upon Morris, who drew his knife and dropped the first of them with a desperate stab. He was not used to such work, however— the knife went with the man, and he was left weaponless. The other two struck at him, struck keenly and surely. A knife streaked crimson across his naked chest, but he avoided the points and his fist sent one man staggering.

Before that one man could recover, a golden flash leaped from beneath the starboard boat and across the man's skull fell the heavy bamboo joint. That man lay quiet.

Isabel straightened up, threw herself forward to aid Morris. The helmsman was coming now, staggering and reeling, a flame-bladed kris in his hand. Then, deftly, Morris tripped the last of the four, caught him with a smash under the ear as he fell, laid him out. Isabel whirled on the helmsman— but he, with a yell of terror, turned and scrambled forward.

"Quick, girl!" Morris was at her side, caught her arm, laughing as he met her eyes. 'Come quick— the boat!"

She fathomed his gesture if not his words, and turned. Side by side they ran aft, and when she saw the boat trailing there, she understood. Morris stooped and drew in the line until the boat was under the rail.

"Jump!"

A laugh broke from her lips. Her hand touched his cheek in caress— then, with a leap, she was in the boat below, asprawl across the thwarts. Morris reached to cast loose the line, when a shadow falling on the deck made him whirl.

Over him stood Kalil the mate, his brown features a mask of fury incarnate.

Swift as light, Morris leaped, struck, drove his fist fair and square to the point of the jaw. Kalil rocked to the blow, but only uttered a bellowing laugh and then caught Morris in his arms.

At the first instant of that grip, Jim Morris knew that he was a doomed man unless he broke free of it. Swift work, swift work— or death in that grip!

He went utterly and completely limp, sagged down with all his weight. His head drooped against the breast of the Moro, slimy with cocoanut-oil; a grunt of exultation burst from Kalil. Then the body of Morris stiffened. His head snapped up — snapped up under the brown jaw. His arms locked about the brown, massive thighs, his fingers clenched in upon the folds of the *sirac* or loin-cloth.

The head of Kalil jerked suddenly up and back. A scream burst from his lips. He threw up his hands to release that neck-breaking grip— and Morris was free, out of his grasp. One leap, and Morris had loosened the line about the rail, let the boat and the crouching wide-eyed girl fall behind.

Then, turning, he drove in at Kalil. The Moro was fumbling for a knife, but had no chance to use it. The fist of Morris smashed in one staggering, convulsing blow square in the throat, a deadly blow. The mate was knocked backward, fell against the rail, leaned over it with his chin in the air.

Morris drove home on that chin with all his weight.

The brown body slid farther over the rail, let go, went hurtling down into the white foam below. A chorus of mad yells, a flash of leaping figures, and Morris knew that the watch below was at hand. A knife sang past his ear. He uttered one ringing laugh, then hurdled the rail and went feet first into the depths.

AS long as he might, he stayed under. When he emerged, gasping, the schooner was three hundred yards distant. No sign of Kalil appeared on the surface of the crested rollers. Morris struck out for the boat where the figure of the golden girl awaited him.

Two minutes afterward she drew him aboard. Then, as he came to his feet, she clutched his arm, uttered a cry, pointed.

Morris looked at the schooner, and panted a low curse of desperation. She was coming about, her streaked gray canvas fluttering in the breeze. Men were tailing on her lines. Beside her wheel stood an erect, tall figure whose scarlet silks matched the scarlet that bedewed one side of his gray head.

"Rais Hamed!" said Morris. "That devil has got us after all— "

But he had forgotten the signpost of luck, or chance, or— Providence.

RAIS HAMED, blood streaking his gray hairs, staggered to the deck almost as Kalil went over the rail.

At the yell that burst from his lips, his six men stood transfixed. He was a figure of wild, unleashed fury. His glittering eye took in everything— the fallen men, the boat astern, all!

An order, followed by a stream of curses, broke from his lips. The men rushed to the wheel, to the lines; the schooner came up into the wind and began to come around on her heel, her canvas flapping. With another oath Rais Hamed strode to the wheel, dashed the helmsman away, took the spokes himself.

Then, as he looked over his shoulder at the boat, his one glittering eye caught that distant smudge of smoke on the horizon. And the smudge was growing fast!

The old Arab stood paralyzed for one long instant. He knew only too well what that smudge signified; this was no ship lane of commerce, and under that smudge was a patrol-boat. If he delayed five minutes longer, if he even delayed to run down that boat tossing on the waves, he was lost, and his schooner with him. That hard camphor down below was damning.

Even so, he hesitated, with fury hot in his soul. But his men, too, now saw that smudge on the skyline. They cried out. Rais Hamed swiftly spun the wheel, shouted an order; the men rushed to the lines; the schooner paid off— and Rais Hamed let her wear into the wind. She heeled over; foam ran along her counter; into the hand of the helmsman the old Arab put the spokes, with an order to keep her so.

Some men believe in chance. Some believe in themselves, some in blind luck. But Rais Hamed, as he stood at his stern rail and looked back across the tumbling waters to the speck that was a boat, uttered one fatalistic phrase that showed the whole man.

"*W' Allah alim*!" he said, and shrugged. "God knows best!"

Had he realized that the bamboo tube of diamonds had gone with the golden girl, however, his pious utterance might have been a trifle more vivid.

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