PAST MASTERS 234

Miles Franklin

James Oliver Curwood

Joseph Conrad

Hume Nisbet

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Fitz-James O'Brien

Booth Tarkington

O. Henry

Mark Hellinger

and more

PAST MASTERS 234

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

4 Sept 2025

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1: Crazy Sunday

F. Scott Fitzgerald
1896-1940
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IT WAS Sunday— not a day, but rather a gap between two other days. Behind, for all of them, lay sets and sequences, the long waits under the crane that swung the microphone, the hundred miles a day by automobiles to and fro across a county, the struggles of rival ingenuities in the conference rooms, the ceaseless compromise, the clash and strain of many personalities fighting for their lives. And now Sunday, with individual life starting up again, with a glow kindling in eyes that had been glazed with monotony the afternoon before. Slowly as the hours waned they came awake like "Puppenfeen" in a toy shop: an intense colloquy in a corner, lovers disappearing to neck in a hall. And the feeling of "Hurry, it's not too late, but for God's sake hurry before the blessed forty hours of leisure are over."

Joel Coles was writing continuity. He was twenty-eight and not yet broken by Hollywood. He had had what were considered nice assignments since his arrival six months before and he submitted his scenes and sequences with enthusiasm. He referred to himself modestly as a hack but really did not think of it that way. His mother had been a successful actress; Joel had spent his childhood between London and New York trying to separate the real from the unreal, or at least to keep one guess ahead. He was a handsome man with the pleasant cow-brown eyes that in 1913 had gazed out at Broadway audiences from his mother's face.

When the invitation came it made him sure that he was getting somewhere. Ordinarily he did not go out on Sundays but stayed sober and took work home with him. Recently they had given him a Eugene O'Neill play destined for a very important lady indeed. Everything he had done so far had pleased Miles Calman, and Miles Calman was the only director on the lot who did not work under a supervisor and was responsible to the money men alone. Everything was clicking into place in Joel's career. ("This is Mr. Calman's secretary. Will you come to tea from four to six Sunday— he lives in Beverly Hills, number —.")

Joel was flattered. It would be a party out of the top-drawer. It was a tribute to himself as a young man of promise. The Marion Davies' crowd, the high-hats, the big currency numbers, perhaps even Dietrich and Garbo and the Marquise, people who were not seen everywhere, would probably be at Calman's.

"I won't take anything to drink," he assured himself. Calman was audibly tired of rummies, and thought it was a pity the industry could not get along without them.

Joel agreed that writers drank too much— he did himself, but he wouldn't this afternoon. He wished Miles would be within hearing when the cocktails were passed to hear his succinct, unobtrusive, "No, thank you."

Miles Calman's house was built for great emotional moments— there was an air of listening, as if the far silences of its vistas hid an audience, but this afternoon it was thronged, as though people had been bidden rather than asked. Joel noted with pride that only two other writers from the studio were in the crowd, an ennobled limey and, somewhat to his surprise, Nat Keogh, who had evoked Calman's impatient comment on drunks.

Stella Calman (Stella Walker, of course) did not move on to her other guests after she spoke to Joel. She lingered— she looked at him with the sort of beautiful look that demands some sort of acknowledgment and Joe drew quickly on the dramatic adequacy inherited from his mother:

"Well, you look about sixteen! Where's your kiddy car?"

She was visibly pleased; she lingered. He felt that he should say something more, something confident and easy— he had first met her when she was struggling for bits in New York. At the moment a tray slid up and Stella put a cocktail glass into his hand.

"Everybody's afraid, aren't they?" he said, looking at it absently. "Everybody watches for everybody else's blunders, or tries to make sure they're with people that'll do them credit. Of course that's not true in your house," he covered himself hastily. "I just meant generally in Hollywood."

Stella agreed. She presented several people to Joel as if he were very important. Reassuring himself that Miles was at the other side of the room, Joel drank the cocktail.

"So you have a baby?" he said. "That's the time to look out. After a pretty woman has had her first child, she's very vulnerable, because she wants to be reassured about her own charm. She's got to have some new man's unqualified devotion to prove to herself she hasn't lost anything."

"I never get anybody's unqualified devotion," Stella said rather resentfully.

"They're afraid of your husband."

"You think that's it?" She wrinkled her brow over the idea; then the conversation was interrupted at the exact moment Joel would have chosen.

Her attentions had given him confidence. Not for him to join safe groups, to slink to refuge under the wings of such acquaintances as he saw about the room. He walked to the window and looked out toward the Pacific, colorless under its sluggish sunset. It was good here— the American Riviera and all that, if there were ever time to enjoy it. The handsome, well-dressed people in the room, the lovely girls, and the— well, the lovely girls. You couldn't have everything.

He saw Stella's fresh boyish face, with the tired eyelid that always drooped a little over one eye, moving about among her guests and he wanted to sit with her and talk a long time as if she were a girl instead of a name; he followed her to see if she paid anyone as much attention as she had paid him. He took another cocktail— not because he needed confidence but because she had given him so much of it. Then he sat down beside the director's mother.

"Your son's gotten to be a legend, Mrs. Calman— Oracle and a Man of Destiny and all that. Personally, I'm against him but I'm in a minority. What do you think of him? Are you impressed? Are you surprised how far he's gone?"

"No, I'm not surprised," she said calmly. "We always expected a lot from Miles."

"Well now, that's unusual," remarked Joel. "I always think all mothers are like Napoleon's mother. My mother didn't want me to have anything to do with the entertainment business. She wanted me to go to West Point and be safe."

"We always had every confidence in Miles."...

He stood by the built-in bar of the dining room with the good-humored, heavy-drinking, highly paid Nat Keogh.

"—I made a hundred grand during the year and lost forty grand gambling, so now I've hired a manager."

"You mean an agent," suggested Joel.

"No, I've got that too. I mean a manager. I make over everything to my wife and then he and my wife get together and hand me out the money. I pay him five thousand a year to hand me out my money."

"You mean your agent."

"No, I mean my manager, and I'm not the only one— a lot of other irresponsible people have him."

"Well, if you're irresponsible why are you responsible enough to hire a manager?"

"I'm just irresponsible about gambling. Look here —"

A singer performed; Joel and Nat went forward with the others to listen.

ii

THE SINGING reached Joel vaguely; he felt happy and friendly toward all the people gathered there, people of bravery and industry, superior to a bourgeoisie that outdid them in ignorance and loose living, risen to a position of the highest prominence in a nation that for a decade had wanted only to be entertained. He liked them— he loved them. Great waves of good feeling flowed through him.

As the singer finished his number and there was a drift toward the hostess to say good-by, Joel had an idea. He would give them "Building It Up," his own composition. It was his only parlor trick, it had amused several parties and it

might please Stella Walker. Possessed by the hunch, his blood throbbing with the scarlet corpuscles of exhibitionism, he sought her.

"Of course," she cried. "Please! Do you need anything?"

"Someone has to be the secretary that I'm supposed to be dictating to."

"I'll be her."

As the word spread the guests in the hall, already putting on their coats to leave, drifted back and Joel faced the eyes of many strangers. He had a dim foreboding, realizing that the man who had just performed was a famous radio entertainer. Then someone said "Sh!" and he was alone with Stella, the center of a sinister Indian-like half-circle. Stella smiled up at him expectantly— he began.

His burlesque was based upon the cultural limitations of Mr. Dave Silverstein, an independent producer; Silverstein was presumed to be dictating a letter outlining a treatment of a story he had bought.

"—a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion," he heard his voice saying, with the intonations of Mr. Silverstein. "But we got to build it up, see?"

A sharp pang of doubt struck through him. The faces surrounding him in the gently molded light were intent and curious, but there was no ghost of a smile anywhere; directly in front the Great Lover of the screen glared at him with an eye as keen as the eye of a potato. Only Stella Walker looked up at him with a radiant, never faltering smile.

"If we make him a Menjou type, then we get a sort of Michael Arlen only with a Honolulu atmosphere."

Still not a ripple in front, but in the rear a rustling, a perceptible shift toward the left, toward the front door.

"—then she says she feels this sex appil for him and he burns out and says 'Oh go on destroy yourself'—"

At some point he heard Nat Keogh snicker and here and there were a few encouraging faces, but as he finished he had the sickening realization that he had made a fool of himself in view of an important section of the picture world, upon whose favor depended his career.

For a moment he existed in the midst of a confused silence, broken by a general trek for the door. He felt the undercurrent of derision that rolled through the gossip; then— all this was in the space of ten seconds— the Great Lover, his eye hard and empty as the eye of a needle, shouted "Boo! Boo!" voicing in an overtone what he felt was the mood of the crowd. It was the resentment of the professional toward the amateur, of the community toward the stranger, the thumbs-down of the clan.

Only Stella Walker was still standing near and thanking him as if he had been an unparalleled success, as if it hadn't occurred to her that anyone hadn't liked

it. As Nat Keogh helped him into his overcoat, a great wave of self-disgust swept over him and he clung desperately to his rule of never betraying an inferior emotion until he no longer felt it.

"I was a flop," he said lightly, to Stella. "Never mind, it's a good number when appreciated. Thanks for your coöperation."

The smile did not leave her face— he bowed rather drunkenly and Nat drew him toward the door....

The arrival of his breakfast awakened him into a broken and ruined world. Yesterday he was himself, a point of fire against an industry, today he felt that he was pitted under an enormous disadvantage, against those faces, against individual contempt and collective sneer. Worse than that, to Miles Calman he was become one of those rummies, stripped of dignity, whom Calman regretted he was compelled to use. To Stella Walker, on whom he had forced a martyrdom to preserve the courtesy of her house— her opinion he did not dare to guess. His gastric juices ceased to flow and he set his poached eggs back on the telephone table. He wrote:

Dear Miles:

You can imagine my profound self-disgust. I confess to a taint of exhibitionism, but at six o'clock in the afternoon, in broad daylight! Good God! My apologies to your wife.

Yours ever,

Joel Coles.

Joel emerged from his office on the lot only to slink like a malefactor to the tobacco store. So suspicious was his manner that one of the studio police asked to see his admission card. He had decided to eat lunch outside when Nat Keogh, confident and cheerful, overtook him.

"What do you mean you're in permanent retirement? What if that Three Piece Suit did boo you?

"Why, listen," he continued, drawing Joel into the studio restaurant. "The night of one of his premiers at Grauman's, Joe Squires kicked his tail while he was bowing to the crowd. The ham said Joe'd hear from him later but when Joe called him up at eight o'clock next day and said, 'I thought I was going to hear from you,' he hung up the phone."

The preposterous story cheered Joel, and he found a gloomy consolation in staring at the group at the next table, the sad, lovely Siamese twins, the mean dwarfs, the proud giant from the circus picture. But looking beyond at the yellow-stained faces of pretty women, their eyes all melancholy and startling with mascara, their ball gowns garish in full day, he saw a group who had been at Calman's and winced.

"Never again," he exclaimed aloud, "absolutely my last social appearance in Hollywood!"

The following morning a telegram was waiting for him at his office:

You were one of the most agreeable people at our party. Expect you at my sister June's buffet supper next Sunday.
Stella Walker Calman.

The blood rushed fast through his veins for a feverish minute. Incredulously he read the telegram over.

"Well, that's the sweetest thing I ever heard of in my life!"

iii

CRAZY SUNDAY again. Joel slept until eleven, then he read a newspaper to catch up with the past week. He lunched in his room on trout, avocado salad and a pint of California wine. Dressing for the tea, he selected a pin-check suit, a blue shirt, a burnt orange tie. There were dark circles of fatigue under his eyes. In his second-hand car he drove to the Riviera apartments. As he was introducing himself to Stella's sister, Miles and Stella arrived in riding clothes— they had been quarrelling fiercely most of the afternoon on all the dirt roads back of Beverly Hills.

Miles Calman, tall, nervous, with a desperate humor and the unhappiest eyes Joel ever saw, was an artist from the top of his curiously shaped head to his niggerish feet. Upon these last he stood firmly— he had never made a cheap picture though he had sometimes paid heavily for the luxury of making experimental flops. In spite of his excellent company, one could not be with him long without realizing that he was not a well man.

From the moment of their entrance Joel's day bound itself up inextricably with theirs. As he joined the group around them Stella turned away from it with an impatient little tongue click— and Miles Calman said to the man who happened to be next to him:

"Go easy on Eva Goebel. There's hell to pay about her at home." Miles turned to Joel, "I'm sorry I missed you at the office yesterday. I spent the afternoon at the analyst's."

"You being psychoanalyzed?"

"I have been for months. First I went for claustrophobia, now I'm trying to get my whole life cleared up. They say it'll take over a year."

"There's nothing the matter with your life," Joel assured him.

"Oh, no? Well, Stella seems to think so. Ask anybody— they can all tell you about it," he said bitterly.

A girl perched herself on the arm of Miles' chair; Joel crossed to Stella, who stood disconsolately by the fire.

"Thank you for your telegram," he said. "It was darn sweet. I can't imagine anybody as good-looking as you are being so good-humored."

She was a little lovelier than he had ever seen her and perhaps the unstinted admiration in his eyes prompted her to unload on him— it did not take long, for she was obviously at the emotional bursting point.

"— and Miles has been carrying on this thing for two years, and I never knew. Why, she was one of my best friends, always in the house. Finally when people began to come to me, Miles had to admit it."

She sat down vehemently on the arm of Joel's chair. Her riding breeches were the color of the chair and Joel saw that the mass of her hair was made up of some strands of red gold and some of pale gold, so that it could not be dyed, and that she had on no make-up. She was that good-looking —

Still quivering with the shock of her discovery, Stella found unbearable the spectacle of a new girl hovering over Miles; she led Joel into a bedroom, and seated at either end of a big bed they went on talking. People on their way to the washroom glanced in and made wisecracks, but Stella, emptying out her story, paid no attention. After a while Miles stuck his head in the door and said, "There's no use trying to explain something to Joel in half an hour that I don't understand myself and the psychoanalyst says will take a whole year to understand."

She talked on as if Miles were not there. She loved Miles, she said— under considerable difficulties she had always been faithful to him.

"The psychoanalyst told Miles that he had a mother complex. In his first marriage he transferred his mother complex to his wife, you see— and then his sex turned to me. But when we married the thing repeated itself— he transferred his mother complex to me and all his libido turned toward this other woman."

Joel knew that this probably wasn't gibberish— yet it sounded like gibberish. He knew Eva Goebel; she was a motherly person, older and probably wiser than Stella, who was a golden child.

Miles now suggested impatiently that Joel come back with them since Stella had so much to say, so they drove out to the mansion in Beverly Hills. Under the high ceilings the situation seemed more dignified and tragic. It was an eerie bright night with the dark very clear outside of all the windows and Stella all rose-gold raging and crying around the room. Joel did not quite believe in picture actresses' grief. They have other preoccupations— they are beautiful rose-gold figures blown full of life by writers and directors, and after hours they sit around and talk in whispers and giggle innuendoes, and the ends of many adventures flow through them.

Sometimes he pretended to listen and instead thought how well she was got up— sleek breeches with a matched set of legs in them, an Italian-colored sweater with a little high neck, and a short brown chamois coat. He couldn't decide whether she was an imitation of an English lady or an English lady was an imitation of her. She hovered somewhere between the realest of realities and the most blatant of impersonations.

"Miles is so jealous of me that he questions everything I do," she cried scornfully. "When I was in New York I wrote him that I'd been to the theater with Eddie Baker. Miles was so jealous he phoned me ten times in one day."

"I was wild," Miles snuffled sharply, a habit he had in times of stress. "The analyst couldn't get any results for a week."

Stella shook her head despairingly. "Did you expect me just to sit in the hotel for three weeks?"

"I don't expect anything. I admit that I'm jealous. I try not to be. I worked on that with Dr. Bridgebane, but it didn't do any good. I was jealous of Joel this afternoon when you sat on the arm of his chair."

"You were?" She started up. "You were! Wasn't there somebody on the arm of your chair? And did you speak to me for two hours?"

"You were telling your troubles to Joel in the bedroom."

"When I think that that woman"— she seemed to believe that to omit Eva Goebel's name would be to lessen her reality —"used to come here —"

"All right— all right," said Miles wearily. "I've admitted everything and I feel as bad about it as you do." Turning to Joel he began talking about pictures, while Stella moved restlessly along the far walls, her hands in her breeches pockets.

"They've treated Miles terribly," she said, coming suddenly back into the conversation as if they'd never discussed her personal affairs. "Dear, tell him about old Beltzer trying to change your picture."

As she stood hovering protectively over Miles, her eyes flashing with indignation in his behalf, Joel realized that he was in love with her. Stifled with excitement he got up to say good night.

With Monday the week resumed its workaday rhythm, in sharp contrast to the theoretical discussions, the gossip and scandal of Sunday; there was the endless detail of script revision —"Instead of a lousy dissolve, we can leave her voice on the sound track and cut to a medium shot of the taxi from Bell's angle or we can simply pull the camera back to include the station, hold it a minute and then pan to the row of taxis"— by Monday afternoon Joel had again forgotten that people whose business was to provide entertainment were ever privileged to be entertained. In the evening he phoned Miles' house. He asked for Miles but Stella came to the phone.

"Do things seem better?"

"Not particularly. What are you doing next Saturday evening?"

"Nothing."

"The Perrys are giving a dinner and theater party and Miles won't be here— he's flying to South Bend to see the Notre Dame-California game. I thought you might go with me in his place."

After a long moment Joel said, "Why— surely. If there's a conference I can't make dinner but I can get to the theater."

"Then I'll say we can come."

Joel walked his office. In view of the strained relations of the Calmans, would Miles be pleased, or did she intend that Miles shouldn't know of it? That would be out of the question— if Miles didn't mention it Joel would. But it was an hour or more before he could get down to work again.

Wednesday there was a four-hour wrangle in a conference room crowded with planets and nebulae of cigarette smoke. Three men and a woman paced the carpet in turn, suggesting or condemning, speaking sharply or persuasively, confidently or despairingly. At the end Joel lingered to talk to Miles.

The man was tired— not with the exaltation of fatigue but life-tired, with his lids sagging and his beard prominent over the blue shadows near his mouth.

"I hear you're flying to the Notre Dame game."

Miles looked beyond him and shook his head.

"I've given up the idea."

"Why?"

"On account of you." Still he did not look at Joel.

"What the hell, Miles?"

"That's why I've given it up." He broke into a perfunctory laugh at himself. "I can't tell what Stella might do just out of spite— she's invited you to take her to the Perrys', hasn't she? I wouldn't enjoy the game."

The fine instinct that moved swiftly and confidently on the set, muddled so weakly and helplessly through his personal life.

"Look, Miles," Joel said frowning. "I've never made any passes whatsoever at Stella. If you're really seriously cancelling your trip on account of me, I won't go to the Perrys' with her. I won't see her. You can trust me absolutely."

Miles looked at him, carefully now.

"Maybe." He shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow there'd just be somebody else. I wouldn't have any fun."

"You don't seem to have much confidence in Stella. She told me she'd always been true to you."

"Maybe she has." In the last few minutes several more muscles had sagged around Miles' mouth, "But how can I ask anything of her after what's happened? How can I expect her —" He broke off and his face grew harder as he said, "I'll tell you one thing, right or wrong and no matter what I've done, if I ever had

anything on her I'd divorce her. I can't have my pride hurt— that would be the last straw."

His tone annoyed Joel, but he said:

"Hasn't she calmed down about the Eva Goebel thing?"

"No." Miles snuffled pessimistically. "I can't get over it either."

"I thought it was finished."

"I'm trying not to see Eva again, but you know it isn't easy just to drop something like that— it isn't some girl I kissed last night in a taxi! The psychoanalyst says —"

"I know," Joel interrupted. "Stella told me." This was depressing. "Well, as far as I'm concerned if you go to the game I won't see Stella. And I'm sure Stella has nothing on her conscience about anybody."

"Maybe not," Miles repeated listlessly. "Anyhow I'll stay and take her to the party. Say," he said suddenly, "I wish you'd come too. I've got to have somebody sympathetic to talk to. That's the trouble— I've influenced Stella in everything. Especially I've influenced her so that she likes all the men I like— it's very difficult."

"It must be," Joel agreed.

iv

JOEL COULD not get to the dinner. Self-conscious in his silk hat against the unemployment, he waited for the others in front of the Hollywood Theatre and watched the evening parade: obscure replicas of bright, particular picture stars, spavined men in polo coats, a stomping dervish with the beard and staff of an apostle, a pair of chic Filipinos in collegiate clothes, reminder that this corner of the Republic opened to the seven seas, a long fantastic carnival of young shouts which proved to be a fraternity initiation. The line split to pass two smart limousines that stopped at the curb.

There she was, in a dress like ice-water, made in a thousand pale-blue pieces, with icicles trickling at the throat. He started forward.

"So you like my dress?"

"Where's Miles?"

"He flew to the game after all. He left yesterday morning— at least I think—" She broke off. "I just got a telegram from South Bend saying that he's starting back. I forgot— you know all these people?"

The party of eight moved into the theater.

Miles had gone after all and Joel wondered if he should have come. But during the performance, with Stella a profile under the pure grain of light hair, he thought no more about Miles. Once he turned and looked at her and she

looked back at him, smiling and meeting his eyes for as long as he wanted. Between the acts they smoked in the lobby and she whispered:

"They're all going to the opening of Jack Johnson's night club— I don't want to go, do you?"

"Do we have to?"

"I suppose not." She hesitated. "I'd like to talk to you. I suppose we could go to our house— if I were only sure —"

Again she hesitated and Joel asked:

"Sure of what?"

"Sure that— oh, I'm haywire I know, but how can I be sure Miles went to the game?"

"You mean you think he's with Eva Goebel?"

"No, not so much that— but supposing he was here watching everything I do. You know Miles does odd things sometimes. Once he wanted a man with a long beard to drink tea with him and he sent down to the casting agency for one, and drank tea with him all afternoon."

"That's different. He sent you a wire from South Bend— that proves he's at the game."

After the play they said good night to the others at the curb and were answered by looks of amusement. They slid off along the golden garish thoroughfare through the crowd that had gathered around Stella.

"You see he could arrange the telegrams," Stella said, "very easily."

That was true. And with the idea that perhaps her uneasiness was justified, Joel grew angry: if Miles had trained a camera on them he felt no obligations toward Miles. Aloud he said:

"That's nonsense."

There were Christmas trees already in the shop windows and the full moon over the boulevard was only a prop, as scenic as the giant boudoir lamps of the corners. On into the dark foliage of Beverly Hills that flamed as eucalyptus by day, Joel saw only the flash of a white face under his own, the arc of her shoulder. She pulled away suddenly and looked up at him.

"Your eyes are like your mother's," she said. "I used to have a scrap book full of pictures of her."

"Your eyes are like your own and not a bit like any other eyes," he answered.

Something made Joel look out into the grounds as they went into the house, as if Miles were lurking in the shrubbery. A telegram waited on the hall table. She read aloud:

Chicago.
Home tomorrow night. Thinking of you. Love.
Miles.

"You see," she said, throwing the slip back on the table, "he could easily have faked that." She asked the butler for drinks and sandwiches and ran upstairs, while Joel walked into the empty reception rooms. Strolling about he wandered to the piano where he had stood in disgrace two Sundays before.

"Then we could put over," he said aloud, "a story of divorce, the younger generators and the Foreign Legion."

His thoughts jumped to another telegram.

"You were one of the most agreeable people at our party —"

An idea occurred to him. If Stella's telegram had been purely a gesture of courtesy then it was likely that Miles had inspired it, for it was Miles who had invited him. Probably Miles had said:

"Send him a wire— he's miserable— he thinks he's queered himself."

It fitted in with "I've influenced Stella in everything. Especially I've influenced her so that she likes all the men I like." A woman would do a thing like that because she felt sympathetic— only a man would do it because he felt responsible.

When Stella came back into the room he took both her hands.

"I have a strange feeling that I'm a sort of pawn in a spite game you're playing against Miles," he said.

"Help yourself to a drink."

"And the odd thing is that I'm in love with you anyhow."

The telephone rang and she freed herself to answer it.

"Another wire from Miles," she announced. "He dropped it, or it says he dropped it, from the airplane at Kansas City."

"I suppose he asked to be remembered to me."

"No, he just said he loved me. I believe he does. He's so very weak."

"Come sit beside me," Joel urged her.

It was early. And it was still a few minutes short of midnight a half-hour later, when Joel walked to the cold hearth, and said tersely:

"Meaning that you haven't any curiosity about me?"

"Not at all. You attract me a lot and you know it. The point is that I suppose I really do love Miles."

"Obviously."

"And tonight I feel uneasy about everything."

He wasn't angry— he was even faintly relieved that a possible entanglement was avoided. Still as he looked at her, the warmth and softness of her body thawing her cold blue costume, he knew she was one of the things he would always regret.

"I've got to go," he said. "I'll phone a taxi."

"Nonsense— there's a chauffeur on duty."

He winced at her readiness to have him go, and seeing this she kissed him lightly and said, "You're sweet, Joel." Then suddenly three things happened: he took down his drink at a gulp, the phone rang loud through the house and a clock in the hall struck in trumpet notes.

Nine— ten— eleven— twelve—

v

IT WAS Sunday again. Joel realized that he had come to the theater this evening with the work of the week still hanging about him like cerements. He had made love to Stella as he might attack some matter to be cleaned up hurriedly before the day's end. But this was Sunday— the lovely, lazy perspective of the next twenty-four hours unrolled before him— every minute was something to be approached with lulling indirection, every moment held the germ of innumerable possibilities. Nothing was impossible— everything was just beginning. He poured himself another drink.

With a sharp moan, Stella slipped forward inertly by the telephone. Joel picked her up and laid her on the sofa. He squirted soda-water on a handkerchief and slapped it over her face. The telephone mouthpiece was still grinding and he put it to his ear.

"—the plane fell just this side of Kansas City. The body of Miles Calman has been identified and —"

He hung up the receiver.

"Lie still," he said, stalling, as Stella opened her eyes.

"Oh, what's happened?" she whispered. "Call them back. Oh, what's happened?"

"I'll call them right away. What's your doctor's name?"

"Did they say Miles was dead?"

"Lie quiet— is there a servant still up?"

"Hold me— I'm frightened."

He put his arm around her.

"I want the name of your doctor," he said sternly. "It may be a mistake but I want someone here."

"It's Doctor— Oh, God, is Miles dead?"

Joel ran upstairs and searched through strange medicine cabinets for spirits of ammonia. When he came down Stella cried:

"He isn't dead— I know he isn't. This is part of his scheme. He's torturing me. I know he's alive. I can feel he's alive."

"I want to get hold of some close friend of yours, Stella. You can't stay here alone tonight."

"Oh, no," she cried. "I can't see anybody. You stay. I haven't got any friend." She got up, tears streaming down her face. "Oh, Miles is my only friend. He's not dead— he can't be dead. I'm going there right away and see. Get a train. You'll have to come with me."

"You can't. There's nothing to do tonight. I want you to tell me the name of some woman I can call: Lois? Joan? Carmel? Isn't there somebody?"

Stella stared at him blindly.

"Eva Goebel was my best friend," she said.

Joel thought of Miles, his sad and desperate face in the office two days before. In the awful silence of his death all was clear about him. He was the only American-born director with both an interesting temperament and an artistic conscience. Meshed in an industry, he had paid with his ruined nerves for having no resilience, no healthy cynicism, no refuge— only a pitiful and precarious escape.

There was a sound at the outer door— it opened suddenly, and there were footsteps in the hall.

"Miles!" Stella screamed. "Is it you, Miles? Oh, it's Miles."

A telegraph boy appeared in the doorway.

"I couldn't find the bell. I heard you talking inside."

The telegram was a duplicate of the one that had been phoned. While Stella read it over and over, as though it were a black lie, Joel telephoned. It was still early and he had difficulty getting anyone; when finally he succeeded in finding some friends he made Stella take a stiff drink.

"You'll stay here, Joel," she whispered, as though she were half-asleep. "You won't go away. Miles liked you— he said you —" She shivered violently, "Oh, my God, you don't know how alone I feel." Her eyes closed, "Put your arms around me. Miles had a suit like that." She started bolt upright. "Think of what he must have felt. He was afraid of almost everything, anyhow."

She shook her head dazedly. Suddenly she seized Joel's face and held it close to hers.

"You won't go. You like me— you love me, don't you? Don't call up anybody. Tomorrow's time enough. You stay here with me tonight."

He stared at her, at first incredulously, and then with shocked understanding. In her dark groping Stella was trying to keep Miles alive by sustaining a situation in which he had figured— as if Miles' mind could not die so long as the possibilities that had worried him still existed. It was a distraught and tortured effort to stave off the realization that he was dead.

Resolutely Joel went to the phone and called a doctor.

"Don't, oh, don't call anybody!" Stella cried. "Come back here and put your arms around me."

"Is Doctor Bales in?"

"Joel," Stella cried. "I thought I could count on you. Miles liked you. He was jealous of you— Joel, come here."

Ah then— if he betrayed Miles she would be keeping him alive— for if he were really dead how could he be betrayed?

"—has just had a very severe shock. Can you come at once, and get hold of a nurse?"

"Joel!"

Now the door-bell and the telephone began to ring intermittently, and automobiles were stopping in front of the door.

"But you're not going," Stella begged him. "You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"No," he answered. "But I'll be back, if you need me."

Standing on the steps of the house which now hummed and palpitated with the life that flutters around death like protective leaves, he began to sob a little in his throat.

"Everything he touched he did something magical to," he thought. "He even brought that little gamin alive and made her a sort of masterpiece."

And then:

"What a hell of a hole he leaves in this damn wilderness— already!"

And then with a certain bitterness, "Oh, yes, I'll be back— I'll be back!"

———————————

2: The Armadi Vase

E. Phillips Oppenheim
1866-1946

Collier's Weekly, 14 Feb, 1927
Collected in: *Pudgy Pete and Co*., 1928, retitled "The Pedagogue of Bellevue Mansions."

Introducing Peter Bragg and Hon. George Vincent Angus, from a series of ten detective short stories

THE Honourable George Vincent Angus, ascending by means of the automatic lift to his rooms, which were situated in the upper regions of the Bellevue Flats, caught the gleam of a brilliantly polished oblong strip of brass affixed to one of the dark mahogany doors on the first floor. He touched the button which arrested the progress of the elevator, and, stepping out, crossed the thickly-carpeted corridor and studied the very neat, obviously new, name-plate.

"Mr Peter Bragg," he murmured to himself. "What a name!"

Whereupon he rang the bell, which was immediately answered by a most correct-looking manservant of middle age.

"Is Mr. Peter Bragg at home?" the visitor enquired.

"Have you an appointment, sir?" the man countered.

"I have no appointment," Angus confessed, "but I have a great desire for a word with Mr. Peter Bragg. My name is of no consequence. I shall not detain your master for more than a few minutes."

"I will enquire through the secretary, sir, whether Mr. Bragg is able to see you," the butler conceded. "Will you step into the waiting-room?"

He threw open the door of a small but handsome apartment on the right-hand side of the hall— an apartment furnished and panelled throughout in light oak. A table stood in the middle of the room piled with magazines, few of which appeared to have been opened. There was a general air of stiffness and newness about the furniture— as though it had been bought for show and not for any practical use.

"What the devil does this fellow want a waiting-room for?" Angus reflected, as he stood on the hearth-rug gazing around him. "Doesn't look as though anyone had ever been inside the place either."

The butler, reappearing before he had time for any further speculation, bowed respectfully.

"Mr. Bragg will see you, sir," he announced, with the air of one bringing good news.

Angus was ushered into a large, impressive-looking apartment opening out from the waiting-room. A man was seated at a handsome rosewood desk nearly in the middle of the room, with his back to the light— a desk upon which stood

a telephone, a set of push-bells, a pile of papers arranged with methodical care, several cardboard folders similar to those used in Government offices, and very little else. He looked at his visitor through horn-rimmed glasses without changing his position.

"You wish to see me?" he enquired. "My name is Bragg."

Angus acknowledged the information courteously and sank, uninvited, into a high-backed chair placed at a convenient distance from the table.

"Very glad to make your acquaintance." he murmured.

Mr. Peter Bragg coughed slightly. He was short and inclined towards a certain rotundity of figure, clean-shaven, of pink and white complexion, and of singularly youthful appearance— an effect which his glasses seemed designed to counteract. He was wearing the right sort of clothes, but in a sense he seemed almost as new as his furniture.

"What might be your name and the nature of your business?" he enquired.

"Business? Oh, I haven't any business," Angus admitted carelessly. "Mere matter of curiosity, my looking you up. Seemed such a queer thing, you see, a fellow having a brass plate outside his door in the Bellevue Flats. Of course you know that no doctors or dentists or those sort of people are allowed here."

Mr. Peter Bragg had the air of one endeavouring to be patient with an impossible person.

"Do I understand you to say that you rang my bell and introduced yourself here for the sole purpose of asking me why I chose the most ordinary means of indicating my exact whereabouts to my friends?"

"Something like that," Angus assented, with unabated good-humour. "It's a very nice plate— lettering in quite good taste, and all that, so long as you have to have it. Unusual name yours, by-the-by. Seems to me I've heard it before somewhere."

"Will it be of interest to you," the young man at the table asked gently, "if I confess that I find your visit something of an intrusion?"

Angus smiled at him pleasantly, and the smile of a young man as good-looking and agreeable as the Honourable George Vincent Angus was a hard thing to resist.

"Don't get huffy," he begged. "Have a cigarette?"

Mr. Peter Bragg waved away the proffered case.

"Thank you," he declined. "I seldom smoke during the daytime."

Angus selected a cigarette for himself, tapped it on the arm of his chair, lit it, and, leaning a little further back, assumed a more comfortable position. His involuntary host watched him with impassive expression.

"Quite a friendly call, I can assure you," the former continued. "I'm a sort of neighbour, as I explained, only I camp out in the attic. I say, you wouldn't mind taking off those spectacles for a moment, would you?"

Mr. Peter Bragg hesitated, but finally complied. His visitor rose to his feet, sat on the edge of the rosewood table, and, leaning over, patted him on the shoulder.

"Pudgy Pete, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "I knew there was something familiar about you. I believe I christened you myself. Fancy your not remembering me!"

"I remember you perfectly," was the composed reply. "You are the Honourable George Vincent Angus, second son of Lord Moningham, and you were expelled from Marlowe's during my second year."

Angus indulged in a little grimace.

"No need to drag up those trifling indiscretions of youth," he murmured deprecatingly. "You went on to Harrow afterwards, didn't you? That's where I lost sight of you."

"I went to Harrow." Peter Bragg admitted. "Owing, I suppose, to family influence, you were received into Walter's, and afterwards at Eton."

"Family influence had nothing whatever to do with it," Angus protested cheerfully. "My cricket worked the oracle. Besides, all that I had done was to lock old Marlowe up and take his class the day he wouldn't let us go to see the football match."

"A gross act of insubordination in which I am thankful to remember that I took no part," Peter Bragg declared.

"Oh, shut up!" his visitor enjoined. "Anyway, here we are now, and let's get back to it. What the devil do you mean by sporting a brass plate outside that magnificent mahogany door of yours, and why have you what your butler calls a 'waiting-room'? I can understand a pal dropping in to see you now and then, but why on earth should anyone 'wait' to see you?"

Peter Bragg leaned back in his chair. The tips of his fingers were pressed together. His nails were almost too well manicured.

"You always were a curious, interfering sort of chap, Angus," he remarked. "I see you haven't changed."

"Not in the least," was the prompt admission. "Just the same as ever. Pudgy. If a thing interests me, I like to know all about it. Now be a good little man and tell me what you are up to."

"I have established myself," Peter Bragg announced, with an air of some dignity, "as a consulting detective."

"As a what?" the other gasped.

"As a consulting detective, or investigator, if you prefer the word. My headquarters are in the Strand, where all the routine work is done. This is my West End branch, where I interview important clients."

Angus stared at his late schoolfellow for a moment incredulously. Then he suddenly began to grin, and afterwards to laugh. He laughed long and pleasantly, but his mirth was apparently not infectious.

His companion's frown deepened. Angus slid from the table, resumed his chair, crossed his legs, and leaned back with the air of one whose sense of humour has been pleasantly stimulated.

"Come to remember it," he reflected, "you were always reading detective stories at school. Marlowe must have taken a whole library away from you at different times. Tell me. Pudgy— I'm not mistaken, am I?— you were at the bottom of every class there, weren't you?"

"I believe so."

"There was some question before my unfortunate little affair of your being asked to leave, eh? 'abnormal lack of intelligence,' the old man use to say you displayed."

"I was not a success at school," Peter Bragg condescended to admit. "Many men, though, who have prospered in the world exceedingly, have commenced life in the same fashion."

Angus nodded sympathetically. He had still the air of a man moved to gentle but continuous mirth. A twinkle of humour remained in his eyes. The idea of Pudgy Pete as a detective appealed to him irresistibly.

"I trust for your own sake, Peter," he said, "that you are not— er— dependent for your livelihood upon success in your profession?"

"My livelihood," Peter Bragg confided, "is already secured. My uncle—"

"My God, of course! Bragg's Knife Polish, wasn't it? The old man left you a matter of half a million, didn't he?"

"He left me a considerable fortune," was the somewhat stiff admission.

"I see," Angus murmured. "So you're taking this up just as a hobby. Any clients yet?" Peter Bragg coughed.

"You will excuse me," he begged, "if I refrain from discussing the details of my business with you. A certain amount of secrecy—"

"Oh, chuck it, Pudgy," his visitor begged, lighting another cigarette. "You always were a funny boy, and with all that money why shouldn't you play at doing what you want to? Won't you get a little bored with it, though— sitting here waiting for clients?"

"I don't anticipate having to wait very long," was the calm reply. "I took over the business of Macpherson's, Limited, with all their staff, and there is always plenty doing there in a minor sort of way. They consult me occasionally, and I deal with the important cases here."

"You mean to say that you have already an established organisation?" Angus demanded.

Peter Bragg made no immediate reply. He rang one of the bells by his side, and almost at once, through a door communicating with an inner apartment, a young woman appeared. She was plainly dressed, and her dark, chestnut-coloured hair was brushed severely back from her forehead, as though to attract

as little attention as possible to the fineness of its quality. She was creamily pale and she wore tinted glasses which one instinctively felt were unnecessary. In movements and speech she was a study of quiescence.

"Has number seven report come in yet. Miss Ash?" her employer asked.

"Ten minutes ago, sir."

"Bring it, please."

Her errand was completed in an incredibly short space of time, considering that she had not once given the impression of haste. Peter Bragg opened the folder which she had brought, straightened his spectacles upon his nose, and, after a glance at his visitor, commenced to read.

"At three o'clock yesterday afternoon," he began—"having lunched at the Ritz, by-the-by— you arrived at Ranelagh intending to play polo against the Incogniti. You found, however, that a back had already been chosen, and you decided to wait for Saturday's match. In the bar afterwards—"

Angus was leaning forward in his chair. His indifferent expression had vanished. He was staring at his erstwhile school-fellow in frank amazement.

"What the—"

"Let me finish, I beg of you," Peter Bragg went on, with an expostulatory wave of the hand. "In the bar afterwards you met a Captain Milner with whom you had a somewhat prolonged conversation, chiefly concerned with a string of polo ponies which are up for side somewhere in Gloucestershire. Later you found your father, Lord Moningham, on the lawn, and had tea with him. Then, at Lady Sybil Fakenham's urgent request, you made up a four at tennis. You had your flannels in the dressing-room, but you were obliged to borrow some shoes. Towards six o'clock you drove back to town, dined at Moningham House and returned to your rooms for a short time, where you received a visitor. Afterwards you supped at the Embassy with friends, called in at your Club, and arrived back here shortly after two. Correct, I think."

Peter Bragg pushed the folder away from him and leaned back in his chair. Angus had risen to his feet. He was a little bewildered, more than a little inclined to be angry.

"Will you explain," he demanded, "what the devil you mean by having my footsteps dogged?"

"There is no law, you know, against anything of the sort," was the good-tempered reply—"nothing to prevent my having your movements watched if it amuses me. Let me remove any anxiety you may feel, at once, though. We have nothing against you. You are not one of our cases, nor, I hope, are you likely to be. The fact of the matter is that I never allow our City staff to be idle, and whenever we have a man doing nothing I turn him on to the first person I can think of, and demand a report. He never knows whether the thing is serious or not and it keeps him from rusting."

The position as between the two men had become curiously reversed. It was Peter Bragg now who was good-humoured, airy, and indifferent, his companion whose face had darkened, and who had shown signs for several moments of annoyance if not of anger. Suddenly, however, the humour of the situation appealed to him. He burst out laughing.

"Do you mean, after all, then, Pudgy," he exclaimed, "that I am to take you seriously? Gad, I wish you'd take me into partnership,"

Peter Bragg took off his glasses and wiped them, looking more ridiculously youthful than ever.

"Oh, I'm in this thing seriously enough as you may find out some tiny or another," he declared. "I have proved to you that I have an organisation. Perhaps you'd like to be present whilst I interview a client. Sit down again, do. Light another cigarette if you want to,"

He touched a bell. The butler entered almost immediately. "Is Miss Burton in the waiting-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"You can show her in."

Angus rose uncertainly to his feet.

"I say, if she's really a client, she won't want me here," he observed. "I'll toddle off."

Peter Bragg motioned him back.

"I have a particular reason for wishing you to remain," he confided.

There was no time for further protest, for the door had already been opened and the young lady was being ushered in. Both men rose to their feet. She came timidly forward.

"This is Miss Burton, is it not?" Peter Bragg said. "My name is Bragg. I am very glad to meet you. Please take a seat. Permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. George Angus. I will explain his presence later."

The girl accepted the chair which Angus had offered her. She looked up at him with a timid little smile.

"You remember me, Mr. Angus?" she asked.

"Of course I do," he answered, with a sudden wave of recollection. "You were governess to my sister's children, weren't you? Spent a summer at Moningham once?"

She nodded.

"Your sister was always very kind to me," she said. "Unfortunately, as the children grew older my French wasn't good enough. I have been for two years now with Mrs. Goldberg in Gloucester Terrace."

Angus looked at her kindly. He had indistinct but pleasant memories of the timid, blue-eyed young woman whom his nieces had adored. He turned towards his old schoolfellow.

"I think I'll be getting along, Peter," he suggested. "If Miss Burton wishes to consult you, I am sure she would rather see you alone."

"Unless the young lady feels that way about it, I should prefer you to remain," Peter Bragg announced. "Two heads are better than one, and I have an idea that you may be interested in her story. Have you any objection to Mr. Angus's presence, Miss Burton?"

She shook her head. The look of trouble which had been in her face when she had first entered the room had returned. Her eyes were dim and her forehead wrinkled. She was obviously very nervous.

"I don't mind in the least, Mr. Bragg," she assented. "I don't know whether anyone can help me, though. It all seems so terrible."

"Please tell your story." he directed. "Tell us in as few words as possible, but leave nothing out."

She clasped her hands in front of her. She sat looking at neither of them— looking at one particular spot in the wall.

"I am quite poor," she began. "The few relatives I have are not very near ones, and they are also poor. I was happy at Lady Cranston's. I have been miserable ever since. A few months ago piece of very good fortune came to me. The only nice man who ever visited at Mrs. Goldberg's, began to take some notice of me. To my surprise, one day he asked me to marry him. We were to have been married next Thursday."

She paused and showed signs of breaking down.

"Now the trouble, please," Peter Bragg demanded briskly.

"Eighteen months ago," she went on, "I met a man in the Park, where I used to walk sometimes in the evening. He looked nice and he obviously wanted to speak to me. My life with Mrs. Goldberg was very unhappy. I never had a moment's pleasure, or anyone to say a kind word. I let him speak to me. We became very friendly. He was always sympathetic, and that counted for so much. He didn't want to marry me— I think he was married already, but separated from his wife. I went on seeing him even after I knew. We had dinners together, and very often he used to beg me to go away with him. I never meant to. I don't think I ever should have done, but my life was so dreary that I couldn't break off with him altogether. I used to write him letters— foolish letters, and a great many of them. One day, as I was reading the morning paper, I had a terrible shock. I saw that he had been run over by a taxi-cab in St. James's Street and killed."

Angus ventured upon a murmured word of sympathy: Peter Bragg remained silent.

"We were leaving for Scotland the next day," she went on, "and when we came back after three or four months, Mr. Poynton, the gentleman I am engaged to, began to call. I suppose it was very heartless of me, but I had almost

forgotten about Mr. Sinclair— that was the other gentleman's name— when last week I received this letter."

She handed it across the table. Peter Bragg smoothed out the folds and read aloud:

"It is dated," he announced, "from number eleven, Dinsmoor Street, West Kensington, and it is signed," he added, turning over the sheet, "by Philip Drayton, Major—

My dear young Lady,

I am writing you with the utmost reluctance a letter which I fear may distress you, and which certainly treats of a very disagreeable affair. An old servant of mine, George Roberts, lies ill in a London hospital. He is penniless and has apparently a family dependent upon him. He has in his possession a packet of letters written by you, addressed to his late employer, a Mr. Sinclair, who was killed in a taxi-cab accident. The scoundrel should, of course, have returned them to you, and he assured me that he fully intended to do so. Now, however, he has met with unexpected reverses, and although I must do him the justice to admit that he seems heartily ashamed of himself, he insists upon having a thousand pounds far them, or inviting a Mr. Poynton, to whom I think you are engaged, to purchase them at that price. I did my best to make Roberts see the enormity of his proposed action, but he insists upon it that his first duty is to his wife and family whom he is leaving penniless. I have persuaded him to entrust the letters to my care, and I think you had better come and see me and discuss the matter.

Sincerely yours,
Philip Drayton.

Peter Bragg folded up the letter and returned it.

"The matter," he pronounced, "is one of blackmail pure and simple. Scotland Yard would deal with it in a moment. The trouble is, as you have no doubt already realised, that you would become involved in the publicity which would follow."

"That is why I came to you," the girl explained eagerly. "I don't want to prosecute."

"Have you any money at all to pay for the letters?" Peter Bragg enquired.

"Not a penny," was the despairing reply. "I had thirty pounds saved, and I have spent that for my trousseau."

"Are the letters very compromising?" Angus interposed. She blushed slightly.

"They would seem so to Mr. Poynton," she admitted. "He is very strict indeed. They were very foolish. Anyone reading them might easily misunderstand what had really happened."

"Did you go and see this Major Drayton?" Peter Bragg asked.

The girl shook her head.

"I came to you instead. It didn't seem to be any use. I couldn't raise a thousand pence."

Peter Bragg touched a bell and rose to his feet.

"You will return here, Miss Burton," he directed, "immediately I send for you. Until then, leave the matter entirely in our hands. Go on, of course, with the preparations for your wedding, and, unless there is anything which you ought to confess— and I gather that there is not— do not mention the matter at all to Mr. Poynton."

The butler was already on the threshold. With a confused word of thanks, she took leave of the two men and left the room.

"Well, I'm damned!" Angus exclaimed, as soon as the door was closed. "Old Phil Drayton, of all men in the world! Belongs to one of my clubs— or rather one I used to belong to. Doddering old fellow, he seems, but I should never have thought that there was any harm in him. Makes a bit buying and selling antiques— generally fakes. Well, I'm damned!"

"We have now to consider," Peter Bragg mused, "how we can get hold of those letters."

THE young man in the dark clothes, and with the upper part of his features obscured by a black silk mask, subsided with a little sigh of content into a well-worn easy-chair in the shabby back room of number eleven, Dinsmoor Street, West Kensington. He buttoned his coat and patted a slight protuberance in his breast pocket with satisfaction. The man seated opposite to him— a white-haired, pathetic-looking figure— made some slight movement, only to shrink back shuddering in his chair as he looked down into the very ugly black cavity of the bull-nosed automatic pistol.

"Put that thing down," he begged tremulously. "I can't do more than I have done. I've given my word of honour not to move or raise my voice."

"For a military man, Major," his *vis-à-vis* observed, "you seem to be a little nervous."

"You know me, then?"

"Quite well by reputation. Until now, I must confess, only as a retired military man of limited income with a passion for collecting antiques. I regret that I cannot view with similar sympathy your latest exploit."

"If the young lady had come to see me herself," the Major declared, "I should not have been hard with her. I can assure you that I would have shown her every consideration. In trying to arrange the matter between her and Roberts, I was acting entirely in her interests."

"It is a subject," the marauder observed, rising in leisurely fashion to his feet, "which we will not discuss. I am always willing to believe the best of everyone."

"Who the devil are you?" the Major demanded abruptly. "Every now and then your voice sounds most unpleasantly familiar."

"Don't worry to find out, my dear sir. You will only waste your time. Look upon me as a nightmare of your fancy who has paid you a brief visit and departed with your priceless vase. As for the letters, you can always believe that you threw them on the back of the fire— a generous action. Major, but why not? I am quite sure that at some time or another during your life you were capable of it."

The Major sighed.

"I have not always been a pauper," he confided bitterly. "Poverty is a cruel taskmaster."

The intruder slipped his pistol back into his pocket and picked up from the table by his side a porcelain vase of strange orange and blue colourings. He passed his hands over it critically.

"So this is Armadi porcelain?" he observed. "A strange design and texture. You must not fret about your loss, Major. After all, as our interview has passed off without disturbance and I am able to depart without leaving indications of my burglarious effort, I imagine—"

He broke off. His whole frame seemed suddenly to have become rigid, hid expression one tense effort at listening. There was no doubt about it. Down the front stairs, outside in the hall, came the sound of soft, descending footsteps. He glanced at the clock. It was five minutes past one.

"I thought you told me there was no one else in the house except yourself?" he said swiftly.

"No one except my niece," the Major reminded him. "I warned you that she might hear us. That is she coming down the stairs now."

The masked man picked up the vase, moved quickly across the room and turned off the light. He stood a little away from the door his back to the wall, watching. The major, still carefully refraining from any sort of movement, showed fresh signs of terror.

"My niece may be difficult," he faltered. "She is young and impetuous. Be careful with her, and for God's sake don't carry that vase as though it were a ginger-pot."

"What do you mean by difficult?"

"She has courage."

The door was suddenly opened, and the marauder's scheme of darkness was frustrated by the light from the hall which shone full into the room. Framed in the doorway stood a very handsome and very determined-looking young woman, wearing a rose-coloured dressing-gown and slippers, and with her dark hair gathered together with a ribbon of the same colour. She looked into the room with amazed eyes, at the bureau still in disorder, her terror-stricken uncle, the masked man with the vase. A cry broke from her lips.

"Madam," the burglar assured her, "you have nothing to fear."

"But you have," was the swift retort. "Put up your hands!"

The girl's arm flashed out— a very beautiful white arm where the wide sleeve of her dressing-gown had fallen away. Gripped in her fingers was an ancient, but still formidable-looking revolver. The masked man obeyed her behest but in a fashion of his own. He held the vase which he had been carrying in front of his face.

"Young lady," he warned her, "if you shoot you will destroy what I am credibly informed to be a most priceless example of Armadi pottery."

"What are you going to do with it?" she demanded. "It belongs to my uncle."

"Alas," the other replied, "it did! At the present moment, it belongs to me— by right of possession. We collectors are compelled sometimes to use violent measures. Will you be so good as to step a little to one side?"

He moved closer to her. The hand which still gripped the pistol trembled noticeably.

"Stay where you are!" she ordered.

"But why should I?" he protested. "I want to go home. It is, believe me, past my usual hour for retiring. It is one o'clock— very late for a member of my profession. You should know that all burglaries which are in the least up-to-date nowadays are committed between eight and ten in the evening."

He spoke slowly, with a note of banter in his tone, yet all the time she felt his eyes watching her, felt that he was seeking his moment for escape.

"Put down the vase and you can go," she proposed.

"My dear young lady," he protested, "do you realise that, for the purpose of acquiring this unique specimen of porcelain, I have run the incredible risk of breaking into your house to-night and of terrorizing your uncle. If you shoot me the vase is smashed. For that reason I possess myself of a spurious courage."

She raised the pistol once more, but it was too late. The burglar had risked everything upon one moment of incredible swiftness. There was a firm grip upon her wrist, an arm around her shoulder. She was completely powerless.

"Need we argue about this little matter?" he continued persuasively. "I have the vase. It is on the carpet for the moment, but it is now my property. Your uncle is resigned to its loss. Let me pass. If I might give you a word of advice, in future see that there is always whisky and soda upon the sideboard. The modern burglar appreciates such attention."

She struggled in his grasp, but she was helpless. He did not at once make his escape, however. His right hand stole out, and he brought the door to within a few inches of closing, so that the room was in darkness. She felt him bending over her, caught the faint perfume of verbena from his shaven chin or hair. His eyes with their grim setting flashed into hers, and what she saw there seemed to drain the last atom of strength from her limbs. She felt her heart throbbing.

"Don't be foolish," he whispered. "The vase is mine, fairly taken in open warfare. Better resign yourself. It is always possible for you to return my visit, to come and fetch it back."

She felt his breath upon her face, an odour of lavender as though the mask had been kept in a perfumed drawer. Another whiff of that cleanly verbena. Then there was a wild, impossible second. His arm had held her even more tightly. His lips had brushed hers, lingered there, clung for one long, breathless moment. Then she gave a little gasp. She was free, and outside in the hall she heard the sound of rapidly retreating footsteps, the closing of the door.

THE attractively secretive young lady who filled the post of secretary to Peter Bragg came noiselessly into the room where Angus and he were engaged in close conversation on the following morning, and laid a slip of paper before her employer. The latter glanced at it and passed it on to his companion, whose lips were pursed for a moment in a reflective whistle.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"You can show Miss Drayton in," Peter Bragg directed.

Angus glanced uneasily towards the door.

"The question is whether I hadn't better make myself scarce," he muttered.

Even as he spoke, however, there was ushered in a remarkably handsome and apparently very angry young lady. Both men rose to their feet. She acknowledged their greeting and accepted a chair.

"You are Mr. Bragg, I suppose," she said, addressing him. "I have come to consult you upon a private matter."

"I am entirely at your disposal, madam," was the measured rejoinder, "and I can see you alone if you prefer it. This gentleman and I, however, were discussing a prospective partnership. Permit me to introduce Mr. Angus— Miss Drayton."

"I have no objection to Mr. Angus's presence," the young lady conceded, looking hard at him.

There was a moment's silence. The frown upon the girl's face seemed to deepen. Angus, however, remained entirely at his ease, and presently she looked away.

"The matter upon which I have come to consult you, Mr. Bragg," she began, "is a curious one. My uncle, Major Drayton, is, for his limited income, an ardent collector of works of art— especially of Oriental porcelain, last night our little house in West Kensington was broken into and a very beautiful vase, which my uncle valued highly, was stolen. We saw the burglar, in fact, he rifled the room in my uncle's presence, and he got away with the vase. He was armed, and although I threatened him with an unloaded revolver, he only laughed at me."

"Why then have you come to me and not to the police?" Peter Bragg asked bluntly.

"Because, for some extraordinary reason, my uncle absolutely refuses to report his loss," the young lady explained. "He won't allow me to go to the police station, or to give any information. I know that he is fretting all the time so I thought that I had better come to you."

"You have shown, if I may say so," Peter Bragg declared, "an unusual amount of common-sense."

"An unusual amount," Angus reiterated fervently. "These antiques are almost impossible of recovery in the ordinary way. The police might possibly have traced the burglar, but you would never have seen your Armadi vase again."

She looked at him fixedly.

"How did you know it was an Armadi vase?" she demanded.

"But my dear young lady," Angus pointed out, without hesitation "you described it as such directly you spoke of your loss."

"I don't remember doing anything of the sort," she declared.

"If you will allow me to say so," Peter Bragg interposed, "I think that my friend Angus is right. I certainly heard the term."

"It seems very extraordinary," the girl murmured, still a little uneasy. "I shall begin to believe that I talk in my sleep next."

"Did the burglar leave anything behind which would afford you a clue, or have you any noteworthy recollection of him?" Peter Bragg enquired.

"He was young," she replied, "and rather tall. He wore a mask over the lower part of his face, so it was difficult to get any definite idea about him, but I should think that he was what would be called in his world, a somewhat superior person— a dealer in antiques himself, perhaps, or something of that sort."

"No other impressions?" Angus ventured.

"None, except that he used either a shaving cream or a hair-wash perfumed with verbena."

Angus moved slightly further away.

"It isn't much to go on," he remarked. "Would you know his voice again, if you heard it?"

"I'm afraid not," she acknowledged. "It was a voice which had some quality, but it was obviously disguised."

"At what sum does your uncle value the vase?" Peter Bragg asked.

"Well, he is rather vague about that," the girl admitted. "He bought it very cheap indeed, but I believe he was hoping to get five hundred pounds for it. We are very poor and I know that the loss is worrying him."

"I think that he can spare himself any undue anxiety," Peter Bragg pronounced. "An Armadi vase can scarcely be concealed. Your description of the

young man is helpful, too. Now tell me, which do you want the more— the return of the vase or the punishment of the burglar?"

The girl's eyes were lit for a moment with something which was half anger and half a curious sort of regret.

"The young man was for a moment terribly rude," she declared—"most offensive— yet on the whole I think I would rather have the vase back again."

Peter Bragg touched the bell.

"You shall have a report from us in twenty-four hours," he promised. "In the meantime our fee for a consultation—"

"But I haven't any money with me," she exclaimed in alarm.

Angus leaned over and whispered; the other nodded gravely.

"My friend here," he announced, "is interested in your case. He has an idea that he can bring it to a successful conclusion. We will therefore waive the matter of a fee for the moment."

The young lady held out her hand gratefully. Angus remained in the background and contented himself with a bow. Nevertheless, she looked at him for a moment steadily before she left the room.

"I'm afraid you're rather an amateur at this sort of thing, Angus," Peter Bragg remarked coldly, as soon as they were alone. "You were giving yourself away the whole of the time."

Angus was gazing out of the window, watching the street.

"A damned good-looking girl, that!" he murmured. "Did you notice her eyes, Peter? I can assure you last night when she came into the room in that rose-coloured dressing-gown— imagine her in rose-colour, Peter!— I nearly dropped the beastly vase, and chucked the whole show."

Peter Bragg glanced at him suspiciously.

"I trust," he said, "that you are not in the habit of allowing sentiment to interfere with business. By-the-by, you were just going to tell me about this vase. Where does it come in, and what on earth made you bring it away?"

"Curiously enough, to please the old boy," Angus explained. "He's obviously a beginner at this blackmailing game, and he was terrified to death lest his niece should guess what it was he's been burgled for. He knew very well that the vase was a fake and practically valueless, so when he realised that the game was up and that I was going to have the letters he begged me to pinch it. The old boy's no fool, either. He'll tell everyone he's been burgled for the sake of his vase, and they'll think he gets hold of some good stuff now and then."

The secretary glided in, and once more handed a folded piece of paper to her employer. He looked at it and passed it on to Angus. The two men exchanged startled glances. Angus indulged in a low whistle.

"This is a sort of situation," his companion murmured, with an air of satisfaction, "which I love to handle. Let the gentleman be shown in."

The girl made her silent exit, and a moment later the butler threw open the door.

"Major Drayton," he announced.

The Major, in the strong morning light, was a wan, almost a pathetic figure. His thinness seemed more noticeable than ever. His clothes, though carefully tended, were shabby. He returned Peter Bragg's greeting nervously, and accepted the chair into which he was waved, with diffidence.

"You wish to consult me, Major— er— Drayton?" Peter Bragg enquired, glancing at the slip of paper in front of him.

"In the strictest confidence," the Major replied, gazing hard at Angus.

"That is just as you wish, of course. Mr. Angus, however— by-the-by, Mr. Angus— Major Drayton— is at the present moment discussing the matter of a partnership with me. I am showing him some of the details of my business, and I can assure you that you can speak with the utmost freedom before him."

"I believe," the Major murmured, "that I have met Mr. Angus. There is something about him which seems to be curiously familiar," he went on, gazing across the room in a puzzled fashion.

"We have met not once but a good many times, Major," Angus assured aim. "I used to be a member of the Stadium Club, which you sometimes, I believe, frequent."

The Major appeared relieved.

"I remember, of course," he admitted. "I wondered where it was I had seen you. Certainly if Mr. Angus is likely to become associated with your business, Mr. Bragg, he can remain. I am not proud of my story— it might, almost be called a confession— but such as it is, gentlemen, I should like to get it off my chest."

Angus resumed his seat, and the Major continued.

"I had a friend," he explained, "named Sinclair— Tom Sinclair— lonely sort of chap, but a good fellow in his way. He was run over by a taxi-cab three or four months ago, and he sent for me. I was just in time. He was desperately ill, but quite conscious. He seemed to have no relatives, but there was a little girl of whom he was very fond. He hadn't much money to leave, and it happened, as he had just sold out his share in a business, it was all in the bank. Whilst I was there he sent down an open cheque for two thousand pounds, put the notes in an envelope as soon as he received them, and handed them over to me."

The Major paused to dab his forehead with his handkerchief. Angus was sitting very still, his cigarette burning unnoticed between his fingers; Peter Bragg's face behind his big glasses was expressionless.

"Nasty job, telling you this," the Major continued, his voice shaking painfully. "Sinclair handed me over, too, a packet of the girl's letters he wanted me to return to her, and I was to let her have the money with his love. We made a

parcel of the lot. I took them home with me, and— well, for a time nothing happened."

"Do I understand," Peter Bragg asked, "that you made no effort to find the young lady?"

"I rang up the address in Gloucester Terrace the next morning," the Major confided. "I can assure you, gentlemen, that if I'd got into touch with her that day she'd have had notes and letters straight away. It turned out, though, that she was a governess with some people called Goldberg, and that they had all left for Scotland a few hours before I rang up. They seemed uncertain about giving me the address, and I am afraid I didn't press them. I decided to wait until the girl came back to London."

The Major threw away his cigarette. Somehow the taste of it was wrong. The sound of his own words and the silence of the other two men distressed him.

"I've been damned hard up all my life," he went on, "but never harder up than the day those two thousand pounds came into my hands. I was practically living on a pound or two a week belonging to my niece. Mind you, I didn't touch the money, but when the girl came back, instead of doing the honourable thing, I became nothing more nor less than a dirty criminal. I wrote her— I tried not to frighten her in my letter, but I invented some lie about Sinclair's servant. I said nothing about the money, but I told her that I had the letters, and that his servant wanted money for them. I asked her to come and see me. The trouble was that she didn't come."

"What exactly was your scheme if she had come?" Angus asked curiously.

The Major seemed to have shrunk in his chair. The words left his lips with difficulty.

"I was going to make her pay a thousand pounds for the letters out of the two thousand," he confessed. "I reckoned that the thousand pounds she would have left would be a godsend to her. She was going to marry a rich man, and I was almost a pauper. There's a pottery sale next week with some wonderful pieces, and I've never had enough money— but there, we'll leave it at that! I've no excuse. The worst of my story is to come."

"The worst!" Peter Bragg murmured.

"A tragedy has happened," the Major groaned. "Last night my house was broken into. The burglar discovered the sealed packet and went off with it."

"The notes and the letters?" Angus asked.

"Both. He was armed and there was nothing I could do. She lost her money, and God knows where the letters are."

There was a long silence. The Major's head disappeared in his hands; his shoulders heaved convulsively.

"There was also a little matter of a vase," Peter Bragg remarked presently.

The Major looked up and stared.

"How did you know anything about that?" he demanded.

"Your niece has been here," Peter Bragg explained. "She wanted us to try to get the vase back again for you. She knew nothing of course, about the rest of the business."

The Major's hands were shaking; his voice too, was tremulous.

"I begged the burglar to take the vase," he confessed. "I didn't want Marjorie to think that there was anything else I had worth taking."

The sliding door was softly opened. Miss Ash, crossing the floor with noiseless footsteps, laid another slip of paper before her employer. Across it was written in every possible place, "*Urgent*."

"The little governess!" Bragg whispered.

There was a moment's silence. Then Peter Bragg left his place and laid his hand not unkindly upon his client's shoulder.

"Major," he said, "we may be able to help you. Please be so good as to step into the waiting-room for a minute or two."

The Major rose unsteadily to his feet and allowed himself to be led into the waiting-room. Little Miss Burton came in like a whirlwind, her blue eyes wide open, a roll of banknotes in her hand.

"My letters!" she exclaimed. "They were all in the packet you sent, and look what else! Money! Bank-notes! Two thousand pounds!"

"Can you," Peter Bragg asked, "bear a shock, provided it is a pleasant one?"

"I have my letters back," she cried in ecstasy. "I can bear anything."

"The notes are yours," Peter Bragg confided. "They were left for you by Mr. Sinclair. He seems to have died without friends or relatives and he wished you to have his money. There has been a little delay in handing it over, and a little trouble about your letters because the trustee was not quite honest. Now that you have both, are you prepared to forgive him? He seems thoroughly repentant."

"But how did you do it, you wonderful people?" she cried, throwing her arms around Mr. Bragg's neck. "Forgive him? Of course I will. I'd forgive anyone for anything, I'm so happy."

Peter Bragg disengaged himself.

"Gratitude of this sort," he said stiffly, "is due not to me, but to my friend here, Mr. Angus, who undertook the adventure of recovering the letters and stumbled upon the notes."

She stretched out her hands towards him. Angus grasped them and raised her fingers gallantly to his lips.

"It was nothing at all," he assured her. "We arrange little affairs like this every day."

"And now," Peter Bragg suggested, "if you will come into the next room, you will find Major Drayton— the person who kept you temporarily out of your

money and letters— waiting to beg for your forgiveness. You must remember that you are very young," he went on, in his most middle-aged tone— he was himself twenty-six—"so please allow a man of experience to give you a word of advice: when restitution has been made and genuine repentance shown, forgiveness is an excellent quality."

She looked up with shining eyes.

"My letters and two thousand pounds!" she exclaimed once more. "I'm brimming over with forgiveness."

Peter Bragg ushered her into the waiting-room, closed the door and came back.

"Events," he remarked, "appear to have developed along satisfactory lines."

Angus laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder.

"Pudgy," he confided. "I think I should like this business. If you're really in earnest about a junior partnership, I'll come in."

The Major walked home jauntily. He had argued for half an hour, but in his waistcoat pocket reposed the price of many a spurious Armadi vase. Then, in his niece's drawing-room he met with a further surprise. Upon the little table in the centre of the room was the Armadi vase, filled with the most amazing profusion of dark red roses, and before them stood Marjorie with a rapt expression upon her face.

"My vase!" the Major exclaimed.

"And roses," she murmured—"from the burglar!"

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3: Tough Guy Sammy

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Collected in: *Moon Over Broadway*, 1931

AS far back as folks can remember, Sammy wanted to be a tough guy. It was a definite complex with him. His father and mother, a pious old couple, were heart-broken by the things the boy said in the house. He seemed to have no respect for law. Or order. Or anything.

"I hate cops," he'd tell his father. "And I like crooks. They're the only real guys. Don't you be surprised if I plug a cop some day. I'd like to stand 'em in a row and plug 'em all, one by one."

Then Sammy would look at his father to see if his words produced the desired effect. They never failed. His mother would sob and his father would beat his breast. That a son of theirs should say such terrible things!

They didn't know something, however, that was known to practically every boy in the neighborhood. They didn't know that their boy was only big in his talk. They didn't know their boy was a coward.

When Sammy was 17, he went to work. He set out to learn the fur business. He got as far as a machine, and stayed where he was. That was far enough, however He earned a good salary and his wants were meagre.

Sammy's real ambition, however, had never been satisfied. He still craved to be recognized as a gunman. He wanted to walk down the streets and have people shudder when they saw him. He wanted to do anything that would give him a bad name. But an unholy terror clutched at his heart whenever there was danger about him. And his very cowardice made him a respectable citizen.

In the nights Sammy would patronize the neighborhood speakeasies. When a gunman or a notorious racketeer would swagger in, Sammy's eye would light up. He would push close to his hero. Once in a while, when a gunman grew drunk enough, he would talk to Sammy and buy him a drink. Then Sammy would be in seventh heaven.

Thus Sammy marched along until he had reached the twenty-fourth year of his life. Just a harmless youth, striving desperately to be something that was not in the cards for him.

GIRLS NEVER worried Sammy to any degree. He had convinced himself long before that, following the crook's creed, women are nothing but omens of trouble. He spoke contemptuously of women until he met the right one.

The right one was no beauty. Slight and unassuming, she would never give Ziegfeld any heart throbs. But she was a sweet little kid with honest eyes. And to Sammy she was the most wonderful thing he had ever met.

When he took her out for the first time he put on the act for her in great style. He told her of his gunmen pals and of the desperate deeds he had been doing for years. As he spoke, he saw her eyes growing larger and larger. She believed him.

"We fellers don't believe in telling things to dames," he assured her, "because that's a dangerous thing to do in our game. But I can tell you're different. I can talk to you.

"I'm in the fur business. Sure. But that's only to fool the cops, see ? At nights I generally go out with the mob. And we don't stop at nothin'. I know they're gonna catch me some day but I just can't get away from it. The thing is in my blood."

The girl was biting her nails. This young boy was a slave to crime. What a pity it all was. If there was only something she could do.

She placed her hand on his.

"You can get away from it, Sammy," she cried earnestly. "I just know you can. You wait and see. Just wait."

A FEW months later, Sammy popped the question. He knew that he loved this kid with all his heart. And he was sure that she loved him. Why not marry?

The girl looked deep into his eyes.

"Sammy," she replied, "I love you. You know that. And I want to become your wife.

"But, Sammy, you must promise me one thing. You must promise me that you will go straight from now on. Promise me that you will give up all of your tough friends and never see them again. Will you promise?"

Sammy nodded rapidly. If she only knew what a simple request she was making !

"It's hard, darling," he murmured. "But you have my word. I promise."

He took her in his arms. His "career of crime" was over.

Sammy left the girl's house that night with his head in the clouds. His heart was singing. If there was a happier guy in the world at that moment it would have been news to Sammy.

He walked slowly toward his home. As he turned a corner, a drunk bumped into him. He looked at the stew. And he recognized him immediately. It was one of the toughest birds in the neighborhood. One of his heroes. The drunk looked at an approaching policeman and reached suddenly into his pocket. He drew forth some cheap jewelry and a revolver.

"Here, kid," muttered the stew. "Hold this stuff for me for a minute." - He thrust the stuff into Sammy's hands. The boy was paralyzed with fear. The drunk stumbled away. The police-man came up. He looked and saw the gun and the jewelry in Sammy's hands.

"What are you doing with that stuff?" he growled.

Sammy couldn't talk. After all these years of talking, here he was in a spot. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He trembled as though he had suddenly developed palsy.

"T-t-that drunk," he finally gasped. "He put these things into my hands."

The patrolman yanked the revolver from his hand and grasped him roughly by the arm.

"Oh, yeah," he returned. "He did, did he? Well, you come with me, and we'll tell the lieutenant just how the naughty man put the revolver into the little boy's hand. Come on, bum!"

And Sammy went to the station house.

WHEN they were through with Sammy he was put away for two years. The storekeeper said he had seen Sammy standing outside while his place was being robbed. And the jury believed him.

Sammy is still in jail. And the girl he loves refuses to write to him. She believes he broke his promise to go straight.

Well, he wanted to be a tough guy.

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4: Terrible Uncle James.

Edward Dyson (as by "Silas Snell")

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 4 June 1914

One of the "Miss Trigg, Domestic" series.

WITH THE CALDWELLS respectability was a sort of religion. Respectability has its own Decalogue, and the Caldwells observed the one hundred and ten commandments much more scrupulously than average Christians regard the sacred ten. Respectability has its catechism, too, and the little Caldwells were carefully instructed therein. At the age of seven not one Caldwell of them all could fail to give the correct answer to any question of Mrs. Grundy's.

At fifteen Henry had his card-case. At ten he knew exactly now to treat a lady when walking abroad, which side to take in fifteen given conditions, with which hand to lift his hat on approaching a person of the other sex, and just now high to lift it in accordance with that person's age or social status.

"Blessed if they don't go to bed by rule an' get up by arithmetic," said Minnie to Miss 'Arriet Brown. "They're the queerest crew ever, they've got little books fer breakfast, so ez I know exactly what's the fashionable way t' crack a negg, or the swagger style iv askin' fer a fresh cup iv corfee. They're got little books fer lunch, an' little books fer dinner. Blime! ye'd think it was a hobject lesson in nachrul 'istory t' see 'em takin' their places fer meals, with Pa Caldwell as 'eadmaster, an' Ma Caldwell ez chief instructor iv the hinfant class."

" 'Ave they got any special book on hetiket fer servants?' asked 'Arriet.

"My hat, have they! Didn't Ma Caldwell come at me with it first evenin' I took on. She's writ it herself, *'Rules an' Hinstructions fer the Guidance iv Domestics Servants*,' it's called, an' it's all set forth in a hexercise book. 'Ow t' do this, an' 'ow t' do that. 'Ow t' wear a cap, 'ow t' open a door, 'ow t' serve soup, 'ow t' haddress yerself to a lady visitor, 'ow to haddress yerself to a gentleman visitor. There's even a page on 'ow to walk.

" 'Trigg,' sez she t' me, 'yer a good servant, but I ain't quite pleased with yer way of walkin'.'

" 'Whatser matter with me walkin'?' sez I, a bit rattled. 'Don't expect a girl t' walk on her 'ands, do yeh?'

" 'No, Trigg, certingly not. Don't be ridiculous, please. But I would like you to keep your head up, your, shoulders square, and take measured steps—so.'

Mr. William Ogden Caldwell was a small, stout, stiff gentleman, with a very, shiny round lace, a very shiny round head, a shiny hat, shiny boots, and a shining shirt front. If shine counts for respectability, no person on earth could have doubted Mr. Caldwell's respectability.

The touchstone of right doing with Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell was, "What will the neighbours say?" If a little Caldwell were tempted to do wrong, that momentous question, "What will the neighbours say?" stirred in his mind, awakening all the good within him, and he resisted the evil thing.

Minnie was admonished in the same way. "You really must not say good-night to that young man at the back gate, Trigg. What will the neighbours say?"

"Please, do not raise the clothes-line above the level of the garden wall, Trigg. Everyone can see the washing. What will the neighbours say?"

"Trigg, I had much rather you did not conduct conversations with the grocer on the back verandah. What will the neighbours say ?"

At length Minnie was stung to retort. "I dunno what you know about the ways of neighbours, ma'am, but from what I've bin gatherin' concernin' their' thinkin's an' doin's l've come to the conclusion they'd say just what they like. What you do won't make no partickler difference."

"All the same, Trigg," said Mrs. Caldwell severely, "there are certain rules of propriety and decorous conduct which we must all observe. See page 15."

This "see page 15" referred Minnie to Mrs. Caldwell's useful brochure, "*Rules and Instructions for the Guidance of Domestic Servants*."

Despite Minnie's acute philosophy concerning the manners and customs of neighbours, the people of Ten Crescent seemed to entertain great respect for the Caldwells. Mrs. Caldwell's "afternoon" was well attended, and was conducted with such taste and such nicety of method as to be regarded as a standard of style to which all young housekeepers should aspire.

It was during the holding of one of these important and almost sacred functions that Minnie appeared at the door, signalling wildly to Mrs. Caldwell. Minnie was visibly disconcerted.

"Bub-bless my soul, is it a fire?" gapped one elderly dame.

Mrs. Caldwell excused herself according to Burbank's "*Brochure of Domestic Etiquette*," chapter 4, page 82, and joined Minnie in the hall.

"How dare you, Trigg?" she said. "You have behaved in a most unseemly manner. What will the guests think?"

"I dunno what they'll think presently," retorted the domestic; "espeshly if he breaks out."

"If who breaks out ?"

"The bloke in my bedroom."

"A man in your bedroom. Heavens!"

"In me bedroom? He's in me bed. What will the neighbours say to that? He's thin, an' he's dark, an' he's dirty, an' I won't have the likes in my bed. So I give you a week's notice. I don't know him. Never seen him afore. Yet when I goes back after servin' the tea there is his nibs, large ez life, sittin' in the kitchin, hisself on one chair, his ole boots on another, 'eatin' the 'am sandwiches. I yells

at him. ' 'Ear, 'ear, yeh beat,' I yell, 'sling yer hook. Whatcher doin' 'ere, eatin' them san'wiches?' He jist smiles et me like a skull, an' 'Go to the deuce, me girl,' he sez, an' reaches fer the cakes. I was jist in time t' save arf iv them. I didn't know what t' do, so dashed in t' cut more san'wiches, an' while I'm doin' it that frowsy waster strolls into my room, an' spreads himself in my bed, boots an' all. What I want is you t' keep a heye on him while I run for a John— a police, that is."

"Stay, Triggs." Mrs. Caldwell was very pale. "Let me have a look at him first."

Mrs. Caldwell stole to the door of Minnie's room, and peeped in. She rams back in great, distress. "You— you mustn't go for the police, Trigg. You mustn't disturb the poor man."

Minnie gaped at her mistress in sheer wonder. "I said a week's notice, mind," she said. "If it comes t' dossin' down boots in my bed I'm off it."

"Hush, hush ! Let us wait till Mr. Caldwell comes home. Meanwhile, do the best you can. This will be made right."

"Blowed if the ole girl didn't go back, an' tell the twitterin' party iv sparrows in the drorin' room I'd scalded meself," said Minnie, describing the incident to 'Arriet, her friend and confidante.

" 'The foolish girl has spilt some boilin' water on her foot. It is really only a trifle, but she is in some pain. I hope you'll forgive me,' sez she. You never saw a perfect lady be so nice an' sweet, cool ez a blessed hice-chest all the time, though I knows fer a cert that hinsolent bla'guard a-snorin' on my bed is weighin' heavy on her nerves."

When the guests had left, Mrs. Caldwell returned to the kitchen, and to her amazement found Minnie seated with her hat on, and a dress basket on her knees.

"I'll send fer me other traps," said Miss Trigg. "I ain't 'ard t' get on with if I'm treated proper, but tramps in me bed is dead hookity, an' I ask yeh to accept me resignation."

"Don't go, Trigg; please don't leave me. I am very much distressed. You may have Clara's room. In any case wait till Mr. Caldwell comes. Don't leave me along with that man."

"Leave yeh alone," said Minnie. "Yeh needn't be alone three minutes. Say the word, an' I'll have the p'lice force an' the fire brigade in two ticks. If the p'lice can't put him out, the fire brigade will."

"No, no, Trigg. I must wait for Mr. Caldwell. I have special reasons."

Minnie set down her basket, and took off her hat. "All right," she said, "on condition I get another bed I'll stay, though it is the first time I've took service in a tupp'ny doss."

When Mr. Caldwell returned home Mrs. Caldwell met him in the hall. There was much whispering, and then William Ogden Caldwell went boldly towards

Minnie's room. His boldness evaporated with each stride, and when he reached the door he was most timorous.

"Don't you be afraid of Mr. Caldwell," said Minnie, approaching with a spade in her two willing hands, "I'll back you up. Get the tongs, ma'am."

"Go away!" said Mr. Caldwell.

Minnie backed off a few steps, and William Ogden Caldwell put his head in at the bedroom door.

" 'Ello, Bill!" said a coarse voice.

"Eh—eh! good-day, James," said Mr. Caldwell.

Then Mr. Caldwell withdrew his head, and looked helplessly at Mrs. Caldwell.

"Go to your work at once, Trigg," said Mrs. Caldwell sharply.

Minnie returned to the kitchen. She put aside the spade very reluctantly.

"I 'ad counted on havin' a bat at him," she told Miss 'Arriet Brown in the latter's room on the following evening. "But, after all, it seems he's a sort iv friend iv the fam'ly. 'I'm a friend iv the Caldwells. Them the sweetest an cleanest' an' properest push on earth— an' 'im! You orter see him, 'Arriet. You wouldn't pick him up to sell to a ragman."

After that peep at "Jim," Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell withdrew to their own room to hold council. They had come to no conclusion by six. Minnie was busy with the dinner, when suddenly the intruder reappeared in the kitchen. He was yawning copiously.

" 'Ello, you," he said,— what's fer tea?"

" 'Tain't tea," said Minnie, "it's dinner; an' it's no blessed bizness iv yours anyhow."

"I don't care what you call it, I want sausages— pork sausages."

"Well, you can want."

"Pork sausages!" roared the stranger.

The roar was so terrific, it brought Mrs. Caldwell to the kitchen, tremulous with concern. Minnie explained in her own simple, direct, emphatic way.

"it's a fine thing," sneered the stranger, "if a poor man can't have a few sausages if he needs them. Is this infamous grinding of the poor in the interests of a brutal plutocracy to continue for ever? Is it?" he roared. "No, no, no! We shall end it, we lawless ones, we free spirits, we rebels. And we know how. By heaven! we know how."

"Really, really, Uncle James, really," protested Mrs. Caldwell. "You know you would not be refused food in this house. William will go for the sausages."

"At once!"

"Yes, yes, certainly at once, Uncle James." Uncle James had pork sausages for his meal. Mrs. Caldwell fried them herself, and a week later James was still with the Caldwells, sprawling about the house, bossing it, an unkempt,

undesirable, of whom Mr. W. Caldwell had an ignominious terror. The one effort of the Caldwells was to keep Uncle James out of sight of the neighbours.

"What would the neighbours say?" was Mrs. Caldwell's constant lament.

Caldwell wanted James to wear some of his old clothes, and offered him clean linen; but the advance stirred James to fury.

" Wear any man's cast offs ?" he snorted. "Make the offer again, Bill, and I'll wring your nose."

"There, there, James, don't be violent," protested Mr. Caldwell.

"Violent? Violent? What recourse have the poor but to violence ? And I tell you, Bill, they will one day end this rotten civilisation— this putrid social system—" with violence James slapped his coat pocket, which seemed to contain a round object about the size of a large apple.

"You— you haven't one of those fearful things on you, James?" faltered William.

"Haven't I? I have just."

Minnie now understood the position.

"He's Mr. Caldwell's brother," she told 'Arriet. "A seasoned rotter, 'e is, one o' them hanarchists. Hanarchist! Blime! I'd hanarchist 'im if they'd give me ten minutes at 'im with a prop. I dunno what he's done in the past, but he's got 'em all dead scared. I ain't scared though, an' one o' these evenin's Jimmy is goin' t' get it frim me."

Minnie let loose rather sooner than, she had expected. James was dissatisfied with the meal she served him on the following evening. He ate in the kitchen, refusing the society of the effete plutocrats in the dining-room. James wasted little time in argument, but took the tablecloth by its corners and showered food and crockery all over the floor; then twirled the cloth about Minnie's head. Miss Trigg extricated herself. She did not wait to express the state of her feelings in plain language, but went down on a rolling-pin. Her first blow caught James the Anarchist on the elbow he threw up to guard his head.

"Oh!" said James. "Whew!" said James.

Minnie struck again. "Outer this, you dirty loafer," she said. Her second blow reached the ear of the anarchist.

"Police!" cried Uncle James.

Minnie's third swing came into contact with the head of James Caldwell, and James made for the door. Minnie beat him out of the house and into the night. When Miss Trigg returned she was met by the horrified Caldwell family. But all Mr. Caldwell said was:

"He'll do a mischief. I'm sure he'll do us all a terrible injury."

All through his dinner Mr. Caldwell was beset by grim anxiety. He was tremulous with nervousness. His face was grey, and the smallest noise set him jumping.

Mr. Caldwell's concern was not without reason. Minnie was serving the pudding when the dining-room window crashed, and a heavy, round, dark object fell upon the table, and rolled to the floor.

William Caldwell uttered a yell of terror.

"Run!" he cried. He caught up Eric, and ran for the door. Mrs. Caldwell snatched up Esther, and ran, too. The other children followed their parents pell-mell out of the house.

Five minutes Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell cowered in the garden, awaiting the expected catastrophe. No catastrophe came. When William stole back he found Minnie busy in the kitchen.

"Whe— where is it?" he faltered.

"Where's what?" asked Minnie.

"The bomb."

"Oh, that? I 'it it with the 'ammer."

"You hit it with the hammer. My goodness! What happened?"

"Then I ate it."

"Ate it? Ate a bomb?''

"I ate some of it. Didn't I tell you that Uncle James was a miserable bluff. See, here's what's left of his bomb!"

Minnie showed the fragments. They were the remains of a coconut.

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5: Almost a Crime

Frances Henshaw Baden

1835-1911

Collected in: *The Phantom Wedding; or, The Fall of The House of Flint*
Philadelphia, T. B. Peterson & Brothers 1878

Half-sister of Emma D. E. N. Southworth

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and beast and fowl;
He prayeth best who loveth best
All creatures, great and small;
For the good Lord, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.
— Coleridge.

"EDDIE, do put down that ugly creature. You are a perfect beast worshipper," said Bertha Dennison, the young bride, to her three weeks' bridegroom.

He obeyed, as bridegrooms of three weeks are apt to do ; but he expostulated, as husbands of all times are sure to do.

"If cherishing means worshipping, Bertha, you might call me a beast worshipper. And if—"

She interrupted him sharply.

"I would not mind if it was a pretty tortoise-shell kitten ; but a great, ugly old tabby cat!"

"My darling!" said Edward Dennison, gravely, "I was about to say, if you knew the 'reason for my being kind to this cat, and to all God's poor dumb creatures that come in our way, you would not blame me. I could tell you something, Bertha. Will you listen?"

She pouted, instead of answering.

"My mother, you know, was a notable housekeeper. She kept her house in perfect order, and ruled everything in it, both animate and inanimate, except one thing— a young rebel of a cat, which was the torment of her life, through jumping up on the tea-table, licking the butter, stealing into the pantry, lapping the cream, and committing divers other petty depredations abhorrent to the souls of careful housewives. It was but a thoughtless young cat, that might have grown better with time and teaching. But my mother declared she was out of all patience with her.

"One dark December day I came home from school, and found mother in our tidy kitchen, where we always took our meals in winter. She was busy setting the table for tea, and in a great passion besides. I soon saw the reason. The cream-jug was turned over, broken, and the cream spilled. Of course the young

cat was the culprit, although she was nowhere to be seen. Mother spoke up suddenly and sharply:

" ' Eddie, I'll give you a silver quarter of a dollar, if you will take that cat and drown her. I can never leave the room one minute but she is up on the table. And now she has gone and broken my best cream-jug. I'll give you a silver quarter if you will tie a stone around her neck and drown her.'

"A silver quarter! I walked out into the yard in search of the cat. I found her sitting up on top of the chicken-house, licking and trimming herself— for she was a vain little creature— in total unconsciousness of her guilt and impending doom. I called her, 'Pussy, pussy, pussy!' She immediately jumped down and ran joyously to me. I picked her up in my arms, and she greeted me with her poor, inarticulate, tender tones, as she rubbed her head against my cheek and chin. Even then my heart smote me for a moment for what I was going to do to her.

"But I hardened my heart, and trotted off toward the river, went upon the bridge, and found a good place for the deed. At that moment my good angel left me, for I took from my pocket the cord and stone that I had provided, and while she was purring and playing with the cord, grimly tied one end of it around her neck and the other around the stone. 'It will soon be over, and after all, she is nothing but a cat,' I said. And I held her over the bridge to drop her into the river. Then indeed she clung to me, and looked astonished and wild. For the first time she seemed to know her danger. She struggled, and grasped my coat with her claws and held on. But I pulled her away by force and threw her into the river. I heard the splash, and saw the water close over her. I hurried away from the spot, with the sickening impression that I had done a murder. I thought of her at the bottom of the Potomac, suffocating to death, and I had to keep repeating to myself, 'Oh, it will soon be over with her. And after all, she is nothing but a cat. And besides, didn't mother tell me to drown her? It would not do; my heart was decidedly heavy. Never do you do a murder, Bertha. No one but a murderer knows how it oppresses one's spirits.

"It was raining hard when I reached home. I found mother just where I left her, busy in the kitchen. She was standing at the table, slicing bread for tea.

" 'Well, mother, I have drowned the cat,' I said, knocking the rain-drops off my cap.

" 'What!' she exclaimed, ceasing her employment, and poising the knife in one hand and the bread in the other, as she stared at me.

" 'Yes, I've drowned the cat; and now I want my silver quarter of a dollar.'

" 'You did!' she said, with a look of surprise, sadness, and reproach on her face.

" 'Yes; I tied a stone around her neck to sink her, and dropped her into the river. And you promised me a quarter of a dollar for doing it,' I answered, sulkily, for I felt injured by her look.

"Without a single word she put her hand into her pocket, drew out a silver quarter, and gave it to me, turning her head away. I felt more injured than before. What did mother mean? I only did what she told me.

"But as I was going to a concert, I tried to throw off all unpleasant thoughts. I dressed myself and came down and joined the family at tea without much appetite. Besides, I missed something— I missed the little cat, who always sat by my chair and touched me softly with her paw now and then, to remind me to give her a morsel. I gulped down my tea, and started off to Concert Hall to see the minstrels. And soon, seated in the front row, enjoying the unparalleled burlesque of song and sentiment, I forgot all about my deed of the evening. Or if I thought of it at all, it was only to laugh at myself as a sickly, sentimental sort of a fellow, to think so much about drowning a cat.

"After the performance I came home. It was not very late, yet the family had retired. I took the key from under the step, where it was usually hidden for any of the family who were out at night, and opened the kitchen door and went in. The stove was warm, and a nightlamp was burning on the table. Everything had been left comfortable for me, and I sat down before the fire to dry my wet clothes. But how empty and desolate and forlorn the place looked after all! I missed something. It was the cat, who always slept at night on the rug in front of the stove; who always welcomed me home, when I came in at night, by getting up and rubbing against my shins and purring her pleasure at seeing me. And now she was at the bottom of the Potomac, with a stone tied to her neck; and I had thrown her there. And for a mean quarter of a dollar!

"I got up, took the lamp, and went up-stairs to bed. But I could not sleep. How the wind and the rain lashed and beat against the windows ! How I thought of the cat at the bottom of the river! 'And she had but this one life, and I took that for a base quarter of a dollar,' I said to myself. And oh, I would have gladly given all the boyish treasures I possessed in the world, if I could have brought her back to life. And so I lay and tossed from side to side, listening to the beating of the storm, and thought what a mean and cruel wretch I had been.

"Hush! what was that? I started, and sat up in bed and listened. As sure as I live, it was a scratch and a mew, at the kitchen door— sounds as familiar to me as the children's voices; but that I never had expected to hear again. Well, I have heard Thalberg and Ole Bull play; I've heard Lind and Nilsson sing; I've heard the dinnerbell; but of all the instrumental or vocal music I ever heard, none ever thrilled my soul with such delight as that performance on the kitchen door.

"In less time than it takes to tell it, I jumped out of bed; and without waiting to draw on a single garment, I ran down-stairs, half naked, in the cold, and tore

open the kitchen door. There stood my cat, dripping wet, with the cord dangling round her neck, and the empty noose. I saw in an instant how it was. In falling over the bridge, when she was thrown, the round stone had slipped from the noose, and the poor cat had swam ashore, and found her way home through night and storm. As soon as she saw me, she jumped in and rubbed up against my shins, with her poor, confiding mew, just as if I had never tried to drown her. I caught her up in my arms, all dripping wet as she was. I hugged her, kissed her, and comforted her in a manner that, under any other circumstances, would have been supremely absurd. I took her up-stairs with me, dried her as well as I could with my towel, and, all damp and cold as she was, took her to bed with me.

"Oh, how relieved I was! How I loved that cat for getting out of the river and coming home! I talked to her, and petted her, half of the night. I told her how sorry I was, and how I never would do it again. But she seemed perfectly indifferent to my crime and repentance, and only cuddled up to my bosom, and purred and sung, in a funny content, until we both fell asleep.

"In the morning, when I went down to breakfast, I carried the cat in my arms, and sat down with her at the table.

" 'Why, I thought you had drowned that cat, Eddie!' my mother said, with a look strangely blended of pleasure and pain, as if she was glad the cat was alive, yet sorry that her boy had deceived her and obtained money under false pretences. 'I say I thought you had drowned that cat, Eddie,' she repeated, as if demanding an explanation.

" 'Well, so I did drown her!' I answered, playing sulky. 'At least, I tried my best to do it. I tied a stone round her neck to sink her, and then dropped her into the Potomac. But she got out, somehow or other, and came home last night. I suppose the stone slipped out of the noose, and she swam ashore. All cats can swim, you know. And now, must I try it again?'

" 'No,' said my mother. And that was all that ever passed between us on the subject.

"But from that time pussy ate of my bread and drank of my cup by day, and slept on my bed at night, until the war broke out. I cured her of her cream-stealing propensities. If any one had even spoken harshly to that cat, they would have had to quarrel with me. The war separated us for a time, as it did many good friends, but peace reunited us, and I have brought her to my new home. And now, dear Bertha, you understand why I cherish the poor cat."

Then, lifting the animal tenderly to his knee, he caressed her.

"You forgave me for trying to murder you, didn't you, pussy ? And not many human beings would have done that, would they?"

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6: The Red Kangaroo

Ethel Castilla

Ethelrita Ramos de Castilla, 1861-1937

Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 13 Dec 1905

Editor's note: the red kangaroo's habitat is the arid interior of Australia; this story is set on the Darling Downs, a fertile well-watered area not far from Brisbane and the habitat of a different species, the grey kangaroo.

THE spring sunshine was lighting up the Maroondah school-room. It was a cheerful room in a cross-curtained out-building, separated from the homestead by a lawn. The Maroondah gardens skirted a Queensland river, and from the school-room could be seen great, green-haired willows, dipping into the shining water, and making a delicious background for snowy fruit trees, and orange-groves, and glorious masses of roses, crimson, white, and golden. Beyond the river ran level green plains to the horizon. The sunbeams danced in at the open school room windows, and the soldier birds sang 'Sweet! Sweet!' up the musical scale, making it difficult for the occupants of the room to take a keen interest in *Little Arthur's History of England*.

In a cushioned arm-chair sat an exceedingly pretty girl of 20. Her dark-blue cotton gown exactly matched the tint of her laughing eyes, and her curling hair made an aureole of gold about her head. Her cheeks had the colouring of rosy shells.

A red-haired boy of eight, sturdy, tanned, and inconceivably freckled, sat on a low chair on her right. On her left nestled against her a pretty, rosy girl of seven, whose red curls and greenish-grey eyes were the only points she had in common with her brother. The governess held a copy of Lady Callcott's *Little Arthur's History of England* in one beautiful, white hand. The boy was droning out from another copy of that celebrated work.

'Although the poor— Britons were al-most naked, and had— very— bad— swords, and very weak spares and bows, and arrers— and small shields, made of basket work— covered with— leather— they were— so— brave— that— they fought a great— many— battles— against— the kangaroos.'

'Jim!' cries the teacher, laughing.

'Well, Crystal, I really can't 'tend. I'm thinking of the drive all the time. And we do fight the kangaroos, anyway.'

'There were none in ancient Britain, Jim.'

'Crikey! What a slow time the boys must have had there!'

And Jim went on stumbling over Lady Callcott's historical facts.

Crystal Wilton was the eldest daughter of a widowed squatter, who had failed and died, leaving four girls on the world's charity. John Forsythe, the

owner of Maroondah had taken Crystal as a governess, chiefly because he got what he called 'edication' for his children, cheap.

Old Forsythe was as economical as he was wealthy and illiterate. The home stead had no mistress. John Forsythe had lost two wives. The first had left two sons. Jim and Margaret, usually called Midget, were the children of the second marriage. The house, was managed by Mrs. Daggert, a grim, middle-aged housekeeper.

John Forsythe was a clever man, who had made Maroondah one of the show sheep stations of the district, but he was entirely unconscious that both his sons were the slaves of the blue-eyed governess. Jim had not been long occupied in slow and painful tracking of the ancient Britons, when there was a loud rap at the schoolroom door.

'Come in,' said Crystal. And a tall young man carrying a gun, strode into the room, with a fine black-and-tan collie at his heels. 'Drive's on in ten minutes,' he cried, In

a ringing voice. 'Look sharp, Rufus and Midget.' The children scampered out upon the lawn.

'I have your gun ready, Crystal,' said Jack Forsyth, gently, coming up to the girl's chair, 'and Mat is saddling Bayard.'

Crystal smiled sweetly at this handsome son of Anak. Jack Forsythe was undeniably good-looking, though a costume consisting of a loose holland coat, a soft shirt, secured at the waist by a cartridge belt, shabby tweed trousers and old leggings, was not calculated to enhance his beauty. He had fine dark eyes, a good nose, and a particularly handsome moustache. This ornament hid a rather coarse and sensual mouth, but Crystal shared in the common opinion of Jack Forsythe, that he was a fine young Queenslander, and twice the man his bookish elder brother Theyre appeared likely to become. Jack was only 23, but he had developed quickly in the forcing Queensland climate, and was reputed the best shot and scrub rider on the Downs.

Old Forsythe grumbled equally at all his children, but he had been heard to own that he 'liked a lad with a spark of the devil in 'im, and Jack 'ad more 'n one.'

Crystal went over to the schoolroom piano and sat down, beginning to play a dreamy waltz.

'I don't know that I want to go. It's cruel work: shooting kangaroos. Poor beasties.'

'It's too bad,' said the young man, impatiently. 'I got up this kangaroo drive for you. And you promised to ride with me.' He paused, and added jealously, 'I believe you want to stay behind with Theyre.'

A quiet voice at the door interrupted him.

'The old man is asking for you, Jack; the Mountfords are come,' and Theyre Forsythe came into the schoolroom. Jack frowned, whistled to his dog, and went reluctantly away.

'The Lily' was' Jack's nickname for his elder brother. Jack had a hearty contempt for the products of Rugby and Oxford, and had firmly refused to enter either of those seats of learning. Theyre had gone to both, and had taken a B.A. degree at Oxford. He was slighter and shorter than Jack, and his smooth-shaven face, with its delicately cut features, was less tanned than his brother's. He had been born and bred on Maroondah, and was not deficient in manly accomplishments, though he could not compete with Jack either as a shot or a rider. He looked well in his brown riding suit, made by a London tailor.

'Aren't you ready for the slaughter, Crystal?' he asked, lightly.

'I'm not coming,' answered the girl, turning round on her music-stool.

'Why, you were keen on this drive yesterday.'

'Yesterday isn't to-day.'

'Well, I was only going because you were. I thought it would please you.'

The young man bent over the capricious creature and spoke with feeling.

'Am I never to please you, Crystal?'

'If you got me a red kangaroo skin,' said the girl, slowly, as though the wish was the result of long, thought, though it was but the caprice of the moment, 'I would like it. I have wanted one for a rug for my room for an age. Di Mountford has a beauty.'

Now, a red kangaroo is a rare beast, and Crystal knew it.

'Come to the drive and ride with me, and I swear I'll shoot one for you,' said Theyre with sudden energy.

'Done!' cried the girl gaily. And she tripped across the lawn and into the house, while Theyre made his way to the stables. A few minutes later they joined the hunting party outside the garden gate. There were a score of horsemen at the gate, each wearing a cartridge belt and carrying a gun, and a couple of led horses were laden with cartridges. Away to the west was a line of white-trunked gum trees, girdled with scrub. Towards this a string of horsemen, armed with stockwhips, were galloping over the plains.

John Forsythe, a short, thick-set, bandy-legged man, with a large head and a red, rugged face, half buried in a grey beard, was standing by his strong, brown horse, Adept. He did not notice Crystal or Theyre, though the girl was conspicuous on the showiest horse in the Maroondah stables, Bayard, a bright chestnut, with a white star on his forehead.

Theyre was the one well dressed man of the party, as Crystal observed, as she rode up to the Mountfords' buggy to exchange gushing confidences with Gawne Mountford's two rosy-cheeked, dashing daughters. He looked well on his bay thoroughbred, which he had named Pegasus, greatly to the puzzlement of

Mat, the groom. That worthy wondered 'Why Mr. Theyre put a mare's name on a 'oss.' 'Peg' the horse remained in the stables, and out of them, until he was gathered to his fathers.

Theyre and Crystal cantered away from the rest until they reached a little creek, shaded by a fragrant tangle of musk trees and golden wattles. They followed its windings, letting their horses walk.

The college-bred man, with loads of learned lumber in his head, was many fathoms deep in love with this untravelled girl. For her sake he was ready to comply with his father's wishes and stay upon the Downs.

'Crystal,' he said, after a long silence, 'I have been trying for the last week to get the old man to stock Kareen.'

Now, Kareen was the cattle station adjoining Maroondah, left to her elder son by the first Mrs. Forsythe.

'And he won't?' asked Crystal, sympathetically.

'Not he; he argues in his own, obstinate way that it won't pay. I think he likes to keep me dependent on him, when I want to strike out on my own. I was at Kareen yesterday. It has such a nice, cosy little homestead. We could be so happy there.'

'Indeed!' said Crystal, laughing. 'You seem sure that I want to go there.'

'I am sure of nothing,' said the young man flushing angrily.

'Don't let us quarrel on this heavenly day,' cried Crystal, and she cantered away towards the scrub, where the party were dismounting. The horses were tied in a line to a wire fence when Crystal reached it. She slipped from Bayard, tied him up, and took her gun from the buggy to join the shooters, who had taken their stations behind trees, with their guns at their shoulders.

Behind the scrub resounded loud shouts of 'Ooay! Ooay!' and the sharp cracking of stockwhips. There was a pause, and then a mob of soft-eyed, brownish-grey kangaroos came hopping out of the under-wood, and seemed to dance round the shooters. Guns went off in all directions, and the pretty creatures fell. The slaughter continued till the belt yielded no more game, when the sportsmen disappeared into the bush to get the big skins and tails, which were fastened on the led horses.

'We take Kooray Paddock next,' shouted John Forsythe, in his harsh voice.

The calvacade set out again, followed by the Maroondah buggy, wherein sat Mrs. Daggert and the children, and that which held Di and Nell Mountford. Crystal kept close to the Mountfords' trap, and appeared deeply interested in Di Mountford's shooting. She was too clever to make herself conspicuous with either of John Forsythe's sons.

The second drive proved even more successful than the first. After a third and fourth had been accomplished, a halt was made for lunch on the banks of a reedy lagoon, shaded by ironbarks girt by silvery brigalows and wallaby bush.

The sun blazed in the clear blue heavens, and deep noonday stillness reigned. The lagoon lay in a grassy flat, well adapted for a dinner-table.

The Maroondah hands lit a fire near the water, and set quart-pots and billies to boil in the glowing embers. The three girls put a tablecloth in the shade of a clump of brigalows, and Theyre spread rugs and buggy cushions round it. Mrs. Daggert took hampers bursting with good things from the buggy. She produced plump cold roast fowls, cheeses round and golden as a summer moon, pyramids of tempting sandwiches, and mounds of crisp brown cakes. Then she began to slice ham with a great carving knife, while Crystal mixed salad dressing and broke lettuces.

The girl's next task was to supply everyone round the rural table with huge cups of tea. Only Crystal could be relied upon to remember that John Forsythe liked lemon and sugar, and Theyre both sugar and milk, that Mrs. Daggert took her tea sugarless and strong, while Jack's must be weak and sugared.

'Who's made top score?' asked Jack, boisterously, looking round the party.

'I got nine. How many did you shoot, Crystal?'

'Five,' answered the girl, absently. 'Best lady's score. How many, Theyre?'

'Ten,' said his brother, reluctantly, 'and not one red one,' he added, turning to Crystal.

'Oh! never mind,' said the girl.

'I've bagged fifteen,' remarked John Forsythe. 'You youngsters can't compete with the old man.'

Lunch was soon over and the men began to stroll about with lighted pipes. Theyre did not smoke, and he lingered near Crystal, who was packing a hamper.

'I'm going for that red kangaroo, Crystal,' he said presently.

'Don't trouble about it,' she said. She looked distractingly pretty in her riding habit of pale grey cloth and her Panama hat, with a white gossamer veil, floating like a cloud about her golden hair. 'Don't go—'

He thought she doubted his skill and was nettled.

'I shall bring it home,' he said firmly. So long!'

And vaulting upon his horse, he cantered away, waving his hat gaily. He took Pegasus over a great tree trunk and disappeared into the scrub.

Theyre made for a paddock holding a great shaped disused kangaroo-yard. During the last drive he thought he had seen a red 'old man' kangaroo, lurking in the bushes by the sapling fence. The yard was about five miles from the homestead and was over grown with wallaby bush and baby eucalypts. It had not been used for 10 years, when there had been a great kangaroo-hunt, and many hundred kangaroos had been driven into it and despatched with iron bars.

As Theyre reached it, the largest red kangaroo he had ever seen, hopped out of the bushes. He fired, but the creature had seen him and disappeared. He dashed into the scrub after it, but failed to find it. He came back to the yard,

having lost his hat, cursing his luck that he should have seen the prize he desired for one maddening minute and then have lost it.

He lingered about the kangaroo-yard, without any result, and then rode aimlessly from one belt of scrub to another, until he I was tired. He hobbled Pegasus and lay down beneath a grove of scrub oaks, whose needle-like foliage piled in masses on the ground made a pleasant pillow. He fell asleep and dreamt that Crystal was laughing at him because he had come home without a red kangaroo.

The plains were flushed by the light of the setting sun, when he awoke. He mounted Pegasus to go home. On his way, he again passed the kangaroo-yard and cast a longing glance into it. Once more he caught a glimpse of what seemed the identical red kangaroo, half hidden by a clump of wallaby bushes.

Theyre fired and wounded him. The beast did not fall at once, but limped slowly into the inner pen of the yard and crouched among the scrub. The young man leaped from his horse. Dropping his gun, he seized a rusty iron bar, that lay at his feet, and ran up to the dying beast to put him out of his misery.

The kangaroo was not dying. He reared himself to his full height and faced Theyre, towering over him. In a flash, the brute had rushed upon the young man and jerked the bar from his hand. Theyre staggered, and the kangaroo holding him with its forepaws tore his clothes to ribbons with his cruel, hind-paws. Again and again, Theyre tried to clutch the iron bar, that lay just beyond his reach.

'Cooee! Cooee!' he cried, but his strength was fast going, and he was answered only by the harsh 'qua-a-ah!' of the carrion crows and the mocking laughter of the jackasses.

The beast tore his flesh, until he was sick and faint from pain. He closed his eyes and ceased to struggle at last, and wondered weakly If the carrion crows would pick out his eyes after he was dead— or before.

The thud of a horse's hoofs roused him.

There was a crashing of boughs as a horseman made his way through the scrub, and in the fading light they recognised Dr. Allworth on his big grey mare. The grey-haired, gaunt, bush doctor, whom everyone liked, rose to the emergency, with characteristic nerve. In a few moments the kangaroo had received his death-blow from a hand that could be as gentle as a woman's. The doctor knelt down and examined the young man's wounds. His face was grave as he bound them up with bandages improvised from his handkerchief, and gave his patient whisky and water from his flask.

In a flash the brute rushed upon the young man, and jerked the rod from his hand.

'And now, how are we to get home?' he said. 'Your horse has gone, I see. I must get you on Bess.' And the doctor raised him gently in a pair of strong arms.

'The kangaroo?' said Theyre, faintly.

'The brute's dead.'

'I-want-the-skin.'

'Can't wait for it,' objected the doctor.

'I must have it; hang it all! I'm not dying.'

Very reluctantly, the doctor skinned the beast and flung the skin over Bess's saddle. Then Theyre suffered himself to be lifted to the mare's back. It was a toilsome journey to the homestead. Theyre lent forward on the horse's neck, like an old man, and the doctor had to support his patient, as well as guide his mare, and look to his own footing. As they moved painfully along, the house party gathered at the Maroondah dinner table.

'Where's Theyre?' asked his father.

No one knew. He had not been missed till the close of the day, and everyone supposed he had gone home.

'Do you know anything about him, Miss Wilton?' asked Mrs. Daggert, looking sharply at Crystal, as she sat behind the tea equipage. Old Forsythe loved the customs of his youth, and insisted on tea at every meal.

Crystal turned as white as the table-cloth, and would have fallen to the floor, had she not been caught by the parlour-maid.

'What is it, Letty?' cried Mrs. Daggert. 'I just told Miss Wilton Mr. Theyre's horse has come home without him, Ma'am,' answered the girl, whimpering.

Mrs. Daggert and Letty carried Crystal to her room, and the others trooped out of the house. They gathered round riderless Pegasus and exhausted themselves in aimless conjectures. Old Forsythe was already organising, a search party, when Jim announced the arrival of Dr. Allworth and Theyre at the garden gate. The doctor and Jack took Theyre to his room and laid him on his bed. He was deadly pale, and lay in a stupor with closed eyes. Old Forsyth followed.

Dr. Allworth dressed his patient's wounds, and explained the accident in a few, curt sentences to his father.

Suddenly Crystal appeared in the room, looking as pale as the patient. The trampling of feet had roused her. She flung herself with a bitter cry beside Theyre's bed, as she saw his blood-stained shirt and still face. She thought he was dying and that she had sent him to his death.

'Theyre! Theyre! Speak to me,' she cried, in a tone that enlightened John Forsythe. Jack was standing with his father, a little way from the bed, in the recess of the bay window of the big, airy room. He turned away his face and groaned.

'He'll get her now,' he murmured, and his face worked. More light broke upon the master of Maroondah.

'You— you want 'er too,' he muttered. 'By—" And he was mute with rage and astonishment.

He turned to his old friend, Dr. Allworth, and carried him away to the dining room. Jack followed, and Crystal was left alone with Theyre. She lifted her tear-stained face and looked at him with a pity fast melting into love.

'Theyre,' she whispered.

The young man opened his eyes and smiled faintly.

'The— red— kangaroo-skin— is— there,' he faltered. 'I— brought— it.'

Her tears rained on his poor bandaged right arm.

'Theyre, stay with me! I cannot bear it! I do love you, Theyre. You must live for me!'

He smiled again. 'I— will— live— now.'

After dinner, Forsythe drew Dr. Allworth out on the verandah, and confided his troubles to him.

'To think of Theyre throwin' 'imself away on 'er,' cried the injured father, 'when 'e might 'ave 'ad a lady o' quality with a fortin, too! After all the good money I've spent on 'is edication— she'll bring 'im nothin' but a family tree. An' they both want 'er.'

'She's an uncommonly pretty piece of feminine ware, Forsythe, and as bright as they make 'em.'

The old man pondered. 'I s'pose I've bin a blitherin' idgit, Allworth, 'avin' the gel in the 'ouse.'

'You have, Forsythe,' the doctor answered with the frankness of old friendship.

'An' I never suspected it, Allworth, never. It come upon me like— like thunder! What do you think of that?'

The doctor laughed. 'I think you'll have an uncommonly clever daughter-in-law.'

DR. ALLWORTH stayed for three days at Maroondah, and had many similar conferences with John Forsythe. Theyre was invalided for three weeks, and spent most of his time in a lounging chair on the verandah. Crystal and the children were his constant companions. His father usually avoided him, but one fine afternoon, old Forsythe came out on the verandah and found his son alone. The old man came up to him and asked him somewhat absently how he did. Then old Forsythe stood silent for some minutes, looking down upon his son, with beetling brows.

'Look 'ere, Theyre,' he said, at last. 'If you're bent on this marryin' business do it. I'll not 'inder you. Indeed, I've bin thinkin' it over and I find it'll pay to stock Kareen.'

He paused. 'The gel's a good gel and pretty enough. I've nothin' agin her. I think she's a bit artful. Never lettin' me see you an' Jack was both soft on 'er— look she don't play you no tricks.' He paused again. 'Be a fool if you like.'

And with this paternal blessing old Forsythe strode into the homestead.

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7: Of Love

Miles Franklin

Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, 1879-1954
Australasian (Melbourne) 30 April 1904

THE HOUSE STANDS on the hill; there is a stretch of rough land, then are the cultiva tion paddocks. On the far side of these, near a great log fence, stands a mammoth wattle leaning on the white spectre-like trunk of a murdered gum, whose naked, gallows-like limbs creak and groan dismally on windy, days. To-night they are silent, and in the dense gloom cast by the wattle I lean against their support, and with nervous ex pectancy wait in this the appointed tryst ing-place for one who loves me but whom I love not.

The soft, warm breath of a summer night fills my nostrils. The plovers rise on the flat and fly by with their clattering kwuh— hah— huh— huh! Is it his approach disturbs them? Hush! No. All drops to silence again.

The evening star with scintillating bril liance swirls down in the west. A moment she tarries and gleams liks a flame amid the rugged horizon behind the house, where the mopoke calls so softly to his love. She goes, and other stars swinging far, oh, so mightily far on high, put forth their faint electric light, the signals of maturing night.

I stand in the first flush of dawning womanhood, my soul athirst for love— love which comes not, love I cannot find, or find ing, will find another has rifled, and careless, unappreciated, holds in boudage that which should be mine. Tangled is the skein of fate.

He for whom I wait has plagued me much with talk of love. I have studied him, with his matter-of-fact materialism, minutely. I have drawn him on for test. Pshaw! What can he know of Love, the Divine. Love the gross may have him in thrall, but love, the love of souls— he who accounts as rubbish the music of poets, and who is blind to the beauty of Nature, what can he feel, suffer, know of love?

How dare he approach me! Thus have I felt towards him, and feeling thus, have half repelled, half encouraged, and wholly played with him.

Now the night in its glory has wiped away narrow thoughts, leaving me before my soul convicted of a sin.

A heart is a heart, and a soul a soul. Some have the ethereal beauty of gems, more the indispensable usefulness of the common pebbles. 'Twere presumptuous arrogance in me to place the gem above the pebble.

What can a soul give more than its all? When it lays its love on the altar of another, 'twere insulting the Great Creator to deem that love unworthy the offering. When a young man and true offers freely the first fruit of his manhood,

methinks 'twere a sin to hold lightly that gift. Yet this have I done, staining my womanhood.

And now he comes!

A cheery whistle accompanies the music of hoofs falling swiftly on the hard, white road. He rides his spirited favourite. The hoof-beats cease; there is the clank of a stirrup expeditiously vacated. There is a long-drawn snort from hot nostrils— me thinks I see their scarlet depths distended wide. A cessation of sounds, he must be opening the gate. No, in his strength and impatience, scorning such decrepit method, he vaults it. I hear the sound as he drops to the ground. The wheat stubble crunches beneath his firm, brisk approaching foot fall.

He is here. His breath is on my cheek; my hands are grasped in others which tremble and are hot with passion, perhaps love, certainly emotion. His face is neat, and the gleam of his eyes is discernible through the semi-darkness.

"I love you!"

"You say that so often it wearies me."

"But it is true. Do you love me? I want your real answer now. You promised to give it to-night."

"My answer is, and always will be— No." He drops my hands as though he had been hit.

"You do not mean it! You cannot. Great Heavens! Can it be possible you do not love me?"

"Yes. I care not a straw's worth for you in the way you mean, and never can."

"Great God! Is it true?"

"Yes."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, why did you sometimes act in a manner which gave me hope?"

His intense agitation pains and startles, me, and I say earnestly:

"I am sorry. Perhaps I was sometimes to blame. Are you sure you care? You will soon forget. I did not dream that you could really feel, or I would have been more careful in my manner towards you."

He leaps against the dead gum-tree, bury-ing his face in his hands, which I endeavour to pull away, saying:

"Please do not feel so. In a few days you will be yourself once more. Men really love no woman for long. It is merely a little mistake."

He grasps my shoulders roughly, saying sternly and bitterly,

"You women do not know what you do and do not care. You play with a man, sometimes giving him Heaven, sometimes the other place, and then coolly tell him you did not know he could feel. You think because we are big brutes, and rough, we cannot feel; but, though you have calmly smashed all my hopes

and plans, I hope you never will, and God help you when you do — love as I do. and get no return."

He stoops and kisses me savagely many times— kisses hateful to me, and which I wipe away.

His departing footsteps are slow. He opens the gate this time. No whistle ac companies the leisurely retreating hoof beats of the horse.

I close my eyes and suffer, knowing there is grim prophecy in his parting words: "God help you when you do love as I do and get no return."

This, the fate of many, is bitter to the few who will love not for an hour, a day, or a year, but until the fettered soul, rending its tenement, earns its rest.

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8: In The Small Hours.

Ernest O'Ferrall (as by "Kodak")

1881-1925

The Bulletin, 17 Oct 1907

A SMALL, red-faced cabman pulled up, and, opening the window of the four-wheeler, shook his fist in Wilson's face.

"Look 'ere," he hissed, "don' you tork t' me!"

Wilson— who is six-feet-three and athletic— winked inanely at him, and asked "Why not, ole chap?"

"Because," said the enraged cabman, "I won' blanky well *stan*' it!"

Wilson took out his watch and yawned.

"Cabbie," he said, "I'd be'stremely'bliged t' yer if you'd start th' horse."

"Well, I *won't* start th' horse!"

"W'y not?"

"Because I 'aven't bin *paid*!"

Wilson is always polite and calm and cool. In the very early hours these vices are accentuated. He started to review their transactions of the previous three hours.

"Look here, cabbie, I've told you 'bout five hundred times already that I'm short of money, *haven't* I?"

"Yes, but—"

An Ive also told you I haven't remotest chance gettin' any more this time night, *didn't* I?"

"Yes, you did! But—"

"Well, what d'ye 'spect me t' *do*?"

"Get out!" yelled the cabman. "Get out an' *walk*!"

Wilson smiled at him. "My dear fren'," he said, "I don't think you're an intell'gent cabman *at all*! I don' know how you ever came to *be* a cabman! How'd it happen?"

The deiver nearly burst. "I'm an hones' man, he shouted, "an' I pay my way!"

"Qui' ri'!" said Wilson approvingly. "Tha's proper ideal f'r working classes. How many children have y' got?"

"What's *that* got to do with it?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What's THAT got t' do with it?"

"Do with what, my man?"

"You ridin' f'r nothin' in my cab!"

Wilson tapped him on the shoulder. "Look here," he said, "I suppose I've met, durin' last thirty years, at least two thousan' cabmen, an' not *one* of 'em talked as much as you do! I wouldn't min' it so much if you kept th' horse going

while you converse; but you *don't*. Ev'ry now an' then you stop th' poor beast an' let it shiver while you talk rot. You'll pardon me saying it, ole man, but you're a frightful gasbag— frightful! "

Once again the cabman shook his fist in Wilson s face.

"What do you think I *am*?" he yelled.

"I think you're 'stremely 'fensive."

"W'y don't y' *pay*?"

"Because I *can't*!"

"Well, get out an' *walk*!"

"*I won't!"*

The small cabman measured Wilson with his gnashed his teeth, and hissed: "*I'll* fix you up, my friend! I'll take you somewhere!"

"I wish t' Heaven you *would*, ole man!"

"Yes," snarled the driver, "I *will*! "

"I'm 'stremely 'bliged t' you!"

The cab jolted on, and Wilson fell asleep in the corner.

When he awoke, he found the cab had stopped, and the cabman, accompanied by a policeman, standing at the door.

"There he is!" the driver was saying.

"Good-night, sir," said the constable.

"How d'ye do?" said Wilson, gravely extending his hand.

"Cabman tells me you won't pay him, sir."

"Wrong," said Wilson, "I didn't tell him anything of th' kind! I said I *couldn't* pay!"

"That won't do, sir!"

Wilson agreed with him. Wilson admitted it was an unsatisfactory state of affairs. He grew confidential, and related many similar instances— curiously involved stories of long-gone mornings and ancient cabs— mysterious detached fragments of adventure rummaged out of the recesses of a fogged memory, and given to the constable for nothing in the cold dawn. It seemed as if he— Wilson— had spent the best part of his life adrift in cabs manned by hostile cabmen.

And, all the time, the driver stood by repeating a sort of awful litany made up of six ejaculations:

"*Make* 'im pay!"

"Well, w'y d'yer *ride* in kebs?"

"I ain't goin't' stan' 'ere *all night*."

"Well, I'll summons yer and charnce it!"

"Th' likes o' *you* oughter walk!"

"Don' you talk t' *me*!"

Then again, "*Make* 'im pay!" and so on.

The constable, at first, tried to stem the flow of Wilson's recollections. Then he made several spasmodic attempts to interrupt him. But Wilson was not to be interrupted. He waved the matter of payment aside as a trivial thing of no interest, and continued his sermon on cabs until the driver climbed back to his seat and, thrusting the butt-end of his whip through the window, poked him gently in the ribs.

Wilson, with his arms outspread in an eloquent gesture, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and, turning slowly round, peered into the dark interior of the cab.

"Wha's *that*!" he cried indignantly: "wha's *that*!"

"Me?" murmured the cabman, in a weak voice.

"What *are* y'!"

"I'm th' driver!"

"Th' *what*?"

"Th' *driver*!"

"Where *are* y'?"

"I'm '*ere*!"

Wilson groped in the gloom with both arms and found nothing. Then he turned to the choking constable and remarked angrily, "There isn't anything! Th' blessed bathing-box is haunted!"

The constable perceived that the cabman had drifted entirely out of Wilson's recollection. He gently, but firmly, introduced the subject, and suggested that the man should be dismissed.

"Cert'nly!" said Wilson, as he got out.

"It's all he deserves— d'smiss him 'mediately!"

The driver rushed round fuming, and caught Wilson's arm.

"'Ere," he said, "'ow much *longer* am I goin' t' wait?"

Wilson wheeled round, and a gleam of recollection stole into his eye. "Hullo! you're th' cabbie, aren't y'?"

"Yes, *I'm* the cabman!"

"Yes," said Wilson, serenely. "I remember y'! You're the cabbie that's been gassin' all ni'!"

"Yes, an' I'll keep on gassin' till I get my money!"

The constable intervened. "Pay him off," he advised. "Pay him off and get rid of him."

Wilson seemed struck with the idea. He patted the policeman, and said "That's ri' ! That's jus' what 'll do! I'll pay him off! "

"That's right!"

"Yesh, I'll pay him off an' "— with a sweep of the arm— "an' *I'll get rid of him!*"

"That's right! "

"Y' know I *want* t' get rid of him!"

"Yes."

Wilson turned to the man and addressed him sternly. "Look here, my fren', I'm goin't' pay you *off*!"

"Yes, fr Gord's sake pay me orf!"

"An'— an' I'm *goin' t' get rid of y'*!"

"Orright— *orright*! "

"How much do I owe yer ?"

"Call it ten shillin's !"

Wilson fumbled in his vest pocket and drew out a coin, which he closely inspected, and then handed to the cabman.

The cabman looked at it in the light of the lamp, and whined, "What's th' good o' *this*?"

Wilson said angrily, "It's a sov'r'n, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I ain't got no change!"

"Well, who *asked* y' f r charge? *I* didn't ask y' f r change!"

The driver mumbled something, and hurriedly clambered up on the box seat, as if he feared Wilson might alter his mind. Then he gathered up the reins, and murmured apologetically:

"Goo' ni', sir!"

Wilson, who was explaining something to the constable, took no notice.

"Goo' *ni'*, sir!"

Wilson manipulated an imaginary cue, and showed the constable how he made the shot. The driver leant out and stirred him gratefully with the whip. "Goo'ni', sir— an'— an' thank y', sir!"

Wilson begged the constable to excuse him, and walked unsteadily to the cab. "Look here, my fren'," he said, "I'll give you one more chance— *jus' one more*! If y' don' shut up an' clear out *now*, I'll pull y'r rotten ole shay t' pieces, an' throw th' horse' at yer! D'ye un'stan' me!"

The cabman, without another word, swung round on the seat and shook out the reins. "Git up! Dammit! git up!"

The horse looked round reproachfully and started off.

Wilson stood on the kerb and told the constable: "Fearful gasbag, that man, I 'sure you! Talked to me whole damn night!"

9: The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry
1862-1910
The New York Sunday World as "Gifts of the Magi", 10 Dec 1905.
Collected in: *The Four Million*, 1906

One of O. Henry's most reprinted short stories

ONE DOLLAR and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at $8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid $30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to $20, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already

introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only $1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only $1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling— something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honour of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an $8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade. "Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation— as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value— the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from

her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends— a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do— oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit for saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two— and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again— you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice— what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you— sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year— what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs— the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims— just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men— wonderfully wise men— who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

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10: The Happy Forger

Albert Dorrington

1874-1953

Townsville Daily Bulletin, 2 Feb 1929

OLD DAVE Gordon leapt with joy the news that his daughter Margaret had escaped in No. 6 boat from the ill-starred *Araluen*. He swallowed with many gulps, however, the tidings that the *Araluen*'s rich cargo of camphor and silk, cinnabar and sandalwood was lying in seven fathoms of shoal water, seven hundred miles west of the Sulu Sea. But Margaret, his Margaret, was safe.

The solitary wireless message made it clear that only No. 6 boat had got away after four others had been swamped. The boat had been in charge or Derek Hamilton when picked up by the *City of Canton*, now on her way to the port of Songolo, where Gordon's big trade-house overlooked the bay.

For the life of him old Gordon could not account tor Hamilton's presence on board the doomed *Araluen*. Margaret had been on a visit to the British Consul's wife in Macassar, and had occupied the *Araluen*'s private state-room amidships on the return trip to Songolo. Hamilton was his clerk and man of business. He had been sent to Batavia to purchase some rubber land. Gordon had given him a bearer cheque for eight thousand pounds, drawn on Gilderman's bank in Batavia to facilitate the deal. With the cash on the table Hamilton should have had an easy task talking to the impoverished owners or the estate in question.

It became evident to old Gordon as the hours wore that Hamilton had successfully terminated the deal, and had, either by chance or design, found a both for the return passage on the same vessel with Margaret.

It was late that night when the *City of Canton* steamed slowly into Songolo, where David Gordon and a madly-cheering crowd of planters and traders awaited the landing of the *Araluen*'s twenty-five survivors.

Gordon was first to greet Margaret and the score of native women and children Hamilton had succeeded in packing into crazy No. 6 boat. Came Hamilton himself down the *City of Canton*'s crowded gangway, sun-seared, wind-burnt and hatless, and grinning boyishly at the excited groups of men and women straining and swaying for a grip of his oar-blistered hand.

Margaret's eyes still reflected something of the last-minute light on the *Araluen*'s boat-deck, where two hundred Malay planters and pilgrims had disputed Hamilton's authority to nil the boat with souls of his own choosing. All the other boats had capsized or been swamped In the black millrace of water that swirled round the reef-battered *Araluen*.

For a seat in No. 6 boat two hundred dank-haired, fear-blinded Malays fought with sticks and knives, pieces of broken cabin furniture. Mick Flanaghan, the famous fat skipper of the *Araluen*, had been struck on the head by a flying

bulkhead stay, and had gone down with his ship, other officers had perished in the swamped boats. Derek Hamilton, with Margaret in his arms, was part of the crowd surging and clamouring for possession of the last boat. As far as Margaret could remember, that was all— that unforgettable picture of the long-armed, sea-burnt Hamilton, his back to the rail, a flat-faced automatic revolver speaking the only language the Malay boat-rushers were ever likely to understand.

'Stand away, there! Only the women and kids get past! Sternly, you rat-faced banana chewing bimboes! Women and children I said!'

Then Margaret recalled his last spoken words on the boat-deck of the foundering *Araluen*.

'This way, little mother! This way for Hampton Court and the swans!"

Old David Gordon was one of the silk kings or Songolo. He had smashed the Chinese guilds and tongs, had built his own ships and pontoons, and carried his own cargoes to the four corners of the earth. His only child was Margaret. Since the death of her mother, eight years before, he had put a score of trained servants at her disposal. He had filled the palatial trade-house with the art wonders of the East, so that she might escape the paralysing loneliness that so often entered the lives of isolated, companionless girls.

Hamilton had come to Songolo in a cargo tramp 18 months before. The old silk king had liked the boy's appearance, liked his well set, rangy figure, fresh from a college playground, the kind of youngster always in a condition to tackle a boatload of sulking Arabs or Chinese coolies.

He had given Hamilton a job in the trade-room with the intimation that business was business in the East, and that one had to fight for it among the slick-handed compradores and silk jobbers of Songolo. The firm had to buy and sell often at throat-cutting rates. Hamilton had listened to the old trader's instructions, had gone about his tasks with alacrity and good humour. And David Gordon, master of a thousand fates and careers, had gone about his own numerous duties and had promptly forgotten Hamilton's existence.

And then the news of the *Araluen*'s foundering had reached Gordon. For a moment sick terror gripped him. Always things were happening In these warm seas, mutinies, cyclones, the havoc of pestilence. He stood rooted on the tradehouse verandah at the mere suggestion of Margaret fighting for her young life among the black gangs of coffee and sugar planters, coolie firemen struggling to reach those accursed boats. Lucky for Margaret that the level-brained, quick-footed Hamilton had secured a berth aboard the *Araluen*. Lucky for them all that his cabin stood between her and the stinking gangs of ghost-footed Mahommedans. Not often a slender, grey-eyed with the English peach bloom in her cheeks came into their lives. And they had watched her slightest movements about the deck of the ill-fated ship. Even with Hamilton beside her

the vessel had a thousand eyes for her. Arab eyes, alive and glowing with the wonder of her presence.

At the moment Gordon and Margaret were about to enter the trade house, a native runner handed him a message. David glimpsed hurriedly, then read it a second time, a serious look of unbelief in his pinched eyes.

Margaret came to life instantly.

'What's wrong, daddy? she asked, holding his shrinking arm.

Gordon crushed the cablegram in his burning fingers, put the crumpled piece into his pocket.

'A fool has played me false; that's all, child! I won't be long finding out the truth.''

Margaret barely tasted her food that evening. Her father's buckled brows, his continued silence, suggested one or more business calamities, bound to follow on the loss of the *Araluen* and her uninsured cargo and hull. Gordon owned the vessel, it was a curious but not uncommon oversight which had caused his native agent in Macassar to neglect her re-insurance for the return voyage. Even Gordon on could hardly survive the blow. Ship and cargo meant a dead loss of nearly half a million sterling!

Margaret felt that Hamilton ought to have dined with them that night. Her father's moods disturbed her. Conscious of his overwhelming affection, his one desire to make her life a dream and a delight, she was secretly pained to think that Derek had not been thanked for his desperate stand against the boat-rushers on the fatal night of the wrack.

'Oh, yes, I'll pay my respects to Hamilton,' Gordon announced, almost guessing the thought in Margaret's mind. 'I'll find him In his bungalow.'

He rose from the table, looked back from the cool draughty doorway to the wistful-eyed Margaret in the slender, high-backed chair. Hamilton did only what a dozen other fellows would have done. Every man's a hero when a rich man's daughter is in danger!'

There was bitterness and gall in David's words as he passed to the rear of the tradehouse where Hamilton's bungalow snuggled among the banyans and magnolias.

Margaret sat very still in the high-backed chair, a lovely, sad-eyed figure in that spacious, exquisitely arranged dining room, a ghost at her own banquet. How lonely and remote her father had made her life, In spite of his wealth and good nature! The soft-fooled Goanese servants flitted in and out, bearing away untasted dishes, wondering in their gentle furtive way why this tall English lily, the lovely child of the great tuan, did not dance and sing as her beautiful mother had done.

GORDON PUSHED open the door of Hamilton's bungalow and stood breathing heavily in the warm darkness of the room. There was a sudden stir on the camp bed, under the open window. The light was switched on. Hamilton almost staggered to his feet. He had been asleep. For sixty hours he had manipulated a heavy steering oar in the crowded lifeboat, scarce daring to shift his glance from star or compass. On board the City of Canton he had failed to snatch an hour's rest, the cabins were packed, the decks noisy and—'

He met David's scowl with a sleepy grin. He had been dreaming of the whimpering, close-huddled shapes at the bottom of the *Araluen*'s lifeboat, the unforgettable, praying voices of the native women as the boat heaved and fell down the mountainous slopes of brine. Gordon was speaking.

'I want to thank you, Hamilton, for lifting my little girl out of that unholy scramble, the other night. It was touch and go for you all. Margaret wishes me to say as much.'

A bald and empty offering that hardly reached Hamilton's tired brain. He smiled sleepily but was not unmindful of the great man's presence in his scantily furnished 'bungalow.

'Things might have been worse, sir,' he managed to say. 'I think those reefs off the Mindanao channel call for notice on our Admiralty charts. Poor old Flanagan wasn't to blame!'

'I've a suspicion he was drunk at usual. All my silk and cinnabar at the bottom of the sea! half a million's worth, reckoning the *Araluen* herself!'

A silence.

For the first time in his young life Derek Hamilton felt his nerves leap and twitch. He knew what was behind this old trader's bitter grin of rage. Gordon had smelt ruin in the loss of his big ocean freighter, bankruptcy, annihilation.

'I'm sorry sir,' Hamilton, said and waited.

All the pent-up anger in David's breast named out now.

'Sorry, ye damned forger! When I dug you out of that old banana tramp that brought ye to Songolo, I thought ye had a grain of gratitude somewhere in your make up!'

Snatching the crumpled cablegram from his pocket he slapped it on the table for Hamilton to read.

Your cheque for eighty thousand pounds was tendered by Hamilton. We paid under extreme pressure. We now suspect cheque has been altered. — Manager Gilderman's Bank.

A bland but weary smile lit up Hamilton's tired face as he read the message. Gordon's fist hit the table like a sledge hammer. If Hamilton imagined he could carry on his criminal exploit on the stretch of his recent work aboard the *Araluen* he was in for the shock of his life.

'I gave ye my cheque for night thousand ! I trusted ye!' The muscles of the old trader's jaw worked convulsively. 'Ye took the cheque and wrote a letter after the word eight, ye added a nought to the figures. The bank paid out, curse them! And now where in Gehenna is the seventy-two thousand ye stole? The money that would now stand between me and perdition!'

Hamilton stood, white-lipped, silent as one not sure of his own explanation. Moreover, lack of sleep had for the moment unsettled him. He wished that old Gordon had waited a day or two longer.

'Ye make no answer!' Gordon volleyed, stung to the point of insanity by Derek's silence. 'To-morrow, at noon, you'll show where the money is or by the powers I'll hand ye to the black police—'

Perhaps it was the thought of Margaret, sitting alone among the phantom-footed servants, kept Gordon sane. He did not look back once as he flung from the bungalow into the soft night air of the magnolia scented night.

The fragrance of wild lavender and broom blew about the tradehouse. From across the lantern-lit bay came the strumming of a mandolin. The sound brought him to his sense, and to the fact that ruin, bleak and pitiless, now stared him in the face. With the money Derek had taken from the Dutch bank in Batavia he could have held off his creditors, the hordes of yellow and black traders who would howl for their dues the moment it became known that his agent in Macassar had neglected the Araluen's re-insurance.

AT BREAKFAST the following morning Margaret heard with consternation that Hamilton had disappeared. Gordon had gone up- river in the tradehouse launch in the hope of arranging a temporary loan with one of the foreign banks in Taluan. An hour before noon came news that Gilderman's bank had suspended payments. Consternation swept through Songolo. Thousands of small traders and compradores would be ruined. Gilderman's agencies and branches extended through the Archipelago.

Margaret met her father the moment he stepped from the launch. One look it his drawn face was enough. He had failed to negotiate a loan, owing to the collapse of Gilderman's. Margaret followed him to his office overlooking the bay where fleets of rice-laden junks and sampans crowded past their steel pontoons. Trade was flowing from them now. In a night the word had gone forth that the great white tuan had lost his best ship and his money. He was now a beggar in his big tradehouse by the beach. He would need a rich old husband for his daughter now, The young men had no money, Allah knew. The heart of the tuan was broken. He had leaned on a reed and the mud was about his ears. All the blood had drained from Gordon's cheeks. Margaret's hand went to his shoulder.

'What is the real trouble, daddy?'

'That snipe Hamilton!' he burst out, unable to control his wrath. 'It doesn't matter now. Gilderman has failed; my money would have gone just the same. It's the fellow's ingratitude. I gave him a roof and a chance to make good. He has robbed me of seventy odd thousand pounds!'

Margaret's face grew deadly white.

'Derek told me all about that cheque, daddy. I thought the idea was splendid!'

'Splendid?' He bent shoulders straightened with the jerk of a lashed steer. 'To take seventy-two thousand, eighty in all, from Gilderman's and smash him? Splendid ye call it.'

Margaret's eyes sparkled suddenly. It was evident that Hamilton had flung off leaving the details of his business trip unexplained. Her father had been over hasty with him. Derek needed handling properly.

'Listen, daddy, please. Derek told me everything while he sat together in the lifeboat. Arriving in Batavia he heard from one of our own compradores that Gilderman's bank was tottering and could only just meet its day to day liabilities. Derek knew of the large sum you had on deposit there and that there was no time to consult or warn you, so, he took a chance, altered the cheque, and, oh, daddy, they paid him!'

'Where's the money?' Gordon choked.

'Paid to your credit in the new English bank on the Malay Avenue, less the eight thousand he paid for that splendid rubber estate. Last night daddy, you shouted and threatened a poor, nerve-broken boy who hasn't known sleep for a week. He— he was simply waiting for Gilderman to crash before plucking up courage to tell you what he'd done. He only wanted to give you a glad surprise.'

A WEEK before the monsoon when the sun stretched like a fiery blade across the tamarisks, Lalum, Margaret's Singalee man called excitedly from the garden path.

'Look, O Light of Day, the young tuan has returned.'

Derek Hamilton presented a somewhat dishevelled appearance on the flower-decked lawn on the house front. His clothes were black with grease of the engine room, his shoes torn on one who had carried loads over jagged reefs and shoals. David hailed him from the office door.

'Out of bedlam, by the look of ye!'

He stepped down from the verandah to survey the bedevilled figure of the young clerk. 'You've come back for your job, I hope?' he added, as one anxious to make amends for his past harshness.

Hamilton straightened his tall, labour-hardened figure, shot a glance in the direction of Margaret's open window, and then found his voice.

'Wasn't aware I'd left my job, sir!' There was an oddly humorous grin on his boyish face. 'It occurred to me the night you cut loose in my bungalow, that our biggest asset was likely to be overlooked if we started quarrelling.'

'Asset!' Gordon pondered, as one who had raked together every available shilling to meet his obligations. He knew of no further assets on which to put his hand.

'I mean the *Araluen*'s salvage, sir. I chartered Van Estman's fleet of sampans and junks for seven hundred pounds, and got to work on the wreck. We've salvaged nearly all the cargo, silk, sandalwood, bullion and cinnabar— about two hundred thousand pounds' worth up-to-date. There are twenty junk-loads in the harbour, and more coming.'

MARGARET did not meet Derek until two hours later. He came into dinner with her father, wearing a silk shirt and borrowed dinner jacket

'Ye may talk to Margaret,' Gordon announced with assumed gruffness. 'Tell her I'm willing to give ye a share in my business if ye'll promise not to develop the habit of skying my cheques!' he added with a short laugh.

'It was a happy forgery for us, daddy!' There was a light in Margaret's eyes. 'You ought to say something nice to Derek.'

'Well, girlie, here's to a handsome penman and a good sailor to boot! May he find—'

'Say no more!' Margaret laughed, touching Hamilton's wineglass with her own. 'The toast is drank!'

Hamilton did not respond. To him the warm touch of Margaret's fingers was more delightful than words or wine

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11: The Great Ruby Robbery

Dick Donovan

(J. E. Muddock, 1843-1934)

In: *A Detective's Triumphs*, 1891

MOST of my readers will, no doubt, be aware that Hatton Garden, London, is a short thoroughfare that runs north from Holborn, and is distinguished by being almost entirely occupied by two classes of people only— lawyers and dealers in precious stones. The physical law that all matter tends to gravitate towards its kind would seem to be illustrated in a marked manner so far as Hatton Garden is concerned, for the dealers in stones, as well as the lawyers, are for the most part of the Hebrew persuasion. The money value of the business transacted in this short street in the course of a week would appear to be fabulous if put on paper. But the stock in the hands of some of these Jewish gem merchants is often valued at tens of thousands of pounds, and the way in which packets of gems worth many thousands of pounds are carried about during the day would astonish an outsider. Of course such a region of wealth has repeatedly aroused the cupidity of adventurers, and there are stories told of gem robberies in Hatton Garden that would read like wild romances. It is only two or three years ago that the post office in the street was attacked one evening by some members of a gang of ruffians. It was just as the evening mail was being made up, and the rascals knew there would be numerous packets of precious stones. The clerks in charge of the office were overcome, and the mail-bag rifled, with the result that the thieves obtained a very valuable booty, with which they got clear off.

The case I am about to narrate, however, dates back many years before this post office robbery. In my time one of the best-known firms in the 'Garden' was that of Benjamin Moses and Sons, whose business ramifications extended to all civilised parts of the world. They were Russian Jews of high respectability, and had been established in London for more than a quarter of a century. The firm consisted of the father and three sons, and a nephew of Mr. Moses, senior. This nephew, whose name was Samuel Cohen, had only a nominal interest in the concern, and his position was that of a clerk or bookkeeper. The business was entirely managed by these five people, and they employed no one else, notwithstanding that their transactions were most extensive, and it was said that Moses and his sons were as wealthy as Creesus. Their premises, which consisted of two rooms on the ground-floor of one of the large, old-fashioned houses which abound in the street, were entered from a. passage common to the whole building. This passage was reached from the street by four or five steps. Then at the end of the passage was a flight of stairs communicating with the upper stories of the building. In the basement was a suite of rooms,

occupied by the caretaker of the premises— a woman named Martin, who lived there with her husband, a blind man, and their daughter, Isabella.

The rooms of Moses and Sons were back and front. The front room was fitted up as an office; the back was where the stock and business books were kept. Each of these rooms communicated with the outer passage by means of a door, but the door of the back room was always kept securely locked and barred. And the back window, which looked into a small yard, peculiar to some of the old houses in the city of London, was also guarded with iron bars. With this description of the place the reader will understand more clearly what follows.

It chanced, one November, two of the sons were on the Continent travelling on business for the firm, and the third son was ill at home, suffering from a severe cold. It was the middle of the month, and was one of those typical mornings which Londoners often experience in November. The air was thick, like pea-soup; and it was so dark that gas had to be lighted in all the business places. On this very morning Mr. Moses had received from abroad a parcel of magnificent Burmese rubies, valued at about £25,000, and he and his nephew were busy in the back room sorting and counting these gems so as to check the invoice. But about eleven o'clock it became necessary for the nephew to take some diamonds and other stones to a customer in Cornhill, consequently old Mr. Moses was left alone, and went on with his work, putting the rubies into cases preparatory to locking them up in one of the ponderous safes which were set into the wall of the room. While so engaged he heard the bell of the office-door strike, which signified that somebody had entered. The door could not be opened without this alarm-bell sounding. Mr. Moses at once went into the office, closing the communicating-door of the two rooms behind him. He was confronted by a young but exceedingly powerful-looking man, who wore a heavy fur-trimmed coat and a fur cap. He had a thick moustache and a long black beard. He introduced himself by saying he was a buyer for a large and very well-known West-End firm of jewellers, and he had been sent to purchase a few exceptionally good brilliants to complete a tiara his firm was making for a titled lady in London.

After some little conversation, Mr. Moses turned round to go into the back room to get the stones, when, with one bound, the intruder sprang over the little counter that stood between him and the doorway, threw his arm round Mr. Moses's throat, half strangling him; then clapped a plaster made of pitch, or something equally adhesive, on to the Jew's mouth, and, as the victim struggled desperately to free himself from the vice-like grip in which he was held, the robber struck him over the head with what was supposed to be a knuckle-duster, and stunned him. After that he securely tied his feet together, and his hands behind his back, with some strong cord which he had brought with him.

The unfortunate merchant being thus rendered helpless and insensible, the thief entered the back room and carried off the rubies, together with a few diamonds and sapphires that were in a glass dish on the table, and, having secured his booty, he turned out the gas and made tracks.

When Mr. Moses recovered consciousness he was almost suffocated with the plaster over his mouth, and it was utterly impossible for him to cry out, and equally impossible for him to free his hands or feet, for they had been most securely tied. Knowing that, besides the outrage on himself, his place must have been robbed, he suffered agony of mind that was dreadful, and in his desperation he managed to struggle to his feet, but at that moment he evidently fainted and fell down again, for a blank ensued, and he could remember nothing.

When he took his departure the thief locked the door on the outside with a key that he had obviously brought with him, for Mr. Moses always kept his own keys in his pocket. The object in locking the door was, no doubt, to prevent any one who might call from entering, and thus discovering the outrage before the thief had a sufficiently long time to make good his escape. As was subsequently proved, two or three people did call, but, finding the door locked and the place in darkness, they concluded that Mr. Moses was temporarily absent.

It was about half-past twelve when Samuel Cohen returned from his errand to Cornhill, and naturally he was surprised to find the door locked. But he, also, thought that his uncle had stepped out for a few minutes. Having waited a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, however, he called upon two or three neighbours where it was probable his uncle might have gone, but failing to get any information he grew uneasy, and seeing a policeman coming down the street, he spoke to him, and expressed his fears that something was wrong. Under these circumstances the policeman suggested that it might be advisable to burst the door open, and, acting on this advice, Cohen and the policeman proceeded to effect forcible entry into the premises, the result being they found Mr. Moses on the floor, bound hand and foot, and his mouth gagged with the horrible plaster.

That outrage had been committed was only too obvious; and outrage suggested robbery, which Cohen speedily determined had been of a very serious character. The first thing to do, however, was to free Mr. Moses from the plaster and the bonds; but, even when this was done, it was some time before he could give any coherent account of the affair, for he was dazed and stupefied. But when a local chemist had dressed the wound in his head and administered some stimulant he was able to detail what had happened; and, as may be imagined, he was in terrible distress of mind at the heavy loss, for he knew only too well that the chances of recovering precious stones were

somewhat remote. Such portable property as that, while going into small bulk, was very valuable, and could be easily disposed of.

As soon as Mr. Moses and his nephew recovered from the shock which the affair naturally caused them I was telegraphed for, or, to be correct, word was sent with all speed to the 'Yard,' and I was instructed to look into the matter.

When I arrived in Hatton Garden it was three o'clock, and as the robbery had been committed about half-past eleven, the enterprising gentleman who had gone off with the rubies had got a fairly good start, so that if he knew how to make the best of his opportunities he might succeed in eluding capture, and that he had his wits about him was manifested from the way he had done his work. That he was bold almost to recklessness seemed equally evident, and it was no less evident that he had deliberately planned the robbery, and carried it out in a most systematic manner, although from the fact that some of the rubies were found scattered about the floor it was safe to argue that he had become somewhat flurried and excited in the end, for when the dropped stones were picked up and valued they were proved to be worth about a thousand pounds; and though the fellow had made a most valuable haul as it was he might have had this additional thousand pounds' worth had he remained cool and collected. However, he probably though that a thousand or two more or less in such a valuable prize made little difference.

Mr. Moses having recovered from the shock, although the wound in his head pained him, related the story to me with a circumstantiality that left nothing to be desired, and he described his assailant as a man of about eight-and-twenty or thirty, very dark complexioned, with dark, piercing eyes, a full moustache and beard, but Mr. Moses was of opinion that the beard was a false one. Although the thief spoke excellent English, the merchant was sure he was a foreigner, as he detected an accent that he thought betrayed an Italian origin.

Now there were certain circumstances in connection with this case that were very significant and suggestive. That the man had deliberately planned the robbery and outrage was evident to the meanest intelligence, otherwise why did he go prepared with plaster and cord? This argued that he knew he would have to encounter the old man, and render him helpless before he could possess himself of the gems. But it did more than that; it seemed to me to point conclusively to foreknowledge on the part of the thief. By that I mean that he had managed by some means or other to ascertain, first, that there had been a large arrival of rubies; and, secondly, that the old Jew was alone. Had he not been aware of this latter fact he would hardly have ventured on the robbery, for he could not have hoped to succeed had any one else been with Mr. Moses at the time. To overcome one man— and that man an old one— was a comparatively easy matter to a young and vigorous fellow, but to subdue two in the same way was next to impossible.

It was but natural that I should ponder upon this, and ask myself— How did the thief gain this knowledge? The reader will see at once how that question was fraught with importance, for, could I get an answer to it, I might be able to get on the track of the robber. I felt morally certain that he had not acted alone, but had had a confederate who had given him the information. Who was the confederate? Did not all the circumstances point to Samuel Cohen as the man? But at that early stage of the inquiry I was hardly justified in giving expression to my suspicions.

I have already mentioned that under the rooms occupied by Mr. Moses the caretaker, Mrs. Martin, and her husband and daughter, lived— that is, they occupied the basement. Their place could be reached from the street by a flight of stone steps going down into an area, and they were also in communication with the house by the back staircase, which came up into the passage I have described. When I had got all the information I could from Mr. Moses, who was almost distracted at the idea of losing so much money as was represented by the stolen rubies, I proceeded to interview Mrs. Martin, and to inquire of her if she had observed any one loitering about. She was an intelligent woman, though a somewhat garrulous one, and I had a difficulty in keeping her to the point. But at last I got from her an emphatic declaration that she had not noticed any one. Her husband was stone blind, and confined to his bed with rheumatism. Their daughter Bella was a good-looking young woman of about four-and-twenty, and was employed, so they informed me, as a check-taker and programme-seller in a West-End theatre.

'How long have you lived here?' I asked Mrs. Martin. Close on five year, sir.'

'And you know Mr. Moses and his sons well?'

'Oh, yes, sir. They ain't very liberal gents, 'cause they don't give me as much at Christmas-time as the other tenants do; but I ain't got nothink to say again them.'

I did not check her in giving me this gratuitous opinion, for I had an object in questioning her, and thought it better to let her answer in her own way, and when she had finished I said in a casual sort of manner, as though I had no interest in asking—

'And I suppose you find Mr. Cohen very little more to your mind?'

'Ah, well now, sir, I wouldn't quite say that, because, as 'ow, I've always found Mr. Cohen a very nice gentleman, and often of a Saturday, when I've been a scrubbing the passage and the stairs, which I 'ave to do every week, he's given me a shilling or a sixpence, saying, as 'ow, it would do to get me and my husband a drop of beer for our Sunday's dinner.'

'Had he any particular reason, do you know, for this display of liberality?' I asked.

'Not that I know of, 'cept his kind-heartedness, like.'

'Well, sir,' put in the blind husband, 'I think the missus ought to tell you that she caught Cohen some time ago a carrying on a flirtation with our Bella, and she threatened as how she would tell Mr. Moses, and, maybe, the shillings and sixpences have been given to keep her tongue quiet.'

The man spoke with a certain anger and bitterness, as though he did not view Mr. Cohen's liberality in the same light as his wife did. But now Bella herself had a say, and she exclaimed pertly, and with an indignant toss of her head—

'What do you talk such nonsense for, father? It isn't true that Mr. Cohen flirted with me.'

'Well, lass, I'm only repeating what your mother told me.'

'Then mother ought to have had more sense than to tell you any such rubbish.'

'Now, Bella,' remarked the mother, 'you know quite well that I caught you and Mr. Cohen together several times.'

'And what if you did! Can't a girl be seen speaking to a gentleman without it's being thought that he is flirting with her?'

Mrs. Martin was evidently averse to discussing the subject further, for probably she did not wish me to imagine that Cohen's liberality was due to the cause her husband had suggested. Of course I drew my own conclusions from what I had heard, and those conclusions left me in no doubt that there had been a good deal of flirtation between this pretty girl and Mr. Samuel Cohen, and though I could not determine then whether this might have any bearing on the robbery I felt it was not to be altogether ignored in sifting the pros and cons of this remarkable case.

Miss Isabella Martin was evidently a young woman who— to use a somewhat vulgar, but, nevertheless, an expressive phrase— knew how many beans made five. There was a self-consciousness, and even a certain. priggishness, about her that asserted themselves in an unpleasant way. She was pretty, I will even say very pretty, and that fact would, in the eyes of some men, have been sufficient to outweigh any objectionable qualities. But she impressed me with something like a conviction that she was cunning, artful, and deceitful, and I deemed it not at all improbable that her flirtations with Mr. Cohen were not quite of the venial character she described them to be. Therefore, it followed as a sequence in the line of argument that she might, under proper conditions, be betrayed into making admissions with reference to Mr. Cohen that would be valuable in assisting me to elucidate the mystery of the robbery. But these conditions were not then; and, as I had no object in prolonging my interview with the Martins, I thanked them, and withdrew with a feeling that I had not wasted my time.

It will, of course, be noted that my suspicions were fastening on Mr. Cohen as an accessory to the crime, and my reasons for this were based upon the significant circumstances of the crime, which were that the robbery took place on the very morning that a large consignment of precious stones had arrived, and at the very hour when Cohen was absent. Everything else was, of course, in favour of the thief— the absence of the sons, the dark morning— but if he had not received 'a tip,' how did he know that one son was away ill, that the rubies had arrived, and that Cohen was out; therefore, that Mr. Moses was alone and engaged in examining his purchase, and that, therefore, again, the stones would be loose in the stockroom? These were pertinent questions for me to put to myself; and if such a tip as that I suggested was given, who was likely to have given it if not Cohen?

Full of my suspicion, but without wishing at that stage to declare it, I went down to Mr. Moses's private house that evening— he lived in good style at Richmond— and, in the course of a conversation I had with him, I said incidentally—

'I presume your nephew had gone out this morning by your request?'

'Oh, certainly,' was the answer. 'I sent him.'

'He himself didn't suggest going?'

'No, of course not.'

I confess that his answers disappointed me. Had they been the other way, they would have seemed to support my suspicion. As it was, they had a tendency to make me think I was in the wrong; and as Mr. Moses had been very emphatic in his 'No, of course not,' I did not consider it prudent then to say another word that might cause him to think I suspected the nephew, but I resolved to take other steps to learn more about Mr. Cohen.

In the few hours that had elapsed we had not let the grass grow under our feet, and news of the outrage and robbery had been sent to every principal station in the kingdom, with a brief description of the thief.

For myself, I did not look for a very speedy capture, because the fellow had not only got a good start, and could, by shaving his face— assuming his beard was not false— alter his appearance; but I felt sure, for several reasons, that he had confederates, who would endeavour to cover his retreat, and throw his pursuers off the scent, and that I was not wrong in this surmise seemed to be confirmed by a letter received at the Detective Department, which read as follows:—

'The fellow what did the job so neatly at Old Moses's place in Hatton Garden sailed last night from Liverpool in one of the liners for the land of the soaring eagle, and he'll never come back no more, and the 'cops' will never take him. He knowed his book, and has won cleverly.— One What Admires Pluck.'

Of course there are plenty of stupid people who are always ready to write a letter like this under the impression that they are having a joke, but I did not think that this one was to be classed amongst the missives which usually pour in from human donkeys whenever there is an unusual case on hand; and the reason I did not so think was that the writer was not so ignorant as he wished to seem. The writing itself was infinitely better than the generality of such letters that are sent to the police, and the slipshod grammar, I felt pretty sure, had been purposely assumed. Any way, if it served no other purpose, it proved that the race of fools had not died out, for I did not believe the thief had gone to America, but the writer's object was to throw us off the scent. The police, however, are not quite such idiots as this class of people consider them to be.

When a fortnight had passed we were still without any clue to the thief, and Mr. Moses was so affected by his heavy loss that he became alarmingly ill. His sons, on hearing of the robbery, had hurried back to London, and I had several interviews with them, but no information they could give me was of the slightest use in helping me to trace the robber. I drew from them, by leading questions I put to them, that they not only had great confidence in their cousin, but were greatly attached to him. And from other sources where I had pushed my inquires, I could learn nothing against Cohen. He was a single man, and, though fond of gaiety and enjoyment, he was considered to be very respectable and very upright.

Notwithstanding all this I could not divest myself of the idea that he was an accessory. I have had a habit all my life of sticking with dogged persistency to any conclusion I have come to that seemed to me warranted by logic, unless, of course, I saw clearly I was in the wrong; but in the present case, although I could not discern much to justify me in saying I was right, I could not, on the other hand, see anything very definite that decided I was wrong. Perhaps this may be regarded as pigheadedness, or crass obtuseness, but every man acts according to his lights, and I had learned from long experience of the ways of evildoers not to be deceived by mere surface appearances. I was not disposed to accept veneering for the solid wood; and, though Mr. Samuel Cohen might turn out to be all that he was represented to be, I was determined to go down a little deeper into his life and mode of living in the exercise of what I considered my duty to the Law, of which I was a humble representative. But little did I dream then that I was to be instrumental in revealing a state of matters that had in them all the elements of a wild romance.

In order to carry out my idea with regard to Mr. Cohen, I made it a special business to have several interviews with him, ostensibly to ask questions having a bearing on the robbery, but in reality that I might study him, and, possibly, by some chance remark on his part, find a justification for suspecting him. But in so

far as this was concerned I was not successful, for he proved himself to be remarkably cautious. However, one or two things I did learn that were of advantage to me, and they were that Cohen was a fast young man, fond of fast company, and that he was exceedingly extravagant, while his income was by no means equivalent to his expenditure. Nevertheless, I had to admit that these points were not in themselves so remarkable as to warrant my regarding him as a dishonest man, for thousands of young men are fast, extravagant, and live beyond their incomes, and yet do not commit any act against the law. So far, then, I could make out nothing against Mr. Cohen, and there were times when I was disposed to admit that I had been following a wrong scent. But still, though other men were engaged on the case, no clue was forthcoming, and I knew that some of the officials were of opinion that the letter which had been received by the Department, signed One What Admires Pluck,' was genuine, and that the thief had really got off to America.

This belief did not recommend itself to me at all, for, as I have already explained, the letter, when viewed in the light of experience, did not bear the stamp of genuineness. On the other hand, in spite of the vigilance that had been exercised, in spite of a considerable reward, and in spite of much detective science that had been brought to bear on the case, we had been unable to get the slightest clue to the thief or the stolen property. Mr. Moses and his sons were naturally greatly distressed, and finding that, as every day passed, the chances of recovering the stolen gems rapidly diminished, they decided to offer a reward of £500 for any information that would lead to the arrest of the criminal and the recovery of the property. But even this offer, tempting as it was, had no effect, nor did it tend in any way to induce me to slacken my vigilance. The idea that had fixed itself in my mind with regard to Cohen would not yield, for the more I analysed all the details of the case the more clearly did it seem to me that the thief must have had a confederate who was well acquainted with what was going on in Moses' office on the morning of the robbery, for which everything had been prepared.

Nearly two months passed, and we were as far off a solution of the mystery as ever, when one afternoon towards the end of January I was going along Oxford Street when I saw a gentleman and lady emerge from a well-known restaurant. In the gentleman I at once recognised Samuel Cohen, and, scrutinising his companion narrowly, I was surprised to find she was none other than Isabella Martin, but she was so stylishly dressed that at first I was disposed to think I was wrong. They hailed a cab, and drove away without having seen me, and this little incident set me pondering.

'How was it,' I asked, 'that the young woman, occupying as she did a very humble position in life, could afford to dress in a way that implied a large expenditure of money?'

However, it was not so much that detail that interested me as the fact of her being in company with Cohen. His acquaintance with her, as it appeared from this, was something more than a mere flirtation, and it occurred to me that Miss Martin might, if diplomatically approached, prove a valuable ally, without knowing that she was aiding me.

A little later on the same evening I called upon the young lady's mother to make some inquiries about the daughter, but the mother told me in bitter sorrow that 'Bella' had been away for several weeks. She had had a few words with her father, and had taken herself off without saying where she was going to, and her parents had neither seen her nor heard from her since. I did not deem it prudent to tell the poor distressed mother that I had seen her daughter that very afternoon, under circumstances that seemed to suggest she was flourishing.

My next step was to proceed to the theatre where

Bella was employed, but there I learnt that she had thrown up her situation four weeks ago. These things were in themselves undoubtedly significant, and seemed to suggest to me that I was striking a trail that might lead to important results. Did it not, for instance, seem probable that Miss Isabella Martin had had a share of the plunder, judging from her style of dress, and the fact of her having thrown up her situation at the theatre? Why had she done that? The feasible answer seemed to be because Cohen had liberally supplied her with money, which had not only enabled her to ape the ways of her superiors, as far as dress was concerned, but also to be independent of the salary which her employment brought her in. Anyway, here was a mystery, and I was determined to solve it, and learn as much as possible about the interesting Bella. To that end I made inquiries at the theatre as to her address, but at the outset was foiled, for nobody seemed able to give it, until a woman, who was employed as a cleaner, volunteered the information that the young woman was living with her husband.

'With her husband!' I exclaimed.

'Yes.'

'But you don't mean to say she's married?'

'Yes, sir, I believe as how she's married.'

'To whom is she married?'

'Well, I believe she married a gent what goes abroad.'

This was news indeed, and seemed to me to strike a key-note.

'How do you know she's married?' I asked.

'Because me and her was pretty friendly, and her sweetheart used to come about the theatre a good deal, and she told me that he was agoing to marry her.'

'Going to! How long is that ago?'

'Well, it's some weeks now.'

'Then she's been married recently?'

'Oh, yes; that's why she left the theaytur.'

'Umph, umph,' I muttered, as I began to see daylight as I thought. 'Do you know the name of her husband?'

'I've heard it, but I can't remember it. It's a furren name.'

'What sort of a man is her husband— I mean in appearance?'

'He's a very dark man.'

'Tall?'

'Well, middling tall.'

'Should you think he was a strong man?'

'Yes, sir, I'm sure he is.'

'Has he a beard?'

'I've never seen him with no beard. He's a young man— a good-looking fellow, with just a moustache.'

As I left my informant, having learnt as much, apparently, as she had to impart, for she could not give me Bella's address, I was somewhat in a quandary— puzzled, in fact; for what I had heard pointed to my being wrong in my suspicions of Cohen; and yet I had seen them together under circumstances that suggested he was sweethearting her. The description I had received of Isabella's husband did not correspond with Cohen's appearance, so that if the information was correct there were two Richmonds in the field, and that rather complicated matters; but I made up my mind to see what I could get out of Cohen in the course of another interview, and, acting on what I had heard, accordingly, that evening I went down to where he lived, but found him out, and so I wrote asking him to give me an appointment, which he did.

'You are probably exceedingly desirous, Mr. Cohen,' I began, 'that the mystery of this robbery should be cleared up, for, as I understand matters, you are a sufferer— that is, you are a loser— in conjunction with your relatives?'

'Of course I am,' he answered, 'and I would do a great deal to bring the thief to justice.'

'You do not speak mere words in saying that?' I asked, with a significant emphasis on my words. What do you mean?' he demanded angrily.

'To be perfectly plain, I mean are you sincere when you say you would be glad to bring the thief to justice?'

This question seemed to anger him to such an extent that his dark eyes flashed fire, and his face became scarlet.

'Do you suppose,' he exclaimed with strong energy, 'that I am the thief?'

'My suppositions and my thoughts are my own,' I remarked, by no means disturbed by his outburst.

He was almost beside himself, and I thought he was meditating falling upon me and crushing me.

'By heavens!' he cried, as he brought his fist down on the table, 'if you insinuate that I am the thief, I will make you prove your words at whatever cost.'

I smiled at his threat, and answered—

'I have not said that I suspected you; but there is a good deal of mystery in this case, and I am trying to get to the bottom of it. Now, there is one thing you won't attempt to deny, and that is you are very familiar with Isabella Martin?'

'And what if I am?'

'A good deal, as far as I am concerned. Isabella has left the protection of her father and mother, and is living under yours.'

'That is a lie,' he hissed.

'You will not deny that you dined with her at a restaurant in Oxford Street last Thursday?'

'No; I do not deny it.'

'You will also admit that she wears clothes that are quite out of keeping with her station in life.'

'Her station in life is that which she likes to make for herself,' he answered somewhat ambiguously.

'Granted. But you will not deny that within the last few weeks— that is, since the robbery— her circumstances have changed?'

'No, I don't deny it, and I will go so far as to admit that I have bought her clothes, and that she left her situation at the theatre at my suggestion.'

'Not because she was going to get married, then?'

'Married!' he exclaimed with a sarcastic laugh.

'Yes. Are you not aware that she is married?'

'No, indeed I am not. If I were, I would throw her up to-morrow.'

'You are in love with her, then?'

'I am much attached to her.'

'Now then, Mr. Cohen, since you make that admission, there is one pointed question I must put to you, and on your answer to it much depends.'

'What is it?' he asked sharply.

'Do you believe sincerely that you have Miss Isabella Martin's undivided affection?'

He paused before making reply, and looked at me keenly, then said—

'Yes, undoubtedly I do.'

'And if you were proved to be in the wrong, what then?'

'What then! By Abraham, I would kill her.'

The force and fire displayed in this answer pointed to his sincerity; and his tone, manner, and expression of face indicated that he was sincere.

'Then you don't think she is playing a double game with you?'

'No,' he answered emphatically, 'indeed I do not.'

'Will you give me her address?'

'Certainly,' and, without hesitation, he told me where she was living.

So far, then, I had gained a point, and I lost no time in proceeding to the address; and I found that the young lady occupied a bedroom and sitting-room, as a single young woman, in a large and respectable house in Kensington. She herself was out, but from inquiries I made I learned that the only caller she had was a gentleman whose name was not known, but whose description tallied with Cohen's. This seemed to involve matters again, and I felt that there was some deception somewhere, and I resolved to shadow Bella. Very soon my persistency was rewarded. I followed her one day from her lodgings to Hampstead, and saw her meet a man whose appearance answered in every way that described by the woman at the theatre. Here, then, was a discovery, and there could no longer be any doubt that Bella was playing a double game. I saw them enter a house together, and, later on, I called there, and found out that Miss Bella and the dark gentleman were known as Mr. and Mrs. Shernsky.

My next step was to see Cohen again, and ask him if he knew of a Mr. Shernsky, and he gave me the most positive assurance that he had never heard the name in his life before, and when I told him that Isabella was keeping company with a man of that name, and passing as his wife, he became furious. After a time he calmed down, and then said that he had worshipped the very ground Miss Martin had walked on, but now was disposed to think she had grossly deceived him. He was for rushing off to her at once, but I stopped him by saying he might prevent my discovering the thief if he did anything rashly, and, though evidently overcome with grief, he consented to place himself in my hands.

I quickly decided on a plan to pursue, and that was to see Isabella Martin, which I did without further delay; and, having obtained an interview with her, I went straight to the point without any beating about the bush.

'You are acquainted with a Mr. Shernsky?' I began.

At this question she changed colour, and betrayed great confusion as she stammered out a 'No,' but then checked herself, and said—

'Well, I did know a person of that name.'

'How long ago?' I asked.

'Some months,' she answered with downcast eyes, and evidently feeling very uneasy.

'Your notions of time, Miss Martin, seem to be vague,' I remarked. 'It is but two days ago I saw you enter a house at Hampstead with him.'

For a moment she cast a furtive glance at me; then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears, and exclaimed—

'I don't know what you mean by playing the spy on me like that. What has it got to do with you whether I know Shernsky or not?'

'Well, it may have a good deal to do with me, and it is very certain it has much to do with Mr. Samuel Cohen, who believes in you implicitly.'

She threw herself on to a sofa, and continued to sob bitterly. I let her go on for a while, and then I said—

'It is no use your trying to deceive me, for, depend upon it, whatever the truth is, I shall get it out. Tell me now, who is Shernsky?'

I had to ask her several times before she answered me, and each time I gave more emphasis to my question. At last she sobbed out—

'He is my husband.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes. It's true; it's true; it's true,' she repeated hysterically.

'When were you married?'

'Two months ago.'

'Your husband is a foreigner?'

'Yes. He is a Pole.'

'Mr. Cohen does not know him?'

'No, indeed he does not. I have deceived him.'

Then suddenly, with a heart-bursting sob, she threw herself on her knees at my feet, and exclaimed:

'Oh, I will tell you all; I will tell you all if you will not punish me.'

Then, without giving me time to reply, she told me in substance the following story:—

She had made the acquaintance of Shernsky about six months before at the theatre; and he almost immediately professed great love for her, and in a very short time he acquired over her a most remarkable influence. He had already got to know, according to her statement, that she lived under Moses's premises, and he proposed to her that they should rob the place, but subsequently he told her that she was to get from Cohen, who was infatuated with her, all the particulars she could about Moses's business, and he promised to marry her if he could make a good haul. She had acquired so much power over Cohen that she used to ask him questions about the business, and he answered her without suspecting her object. It was thus that she came to know that his firm were to receive a large packet of rubies, and this information she gave to her Polish lover, who thereupon made arrangements to rob the place. It was at first arranged that on the morning of the robbery Isabella was to send a message to Cohen, saying she wished to see him, so as to get him away from the place. But before she could do this, he by a strange chance went out, and she immediately communicated with Shernsky, who was loitering in the street.

Shortly after the robbery Shernsky married her. At first he wanted to back out of that part of the arrangement, but she threatened to denounce him, and under that threat he made her his wife; and he had ever since done nothing but urge her to obtain money from Cohen, who had already supplied her very liberally.

Such was the remarkable confession she made to me, and, placing her in safe hands, I lost no time in going in search of Shernsky, and that night arrested him. Her story was proved to be true in every particular, and I got evidence that left no doubt Shernsky was meditating flight and the abandonment of his wife; but he lingered rather too long, and I was enabled to spoil his little game, much to his amazement. We proved also beyond doubt that he himself wrote the letter which was sent to the police, and also that he was one of a gang of most notorious thieves, whose operations extended all over Europe. It may be imagined what Cohen's feelings were when he discovered how the pretty Jezebel had deceived him; and, though a terrible lesson for him, it was a salutary one.

As regards the property, we ascertained that the gems were sent abroad soon after the robbery, and we could not recover them; but a sum of money amounting to nearly four thousand pounds was found in Shernsky's possession.

In due course he was tried, and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude. The unhappy Bella was not proved to be legally blameable, and so she escaped, but during her ten years of grass widowhood she, no doubt, had time to reflect that the stepping-stone to happiness is not that of crime.

12: Parpon The Dwarf

Gilbert Parker
1862-1932
The Pall Mall Magazine, March 1894
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PARPON perched in a room at the top of the mill. He could see every house in the village, and he knew people a long distance off. He was a droll dwarf, and, in his way, had good times in the world. He turned the misery of the world into a game, and grinned at it from his high little eyrie with the dormer window. He had lived with Farette the miller for some years, serving him with a kind of humble insolence.

It was not a joyful day for Farette when he married Julie. She led him a pretty travel. He had started as her master; he ended by being her slave and victim.

She was a wilful wife. She had made the Seigneur de la Riviere, of the House with the Tall Porch, to quarrel with his son Armand, so that Armand disappeared from Pontiac for years.

When that happened she had already stopped confessing to the good Cure; so it may be guessed there were things she did not care to tell, and for which she had no repentance. But Parpon knew, and Medallion the auctioneer guessed; and the Little Chemist's wife hoped that it was not so. When Julie looked at Parpon, as he perched on a chest of drawers, with his head cocked and his eyes blinking, she knew that he read the truth. But she did not know all that was in his head; so she said sharp things to him, as she did to everybody, for she had a very poor opinion of the world, and thought all as flippant as herself. She took nothing seriously; she was too vain. Except that she was sorry Armand was gone, she rather plumed herself on having separated the Seigneur and his son— it was something to have been the pivot in a tragedy. There came others to the village, as, for instance, a series of clerks to the Avocat; but she would not decline from Armand upon them. She merely made them miserable.

But she did not grow prettier as time went on. Even Annette, the sad wife of the drunken Benoit, kept her fine looks; but then, Annette's life was a thing for a book, and she had a beautiful child. You cannot keep this from the face of a woman. Nor can you keep the other: when the heart rusts the rust shows.

After a good many years, Armand de la Riviere came back in time to see his father die. Then Julie picked out her smartest ribbons, capered at the mirror, and dusted her face with oatmeal, because she thought that he would ask her to meet him at the Bois Noir, as he had done long ago. The days passed, and he did not come. When she saw Armand at the funeral— a tall man with a dark beard and a grave face, not like the Armand she had known, he seemed a great

distance from her, though she could almost have touched him once as he turned from the grave. She would have liked to throw herself into his arms, and cry before them all: "Mon Armand!" and go away with him to the House with the Tall Porch. She did not care about Farette, the mumbling old man who hungered for money, having ceased to hunger for anything else— even for Julie, who laughed and shut her door in his face, and cowed him.

After the funeral Julie had a strange feeling. She had not much brains, but she had some shrewdness, and she felt her romance askew. She stood before the mirror, rubbing her face with oatmeal and frowning hard. Presently a voice behind her said: "Madame Julie, shall I bring another bag of meal?"

She turned quickly, and saw Parpon on a table in the corner, his legs drawn up to his chin, his black eyes twinkling.

"Idiot!" she cried, and threw the meal at him. He had a very long, quick arm. He caught the basin as it came, but the meal covered him. He blew it from his beard, laughing softly, and twirled the basin on a finger-point.

"Like that, there will need two bags!" he said.

"Imbecile!" she cried, standing angry in the centre of the room.

"Ho, ho, what a big word! See what it is to have the tongue of fashion!"

She looked helplessly round the room. "I will kill you!"

"Let us die together," answered Parpon; "we are both sad."

She snatched the poker from the fire, and ran at him. He caught her wrists with his great hands, big enough for tall Medallion, and held her.

"I said 'together,"' he chuckled; "not one before the other. We might jump into the flume at the mill, or go over the dam at the Bois Noir; or, there is Farette's musket which he is cleaning— gracious, but it will kick when it fires, it is so old!"

She sank to the floor. "Why does he clean the musket?" she asked; fear, and something wicked too, in her eye. Her fingers ran forgetfully through the hair on her forehead, pushing it back, and the marks of small-pox showed. The contrast with her smooth cheeks gave her a weird look. Parpon got quickly on the table again and sat like a Turk, with a furtive eye on her. "Who can tell!" he said at last. "That musket has not been fired for years. It would not kill a bird; the shot would scatter: but it might kill a man— a man is bigger."

"Kill a man!" She showed her white teeth with a savage little smile.

"Of course it is all guess. I asked Farette what he would shoot, and he said, 'Nothing good to eat.' I said I would eat what he killed. Then he got pretty mad, and said I couldn't eat my own head. Holy! that was funny for Farette. Then I told him there was no good going to the Bois Noir, for there would be nothing to shoot. Well, did I speak true, Madame Julie?"

She was conscious of something new in Parpon. She could not define it. Presently she got to her feet and said: "I don't believe you—you're a monkey."

"A monkey can climb a tree quick; a man has to take the shot as it comes." He stretched up his powerful arms, with a swift motion as of climbing, laughed, and added: "Madame Julie, Farette has poor eyes; he could not see a hole in a ladder. But he has a kink in his head about the Bois Noir. People have talked—"

"Pshaw!" Julie said, crumpling her apron and throwing it out; "he is a child and a coward. He should not play with a gun; it might go off and hit him."

Parpon hopped down and trotted to the door. Then he turned and said, with a sly gurgle: "Farette keeps at that gun. What is the good! There will be nobody at the Bois Noir any more. I will go and tell him."

She rushed at him with fury, but seeing Annette Benoit in the road, she stood still and beat her foot angrily on the doorstep. She was ripe for a quarrel, and she would say something hateful to Annette; for she never forgot that Farette had asked Annette to be his wife before herself was considered. She smoothed out her wrinkled apron and waited.

"Good day, Annette," she said loftily.

"Good day, Julie," was the quiet reply.

"Will you come in?"

"I am going to the mill for flax-seed. Benoit has rheumatism."

"Poor Benoit!" said Julie, with a meaning toss of her head.

"Poor Benoit," responded Annette gently. Her voice was always sweet. One would never have known that Benoit was a drunken idler.

"Come in. I will give you the meal from my own. Then it will cost you nothing," said Julie, with an air.

"Thank you, Julie, but I would rather pay."

"I do not sell my meal," answered Julie. "What's a few pounds of meal to the wife of Farette? I will get it for you. Come in, Annette."

She turned towards the door, then stopped all at once. There was the oatmeal which she had thrown at Parpon, the basin, and the poker. She wished she had not asked Annette in. But in some things she had a quick wit, and she hurried to say: "It was that yellow cat of Parpon's. It spilt the meal, and I went at it with the poker."

Perhaps Annette believed her. She did not think about it one way or the other; her mind was with the sick Benoit. She nodded and said nothing, hoping that the flax-seed would be got at once. But when she saw that Julie expected an answer, she said: "Cecilia, my little girl, has a black cat-so handsome. It came from the house of the poor Seigneur de la Riviere a year ago. We took it back, but it would not stay."

Annette spoke simply and frankly, but her words cut like a knife.

Julie responded, with a click of malice: "Look out that the black cat doesn't kill the dear Cecilia." Annette started, but she did not believe that cats sucked the life from children's lungs, and she replied calmly: "I am not afraid; the good

God keeps my child." She then got up and came to Julie, and said: "It is a pity, Julie, that you have not a child. A child makes all right."

Julie was wild to say a fierce thing, for it seemed that Annette was setting off Benoit against Farette; but the next moment she grew hot, her eyes smarted, and there was a hint of trouble at her throat. She had lived very fast in the last few hours, and it was telling on her. She could not rule herself—she could not play a part so well as she wished. She had not before felt the thing that gave a new pulse to her body and a joyful pain at her breasts. Her eyes got thickly blurred so that she could not see Annette, and, without a word, she hurried to get the meal. She was silent when she came back. She put the meal into Annette's hands. She felt that she would like to talk of Armand. She knew now there was no evil thought in Annette. She did not like her more for that, but she felt she must talk, and Annette was safe. So she took her arm. "Sit down, Annette," she said. "You come so seldom."

"But there is Benoit, and the child—"

"The child has the black cat from the House!" There was again a sly ring to Julie's voice, and she almost pressed Annette into a chair.

"Well, it must only be a minute."

"Were you at the funeral to-day?" Julie began.

"No; I was nursing Benoit. But the poor Seigneur! They say he died without confession. No one was there except M'sieu' Medallion, the Little Chemist, Old Sylvie, and M'sieu' Armand. But, of course, you have heard everything."

"Is that all you know?" queried Julie.

"Not much more. I go out little, and no one comes to me except the Little Chemist's wife— she is a good woman."

"What did she say?"

"Only something of the night the Seigneur died. He was sitting in his chair, not afraid, but very sad, we can guess. By-and-by he raised his head quickly. 'I hear a voice in the Tall Porch,' he said. They thought he was dreaming. But he said other things, and cried again that he heard his son's voice in the Porch. They went and found M'sieu' Armand. Then a great supper was got ready, and he sat very grand at the head of the table, but died quickly, when making a grand speech. It was strange he was so happy, for he did not confess-he hadn't absolution."

This was more than Julie had heard. She showed excitement.

"The Seigneur and M'sieu' Armand were good friends when he died?" she asked.

"Quite."

All at once Annette remembered the old talk about Armand and Julie. She was confused. She wished she could get up and run away; but haste would look strange.

"You were at the funeral?" she added, after a minute.

"Everybody was there."

"I suppose M'sieu' Armand looks very fine and strange after his long travel," said Annette shyly, rising to go.

"He was always the grandest gentleman in the province," answered Julie, in her old vain manner. "You should have seen the women look at him to-day! But they are nothing to him— he is not easy to please."

"Good day," said Annette, shocked and sad, moving from the door. Suddenly she turned, and laid a hand on Julie's arm. "Come and see my sweet Cecilia," she said. "She is gay; she will amuse you."

She was thinking again what a pity it was that Julie had no child.

"To see Cecilia and the black cat? Very well— some day."

You could not have told what she meant. But, as Annette turned away again, she glanced at the mill; and there, high up in the dormer window, sat Parpon, his yellow cat on his shoulder, grinning down at her. She wheeled and went into the house.

ii

PARPON sat in the dormer window for a long time, the cat purring against his head, and not seeming the least afraid of falling, though its master was well out on the window-ledge. He kept mumbling to himself:

"Ho, ho, Farette is below there with the gun, rubbing and rubbing at the rust! Holy mother, how it will kick! But he will only meddle. If she set her eye at him and come up bold and said: 'Farette, go and have your whiskey-wine, and then to bed,' he would sneak away. But he has heard something. Some fool, perhaps that Benoit— no, he is sick— perhaps the herb-woman has been talking, and he thinks he will make a fuss. But it will be nothing. And M'sieu' Armand, will he look at her?" He chuckled at the cat, which set its head back and hissed in reply. Then he sang something to himself.

Parpon was a poor little dwarf with a big head, but he had one thing which made up for all, though no one knew it— or, at least, he thought so. The Cure himself did not know. He had a beautiful voice. Even in speaking it was pleasant to hear, though he roughened it in a way. It pleased him that he had something of which the finest man or woman would be glad. He had said to himself many times that even Armand de la Riviere would envy him.

Sometimes Parpon went off away into the Bois Noir, and, perched there in a tree, sang away— a man, shaped something like an animal, with a voice like a muffled silver bell.

Some of his songs he had made himself: wild things, broken thoughts, not altogether human; the language of a world between man and the spirits. But it

was all pleasant to hear, even when, at times, there ran a weird, dark thread through the woof. No one in the valley had ever heard the thing he sang softly as he sat looking down at Julie:

"The little white smoke blows there, blows here,
The little blue wolf comes down—
C'est la!

And the hill-dwarf laughs in the young wife's ear,
When the devil comes back to town—
C'est la!"

It was crooned quietly, but it was distinct and melodious, and the cat purred an accompaniment, its head thrust into his thick black hair. From where Parpon sat he could see the House with the Tall Porch, and, as he sang, his eyes ran from the miller's doorway to it.

Off in the grounds of the dead Seigneur's manor he could see a man push the pebbles with his foot, or twist the branch of a shrub thoughtfully as he walked. At last another man entered the garden. The two greeted warmly, and passed up and down together.

iii

"MY good friend," said the Cure, "it is too late to mourn for those lost years. Nothing can give them back. As Parpon the dwarf said— you remember him, a wise little man, that Parpon— as he said one day, 'For everything you lose you get something, if only how to laugh at yourself."'

Armand nodded thoughtfully and answered: "You are right— you and Parpon. But I cannot forgive myself; he was so fine a man: tall, with a grand look, and a tongue like a book. Yes, yes, I can laugh at myself—for a fool."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and tapped the ground nervously with his foot, shrugging his shoulders a little. The priest took off his hat and made the sacred gesture, his lips moving. Armand caught off his hat also, and said: "You pray— for him?"

"For the peace of a good man's soul."

"He did not confess; he had no rites of the Church; he had refused you many years."

"My son, he had a confessor."

Armand raised his eyebrows. "They told me of no one."

"It was the Angel of Patience."

They walked on again for a time without a word. At last the Cure said: "You will remain here?"

"I cannot tell. This 'here' is a small world, and the little life may fret me. Nor do I know what I have of this,"— he waved his hands towards the house,—"or of my father's property. I may need to be a wanderer again."

"God forbid! Have you not seen the will?"

"I have got no farther than his grave," was the sombre reply.

The priest sighed. They paced the walk again in silence. At last the Cure said: "You will make the place cheerful, as it once was."

"You are persistent," replied the young man, smiling. "Whoever lives here should make it less gloomy."

"We shall soon know who is to live here. See, there is Monsieur Garon, and Monsieur Medallion also."

"The Avocat to tell secrets, the auctioneer to sell them— eh?" Armand went forward to the gate. Like most people, he found Medallion interesting, and the Avocat and he were old friends.

"You did not send for me, monsieur," said the Avocat timidly, "but I thought it well to come, that you might know how things are; and Monsieur Medallion came because he is a witness to the will, and, in a case"— here the little man coughed nervously— "joint executor with Monsieur le Cure."

They entered the house. In a business-like way Armand motioned them to chairs, opened the curtains, and rang the bell. The old housekeeper appeared, a sorrowful joy in her face, and Armand said: "Give us a bottle of the white-top, Sylvie, if there is any left."

"There is plenty, monsieur," she said; "none has been drunk these twelve years."

The Avocat coughed, and said hesitatingly to Armand: "I asked Parpon the dwarf to come, monsieur. There is a reason."

Armand raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Very good," he said. "When will he be here?"

"He is waiting at the Louis Quinze hotel."

"I will send for him," said Armand, and gave the message to Sylvie, who was entering the room.

After they had drunk the wine placed before them, there was silence for a moment, for all were wondering why Parpon should be remembered in the Seigneur's Will.

"Well," said Medallion at last, "a strange little dog is Parpon. I could surprise you about him— and there isn't any reason why I should keep the thing to myself. One day I was up among the rocks, looking for a strayed horse. I got tired, and lay down in the shade of the Rock of Red Pigeons— you know it. I fell asleep. Something waked me. I got up and heard the finest singing you can

guess: not like any I ever heard; a wild, beautiful, shivery sort of thing. I listened for a long time. At last it stopped. Then something slid down the rock. I peeped out, and saw Parpon toddling away."

The Cure stared incredulously, the Avocat took off his glasses and tapped his lips musingly, Armand whistled softly.

"So," said Armand at last, "we have the jewel in the toad's head. The clever imp hid it all these years— even from you, Monsieur le Cure."

"Even from me," said the Cure, smiling. Then, gravely: "It is strange, the angel in the stunted body."

"Are you sure it's an angel?" said Armand.

"Who ever knew Parpon do any harm?" queried the Cure.

"He has always been kind to the poor," put in the Avocat.

"With the miller's flour," laughed Medallion: "a pardonable sin." He sent a quizzical look at the Cure. "Do you remember the words of Parpon's song?" asked Armand.

"Only a few lines; and those not easy to understand, unless one had an inkling."

"Had you the inkling?"

"Perhaps, monsieur," replied Medallion seriously. They eyed each other.

"We will have Parpon in after the will is read," said Armand suddenly, looking at the Avocat. The Avocat drew the deed from his pocket. He looked up hesitatingly, and then said to Armand: "You insist on it being read now?"

Armand nodded coolly, after a quick glance at Medallion. Then the Avocat began, and read to that point where the Seigneur bequeathed all his property to his son, should he return— on a condition. When the Avocat came to the condition Armand stopped him.

"I do not know in the least what it may be," he said, "but there is only one by which I could feel bound. I will tell you. My father and I quarrelled"— here he paused for a moment, clinching his hands before him on the table— "about a woman; and years of misery came. I was to blame in not obeying him. I ought not to have given any cause for gossip. Whatever the condition as to that matter may be, I will fulfil it. My father is more to me than any woman in the world; his love of me was greater than that of any woman. I know the world—and women."

There was a silence. He waved his hand to the Avocat to go on, and as he did so the Cure caught his arm with a quick, affectionate gesture. Then Monsieur Garon read the conditions: "That Farette the miller should have a deed of the land on which his mill was built, with the dam of the mill— provided that Armand should never so much as by a word again address Julie, the miller's wife. If he agreed to the condition, with solemn oath before the Cure, his blessing would rest upon his dear son, whom he still hoped to see before he died."

When the reading ceased there was silence for a moment, then Armand stood up, and took the will from the Avocat; but instantly, without looking at it, handed it back. "The reading is not finished," he said. "And if I do not accept the condition, what then?"

Again Monsieur Garon read, his voice trembling a little. The words of the will ran: "But if this condition be not satisfied, I bequeath to my son Armand the house known as the House with the Tall Porch, and the land, according to the deed thereof; and the residue of my property— with the exception of two thousand dollars, which I leave to the Cure of the parish, the good Monsieur Fabre— I bequeath to Parpon the dwarf."

Then followed a clause providing that, in any case, Parpon should have in fee simple the land known as the Bois Noir, and the hut thereon.

Armand sprang to his feet in surprise, blurting out something, then sat down, quietly took the will, and read it through carefully. When he had finished he looked inquiringly, first at Monsieur Garon, then at the Cure. "Why Parpon?" he said searchingly.

The Cure, amazed, spread out his hands in a helpless way. At that moment Sylvie announced Parpon. Armand asked that he should be sent in. "We'll talk of the will afterwards," he added.

Parpon trotted in, the door closed, and he stood blinking at them. Armand put a stool on the table. "Sit here, Parpon," he said. Medallion caught the dwarf under the arms and lifted him on the table.

Parpon looked at Armand furtively. "The wild hawk comes back to its nest," he said. "Well, well, what is it you want with the poor Parpon?"

He sat down and dropped his chin in his hands, looking round keenly. Armand nodded to Medallion, and Medallion to the priest, but the priest nodded back again. Then Medallion said: "You and I know the Rock of Red Pigeons, Parpon. It is a good place to perch. One's voice is all to one's self there, as you know. Well, sing us the song of the little brown diver."

Parpon's hands twitched in his beard. He looked fixedly at Medallion. Presently he turned towards the Cure, and shrank so that he looked smaller still.

"It's all right, little son," said the Cure kindly. Turning sharply on Medallion, Parpon said: "When was it you heard?"

Medallion told him. He nodded, then sat very still. They said nothing, but watched him. They saw his eyes grow distant and absorbed, and his face took on a shining look, so that its ugliness was almost beautiful. All at once he slid from the stool and crouched on his knees. Then he sent out a low long note, like the toll of the bell-bird. From that time no one stirred as he sang, but sat and watched him. They did not even hear Sylvie steal in gently and stand in the curtains at the door.

The song was weird, with a strange thrilling charm; it had the slow dignity of a chant, the roll of an epic, the delight of wild beauty. It told of the little good Folk of the Scarlet Hills, in vague allusive phrases: their noiseless wanderings; their sojourning with the eagle, the wolf, and the deer; their triumph over the winds, the whirlpools, and the spirits of evil fame. It filled the room with the cry of the west wind; it called out of the frozen seas ghosts of forgotten worlds; it coaxed the soft breezes out of the South; it made them all to be at the whistle of the Scarlet Hunter who ruled the North.

Then, passing through veil after veil of mystery, it told of a grand Seigneur whose boat was overturned in a whirlpool, and was saved by a little brown diver. And the end of it all, and the heart of it all, was in the last few lines, clear of allegory:

"And the wheel goes round in the village mill, And the little brown diver he tells the grain... And the grand Seigneur he has gone to meet The little good Folk of the Scarlet Hills!"

At first, all were so impressed by the strange power of Parpon's voice, that they were hardly conscious of the story he was telling. But when he sang of the Seigneur they began to read his parable. Their hearts throbbed painfully.

As the last notes died away Armand got up, and standing by the table, said: "Parpon, you saved my father's life once?"

Parpon did not answer.

"Will you not tell him, my son?" said the Cure, rising. Still Parpon was silent.

"The son of your grand Seigneur asks you a question, Parpon," said Medallion soothingly.

"Oh, my grand Seigneur!" said Parpon, throwing up his hands. "Once he said to me, 'Come, my brown diver, and live with me.' But I said, 'No, I am not fit. I will never go to you at the House with the Tall Porch.' And I made him promise that he would never tell of it. And so I have lived sometimes with old Farette." Then he laughed strangely again, and sent a furtive look at Armand.

"Parpon," said Armand gently, "our grand Seigneur has left you the Bois Noir for your own. So the hills and the Rock of Red Pigeons are for you— and the little good people, if you like."

Parpon, with fiery eyes, gathered himself up with a quick movement, then broke out: "Oh, my grand Seigneur—my grand Seigneur!" and fell forward, his head in his arms, laughing and sobbing together.

Armand touched his shoulder. "Parpon!" But Parpon shrank away.

Armand turned to the rest. "I do not understand it, gentlemen. Parpon does not like the young Seigneur as he liked the old."

Medallion, sitting in the shadow, smiled. He understood. Armand continued: "As for this 'testament, gentlemen, I will fulfil its conditions; though I swear,

were I otherwise minded regarding the woman"— here Parpon raised his head swiftly— "I would not hang my hat for an hour in the Tall Porch."

They rose and shook hands, then the wine was poured out, and they drank it off in silence. Parpon, however, sat with his head in his hands.

"Come, little comrade, drink," said Medallion, offering him a glass.

Parpon made no reply, but caught up the will, kissed it, put it into Armand's hand, and then, jumping down from the table, ran to the door and disappeared through it.

iv

THE NEXT afternoon the Avocat visited old Farette. Farette was polishing a gun, mumbling the while. Sitting on some bags of meal was Parpon, with a fierce twinkle in his eye. Monsieur Garon told Farette briefly what the Seigneur had left him. With a quick, greedy chuckle Farette threw the gun away.

"Man alive!" said he; "tell me all about it. Ah, the good news!"

"There is nothing to tell: he left it; that is all."

"Oh, the good Seigneur," cried Farette, "the grand Seigneur!"

Some one laughed scornfully in the doorway. It was Julie.

"Look there," she cried; "he gets the land, and throws away the gun! Brag and coward, miller! It is for me to say 'the grand Seigneur!'"

She tossed her head: she thought the old Seigneur had relented towards her. She turned away to the house with a flaunting air, and got her hat. At first she thought she would go to the House with the Tall Porch, but she changed her mind, and went to the Bois Noir instead. Parpon followed her a distance off. Behind, in the mill, Farette was chuckling and rubbing his hands.

Meanwhile, Armand was making his way towards the Bois Noir. All at once, in the shade of a great pine, he stopped. He looked about him astonished.

"This is the old place. What a fool I was, then!" he said.

At that moment Julie came quickly, and lifted her hands towards him. "Armand—beloved Armand!" she said.

Armand looked at her sternly, from her feet to her pitted forehead, then wheeled, and left her without a word.

She sank in a heap on the ground. There was a sudden burst of tears, and then she clinched her hands with fury.

Some one laughed in the trees above her— a shrill, wild laugh. She looked up frightened. Parpon presently dropped down beside her.

"It was as I said," whispered the dwarf, and he touched her shoulder. This was the full cup of shame. She was silent.

"There are others," he whispered again. She could not see his strange smile; but she noticed that his voice was not as usual. "Listen," he urged, and he sang softly over her shoulder for quite a minute. She was amazed.

"Sing again," she said.

"I have wanted to sing to you like that for many years," he replied; and he sang a little more. "He cannot sing like that," he wheedled, and he stretched his arm around her shoulder.

She hung her head, then flung it back again as she thought of Armand.

"I hate him!" she cried; "I hate him!"

"You will not throw meal on me any more, or call me idiot?" he pleaded.

"No, Parpon," she said.

He kissed her on the cheek. She did not resent it. But now he drew away, smiled wickedly at her, and said: "See, we are even now, poor Julie!" Then he laughed, holding his little sides with huge hands. "Imbecile!" he added, and, turning, trotted away towards the Rock of Red Pigeons.

She threw herself, face forward, in the dusty needles of the pines.

When she rose from her humiliation, her face was as one who has seen the rags of harlequinade stripped from that mummer Life, leaving only naked being. She had touched the limits of the endurable; her sordid little hopes had split into fragments. But when a human soul faces upon its past, and sees a gargoyle at every milestone where an angel should be, and in one flash of illumination— the touch of genius to the smallest mind— understands the pitiless comedy, there comes the still stoic outlook.

Julie was transformed. All the possible years of her life were gathered into the force of one dreadful moment— dreadful and wonderful. Her mean vanity was lost behind the pale sincerity of her face— she was sincere at last. The trivial commonness was gone from her coquetting shoulders and drooping eyelids; and from her body had passed its flexuous softness. She was a woman; suffering, human, paying the price.

She walked slowly the way that Parpon had gone. Looking neither to right nor left, she climbed the long hillside, and at last reached the summit, where, bundled in a steep corner, was the Rock of Red Pigeons. As she emerged from the pines, she stood for a moment, and leaned with outstretched hand against a tree, looking into the sunlight. Slowly her eyes shifted from the Rock to the great ravine, to whose farther side the sun was giving bastions of gold. She was quiet. Presently she stepped into the light and came softly to the Rock. She walked slowly round it as though looking for some one. At the lowest side of the Rock, rude narrow hollows were cut for the feet. With a singular ease she climbed to the top of it. It had a kind of hollow, in which was a rude seat, carved out of the stone. Seeing this, a set look came to her face: she was thinking of Parpon, the master of this place. Her business was with him.

She got down slowly, and came over to the edge of the precipice. Steadying herself against a sapling, she looked over. Down below was a whirlpool, rising and falling-a hungry funnel of death. She drew back. Presently she peered again, and once more withdrew. She gazed round, and then made another tour of the hill, searching. She returned to the precipice. As she did so she heard a voice. She looked and saw Parpon seated upon a ledge of rock not far below. A mocking laugh floated up to her. But there was trouble in the laugh too— a bitter sickness. She did not notice that. She looked about her. Not far away was a stone, too heavy to carry but perhaps not too heavy to roll!

Foot by foot she rolled it over. She looked. He was still there. She stepped back. As she did so a few pebbles crumbled away from her feet and fell where Parpon perched. She did not see or hear them fall. He looked up, and saw the stone creeping upon the edge. Like a flash he was on his feet, and, springing into the air to the right, caught a tree steadfast in the rock. The stone fell upon the ledge, and bounded off again. The look of the woman did not follow the stone. She ran to the spot above the whirlpool, and sprang out and down.

From Parpon there came a wail such as the hills of the north never heard before. Dropping upon a ledge beneath, and from that to a jutting tree, which gave way, he shot down into the whirlpool. He caught Julie's body as it was churned from life to death: and then he fought. There was a demon in the whirlpool, but God and demon were working in the man. Nothing on earth could have unloosed that long, brown arm from Julie's drenched body. The sun lifted an eyelid over the yellow bastions of rock, and saw the fight. Once, twice, the shaggy head was caught beneath the surface— but at last the man conquered.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Parpon, with the lifeless Julie clamped in one arm, climbed the rough wall, on, on, up to the Rock of Red Pigeons. He bore her to the top of it. Then he laid her down, and pillowed her head on his wet coat.

The huge hands came slowly down Julie's soaked hair, along her blanched cheek and shoulders, caught her arms and held them. He peered into her face. The eyes had the film which veils Here from Hereafter. On the lips was a mocking smile. He stooped as if to kiss her. The smile stopped him. He drew back for a time, then he leaned forward, shut his eyes, and her cold lips were his.

Twilight-dusk-night came upon Parpon and his dead— the woman whom an impish fate had put into his heart with mockery and futile pain.

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13: The Woman With The Hood

L. T. Meade
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IT WAS LATE in the October of a certain year when I was asked to become "*locum tenens*" to a country practitioner in one of the midland counties. He was taken ill and obliged to leave home hastily. I therefore entered on my duties without having any indication of the sort of patients whom I was to visit. I was a young man at the time, and a great enthusiast with regard to the medical profession. I believed in personal influence and the magnetism of a strong personality as being all-conducive to the furtherance of the curative art. I had no experience, however, to guide me with regard to country patients, my work hitherto having been amongst the large population of a manufacturing town. On the very night of my arrival my first experience as a country doctor began. I had just got into bed, and was dozing off into a sound sleep, when the night bell which hung in my room rang pretty sharply. I jumped up and went to the tube, calling down to ask what was the matter.

"Are you the new doctor?" asked the voice.

"Yes, my name is Bruce; who wants me?"

"Mrs. Frayling of Garth Hall. The young lady is very bad. I have got a trap here; how soon can you be ready?"

"In a couple of minutes," I answered. I hastily got into my clothes, and in less than five minutes had mounted beside a rough-looking man, into a high gig. He touched his horse, who bounded off, at a great speed, and I found myself rattling through the country in the dead of night.

"How far off is the Hall?" I asked.

"A matter of two miles," was the reply.

"Do you know anything of the nature of the young lady's illness?"

"Yes I do; it is the old thing."

"Can you not enlighten me?" I asked, seeing that the man had shut up his lips and employed himself flicking his horse with the end of his long whip. The beast flew faster and faster, the man turned and fixed his eyes full upon me in the moonlight.

"They'll tell you when you get there," he said. "All I can say is that you will do no good, no one can, the matter ain't in our province. We are turning into the avenue now; you will soon know for yourself."

We dashed down a long avenue, and drew up in a couple of moments at a door sheltered by a big porch. I saw a tall lady in evening dress standing in the brightly lighted hail within.

"Have you brought the doctor, Thompson?" I heard her say to the man who had driven me.

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply. "The new doctor, Doctor Bruce."

"Oh! Then Dr. Mackenzie has really left?"

"He left this morning, ma'am, I told you so."

I heard her utter a slight sigh of disappointment.

"Come this way, Dr. Bruce," she said. "I am sorry to have troubled you."

She led me as she spoke across the hall and into a drawing-room of lofty dimensions, beautifully furnished in modern style. It was now between one and two in the morning, but the whole house was lit up as if the night were several hours younger. Mrs. Frayling wore a black evening dress, low to the neck and with demi sleeves. She had dark eyes and a beautiful, kindly face. It looked haggard now and alarmed.

"The fact is," she said, "I have sent for you on a most extraordinary mission. I do not know that I should have troubled a strange doctor, but I hoped that Dr. Mackenzie had not yet left."

"He left this morning," I said. "He was very ill; a case of nervous breakdown. He could not even wait to give me instructions with regard to my patients."

"Ah, yes," she said averting her eyes from mine as she spoke. "Our doctor used to be as hale a man as could be found in the country round. Nervous breakdown; I think I understand. I hope, Dr. Bruce, that you are not troubled by nerves."

"Certainly not," I answered. "As far as I am concerned they don't exist. Now what can I do for you, Mrs. Frayling?"

"I want you to see my daughter. I want you to try and quiet her terrors. Dr. Mackenzie used to be able to do so, but of late—"

"Her terrors!" I said. "I must ask you to explain further."

"I am going to do so. My daughter, Lucy, she is my only child, is sorely troubled by the appearance of an apparition."

I could scarcely forbear from smiling.

"Your daughter wants change," I said, "change of scene and air."

"That is the queer thing," said Mrs. Frayling; "she will not take change, nothing will induce her to leave Garth Hall; and yet living here is slowly but surely bringing her either to her grave or to a worse fate, that of a lunatic asylum. She went to bed tonight as usual, but an hour afterwards I was awakened by her screams; I ran to her room and found her sitting up in bed, trembling violently. Her eyes were fixed on a certain part of the room; they were wide open, and had a look of the most horrified agony in them which I have never seen in the human face. She did not see me when I went into the room, but when I touched her hand she clasped it tightly.

"'Tell her to go away, mother,' she said, 'she won't stir for me; I cannot speak to her, I have not the courage, and she is waiting for me to speak; tell her to go away, mother— tell her to cease to trouble me— tell her to go.'

"I could see nothing, Dr. Bruce, but she continued to stare just towards the foot of her bed, and described the terrible thing which was troubling her.

"'Can't you see her yourself?' she said. 'She is a dead woman, and she comes here night after night— see her yellow face— oh, mother, tell her to go— tell her to go!'

"I did what I could for my poor child, but no words of mine could soothe or reassure her. The room was bright with firelight, and there were several candles burning, I could not see a soul. At last the poor girl fainted off with terror. I then sent a messenger for Dr. Mackenzie. She now lies moaning in her bed, our old nurse is sitting with her. She is terribly weak, and drops of agony are standing on her forehead. She cannot long continue this awful strain."

"It must be a case of delusion," I said. "You say you saw nothing in the room?"

"Nothing; but it is only right to tell you that the house is haunted."

I smiled, and fidgeted in my chair.

"Ah! I know," said Mrs. Frayling, "that you naturally do not believe in ghosts and apparitions, but perhaps you would change your mind if you lived long at Garth Hall. I have lived here for the last twelve years, and can certainly testify to the fact of having heard most unaccountable sounds, but I have never seen anything. My daughter, Lucy, has been educated abroad, and did not come to Garth Hall to live until three months ago; it was soon after this that the apparition began to appear to her. Now it is her nightly torment, and it is simply killing her, and yet she refuses to go. Every day she says to me, 'I know, mother, that that awful spirit is in fearful trouble, and perhaps tonight I may have the courage to speak to it,' but night after night much the same thing takes place; the poor child endures the agony until she faints right off, and each day her nerves are weaker and her whole strength more completely shattered."

"Well, I will go up now and see the patient," I said. "It is of course nothing whatever but a case of strong delusion, and against her will, Mrs. Frayling, it is your duty to remove your daughter from this house immediately."

"You will tell a different story after you have seen her," said the mother.

She rose as she spoke and conducted me up some shallow bright-looking stairs. She then led me into a large bedroom on the first landing. The fire burned brightly in the grate, and four or five candles stood about in different directions. Their light fell full upon the form of a very young and extremely beautiful girl.

Her face was as white as the pillow on which it rested; her eyes were shut, and the dark fringe of her long eyelashes rested on her cheeks; her hair was

tossed over the pillow; her hands, thin to emaciation, lay outside the coverlet; now and then her fingers worked convulsively.

Bending gently forward I took her wrist between my finger and thumb. The pulse was very faint and slow. As I was feeling it she opened her eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking at me without any alarm, and with only a very languid curiosity in her tone.

"I am the new doctor who has come in Dr. Mackenzie's place," I answered. "My name is Bruce."

She gave me just the ghost of a smile.

"Mine is not a case for the doctor," she said. "Has mother told you what troubles me?"

"Yes," I answered. "You are very nervous and must not be alone. I will sit with you for a little."

"It makes no difference whether you are here or not," she said. "She will come back again in about an hour. You may or may not see her. She will certainly come, and then my awful terrors will begin again."

"Well, we will wait for her together," I said, as cheerfully as I could.

I moved a chair forward as I spoke and sat down by the bedside.

Miss Frayling shut her eyes with a little impatient gesture. I motioned to Mrs. Frayling to seat herself not far away; and going deliberately to some of the candles put them out. The light no longer fell strongly on the bed— the patient was in shadow. I hoped she might fall into really deep slumber and not awaken till the morning light had banished ghostly terrors. She certainly seemed to have sunk into gentle and calm sleep; the expression of her face seemed to smooth out, her brow was no longer corrugated with anxious wrinkles— gentle smiles played about her lips. She looked like the child she was. I guessed as I watched her that her years could not number more than seventeen or eighteen.

"She is better," said Mrs. Frayling. "She may not have another attack tonight." As she spoke she rose, and telling me she would return in a few minutes, left the room. She and I were the only watchers by the sick girl, the servants having retired to bed. Mrs. Frayling went to fetch something. She had scarcely done so before I was conscious of a complete change in the aspect of the room— it had felt homelike, warm, and comfortable up to this moment; now I was distinctly conscious of a sense of chill. I could not account for my sensations, but most undoubtedly my heart began to beat more quickly than was quite agreeable; I felt a creeping sensation down my back— the cold seemed to grow greater.

I said to myself, "The fire wants replenishing," but I had an unaccountable aversion to stirring; I did not even want to turn my head. At the same moment Miss Frayling, who had been sleeping so peacefully, began evidently to dream;

her face worked with agitation; she suddenly opened her eyes and uttered a sharp, piercing cry.

"Keep her back," she said, flinging out her arms, as if she wanted to push something from her.

I started up instantly, and went to the bedside.

At this moment Mrs. Frayling came into the room. The moment she did so the sense of chill and unaccountable horror left me; the room became once more warm and homelike. I looked at the fire, it was piled up high in the grate and was burning merrily. Miss Frayling, however, did not share my pleasanter sensations.

"I said she would come back," she exclaimed, pointing with her finger to the foot of the bed.

I looked in that direction but could see nothing.

"Can't you see her? Oh, I wish you could see her," she cried. "She stands there at the foot of the bed; she wears a hood, and her face is yellow. She has been dead a long time, and I know she wants to say something. I cannot speak to her. Oh, tell her to go away; tell her to go away."

"Shut your eyes, Miss Frayling; do not look," I said.

Then I turned and boldly faced the empty space where the excited girl had seen the apparition.

"Whoever you are, leave us now," I said in an authoritative voice. "We are not prepared for you tonight. Leave us now."

To my surprise Miss Frayling gave a gleeful laugh.

"Why, she has gone," she exclaimed in a voice of relief. "She walked out of the door— I saw her go. I don't believe she will come back at present. How queer! Then you did see her, Dr. Bruce?"

"No," I answered; "I saw nothing."

"But she heard you; she nodded her head once and then went. She will come back again, of course; but perhaps not tonight. I don't feel frightened any longer. I believe I shall sleep."

She snuggled down under the bedclothes.

"Have some of this beef-tea, Lucy," said her mother, bringing a cup up to the bedside. It was steaming hot, she had gone away to warm it.

"Yes, I feel faint and hungry," replied the girl; she raised her pretty head and allowed her mother to feed and pet her.

"I am much better," she said. "I know she won't come back again tonight; you need not stay with me any longer, Dr. Bruce."

"I will stay with her, Doctor; you must lie down in another room," said the mother.

I consented to go as far as the anteroom. There was a comfortable sofa there, and I had scarcely laid my head upon it before I fell into a sound slumber.

When I awakened it was broad daylight and Mrs. Frayling was standing over me.

"Lucy is much better and is getting up," she said. "She looks almost herself. What an extraordinary effect your words had, Dr. Bruce."

"They came as a sort of inspiration," I said; "I did not mean them to be anything special."

"Then you do not believe that she really saw the apparition?"

"Certainly not; her brain is very much excited and overwrought. You ought to take her away today."

"That is the queer thing," said Mrs. Frayling. "I told you that she would not consent to leave the house, believing, poor child, that her mission was to try and comfort this awful ghost, in case she could summon courage to speak to it. She told me this morning, however, that she was quite willing to go and suggested that we should sleep at the Metropole in town tonight."

"The best thing possible," I said. "Take her away immediately. Give her plenty of occupation and variety, and let her see heaps of cheerful people. She will doubtless soon get over her terrors."

"It is very strange," repeated Mrs. Frayling. "Her attitude of mind seems completely altered. She wishes to see you for a moment before you leave us. I will meet you in the breakfast-room in a quarter of an hour, Dr. Bruce."

I made a hasty toilet and followed Mrs. Frayling downstairs. We ate breakfast almost in silence, and just before the meal was over Miss Frayling made her appearance. She was a very slightly-built girl, tall and graceful as a reed. She came straight up to me.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said, holding out her hand.

"Why?" I asked in astonishment. "I am glad I was able to relieve you, but I am rather puzzled to know what great thing I really did."

"Why, don't you know?" she answered. "Can't you guess? She will come to you now. I don't believe she will trouble me any more."

"Well, I am stronger to receive her than you are," I said, smiling and trying to humour the girl's fancy.

Soon afterwards I took my leave and returned to Dr. Mackenzie's house. I spent the day without anything special occurring, and in the evening, being dead tired, went to bed as usual. Dr. Mackenzie's house was an essentially modern one. Anything less ghostly than the squarely-built cheerful rooms could scarcely be imagined. I was alone in the house with the exception of his servants. I went to bed, and had scarcely laid my head on the pillow before I was sound asleep. I was suddenly awakened out of my first slumbers by someone calling to me through the speaking-tube.

"Yes, I will come immediately," I answered.

I sprang out of bed and applied my ear to the tube. "You are wanted at Garth Hall," said the voice.

"But surely there is no one ill there tonight?" I said.

"You are wanted immediately; come without delay," was the reply.

"I will be with you in a minute," I answered.

I felt almost annoyed, but there was no help for it. I hurried into my clothes and went downstairs.

"How very silly of Mrs. Frayling not to have taken her daughter away— shall I have to go through a repetition of last night's scene over again?" I thought.

I opened the hall door, expecting to see a horse and gig, and the man who had driven me the night before. To my astonishment there was not a soul in sight.

"What can this mean?" I said to myself. "Has the messenger been careless enough not to bring a trap— it will be very troublesome if I have to get my own horse out at this hour— where can the man be?"

I looked to right and left— the night was a moonlit one— there was not a soul in sight. Very much provoked, but never for a moment doubting that I was really summoned, I went off to the stables, saddled Dr. Mackenzie's horse, Rover, and mounting, rode off to Garth Hall. The hour was quite late, between twelve and one o'clock. When I drew up at the door the house was in total darkness.

"What can this mean?" I said to myself. I rang a bell fiercely, and after a long time a servant put her head out of an upper window.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"I— Dr. Bruce," I cried. "I have been sent for in a hurry to see Miss Frayling."

"Good Lord!" I heard the woman exclaim. "Wait a minute, sir, and I will come down to you," she shouted.

In a couple of minutes the great hail door was unchained and unlocked, and a respectable middle-aged woman stood on the steps.

"Miss Frayling has gone to London with her mother, sir," she said. "You are quite certain you were sent for?"

"Quite," I answered. "Your man— the man who came last night—"

"Not Thompson!" she cried.

"Yes, the same man called for me through the speaking tube to come here at once— he said Miss Frayling was ill, and wanted me."

"It must have been a hoax, sir," said the housekeeper, but I noticed a troubled and perplexed look on her face. "I am very sorry indeed, but Miss Frayling is not here— we do not expect the ladies back for some weeks," she added.

"I am sorry I troubled you," I answered; I turned my horse's head and went home again.

The next day I set enquiries on foot with regard to the hoax which had been played upon me. Whoever had done the trick, no one was ready to own to it, and I noticed that the servants looked mysterious and nodded their heads when I said it was to Garth Hall I had been summoned.

The next night the same thing occurred. My night bell was rung and a voice shouted to me through the speaking-tube to come immediately to Garth Hall. I took no notice whatever of the trick, but determined to lay a trap for the impertinent intruder on my repose for the following night. I had a very savage dog, and I tied him outside the house. My housekeeper also agreed to sit up. Between twelve and one o'clock I was called again. I flew to my window and looked out. There was not a soul in sight, but a queer sense of indescribable chill and unaccountable horror took sudden possession of me. The dog was crouching down on the ground with his face hidden in his paws; he was moaning feebly. I dressed, went downstairs, unchained him and brought him up to my room. He crept on to my bed and lay there trembling; I will own to the fact that his master shared the unaccountable horror. What was the matter? I dared not answer this question even to myself. Mrs. Marks, my housekeeper, looked very solemn and grave the next morning.

"Sir," she said, when she brought in breakfast, "if I were you, I would go away from here. There is something very queer at the Hall and it seems to me—but there, I cannot speak of it."

"There are some things best not spoken of," I said shortly; "whoever is playing me a hoax has not chosen to reveal himself or herself. We can best tire the unlucky individual out by taking no notice."

"Yes, sir, perhaps that is best. Now I have got some news for you."

"What is that?" I asked.

"Mrs. and Miss Frayling returned to the Hall this morning."

"This morning!" I exclaimed, in astonishment, "but it is not yet nine o'clock."

"True, sir, but early as the hour is they passed this house not half-an-hour ago in the closed brougham. Miss Frayling looked very white, and the good lady, her mother, full of anxiety. I caught a glimpse of them as I was cleaning the steps; I doubt not, sir, but you will be summoned to the Hall today."

"Perhaps so," I answered briefly.

Mrs. Marks looked at me as if she would say something further, but refrained, and to my relief soon afterwards left me alone.

I finished my breakfast and went out about my daily rounds. I do not think myself destitute of pluck but I cannot pretend that I liked the present position. What was the mystery? What horrible dark joke was being played? With my healthy bringing up I could not really ascribe the thing to supernatural agency. A trick there was, of course. I vowed that I would find it out before I was much older, but then I remembered the chill and the terror which had assailed me

when sitting up with Miss Frayling. The same chill and terror had come over me when I suddenly opened my window the night before.

"The best thing I can do is not to think of this," I commented, and then I absorbed myself with my patients.

Nothing occurred of any moment that day, nor was I summoned to attend the ladies at Garth Hall. About ten o'clock that night I had to go out to attend a farmer's wife who was suddenly taken ill. I sat with her for a little time and did not return till about half past eleven. I then went straight up to my room and went to bed. I had scarcely fallen into my first slumber when I was aroused by the sharp ringing of my night bell. I felt inclined for a moment not to pay the least attention to it, but as it rang again with a quick imperative sound, I got up, more from the force of habit than anything else, and calling through the speaking-tube, applied my ear to it.

"Dr. Bruce, will you come at once to Garth Hall?" called a voice.

"No, I will not," I called back in reply.

There was a pause below, evidently of astonishment— and then the voice called again.

"I don't think you quite understand, sir. Mrs. Frayling wants you to visit Miss Frayling immediately; the young lady is very ill."

I was about to put the cap on the tube and return to my bed when I distinctly heard the crunch of wheels beneath my window and the

pawing of an impatient horse. I crossed the room, threw open the window and looked out. A horse and gig were now standing under the window, and the man, Thompson, who had summoned me on the first night, was staring up at me.

"For God's sake, come, sir," he said. "The young lady is mortal bad."

"I will be with you in a minute," I said. I dressed myself trembling.

In an incredibly short space of time Thompson and I arrived at the Hall. Through our entire drive the man never spoke, but when we drew up at the great porch he uttered a heavy sigh of relief and muttered the words: "The devil is in this business. I don't pretend to understand it."

I looked at him, but resolved to take no notice of his queer remark. Mrs. Frayling met me on the steps.

"Come in at once," she said. She took both my hands in hers and drew me into the house. We entered her cheerful drawing-room. The poor lady's face was ghastly, her eyes full not only of trouble, but of horror.

"Now, Dr. Bruce," she said, "you must do your best."

"In what way?" I said.

"I fear my poor girl is mad. Unless you can manage to relieve her mind, she certainly will be by morning."

"Tell me what has happened since I last saw you, as briefly as possible," I said.

"I will do so," she replied. "Acting on your instructions, Lucy and I went to the Metropole. She was quite happy on the first day, but in the middle of the night grew very much disturbed. She and I were sleeping together. She awakened me and told me that the apparition at Garth Hall was pulling her— that the woman in the hood was imperatively demanding her presence.

"'I know what has happened,' said Lucy. 'Dr. Bruce has refused to help her. She has gone to him but he won't respond to her efforts to bring him on the scene. How cruel he is!'

"I soothed the poor child as best I could, and towards morning she dropped off asleep. The next night she was in a still greater state of terror, again assuring me that the lady in the hood was drawing her, and that you, Dr. Bruce, were turning a deaf ear to her entreaties. On the third night she became almost frantic.

'"I must go back,' she said. 'My spirit is being torn out of my body. If I am not back at Garth Hall early in the morning I shall die.'

"Her distress and horror were so extreme that I had to humour her. We took the very earliest train from London, and arrived at the Hall at nine o'clock. During the day Lucy was gentle and subdued; she seemed relieved at being back again, told me that she would go early to bed and that she hoped that she might have a good night. About an hour ago I heard her screaming violently, and, rushing to her room, found her in almost a state of collapse from horror— she kept pointing in a certain direction, but could not speak. I sent Thompson off in a hurry for you. As soon as ever I said I would do so she became a little better, and said she would dress herself. It is her intention now to ask you to spend the night with us, and, if possible, speak again to the horrible thing which is driving my child into a madhouse."

"I will tell you something strange," I said, when Mrs. Frayling paused, "I was undoubtedly called during the last three nights. A voice shouted through my speaking-tube, desiring me to come to Garth Hall. On the first night I went, feeling sure that I was really summoned; since then I have believed that it was a hoax."

"Oh, this is awful," said Mrs. Frayling, trembling excessively; she turned and asked me to follow her upstairs. We entered the same spacious and cheerful bedroom; Lucy Frayling was now pacing up and down in front of the fireplace; she did not notice either of us when we came in; the expression on her face was almost that of an insane person. The pupils of her eyes were widely dilated.

"Lucy," said her mother, "Here is Dr. Bruce."

She paused when my name was mentioned and looked at me fixedly. Her eyes grew dark with anger— she clenched her hand.

"You were faithless," she said; "she wanted you, and you would not accept the burden; you told me when last I saw you that you were glad she had turned to you, for you are stronger than me, but you are a coward."

"Come, come," I said, trying to speak cheerfully. "I am here now, and will do anything you wish."

"I will prove you," said Miss Frayling, in a eager voice; "She will come again presently; when she comes, will you speak to her?"

"Certainly," I replied, "but remember I may not see her."

"I will tell you when she appears; I will point with my hand— I may not have power to utter words— but I will point to where she stands. When I do, speak to her; ask her why she troubles us— promise— you spoke once, speak again."

"I promise," I replied, and my voice sounded solemn and intense.

Miss Frayling heaved a deep sigh of relief, she went and stood by the mantlepiece with her back to the fire. I sat down on the nearest chair, and Mrs. Frayling followed my example. The clock ticked loudly on the mantlepiece, the candles burned with a steady gleam, the fire threw out cheerful flames, all was silent in the chamber. There was not a stir, not a sound. The minutes flew on. Miss Frayling stood as quiet as if she were turned into stone; suddenly she spoke,

"There is an adverse influence here," she said. "Mother, will you go into the anteroom. You can leave the door open, but will you stay in the anteroom for a little?"

Mrs. Frayling glanced at me; I nodded to her to comply. She left the room, going into a pretty little boudoir out of which the bedroom opened. I could see her from where I sat. Lucy now slightly altered her position. I saw that her eyes were fixed in the direction of another door, which opened from the outside corridor into the room. I tried to speak, to say something cheerful, but she held up her finger to stop me.

"She is coming," she said, in a stifled voice. "I feel the first stirring of the indescribable agony which always heralds her approach. Oh, my God, help me to endure. Was ever girl tortured as I am, before?"

She wrung her slight hands, her brows were knit, I saw the perspiration standing in great drops on her brow. I thought she would faint, and was about to rise to administer some restorative, when in the far distance I distinctly heard a sound; it was the sound of a woman's footsteps. It came along, softly tapping on the floor as it came; I heard the swish of a dress, the sound came nearer, the handle of the door was turned, I started and looked round. I did not see anybody, but immediately the room was filled with that sense of cold and chill which I had twice before experienced. My heart beat to suffocation, I felt my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, I was so overpowered by my own sensations that I had no time to watch Miss Frayling. Suddenly I heard her utter

a low groan. I made a violent effort and turned my face in her direction. The poor girl was staring straight before her as if she were turned into stone. Her eyes were fixed in the direction of the door.

She raised her hand slowly and tremblingly, and pointed in the direction where her eyes were fixed. I looked across the room. Was it fancy, or was I conscious of a faint blue mist where no mist ought to be? I am not certain on that point, but I know at the same moment the horror which had almost overbalanced my reason suddenly left me. I found my voice.

"What do you want?" I said. "Why do you trouble us? What is the matter?"

The words had scarcely passed my lips before Miss Frayling's face underwent a queer change; she was also relieved from the agony of terror which was overmasting her.

"She is beckoning," she said; "come quickly."

She sprang across the room as she spoke, and seized a candle.

"Come at once," she said in a breathless voice, "she is beckoning— come."

Miss Frayling ran out of the room; I followed her, and Mrs. Frayling who had come to the door while this strange scene was going on, accompanied us. Miss Frayling still taking the lead, we went downstairs. The whole house was full of strange unaccountable chill. We entered the upper hall, and then turning to our left, went down some steep stairs which led into a cellar.

"Where are you going now?" asked Mrs. Frayling.

"Come on, mother, come on," called Lucy, "she will tell us what to do."

We turned at the foot of the stairs into a low arched room with one tiny window. There was a heavy buttress of wall here which bulged out in an unaccountable manner. The moment we entered this room, Lucy turned and faced us.

"She has gone in there," she said— "right into the wall."

"Well," I said, "now that we have followed her, let us go back— it is very cold in the cellar."

Miss Frayling laughed hysterically.

"Do you think," she said, "that I will go back now. We must have this wall opened— can you do it, Dr. Bruce? Can you do it now, this moment? Mother, are there tools anywhere?"

"Not now, dear, not tonight," said the mother.

"Yes, tonight, this moment," exclaimed the girl. "Let Thompson be called— we have not a moment to lose. She went in right through this wall and smiled at me as she went. Poor, poor ghost! I believe her sad wanderings are nearly over."

"What are we to do?" said Mrs. Frayling, turning to me.

"We will open the wall at once," I said. "It will not be difficult to remove a few bricks. If you will kindly tell me where Thompson is I will fetch him."

"No, I will go for him myself," said Mrs. Frayling.

She left the cellar, returning in the space of a few minutes with the man. He brought a crowbar and other tools with him. He and I quickly removed some bricks. As soon as we had done so we found an empty space inside, into which we could thrust our hands. We made it a little larger and then were able to insert a candle. Lying on the floor within this space was a human skeleton.

I cried out at the awful discovery we had made, but Miss Frayling showed neither surprise nor terror.

"Poor ghost!" repeated the girl; "she will rest now. It was worth all this fearful suffering to bring her rest at last."

The discovery of the skeleton was the topic of the neighbourhood. It was given Christian burial in due course, and from that hour to this the ghost at Garth Hall has never appeared.

I cannot pretend to account for this story in any way— no one has ever found out why those human bones were built into the old wall. The whole thing is queer and uncomfortable, a phenomenon which will not be explained on this side of Eternity.

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14: The Hunted Man

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1921

Skipton Standard and Streatham Gazette (Victoria) 19 June 1915

A most elusive author, almost certainly a pseudonym. His stories were first published exclusively in The Weekly Tale Teller*, and* Yes or No*, both magazines published by Harry Shurey. The Ralston name disappeared when the magazines closed around 1921.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The fact, that he devotes himself to our interests ought not to tell against him. He is a most industrious man. He spends all his time at evening classes. If we wish to fight the Germans commercially we must do it with their own . weapons. Rogers must certainly have the appointment. It will carry with it an

extra fifty pounds a years. Dear me! I must go to the bank. I think you might inform Rogers of our decision." .

Mr. Harris crumpled up his newspaper and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

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

"Certainly— that is a rule."

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

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

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

A few minutes later Mr. Harris rang his bell for Rogers. Mr. Rogers was ayoung man with large round spectacles, a pallid complexion and an expression of intense industry. He came into the office at a rush to show his devotion to his employers.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Harris eyed the unsuspicious young man complacently.

"Of course it is necessary that a branch manager should be married. Mr. Wicks makes a great point of that. Unless, of course, you have been secretly married—"

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

"Well, perhaps you are engaged."

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

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

"But, sir—"

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

Mr. Harris chuckled when the spectacled youth had withdrawn and rang for Miss Tyrer, the senior typiste. He dictated a few letters to her, and then said,

"By the way, Miss Tyrer, you are engaged to Mr. Jubb, aren't you? I think he said that you were going to be married when he came back from the war."

Miss Tyrer colored prettily.

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

The girl's eyes sparkled.

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

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

"I don't know who would marry him," snapped the girl. "He is not my ideal of what a husband should be. By the way, Miss Tyrer, some of the junior typistes are a little disposed to flirt, are they not? I am reflecting on your control of them, but, after all, human nature is human nature. I think a mild hint given to your staff that Mr. Rogers should be made love to might be desirable."

There was a twinkle in Mr. Harris's eyes.

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

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

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

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

A calculating look cgme. into Mrs. Tonks' eye.

"And a very good 'usband you'd make for anybody. Now my poor 'usband would 'ave been better unmarried. He aggravated me more than you can say by his 'abit of drinking up the morning's milk when he come home at night, which was generally by the first morning train. Now you'd be a prize."

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

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

"Now, then, do up your 'air and put a clean blouse on. You've got to take up Mr. Rogers' tea. He's got another fifty quid a year, and his boss has told him to

get married. There's a chance for you. Bless you! Anyone could get a mug like him."

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

"You'll not mind about that when you're married.

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

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

"Look 'ere, Mabel," proceeded Mrs. Tonks, "you'll 'ave to meet 'im a ' good deal more than 'alf-way."

"Bless you, ma, do you think I've never talked to a feller before?"

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

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

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

"Oh, I can. I notice a lot more than you think. Before now when I have seen you come in all worn-out I've quite cried. I've said to ma many a time, 'He'll never live if he keeps on like that.' Oh, excuse me, there's a bit of fluff on the collar of your coat."

She leant forward across. Mr. Rogers. Her hair-net brushed his face and entangled itself on the points of his collar.

"Oh! dear, do undo me now, Mr. Rogers."

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

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

"Now, now, you two."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"He's that shy!" she said, contemptuously.

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

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

Suddenly a voice said, "Why, it's Mr. Rogers. Who would have thought of . meeting you here? I've just been to see an aunt of mine and was coming home. It is lucky I met you. I'm not quite sure of my way to the Tube Station, and I hate asking strange gentlemen. It seems so forward. Oh, dear me! There's my weak ankle given now. I hate these wretched slippery pavements. If you would not mind letting me take your arm."

Again the reluctant Rogers had to offer an arm. The maiden leant very heavily on it. Sometimes her head almost rested on his shoulder. Nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand would have encircled her waist with a protecting arm— but Mr. Rogers was a spectacled Joseph.

After the Tube journey was over they proceeded to-wards their abode. The ankle grew worse and worse, the weight of the maiden more and more. Mr. Rogers, to avoid embarrassing subjects, discoursed on such of the heavenly host as chanced to be visible in the mist.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I beg pardon, sir, but I—"

"I require no explanations. I can use my eyes, Mr. Rogers."

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

"Mr. Rogers, there's a lady outside wants to see you."

"Who is she?"

"She said you'd know."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With a polite bow to Miss Tonks he passed on.

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

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

The next morning— Miss Tonks being a late riser had not hunted her prey around the breakfast table— Mr. Rogers went to business in subdued spirits. Before the letters were opened a typiste patted him on the head and told him that she always loved brown hair that stood upright.

It was the last straw. The poor young man was desperate. Directly Mr. Harris arrived he went in to see him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Wicks gazed scornfully at the clerk.

"Yes. Write to Mr. Jubb and tell him that, the new post will be at his disposal when be returns. And, Mr. Rogers, we all make sacrifices for the Empire. In such

a case you will understand that I can give no advance in salary to an employe who is merely holding a post temporarily. That's all."

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

"Jubb shall have that appointment. That Rogers seems to me to lack pluck. He only undertakes to occupy the post temporarily. Of course, I've told him that in such a case we could pay no advance. If the war lasts a year that will save us fifty pounds. I am disappointed in Rogers. Like many of the young men to-day, he shirks responsibility."

The junior partner smiled. "Yes, but make it plural. I think he's shirking responsibilities."

15: The Fiddling Man

James Oliver Curwood
1878-1927
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BREAULT'S COUGH was not pleasant to hear. A cough possesses manifold and almost unclassifiable diversities. But there is only one cough when a man has a bullet through his lungs and is measuring his life by minutes, perhaps seconds. Yet Breault, even as he coughed the red stain from his lips, was not afraid. Many times he had found himself in the presence of death, and long ago it had ceased to frighten him. Some day he had expected to come under the black shadow of it himself— not in a quiet and peaceful way, but all at once, with a shock. And the time had come. He knew that he was dying; and he was calm. More than that— in dying he was achieving a triumph. The red-hot death-sting in his lung had given birth to a frightful thought in his sickening brain. The day of his great opportunity was at hand. The hour— the minute.

A last flush of the pale afternoon sun lighted up his black-bearded face as his eyes turned, with their new inspiration, to his sledge. It was a face that one would remember— not pleasantly, perhaps, but as a fixture in a shifting memory of things; a face strong with a brute strength, implacable in its hard lines, emotionless almost, and beyond that, a mystery.

It was the best known face in all that part of the northland which reaches up from Fort McMurray to Lake Athabasca and westward to Fond du Lac and the Wholdais country. For ten years Breault had made that trip twice a year with the northern mails. In all its reaches there was not a cabin he did not know, a face he had not seen, or a name he could not speak; yet there was not a man, woman, or child who welcomed him except for what he brought. But the government had found its faith in him justified. The police at their lonely outposts had come to regard his comings and goings as dependable as day and night. They blessed him for his punctuality, and not one of them missed him when he was gone. A strange man was Breault.

With his back against a tree, where he had propped himself after the first shock of the bullet in his lung, he took a last look at life with a passionless imperturbability. If there was any emotion at all in his face it was one of vindictiveness— an emotion roused by an intense and terrible hatred that in this hour saw the fulfilment of its vengeance. Few men nursed a hatred as Breault had nursed his. And it gave him strength now, when another man would have died.

He measured the distance between himself and the sledge. It was, perhaps, a dozen paces. The dogs were still standing, tangled a little in their traces,—

eight of them,— wide-chested, thin at the groins, a wolfish horde, built for endurance and speed. On the sledge was a quarter of a ton of his Majesty's mail. Toward this Breault began to creep slowly and with great pain. A hand inside of him seemed crushing the fiber of his lung, so that the blood oozed out of his mouth. When he reached the sledge there were many red patches in the snow behind him. He opened with considerable difficulty a small dunnage sack, and after fumbling a bit took there-from a pencil attached to a long red string, and a soiled envelope.

For the first time a change came upon his countenance— a ghastly smile. And above his hissing breath, that gushed between his lips with the sound of air pumped through the fine mesh of a colander, there rose a still more ghastly croak of exultation and of triumph. Laboriously he wrote. A few words, and the pencil dropped from his stiffening fingers into the snow. Around his neck he wore a long red scarf held together by a big brass pin, and to this pin he fastened securely the envelope.

This much done,— the mystery of his death solved for those who might some day find him,— the ordinary man would have contented himself by yielding up life's struggle with as little more physical difficulty as possible. Breault was not ordinary. He was, in his one way, efficiency incarnate. He made space for himself on the sledge, and laid himself out in that space with great care, first taking pains to fasten about his thighs two babiche thongs that were employed at times to steady his freight. Then he ran his left arm through one of the loops of the stout mail-chest. By taking these precautions he was fairly secure in the belief that after he was dead and frozen stiff no amount of rough trailing by the dogs could roll him from the sledge.

In this conjecture he was right. When the starved and exhausted malamutes dragged their silent burden into the Northwest Mounted Police outpost barracks at Crooked Bow twenty-four hours later, an ax and a sapling bar were required to pry Francois Breault from his bier. Previous to this process, however, Sergeant Fitzgerald, in charge at the outpost, took possession of the soiled envelope pinned to Breault's red scarf. The information it bore was simple, and yet exceedingly definite. Few men in dying as Breault had died could have made the matter easier for the police.

On the envelope he had written:

Jan Thoreau shot me and left me for dead. Have just strength to write this— no more. Francois Breault.

It was epic— a colossal monument to this man, thought Sergeant Fitzgerald, as they pried the frozen body loose.

To Corporal Blake fell the unpleasant task of going after Jan Thoreau. Unpleasant, because Breault's starved huskies and frozen body brought with them the worst storm of the winter. In the face of this storm Blake set out, with the Sergeant's last admonition in his ears:

"Don't come back, Blake, until you've got him, dead or alive."

That is a simple and efficacious formula in the rank and file of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. It has made volumes of stirring history, because it means a great deal and has been lived up to. Twice before, the words had been uttered to Blake— in extreme cases. The first time they had taken him for six months into the Barren Lands between Hudson's Bay and the Great Slave— and he came back with his man; the second time he was gone for nearly a year along the rim of the Arctic— and from there also he came back with his man. Blake was of that sort. A bull-dog, a Nemesis when he was once on the trail, and— like most men of that kind— without a conscience. In the Blue Books of the service he was credited with arduous patrols and unusual exploits. "Put Blake on the trail" meant something, and "He is one of our best men" was a firmly established conviction at departmental headquarters.

Only one man knew Blake as Blake actually lived under his skin— and that was Blake himself. He hunted men and ran them down without mercy— not because he loved the law, but for the reason that he had in him the inherited instincts of the hound. This comparison, if quite true, is none the less unfair to the hound. A hound is a good dog at heart.

In the January storm it may be that the vengeful spirit of Francois Breault set out in company with Corporal Blake to witness the consummation of his vengeance. That first night, as he sat close to his fire in the shelter of a thick spruce timber, Blake felt the unusual and disturbing sensation of a presence somewhere near him. The storm was at its height. He had passed through many storms, but to-night there seemed to be an uncannily concentrated fury in its beating and wailing over the roofs of the forests.

He was physically comfortable. The spruce trees were so dense that the storm did not reach him, and fortune favored him with a good fire and plenty of fuel. But the sensation oppressed him. He could not keep away from him his mental vision of Breault as he had helped to pry him from the sledge— his frozen features, the stiffened fingers, the curious twist of the icy lips that had been almost a grin.

Blake was not superstitious. He was too much a man of iron for that. His soul had lost the plasticity of imagination. But he could not forget Breault's lips as they had seemed to grin up at him. There was a reason for it. On his last trip down, Breault had said to him, with that same half-grin on his face:

"M'sieu, some day you may go after my murderer, and when you do, Francois Breault will go with you."

That was three months ago. Blake measured the time back as he sucked at his pipe, and at the same time he looked at the shadowy and half-lost forms of his dogs, curled up for the night in the outer rim of firelight.

Over the tree-tops a sudden blast of wind howled. It was like a monster voice. Blake rose to his feet and rolled upon the fire the big night log he had dragged in, and to this he added, with the woodman's craft of long experience, lengths of green timber, so arranged that they would hold fire until morning. Then he went into his silk service tent and buried himself in his sleeping-bag.

For a long time he did not sleep. He listened to the crackle of the fire. Again and again he heard that monster voice moaning and shrieking over the forest. Never had the rage of storm filled him with the uneasiness of to-night. At last the mystery of it was solved for him. The wind came and went each time in a great moaning, half shrieking sound: B-r-r-r-r— e-e-e-e— aw-w-w-w!

It was like a shock to him; and yet, he was not a superstitious man. No, he was not that. He would have staked his life on it. But it was not pleasant to hear a dead man's name shrieked over one's head by the wind. Under the cover of his sleeping-bag flap Corporal Blake laughed. Funny things were always happening, he tried to tell himself. And this was a mighty good joke. Breault wasn't so slow, after all. He had given his promise, and he was keeping it; for, if it wasn't really Breault's voice up there in the wind, multiplied a thousand times, it was a good imitation of it. Again Corporal Blake laughed— a laugh as unpleasant as the cough that had come from Breault's bullet-punctured lung. He fell asleep after a time; but even sleep could not drive from him the clinging obsession of the thought that strange things were to happen in this taking of Jan Thoreau.

With the gray dawn there was nothing to mark the passing of the storm except freshly fallen snow, and Blake was on the trail before it was light enough to see a hundred yards ahead. There was a defiance and a contempt of last night in the crack of his long caribou-gut whip and the halloo of his voice as he urged on his dogs. Breault's voice in the wind? Bah! Only a fool would have thought that. Therefore he was a fool. And Jan Thoreau— it would be like taking a child. There would be no happenings to report— merely an arrest, a quick return journey, an affair altogether too ordinary to be interesting. Perhaps it was all on account of the hearty supper of caribou liver he had eaten. He was fond of liver, and once or twice before it had played him tricks.

He began to wonder if he would find Jan Thoreau at home. He remembered Jan quite vividly. The Indians called him Kitoochikun because he played a fiddle. Blake, the Iron Man, disliked him because of that fiddle. Jan was never without it, on the trail or off. The Fiddling Man, he called him contemptuously— a baby, a woman; not fit for the big north. Tall and slim, with blond hair in spite of his French blood and name, a quiet and unexcitable face, and an air that Blake

called "damned superiority." He wondered how the Fiddling Man had ever screwed up nerve enough to kill Breault. Undoubtedly there had been no fight. A quick and treacherous shot, no doubt. That was like a man who played a fiddle. *Pouf*! He had no more respect for him than if he dressed in woman's clothing.

And he *did* have a wife, this Jan Thoreau. They lived a good twenty miles off the north-and-south trail, on an island in the middle of Black Bear Lake. He had never seen the wife. A poor sort of woman, he made up his mind, that would marry a fiddler. Probably a half-breed; maybe an Indian. Anyway, he had no sympathy for her. Without a doubt, it was the woman who did the trapping and cut the wood. Any man who would tote a fiddle around on his back—

Corporal Blake traveled fast, and it was afternoon of the second day when he came to the dense spruce forest that shut in Black Bear Lake. Here something happened to change his plans somewhat. He met an Indian he knew— an Indian who, for two or three good reasons that stuck in the back of his head, dared not lie to him; and this tribesman, coming straight from the Thoreau cabin, told him that Jan was not at home, but had gone on a three-day trip to see the French missioner who lived on one of the lower Wholdaia waterways.

Blake was keen on strategem. With him, man-hunting was like a game of chess; and after he had questioned the Indian for a quarter of an hour he saw his opportunity. Pastamoo, the Cree, was made a part of his Majesty's service on the spot, with the promise of torture and speedy execution if he proved himself a traitor.

Blake turned over to him his dogs and sledge, his provisions, and his tent, and commanded him to camp in the heart of a cedar swamp a few miles back, with the information that he would return for his outfit at some time in the indefinite future. He might be gone a day or a week. When he had seen Pastamoo off, he continued his journey toward the cabin, in the hope that Jan Thoreau's wife was either an Indian or a fool. He was too old a hand at his game to be taken in by the story that had been told to the Cree.

Jan had not gone to the French missioner's. A murderer's trail would not be given away like that. Of course the wife knew. And Corporal Blake desired no better string to a criminal than the faith of a wife. Wives were easy if handled right, and they had put the finishing touch to more than one of his great successes.

At the edge of the lake he fell back on his old trick— hunger, exhaustion, a sprained leg. It was not more than a quarter of a mile across the snow-covered ice of the lake to the thin spiral of smoke that he saw rising above the thick balsams on the island. Five times in that distance he fell upon his face; he crawled like a man about to die. He performed an arduous task, a devilish task, and when at last he reached the balsams he cursed his luck until he was red in

the face. No one had seen him. That quarter-mile of labor was lost, its finesse a failure. But he kept up the play, and staggered weakly through the sheltering balsams to the cabin. His artifice had no shame, even when played on women; and he fell heavily against the door, beat upon it with his fist; and slipped down into the snow, where he lay with his head bowed, as if his last strength was gone.

He heard movement inside, quick steps— and then the door opened. He did not look up for a moment. That would have been crude. When he did raise his head, it was very slowly, with a look of anguish in his face. And then— he stared. His body all at once grew tense, and the counterfeit pain in his eyes died out like a flash in this most astounding moment of his life. Man of iron though he was, steeled to the core against the weaknesses of sudden emotions, it was impossible for him to restrain the gasp of amazement that rose to his lips.

In that stifled cry Jan Thoreau's wife heard the supplication of a dying man. She did not catch, back of it, the note of a startled beast. She was herself startled, frightened for a moment by the unexpectedness of it all.

And Blake stared. This— the fiddler's wife! She was clutching in her hand a brush with which she had been arranging her hair. The hair, jet black, was wonderful. Her eyes were still more wonderful to Blake. She was not an Indian— not a half-breed— and beautiful. The loveliest face he had ever visioned, sleeping or awake, was looking down at him.

With a second gasp, he remembered himself, and his body sagged, and the amazed stare went out of his eyes as he allowed his head to fall a little. In this movement his cap fell off. In another moment she was at his side, kneeling in the snow and bending over him.

"You are hurt, m'sieu!"

Her hair fell upon him, smothering his neck and shoulders. The perfume of it was like the delicate scent of a rare flower in his nostrils. A strange thrill swept through him. He did not try to analyze it in those few astonishing moments. It was beyond his comprehension, even had he tried. He was ignorant of the finer fundamentals of life, and of the great truth that the case-hardened nature of a man, like the body of an athlete, crumbles fastest under sudden and unexpected change and strain.

He regained his feet slowly and stupidly, assisted by Marie. They climbed the one step to the door. As he sank back heavily on the cot, in the room they entered, a thick tress of her hair fell softly upon his face. He closed his eyes for a space. When he opened them, Marie was bending over the stove.

And *she* was Thoreau's wife! The instant he had looked up into her face, he had forgotten the fiddler; but he remembered him now as he watched the woman, who stood with her back toward him. She was as slim as a reed. Her hair fell to her hips. He drew a deep breath. Unconsciously he clenched his

hands. *She*— the fiddler's wife! The thought repeated itself again and again. Jan Thoreau, *murderer*, and this woman— *his wife*.

She returned in a moment with hot tea, and he drank with subtle hypocrisy from the cup she held to his lips.

"Sprained my leg," he said then, remembering his old part, and replying to the questioning anxiety in her eyes. "Dogs ran away and left me, and I got here just by chance. A little more and— "

He smiled grimly, and as he sank back he gave a sharp cry. He had practised that cry in more than one cabin, and along with it a convulsion of his features to emphasize the impression he labored to make.

"I'm afraid— I'll be a trouble to you," he apologized. "It's not broken; but it's bad, and I won't be able to move— soon. Is Jan at home?"

"No, m'sieu; he is away."

"Away," repeated Blake disappointedly. "Perhaps sometime he has told you about me," he added with sudden hopefulness. "I am John Duval."

"M'sieu— *Duval*!"

Marie's eyes, looking down at him, became all at once great pools of glowing light. Her lips parted. She leaned toward him, her slim hands clasped suddenly to her breast.

"M'sieu Duval— who nursed him through the smallpox?" she cried, her voice trembling. "M'sieu Duval— who saved my Jan's life!"

Blake had looked up his facts at headquarters. He knew what Duval, the Barren Land trapper, had once upon a time done for Jan.

"Yes; I am John Duval," said. "And so— you see— I am sorry that Jan is away."

"But he is coming back soon— in a few days," exclaimed Marie. "You shall stay, m'sieu! You will wait for him? Yes?"

"This leg— " began Blake. He cut himself short with a grimace. "Yes, I'll stay. I guess I'll have to."

Marie had changed at the mention of Duval's name. With the glow in her eyes had come a flush into her cheeks, and Blake could see the strange little quiver at her throat as she looked at him. But she did not see Blake so much as what lay beyond him— Duval's lonely cabin away up on the edge of the Great Barren, the hours of darkness and agony through which Jan had passed, and the magnificent comradeship of this man who had now dragged himself to their own cabin, half dead.

Many times Jan had told her the story of that terrible winter when Duval had nursed him like a woman, and had almost given up his life as a sacrifice. And this— *this*— was Duval? She bent over him again as he lay on the cot, her eyes shining like stars in the growing dusk. In that dusk she was unconscious of the fact that his fingers had found a long tress of her hair and were clutching it

passionately. Remembering Duval as Jan had enshrined him in her heart, she said:

"I have prayed many times that the great God might thank you, m'sieu."

He raised a hand. For an instant it touched her soft, warm cheek and caressed her hair. Marie did not shrink— yes, that would have been an insult. Even Jan would have said that. For was not this Duval, to whom she owed all the happiness in her life— Duval, more than brother to Jan Thoreau, her husband?

"And you— are Marie?" said Blake.

"Yes, m'sieu, I am Marie."

A joyous note trembled in her voice as she drew back from the cot. He could hear her swiftly braiding her hair before she struck a match to light the oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. After that, through partly closed eyes, he watched her as she prepared their supper. Occasionally, when she turned toward him as if to speak, he feigned a desire to sleep. It was a catlike watchfulness, filled with his old cunning. In his face there was no sign to betray its hideous significance. Outwardly he had regained his iron-like impassiveness; but in his body and his brain every nerve and fiber was consumed by a monstrous desire— a desire for this woman, the murderer's wife. It was as strange and as sudden as the death that had come to Francois Breault.

The moment he had looked up into her face in the doorway, it had overwhelmed him. And now even the sound of her footsteps on the floor filled him with an exquisite exultation. It was more than exultation. It was a feeling of *possession*.

In the hollow of his hand he— Blake, the man-hunter— held the fate of this woman. She was the Fiddler's wife— and the Fiddler was a murderer.

Marie heard the sudden deep breath that forced itself from his lips, a gasp that would have been a cry of triumph if he had given it voice.

"You are in pain, m'sieu," she exclaimed, turning toward him quickly.

"A little," he said, smiling at her. "Will you help me to sit up, Marie?"

He saw ahead of him another and more thrilling game than the man-hunt now. And Marie, unsuspicious, put her arms about the shoulders of the Pharisee and helped him to rise. They ate their supper with a narrow table between them. If there had been a doubt in Blake's mind before that, the half hour in which she sat facing him dispelled it utterly. At first the amazing beauty of Thoreau's wife had impinged itself upon his senses with something of a shock. But he was cool now. He was again master of his old cunning. Pitilessly and without conscience, he was marshaling the crafty forces of his brute nature for this new and more thrilling fight— the fight for a woman.

That in representing the Law he was pledged to virtue as well as order had never entered into his code of life. To him the Law was force— power. It had exalted him. It had forged an iron mask over the face of his savagery. And it was

the savage that was dominant in him now. He saw in Marie's dark eyes a great love— love for a murderer.

It was not his thought that he might alienate that. For that look, turned upon himself, he would have sacrificed his whole world as it had previously existed. He was scheming beyond that impossibility, measuring her even as he called himself Duval, counting— not his chances of success, but the length of time it would take him to succeed.

He had never failed. A man had never beaten him. A woman had never tricked him. And he granted no possibility of failure now. But— *how*? That was the question that writhed and twisted itself in his brain even as he smiled at her over the table and told her of the black days of Jan's sickness up on the edge of the Barren.

And then it came to him— all at once. Marie did not see. She did not *feel*. She had no suspicion of this loyal friend of her husband's.

Blake's heart pounded triumphant. He hobbled back to the cot, leaning on Marie slim shoulder; and as he hobbled he told her how he had helped Jan into his cabin in just this same way, and how at the end Jan had collapsed— just as he collapsed when he came to the cot. He pulled Marie down with him— accidentally. His lips touched her head. He laughed.

For a few moments he was like a drunken man in his new joy. Willingly he would have gambled his life on his chance of winning. But confidence displaced none of his cunning. He rubbed his hands and said:

"Gawd, but won't it be a surprise for Jan? I told him that some day I'd come. I told him!"

It would be a tremendous joke— this surprise he had in store for Jan. He chuckled over it again and again as Marie went about her work; and Marie's face flushed and her eyes were bright and she laughed softly at this great love which Duval betrayed for her husband. No; even the loss of his dogs and his outfit couldn't spoil his pleasure! Why should it? He could get other dogs and another outfit— but it had been three years since he had seen Jan Thoreau! When Marie had finished her work he put his hand suddenly to his eyes and said:

"Peste! but last night's storm must have hurt my eyes. The light blinds them, ma cheri. Will you put it out, and sit down near me, so that I can see you as you talk, and tell me all that has happened to Jan Thoreau since that winter three years ago?"

She put out the light, and threw open the door of the box-stove. In the dim firelight she sat on a stool beside Blake's cot. Her faith in him was like that of a child. She was twenty-two. Blake was fifteen years older. She felt the immense superiority of his age.

This man, you must understand, had been more than a brother to Jan. He had been a father. He had risked his life. He had saved him from death. And

Marie, as she sat at his side, did not think of him as a young man— thirty-seven. She talked to him as she might have talked to an elder brother of Jan's, and with something like the same reverence in her voice.

It was unfortunate— for her— that Jan had loved Duval, and that he had never tired of telling her about him. And now, when Blake's caution warned him to lie no more about the days of plague in Duval's cabin, she told him— as he had asked her— about herself and Jan; how they had lived during the last three years, the important things that had happened to them, and what they were looking forward to. He caught the low note of happiness that ran through her voice; and with a laugh, a laugh that sounded real and wholesome, he put out his hand in the darkness— for the fire had burned itself low— and stroked her hair. She did not shrink from the caress. He was happy because THEY were happy. That was her thought! And Blake did not go too far.

She went on, telling Jan's life away, betraying him In her happiness, crucifying him in her faith. Blake knew that she was telling the truth. She did not know that Jan had killed Francois Breault, and she believed that he would surely return— in three days. And the way he had left her that morning! Yes, she confided even that to this big brother of Jan, her cheeks flushing hotly in the darkness— how he had hated to go, and held her a long time in his arms before he tore himself away.

Had he taken his fiddle along with him? Yes— always that. Next to herself he loved his violin. Oo-oo— no, no— she was not jealous of the violin! Blake laughed— such a big, healthy, happy laugh, with an odd tremble in it. He stroked her hair again, and his fingers lay for an instant against her warm cheek.

And then, quite casually, he played his second big card.

"A man was found dead on the trail yesterday," he said. "Some one killed him. He had a bullet through his lung. He was the mail-runner, Francois Breault."

It was then, when he said that Breault had been murdered, that Blake's hand touched Marie's cheek and fell to her shoulder. It was too dark in the cabin to see. But under his hand he felt her grow suddenly rigid, and for a moment or two she seemed to stop breathing. In the gloom Blake's lips were smiling. He had struck, and he needed no light to see the effect.

"Francois— Breault!" he heard her breathe at last, as if she was fighting to keep something from choking her. "Francois Breault— dead— killed by someone—"

She rose slowly. His eyes followed her, a shadow in the gloom as she moved toward the stove. He heard her strike a match, and when she turned toward him again in the light of the oil-lamp, her face was pale and her eyes were big and staring. He swung himself to the edge of the cot, his pulse beating with the savage thrill of the inquisitor. Yet he knew that it was not quite time for him to disclose himself— not quite. He did not dread the moment when he would rise

and tell her that he was not injured, and that he was not M'sieu Duval, but Corporal Blake of the Royal Mounted Police. He was eager for that moment. But he waited— discreetly. When the trap was sprung there would be no escape.

"You are sure— it was Francois Breault?" she said at last.

He nodded.

"Yes, the mail-runner. You knew him?"

She had moved to the table, and her hand was gripping the edge of it. For a space she did not answer him, but seemed to be looking somewhere through the cabin walls— a long way off. Ferret-like, he was watching her, and saw his opportunity. How splendidly fate was playing his way!

He rose to his feet and hobbled painfully to her, a splendid hypocrite, a magnificent dissembler. He seized her hand and held it in both his own. It was small and soft, but strangely cold.

"*Ma cheri*— my dear child— what makes you look like that? What has the death of Francois Breault to do with you— you and Jan?"

It was the voice of a friend, a brother, low, sympathetic, filled just enough with anxiety. Only last winter, in just that way, it had won the confidence and roused the hope of Pierrot's wife, over on the Athabasca. In the summer that followed they hanged Pierrot. Gently Blake spoke the words again. Marie's lips trembled. Her great eyes were looking at him— straight into his soul, it seemed.

"You may tell me, ma cheri," he encouraged, barely above a whisper. "I am Duval. And Jan— I love Jan."

He drew her back toward the cot, dragging his limb painfully, and seated her again upon the stool. He sat beside her, still holding her hand, patting it, encouraging her. The color was coming back into Marie's cheeks. Her lips were growing full and red again, and suddenly she gave a trembling little laugh as she looked up into Blake's face. His presence began to dispel the terror that had possessed her all at once.

"Tell me, Marie."

He saw the shudder that passed through her slim shoulders.

"They had a fight— here— in this cabin— three days ago," she confessed. "It must have been— the day— he was killed."

Blake knew the wild thought that was in her heart as she watched him. The muscles of his jaws tightened. His shoulders grew tense. He looked over her head as if he, too, saw something beyond the cabin walls. It was Marie's hand that gripped his now, and her voice, panting almost, was filled with an agonized protest.

"No, no, no— it was not Jan," she moaned. "It was not Jan who killed him!"

"Hush!" said Blake.

He looked about him as if there was a chance that someone might hear the fatal words she had spoken. It was a splendid bit of acting, almost unconscious,

and tremendously effective. The expression in his face stabbed to her heart like a cold knife. Convulsively her fingers clutched more tightly at his hands. He might as well have spoken the words: "It was Jan, then, who killed Francois Breault!"

Instead of that he said:

"You must tell me everything, Marie. How did it happen? Why did they fight? And why has Jan gone away so soon after the killing? For Jan's sake, you must tell me— everything."

He waited. It seemed to him that he could hear the fighting struggle in Marie's breast. Then she began, brokenly, a little at a time, now and then barely whispering the story. It was a woman's story, and she told it like a woman, from the beginning. Perhaps at one time the rivalry between Jan Thoreau and Francois Breault, and their struggle for her love, had made her heart beat faster and her cheeks flush warm with a woman's pride of conquest, even though she had loved one and had hated the other. None of that pride was in her voice now, except when she spoke of Jan.

"Yes— like that— children together— we grew up," she confided. "It was down there at Wollaston Post, in the heart of the big forests, and when I was a baby it was Jan who carried me about on his shoulders. Oui, even then he played the violin. I loved it. I loved Jan— always. Later, when I was seventeen, Francois Breault came."

She was trembling.

"Jan has told me a little about those days," lied Blake. "Tell me the rest, Marie."

"I— I knew I was going to be Jan's wife," she went on, the hands she had withdrawn from his twisting nervously in her lap. "We both knew. And yet— he had not spoken— he had not been definite. Oo-oo, do you understand, M'sieu Duval? It was my fault at the beginning! Francois Breault loved me. And so— I played with him— only a little, m'sieu!— to frighten Jan into the thought that he might lose me. I did not know what I was doing. No— no; I didn't understand.

"Jan and I were married, and on the day Jan saw the missioner— a week before we were made man and wife— Francois Beault came in from the trail to see me, and I confessed to him, and asked his forgiveness. We were alone. And he— Francois Breault— was like a madman."

She was panting. Her hands were clenched. "If Jan hadn't heard my cries, and come just in time— " she breathed.

Her blazing eyes looked up into Blake's face. He understood, and nodded.

"And it was like that— again— three days ago," she continued. "I hadn't seen Breault in two years— two years ago down at Wollaston Post. And he was mad. Yes, he must have been mad when he came three days ago. I don't know

that he came so much for me as it was to kill Jan, He said it was Jan. Ugh, and it was here— in the cabin— that they fought!"

"And Jan— punished him," said Blake in a low voice.

Again the convulsive shudder swept through Marie's shoulders.

"It was strange— what happened, m'sieu. I was going to shoot. Yes, I would have shot him when the chance came. But all at once Francois Breault sprang back to the door, and he cried: 'Jan Thoreau, I am mad— mad! Great God, what have I done?' Yes, he said that, m'sieu, those very words— and then he was gone."

"And that same day— a little later— Jan went away from the cabin, and was gone a long time," whispered Blake. "Was it not so, Marie?"

"Yes; he went to his trap-line, m'sieu."

For the first time Blake made a movement. He took her face boldly between his two hands, and turned it so that her staring eyes were looking straight into his own. Every fiber in his body was trembling with the thrill of his monstrous triumph. "My dear little girl, I must tell you the truth," he said. "Your husband, Jan, did not go to his trap-line three days ago. He followed Francois Breault, and killed him. And I am not John Duval. I am Corporal Blake of the Mounted Police, and I have come to get Jan, that he may be hanged by the neck until he is dead for his crime. I came for that. But I have changed my mind. I have seen you, and for you I would give even a murderer his life. Do you understand? For *you*— *you*— YOU—"

And then came the grand finale, just as he had planned it. His words had stupefied her. She made no movement, no sound— only her great eyes seemed alive. And suddenly he swept her into his arms with the wild passion of a beast. How long she lay against his breast, his arms crushing her, his hot lips on her face, she did not know.

The world had grown suddenly dark. But in that darkness she heard his voice; and what it was saying roused her at last from the deadliness of her stupor. She strained against him, and with a wild cry broke from his arms, and staggered across the cabin floor to the door of her bedroom. Blake did not pursue her. He let the darkness of that room shut her in. He had told her— and she understood.

He shrugged his shoulders as he rose to his feet. Quite calmly, in spite of the wild rush of blood through his body, he went to the cabin door, opened it, and looked out into the night. It was full of stars, and quiet.

It was quiet in that inner room, too— so quiet that one might fancy he could hear the beating of a heart. Marie had flung herself in the farthest corner, beyond the bed. And there her hand had touched something. It was cold— the chill of steel. She could almost have screamed, in the mighty reaction that swept

through her like an electric shock. But her lips were dumb and her hand clutched tighter at the cold thing.

She drew it toward her inch by inch, and leveled it across the bed. It was Jan's goose-gun, loaded with buck-shot. There was a single metallic click as she drew the hammer back. In the doorway, looking at the stars, Blake did not hear.

Marie waited. She was not reasoning things now, except that in the outer room there was a serpent that she must kill. She would kill him as he came between her and the light; then she would follow over Jan's trail, overtake him somewhere, and they would flee together. Of that much she thought ahead. But chiefly her mind, her eyes, her brain, her whole being, were concentrated on the twelve-inch opening between the bedroom door and the outer room. The serpent would soon appear there. And then—

She heard the cabin door close, and Blake's footsteps approaching. Her body did not tremble now. Her forefinger was steady on the trigger. She held her breath— and waited. Blake came to the deadline and stopped. She could see one arm and a part of his shoulder. But that was not enough. Another half step— six inches— four even, and she would fire. Her heart pounded like a tiny hammer in her breast.

And then the very life in her body seemed to stand still. The cabin door had opened suddenly, and someone had entered. In that moment she would have fired, for she knew that it must be Jan who had returned. But Blake had moved. And now, with her finger on the trigger, she heard his cry of amazement:

"Sergeant Fitzgerald!"

"Yes. Put up your gun, Corporal. Have you got Jan Thoreau?"

"He— is gone."

"That is lucky for us." It was the stranger's voice, filled with a great relief. "I have traveled fast to overtake you. Matao, the half-breed, was stabbed in a quarrel soon after you left; and before he died he confessed to killing Breault. The evidence is conclusive. Ugh, but this fire is good! Anybody at home?"

"Yes," said Blake slowly. "Mrs. Thoreau— is— at home."

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16: Il Conde

A Pathetic Tale

Joseph Conrad

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski, 1857-1924

Cassell's Magazine Aug 1908

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"*VEDI Napoli e poi mori*."

The first time we got into conversation was in the National Museum in Naples, in the rooms on the ground floor containing the famous collection of bronzes from Herculaneum and Pompeii: that marvellous legacy of antique art whose delicate perfection has been preserved for us by the catastrophic fury of a volcano.

He addressed me first, over the celebrated Resting Hermes which we had been looking at side by side. He said the right things about that wholly admirable piece. Nothing profound. His taste was natural rather than cultivated. He had obviously seen many fine things in his life and appreciated them: but he had no jargon of a dilettante or the connoisseur. A hateful tribe. He spoke like a fairly intelligent man of the world, a perfectly unaffected gentleman.

We had known each other by sight for some few days past. Staying in the same hotel— good, but not extravagantly up to date— I had noticed him in the vestibule going in and out. I judged he was an old and valued client. The bow of the hotel-keeper was cordial in its deference, and he acknowledged it with familiar courtesy. For the servants he was Il Conde. There was some squabble over a man's parasol— yellow silk with white lining sort of thing— the waiters had discovered abandoned outside the dining-room door. Our gold-laced door-keeper recognized it and I heard him directing one of the lift boys to run after Il Conde with it. Perhaps he was the only Count staying in the hotel, or perhaps he had the distinction of being the Count par excellence, conferred upon him because of his tried fidelity to the house.

Having conversed at the Museo— (and by the by he had expressed his dislike of the busts and statues of Roman emperors in the gallery of marbles: their faces were too vigorous, too pronounced for him)— having conversed already in the morning I did not think I was intruding when in the evening, finding the dining-room very full, I proposed to share his little table. Judging by the quiet urbanity of his consent he did not think so either. His smile was very attractive.

He dined in an evening waistcoat and a "smoking" (he called it so) with a black tie. All this of very good cut, not new— just as these things should be. He was, morning or evening, very correct in his dress. I have no doubt that his whole existence had been correct, well ordered and conventional, undisturbed

by startling events. His white hair brushed upwards off a lofty forehead gave him the air of an idealist, of an imaginative man. His white moustache, heavy but carefully trimmed and arranged, was not unpleasantly tinted a golden yellow in the middle. The faint scent of some very good perfume, and of good cigars (that last an odour quite remarkable to come upon in Italy) reached me across the table. It was in his eyes that his age showed most. They were a little weary with creased eyelids. He must have been sixty or a couple of years more. And he was communicative. I would not go so far as to call it garrulous— but distinctly communicative.

He had tried various climates, of Abbazia, of the Riviera, of other places, too, he told me, but the only one which suited him was the climate of the Gulf of Naples. The ancient Romans, who, he pointed out to me, were men expert in the art of living, knew very well what they were doing when they built their villas on these shores, in Baiae, in Vico, in Capri. They came down to this seaside in search of health, bringing with them their trains of mimes and flute-players to amuse their leisure. He thought it extremely probable that the Romans of the higher classes were specially predisposed to painful rheumatic affections.

This was the only personal opinion I heard him express. It was based on no special erudition. He knew no more of the Romans than an average informed man of the world is expected to know. He argued from personal experience. He had suffered himself from a painful and dangerous rheumatic affection till he found relief in this particular spot of Southern Europe.

This was three years ago, and ever since he had taken up his quarters on the shores of the gulf, either in one of the hotels in Sorrento or hiring a small villa in Capri. He had a piano, a few books: picked up transient acquaintances of a day, week, or month in the stream of travellers from all Europe. One can imagine him going out for his walks in the streets and lanes, becoming known to beggars, shopkeepers, children, country people; talking amiably over the walls to the contadini— and coming back to his rooms or his villa to sit before the piano, with his white hair brushed up and his thick orderly moustache, "to make a little music for myself." And, of course, for a change there was Naples near by— life, movement, animation, opera. A little amusement, as he said, is necessary for health. Mimes and flute-players, in fact. Only unlike the magnates of ancient Rome, he had no affairs of the city to call him away from these moderate delights. He had no affairs at all. Probably he had never had any grave affairs to attend to in his life. It was a kindly existence, with its joys and sorrows regulated by the course of Nature— marriages, births, deaths— ruled by the prescribed usages of good society and protected by the State.

He was a widower; but in the months of July and August he ventured to cross the Alps for six weeks on a visit to his married daughter. He told me her name. It was that of a very aristocratic family. She had a castle— in Bohemia, I

think. This is as near as I ever came to ascertaining his nationality. His own name, strangely enough, he never mentioned. Perhaps he thought I had seen it on the published list. Truth to say, I never looked. At any rate, he was a good European— he spoke four languages to my certain knowledge— and a man of fortune. Not of great fortune evidently and appropriately. I imagine that to be extremely rich would have appeared to him improper, outre— too blatant altogether. And obviously, too, the fortune was not of his making. The making of a fortune cannot be achieved without some roughness. It is a matter of temperament. His nature was too kindly for strife. In the course of conversation he mentioned his estate quite by the way, in reference to that painful and alarming rheumatic affection. One year, staying incautiously beyond the Alps as late as the middle of September, he had been laid up for three months in that lonely country house with no one but his valet and the caretaking couple to attend to him. Because, as he expressed it, he "kept no establishment there." He had only gone for a couple of days to confer with his land agent. He promised himself never to be so imprudent in the future. The first weeks of September would find him on the shores of his beloved gulf.

Sometimes in travelling one comes upon such lonely men, whose only business is to wait for the unavoidable. Deaths and marriages have made a solitude round them, and one really cannot blame their endeavours to make the waiting as easy as possible. As he remarked to me, "At my time of life freedom from physical pain is a very important matter."

It must not be imagined that he was a wearisome hypochondriac. He was really much too well-bred to be a nuisance. He had an eye for the small weaknesses of humanity. But it was a good-natured eye. He made a restful, easy, pleasant companion for the hours between dinner and bedtime. We spent three evenings together, and then I had to leave Naples in a hurry to look after a friend who had fallen seriously ill in Taormina. Having nothing to do, Il Conde came to see me off at the station. I was somewhat upset, and his idleness was always ready to take a kindly form. He was by no means an indolent man.

He went along the train peering into the carriages for a good seat for me, and then remained talking cheerily from below. He declared he would miss me that evening very much and announced his intention of going after dinner to listen to the band in the public garden, the Villa Nazionale. He would amuse himself by hearing excellent music and looking at the best society. There would be a lot of people, as usual.

I seem to see him yet— his raised face with a friendly smile under the thick moustaches, and his kind, fatigued eyes. As the train began to move, he addressed me in two languages: first in French, saying, "Bon voyage"; then, in his very good, somewhat emphatic English, encouragingly, because he could see my concern: "All will— be— well— yet!"

My friend's illness having taken a decidedly favourable turn, I returned to Naples on the tenth day. I cannot say I had given much thought to Il Conde during my absence, but entering the dining-room I looked for him in his habitual place. I had an idea he might have gone back to Sorrento to his piano and his books and his fishing. He was great friends with all the boatmen, and fished a good deal with lines from a boat. But I made out his white head in the crowd of heads, and even from a distance noticed something unusual in his attitude. Instead of sitting erect, gazing all round with alert urbanity, he drooped over his plate. I stood opposite him for some time before he looked up, a little wildly, if such a strong word can be used in connection with his correct appearance.

"Ah, my dear sir! Is it you?" he greeted me. "I hope all is well."

He was very nice about my friend. Indeed, he was always nice, with the niceness of people whose hearts are genuinely humane. But this time it cost him an effort. His attempts at general conversation broke down into dullness. It occurred to me he might have been indisposed. But before I could frame the inquiry he muttered:

"You find me here very sad."

"I am sorry for that," I said. "You haven't had bad news, I hope?"

It was very kind of me to take an interest. No. It was not that. No bad news, thank God. And he became very still as if holding his breath. Then, leaning forward a little, and in an odd tone of awed embarrassment, he took me into his confidence.

"The truth is that I have had a very— a very— how shall I say?— abominable adventure happen to me."

The energy of the epithet was sufficiently startling in that man of moderate feelings and toned-down vocabulary. The word unpleasant I should have thought would have fitted amply the worst experience likely to befall a man of his stamp. And an adventure, too. Incredible! But it is in human nature to believe the worst; and I confess I eyed him stealthily, wondering what he had been up to. In a moment, however, my unworthy suspicions vanished. There was a fundamental refinement of nature about the man which made me dismiss all idea of some more or less disreputable scrape.

"It is very serious. Very serious." He went on, nervously. "I will tell you after dinner, if you will allow me."

I expressed my perfect acquiescence by a little bow, nothing more. I wished him to understand that I was not likely to hold him to that offer, if he thought better of it later on. We talked of indifferent things, but with a sense of difficulty quite unlike our former easy, gossipy intercourse. The hand raising a piece of bread to his lips, I noticed, trembled slightly. This symptom, in regard to my reading of the man, was no less than startling.

In the smoking-room he did not hang back at all. Directly we had taken our usual seats he leaned sideways over the arm of his chair and looked straight into my eyes earnestly.

"You remember," he began, "that day you went away? I told you then I would go to the Villa Nazionale to hear some music in the evening."

I remembered. His handsome old face, so fresh for his age, unmarked by any trying experience, appeared haggard for an instant. It was like the passing of a shadow. Returning his steadfast gaze, I took a sip of my black coffee. He was systematically minute in his narrative, simply in order, I think, not to let his excitement get the better of him.

After leaving the railway station, he had an ice, and read the paper in a cafe. Then he went back to the hotel, dressed for dinner, and dined with a good appetite. After dinner he lingered in the hall (there were chairs and tables there) smoking his cigar; talked to the little girl of the Primo Tenore of the San Carlo theatre, and exchanged a few words with that "amiable lady," the wife of the Primo Tenore. There was no performance that evening, and these people were going to the Villa also. They went out of the hotel. Very well.

At the moment of following their example— it was half-past nine already— he remembered he had a rather large sum of money in his pocket-book. He entered, therefore, the office and deposited the greater part of it with the book-keeper of the hotel. This done, he took a carozella and drove to the seashore. He got out of the cab and entered the Villa on foot from the Largo di Vittoria end.

He stared at me very hard. And I understood then how really impressionable he was. Every small fact and event of that evening stood out in his memory as if endowed with mystic significance. If he did not mention to me the colour of the pony which drew the carozella, and the aspect of the man who drove, it was a mere oversight arising from his agitation, which he repressed manfully.

He had then entered the Villa Nazionale from the Largo di Vittoria end. The Villa Nazionale is a public pleasure-ground laid out in grass plots, bushes, and flower-beds between the houses of the Riviera di Chiaja and the waters of the bay. Alleys of trees, more or less parallel, stretch its whole length— which is considerable. On the Riviera di Chiaja side the electric tramcars run close to the railings. Between the garden and the sea is the fashionable drive, a broad road bordered by a low wall, beyond which the Mediterranean splashes with gentle murmurs when the weather is fine.

As life goes on late at night in Naples, the broad drive was all astir with a brilliant swarm of carriage lamps moving in pairs, some creeping slowly, others running rapidly under the thin, motionless line of electric lamps defining the shore. And a brilliant swarm of stars hung above the land humming with voices,

piled up with houses, glittering with lights— and over the silent flat shadows of the sea.

The gardens themselves are not very well lit. Our friend went forward in the warm gloom, his eyes fixed upon a distant luminous region extending nearly across the whole width of the Villa, as if the air had glowed there with its own cold, bluish, and dazzling light. This magic spot, behind the black trunks of trees and masses of inky foliage, breathed out sweet sounds mingled with bursts of brassy roar, sudden clashes of metal, and grave, vibrating thuds.

As he walked on, all these noises combined together into a piece of elaborate music whose harmonious phrases came persuasively through a great disorderly murmur of voices and shuffling of feet on the gravel of that open space. An enormous crowd immersed in the electric light, as if in a bath of some radiant and tenuous fluid shed upon their heads by luminous globes, drifted in its hundreds round the band. Hundreds more sat on chairs in more or less concentric circles, receiving unflinchingly the great waves of sonority that ebbed out into the darkness. The Count penetrated the throng, drifted with it in tranquil enjoyment, listening and looking at the faces. All people of good society: mothers with their daughters, parents and children, young men and young women all talking, smiling, nodding to each other. Very many pretty faces, and very many pretty toilettes. There was, of course, a quantity of diverse types: showy old fellows with white moustaches, fat men, thin men, officers in uniform; but what predominated, he told me, was the South Italian type of young man, with a colourless, clear complexion, red lips, jet-black little moustache and liquid black eyes so wonderfully effective in leering or scowling.

Withdrawing from the throng, the Count shared a little table in front of the cafe with a young man of just such a type. Our friend had some lemonade. The young man was sitting moodily before an empty glass. He looked up once, and then looked down again. He also tilted his hat forward. Like this—

The Count made the gesture of a man pulling his hat down over his brow, and went on:

"I think to myself: he is sad; something is wrong with him; young men have their troubles. I take no notice of him, of course. I pay for my lemonade, and go away."

Strolling about in the neighbourhood of the band, the Count thinks he saw twice that young man wandering alone in the crowd. Once their eyes met. It must have been the same young man, but there were so many there of that type that he could not be certain. Moreover, he was not very much concerned except in so far that he had been struck by the marked, peevish discontent of that face.

Presently, tired of the feeling of confinement one experiences in a crowd, the Count edged away from the band. An alley, very sombre by contrast,

presented itself invitingly with its promise of solitude and coolness. He entered it, walking slowly on till the sound of the orchestra became distinctly deadened. Then he walked back and turned about once more. He did this several times before he noticed that there was somebody occupying one of the benches.

The spot being midway between two lamp-posts the light was faint.

The man lolled back in the corner of the seat, his legs stretched out, his arms folded and his head drooping on his breast. He never stirred, as though he had fallen asleep there, but when the Count passed by next time he had changed his attitude. He sat leaning forward. His elbows were propped on his knees, and his hands were rolling a cigarette. He never looked up from that occupation.

The Count continued his stroll away from the band. He returned slowly, he said. I can imagine him enjoying to the full, but with his usual tranquillity, the balminess of this southern night and the sounds of music softened delightfully by the distance.

Presently, he approached for the third time the man on the garden seat, still leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. It was a dejected pose. In the semi-obscurity of the alley his high shirt collar and his cuffs made small patches of vivid whiteness. The Count said that he had noticed him getting up brusquely as if to walk away, but almost before he was aware of it the man stood before him asking in a low, gentle tone whether the signore would have the kindness to oblige him with a light.

The Count answered this request by a polite "Certainly," and dropped his hands with the intention of exploring both pockets of his trousers for the matches.

"I dropped my hands," he said, "but I never put them in my pockets. I felt a pressure there—"

He put the tip of his finger on a spot close under his breastbone, the very spot of the human body where a Japanese gentleman begins the operations of the Harakiri, which is a form of suicide following upon dishonour, upon an intolerable outrage to the delicacy of one's feelings.

"I glance down," the Count continued in an awestruck voice, "and what do I see? A knife! A long knife—"

"You don't mean to say," I exclaimed, amazed, "that you have been held up like this in the Villa at half-past ten o'clock, within a stone's throw of a thousand people!"

He nodded several times, staring at me with all his might.

"The clarionet," he declared, solemnly, "was finishing his solo, and I assure you I could hear every note. Then the band crashed fortissimo, and that creature rolled its eyes and gnashed its teeth hissing at me with the greatest ferocity, 'Be silent! No noise or—' "

I could not get over my astonishment.

"What sort of knife was it?" I asked, stupidly.

"A long blade. A stiletto— perhaps a kitchen knife. A long narrow blade. It gleamed. And his eyes gleamed. His white teeth, too. I could see them. He was very ferocious. I thought to myself: 'If I hit him he will kill me.' How could I fight with him? He had the knife and I had nothing. I am nearly seventy, you know, and that was a young man. I seemed even to recognize him. The moody young man of the cafe. The young man I met in the crowd. But I could not tell. There are so many like him in this country."

The distress of that moment was reflected in his face. I should think that physically he must have been paralyzed by surprise. His thoughts, however, remained extremely active. They ranged over every alarming possibility. The idea of setting up a vigorous shouting for help occurred to him, too. But he did nothing of the kind, and the reason why he refrained gave me a good opinion of his mental self-possession. He saw in a flash that nothing prevented the other from shouting, too.

"That young man might in an instant have thrown away his knife and pretended I was the aggressor. Why not? He might have said I attacked him. Why not? It was one incredible story against another! He might have said anything— bring some dishonouring charge against me— what do I know? By his dress he was no common robber. He seemed to belong to the better classes. What could I say? He was an Italian— I am a foreigner. Of course, I have my passport, and there is our consul— but to be arrested, dragged at night to the police office like a criminal!"

He shuddered. It was in his character to shrink from scandal, much more than from mere death. And certainly for many people this would have always remained— considering certain peculiarities of Neapolitan manners— a deucedly queer story. The Count was no fool. His belief in the respectable placidity of life having received this rude shock, he thought that now anything might happen. But also a notion came into his head that this young man was perhaps merely an infuriated lunatic.

This was for me the first hint of his attitude towards this adventure. In his exaggerated delicacy of sentiment he felt that nobody's self-esteem need be affected by what a madman may choose to do to one. It became apparent, however, that the Count was to be denied that consolation. He enlarged upon the abominably savage way in which that young man rolled his glistening eyes and gnashed his white teeth. The band was going now through a slow movement of solemn braying by all the trombones, with deliberately repeated bangs of the big drum.

"But what did you do?" I asked, greatly excited.

"Nothing," answered the Count. "I let my hands hang down very still. I told him quietly I did not intend making a noise. He snarled like a dog, then said in an ordinary voice:

" *'Vostro portofolio*.' "

"So I naturally," continued the Count— and from this point acted the whole thing in pantomime. Holding me with his eyes, he went through all the motions of reaching into his inside breast pocket, taking out a pocket-book, and handing it over. But that young man, still bearing steadily on the knife, refused to touch it.

He directed the Count to take the money out himself, received it into his left hand, motioned the pocketbook to be returned to the pocket, all this being done to the sweet thrilling of flutes and clarionets sustained by the emotional drone of the hautboys. And the "young man," as the Count called him, said: "This seems very little."

"It was, indeed, only 340 or 360 lire," the Count pursued. "I had left my money in the hotel, as you know. I told him this was all I had on me. He shook his head impatiently and said:

" *'Vostro orologio*.' "

The Count gave me the dumb show of pulling out his watch, detaching it. But, as it happened, the valuable gold half-chronometer he possessed had been left at a watch-maker's for cleaning. He wore that evening (on a leather guard) the Waterbury fifty-franc thing he used to take with him on his fishing expeditions. Perceiving the nature of this booty, the well-dressed robber made a contemptuous clicking sound with his tongue like this, "Tse-Ah!" and waved it away hastily. Then, as the Count was returning the disdained object to his pocket, he demanded with a threateningly increased pressure of the knife on the epigastrium, by way of reminder:

" *'Vostri anelli*.' "

"One of the rings," went on the Count, "was given me many years ago by my wife; the other is the signet ring of my father. I said, 'No. That you shall not have!'"

Here the Count reproduced the gesture corresponding to that declaration by clapping one hand upon the other, and pressing both thus against his chest. It was touching in its resignation. "That you shall not have," he repeated, firmly, and closed his eyes, fully expecting— I don't know whether I am right in recording that such an unpleasant word had passed his lips— fully expecting to feel himself being— I really hesitate to say— being disembowelled by the push of the long, sharp blade resting murderously against the pit of his stomach— the very seat, in all human beings, of anguishing sensations.

Great waves of harmony went on flowing from the band.

Suddenly the Count felt the nightmarish pressure removed from the sensitive spot. He opened his eyes. He was alone. He had heard nothing. It is probable that "the young man" had departed, with light steps, some time before, but the sense of the horrid pressure had lingered even after the knife had gone. A feeling of weakness came over him. He had just time to stagger to the garden seat. He felt as though he had held his breath for a long time. He sat all in a heap, panting with the shock of the reaction.

The band was executing, with immense bravura, the complicated finale. It ended with a tremendous crash. He heard it unreal and remote, as if his ears had been stopped, and then the hard clapping of a thousand, more or less, pairs of hands, like a sudden hail-shower passing away. The profound silence which succeeded recalled him to himself.

A tramcar resembling a long glass box wherein people sat with their heads strongly lighted, ran along swiftly within sixty yards of the spot where he had been robbed. Then another rustled by, and yet another going the other way. The audience about the band had broken up, and were entering the alley in small conversing groups. The Count sat up straight and tried to think calmly of what had happened to him. The vileness of it took his breath away again. As far as I can make it out he was disgusted with himself. I do not mean to say with his behaviour. Indeed, if his pantomimic rendering of it for my information was to be trusted, it was simply perfect. No, it was not that. He was not ashamed. He was shocked at being the selected victim, not of robbery so much as of contempt. His tranquillity had been wantonly desecrated. His lifelong, kindly nicety of outlook had been defaced.

Nevertheless, at that stage, before the iron had time to sink deep, he was able to argue himself into comparative equanimity. As his agitation calmed down somewhat, he became aware that he was frightfully hungry. Yes, hungry. The sheer emotion had made him simply ravenous. He left the seat and, after walking for some time, found himself outside the gardens and before an arrested tramcar, without knowing very well how he came there. He got in as if in a dream, by a sort of instinct. Fortunately he found in his trouser pocket a copper to satisfy the conductor. Then the car stopped, and as everybody was getting out he got out, too. He recognized the Piazza San Ferdinando, but apparently it did not occur to him to take a cab and drive to the hotel. He remained in distress on the Piazza like a lost dog, thinking vaguely of the best way of getting something to eat at once.

Suddenly he remembered his twenty-franc piece. He explained to me that he had that piece of French gold for something like three years. He used to carry it about with him as a sort of reserve in case of accident. Anybody is liable to have his pocket picked— a quite different thing from a brazen and insulting robbery.

The monumental arch of the Galleria Umberto faced him at the top of a noble flight of stairs. He climbed these without loss of time, and directed his steps towards the Cafe Umberto. All the tables outside were occupied by a lot of people who were drinking. But as he wanted something to eat, he went inside into the cafe, which is divided into aisles by square pillars set all round with long looking-glasses. The Count sat down on a red plush bench against one of these pillars, waiting for his risotto. And his mind reverted to his abominable adventure.

He thought of the moody, well-dressed young man, with whom he had exchanged glances in the crowd around the bandstand, and who, he felt confident, was the robber. Would he recognize him again? Doubtless. But he did not want ever to see him again. The best thing was to forget this humiliating episode.

The Count looked round anxiously for the coming of his risotto, and, behold! to the left against the wall— there sat the young man. He was alone at a table, with a bottle of some sort of wine or syrup and a carafe of iced water before him. The smooth olive cheeks, the red lips, the little jet-black moustache turned up gallantly, the fine black eyes a little heavy and shaded by long eyelashes, that peculiar expression of cruel discontent to be seen only in the busts of some Roman emperors— it was he, no doubt at all. But that was a type. The Count looked away hastily. The young officer over there reading a paper was like that, too. Same type. Two young men farther away playing draughts also resembled—

The Count lowered his head with the fear in his heart of being everlastingly haunted by the vision of that young man. He began to eat his risotto. Presently he heard the young man on his left call the waiter in a bad-tempered tone.

At the call, not only his own waiter, but two other idle waiters belonging to a quite different row of tables, rushed towards him with obsequious alacrity, which is not the general characteristic of the waiters in the Cafe Umberto. The young man muttered something and one of the waiters walking rapidly to the nearest door called out into the Galleria: "Pasquale! O! Pasquale!"

Everybody knows Pasquale, the shabby old fellow who, shuffling between the tables, offers for sale cigars, cigarettes, picture postcards, and matches to the clients of the cafe. He is in many respects an engaging scoundrel. The Count saw the grey-haired, unshaven ruffian enter the cafe, the glass case hanging from his neck by a leather strap, and, at a word from the waiter, make his shuffling way with a sudden spurt to the young man's table. The young man was in need of a cigar with which Pasquale served him fawningly. The old pedlar was going out, when the Count, on a sudden impulse, beckoned to him.

Pasquale approached, the smile of deferential recognition combining oddly with the cynical searching expression of his eyes. Leaning his case on the table,

he lifted the glass lid without a word. The Count took a box of cigarettes and urged by a fearful curiosity, asked as casually as he could—

"Tell me, Pasquale, who is that young signore sitting over there?"

The other bent over his box confidentially.

"That, Signor Conde," he said, beginning to rearrange his wares busily and without looking up, "that is a young Cavaliere of a very good family from Bari. He studies in the University here, and is the chief, *capo*, of an association of young men— of very nice young men."

He paused, and then, with mingled discretion and pride of knowledge, murmured the explanatory word "Camorra" and shut down the lid. "A very powerful Camorra," he breathed out. "The professors themselves respect it greatly... *una lira e cinquanti centesimi*, Signor Conde."

Our friend paid with the gold piece. While Pasquale was making up the change, he observed that the young man, of whom he had heard so much in a few words, was watching the transaction covertly. After the old vagabond had withdrawn with a bow, the Count settled with the waiter and sat still. A numbness, he told me, had come over him.

The young man paid, too, got up, and crossed over, apparently for the purpose of looking at himself in the mirror set in the pillar nearest to the Count's seat. He was dressed all in black with a dark green bow tie. The Count looked round, and was startled by meeting a vicious glance out of the corners of the other's eyes. The young Cavaliere from Bari (according to Pasquale; but Pasquale is, of course, an accomplished liar) went on arranging his tie, settling his hat before the glass, and meantime he spoke just loud enough to be heard by the Count. He spoke through his teeth with the most insulting venom of contempt and gazing straight into the mirror.

"Ah! So you had some gold on you— you old liar— you old birba— you furfante! But you are not done with me yet."

The fiendishness of his expression vanished like lightning, and he lounged out of the cafe with a moody, impassive face.

The poor Count, after telling me this last episode, fell back trembling in his chair. His forehead broke into perspiration. There was a wanton insolence in the spirit of this outrage which appalled even me. What it was to the Count's delicacy I won't attempt to guess. I am sure that if he had been not too refined to do such a blatantly vulgar thing as dying from apoplexy in a cafe, he would have had a fatal stroke there and then. All irony apart, my difficulty was to keep him from seeing the full extent of my commiseration. He shrank from every excessive sentiment, and my commiseration was practically unbounded. It did not surprise me to hear that he had been in bed a week. He had got up to make his arrangements for leaving Southern Italy for good and all.

And the man was convinced that he could not live through a whole year in any other climate!

No argument of mine had any effect. It was not timidity, though he did say to me once: "You do not know what a Camorra is, my dear sir. I am a marked man." He was not afraid of what could be done to him. His delicate conception of his dignity was defiled by a degrading experience. He couldn't stand that. No Japanese gentleman, outraged in his exaggerated sense of honour, could have gone about his preparations for Hara-kiri with greater resolution. To go home really amounted to suicide for the poor Count.

There is a saying of Neapolitan patriotism, intended for the information of foreigners, I presume: "See Naples and then die." Vedi Napoli e poi mori. It is a saying of excessive vanity, and everything excessive was abhorrent to the nice moderation of the poor Count. Yet, as I was seeing him off at the railway station, I thought he was behaving with singular fidelity to its conceited spirit. *Vedi Napoli*!... He had seen it! He had seen it with startling thoroughness— and now he was going to his grave. He was going to it by the train de luxe of the International Sleeping Car Company, via Trieste and Vienna. As the four long, sombre coaches pulled out of the station I raised my hat with the solemn feeling of paying the last tribute of respect to a funeral cortege. Il Conde's profile, much aged already, glided away from me in stony immobility, behind the lighted pane of glass— *Vedi Napoli e poi mori*!

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17: "Aurore"

Ethel Watts Mumford

1873-1940

Pictorial Review Feb 1921

"YOUR NAME!— *Votre nom*?" Crossman added, for in the North Country not many of the habitants are bilingual.

She looked at him and smiled slowly, her teeth white against cardinal-flower lips.

"Ma name? Aurore," she answered in a voice as mystically slow as her smile, while the mystery of her eyes changed and deepened.

Crossman watched her, fascinated. She was like no woman he had ever seen, radiating a personality individual and strange. "Aurore," he repeated. "You're not the dawn, you know; not a bit like it." He did not expect her to own to any knowledge of the legend of her name, but she nodded her head understandingly.

"It was the Curé name' me so," she explained. "But the Curé and me," she shrugged, "never could— how you say?— see— hear— one the other— so, I would not be a blonde just for spite to him— I am a very black dawn, *n'est-ce pas*?"

"A black dawn," he repeated. Her words unleashed his fancy— her heavy brows and lashes, her satiny raven hair, her slow voice that seemed made of silence, her eyes that changed in expression so rapidly that they dizzied one with a sense of space. "Black Dawn!" He stared at her long, which in no wise disconcerted her.

"Will you want, then, Antoine and me?" she asked at length.

He woke from his dream with a savage realization that, most surely, he wanted her. "Yes. Of course— you— and Antoine. Wait, *attendez*, don't go yet."

"*Why* not?" she smiled. "I have what I came for."

Her hand was on the door-latch. The radiance from the opened door of the square, old-fashioned stove shimmered over her fur cap and intensified the broad scarlet stripes of her mackinaw. In black corduroy trousers, full and bagging as a moujik's, she stood at ease, her feet small and dainty even in the heavy caribou-hide boots.

"*Bon soir, monsieur*," she said. "In two days we go with you to camp— me— *and* Antoine."

"Wait!" he cried, but she had opened the door. He rose with a start, and, ignoring the intense cold, followed her till the stinging breath of the North stabbed him with the recollection of its immutable power. All about him the night was radiant. Of a sudden the sky was hung with banners— banners that rippled and folded and unfolded, banners of rainbows, long, shaking loops of red

and silver, ghosts of lost emeralds and sapphires, oriflammes that fluttered in the heavens, swaying across the world in mysterious majesty. Immensity, Silence, Mystery— The Northern Lights! "Aurora!" he called into the night, "Aurora— Borealis!"

The Curé of Portage Dernier drove up to the log-cabin office and shook himself from his blankets; his *soutane* was rolled up around his waist and secured with safety-pins; his solid legs were encased in the heaviest of woollen trousers and innumerable long stockings. His appearance was singularly divided— clerical above, under the long wool-lined cape, and "lay" below. Though the thermometer showed a shockingly depressed figure, the stillness and the warmth of the sun, busy at diamond-making in the snow, gave the feeling of spring.

The sky was inconceivably blue. The hard-frozen world was one immaculate glitter, the giant evergreens standing black against its brightness. The sonorous ring of axes on wood, the gnawing of saws, the crunching of runners, the crackling crash of distant trees falling to the woodsmen's onslaughts— Bijou Falls logging-camp was a vital centre of joyous activity.

The Curé grinned and rubbed his mittened hands. "H— Hola!" he called.

At his desk in the north window Crossman heard the hail, and went to the door. At sight of the singular padded figure his face lifted in a grin. "Come in, Father," he exclaimed; "be welcome."

"Ah," said the Priest, his pink face shining with benevolence, "I thank you. Where is my friend, that good Jakapa? I am on my monthly circuit, and I thought to see what happens at the Falls of the Bijou." He stepped inside the cabin and advanced to the stove with outstretched hands. "I have not the pleasure," he said tentatively.

"My name is Crossman," the other answered. "I am new to the North."

"Ah, so? I am the Curé of Portage Dernier, but, as you see, I must wander after my lambs— very great goats are they, many of them, and the winter brings the logging. So I, too, take to the timber. My team," he waved an introducing hand at the two great cross-bred sled-dogs that unhooked from their traces had followed him in and now sat gravely on their haunches, staring at the fire. "You are an overseer for the company?" suggested the Curé, politely curious— "or perhaps you cruise?"

Crossman shook his head. "No, *mon père*. I came up here to get well."

"Ah," said the Curé, sympathetically tapping his lung. "In this air of the evergreens and the new wood, in the clean cold— it is the world's sanatorium— you will soon be yourself again."

Crossman smiled painfully. "Perhaps *here*"— he laid a long, slender finger on his broad chest— "but I heal not easily of the great world sickness— the War. It has left its mark! The War, the great malady of the world."

"You are right." Meditatively the Priest threw aside his cape and began unfastening the safety-pins that held up his cassock. "You say well. It strikes at the *heart*."

Crossman nodded.

"Yet it passes, my son, and Nature heals; as long as the hurt be in Nature, Nature will take care. And you have come where Nature and God work together. In this great living North Country, for sick bodies and sick souls, the good God has His good sun and His clean winds." He nodded reassurance, and Crossman's dark face cleared of its brooding.

"Sit down, Father." He advanced a chair.

"So," murmured the Curé, continuing his thought as he sank into the embrace of thong and withe. "So you were in the War, and did you take hurt there, my son?"

Crossman nodded. "Trench pneumonia, and then the rat at the lung; but of shock, something also. But I think it was not concussion, as the doctors said, but *soul*-shock. It has left me, Father, like Mohammed's coffin, suspended. I think I have lost my grip on the world— and not found my hold on another."

"Shock of the soul," the Priest ruminated. "Your soul is bruised, my son. We must take care of it." His voice trailed off. There was silence in the little office broken only by the yawn and snuffle of the sled-dogs.

Suddenly the door swung open. In the embrasure stood Aurore in her red mackinaw and corduroy trousers. A pair of snowshoes hung over her back, and her hand gripped a short-handled broad axe. Her great eyes turned from Crossman to the Curé, and across her crimson mouth crept her slow smile. The Curé sprang to his feet at sight of her, his face went white, and the lines from nose to lips seemed to draw in.

"Aurore!" he exclaimed; "Aurore!"

"*Oui, mon père*," she drawled. "It is Aurore." She struck a provocative pose, her hand on her hip, her head thrown back, while her eyes changed colour as alexandrite in the sun.

The Curé turned on Crossman. "What is this woman to you?"

Her eyes defied him. "Tell him," she jeered. "What *am* I to you?"

"She is here with Antoine Marceau, the log-brander," Crossman answered unsteadily. "She takes care of our cabin, Jakapa's and mine."

"Is that *all*?" the Priest demanded.

Her eyes challenged him. What, indeed, was she to him? What *was* she? From the moment he had followed her into the boreal night, with its streaming lights of mystery and promise, she had held his imagination and his thoughts.

"Is that *all*?" the Priest insisted.

"You insult both this girl and me," Crossman retorted, stung to sudden anger.

"*Dieu merci*!" the Curé made the sign of the cross as he spoke. "As for this woman, send her away. She is *not* the wife of Antoine Marceau; she is not married— she *will* not be."

In spite of himself a savage joy burned in Crossman's veins. She was the wife of no man; she was a free being, whatever else she was.

"I do not have to marry," she jeered. "That is for the women that only one man desires— or perhaps two— like some in your parish, *mon père*."

"She is evil," the Priest continued, paying no attention to her sneering comment. "I know not what she is, nor who. One night, in autumn, in the dark of the hour before morning, she was brought to me by some Indians. They had found her, a baby, wrapped in furs, in an empty canoe, rocking almost under the Grande Falls. But I tell you, and to my sorrow, I *know*, she is evil. She knows not God, nor God her. You, whose soul is sick, flee her as you would the devil! Aurore, the Dawn! I named her, because she came so near the morning. Aurore! Ah, God! She should be named after the blackest hour of a witch's Sabbath!"

She laughed. It was the first time Crossman had heard her laugh— a deep, slow, far-away sound, more like an eerie echo.

"*He* has a better name for me," she said, casting Crossman a look whose intimacy made his blood run hot within him. " 'The Black Dawn'— *n'est-ce-pas?* Though I *have* heard him call me in the night— by another name," with which equivocal statement she swung the axe into the curve of her arm, turned on her heel, and softly closed the door between them.

The Priest turned on him. "My son," his eyes searched Crossman's, "you have not lied to me?"

"No," he answered steadily. "Once I called her the Aurora Borealis— that is all. To me she seems mysterious and changing, and coloured, like the Northern Lights."

"She is mysterious and changing and beautiful, but it is not the lights of the North and of Heaven. She is the *feu follet*, the will-o'-the-wisp that hovers over what is rotten, and dead. Send her away, my son; send her away. Oh, she has left her trail of blood and hatred and malice in my parish, I know. She has bred feuds; she has sent strong men to the devil, and broken the hearts of good women. But *you* will not believe me. It is to Jakapa I must talk. *Mon Dieu*! how is it that he let her come! You are a stranger, but he—"

"Jakapa wished for Antoine, and she was with him," explained Crossman uneasily, yet resentful of the Priest's vehemence.

"I can not wait." The Curé rose and began repinning his clerical garments. "Where is Jakapa? Have you a pair of snowshoes to lend me? You must forgive my agitation, Monsieur, but you do not understand— I— which way?"

"He should be at Mile End, just above the Bijou. Sit still, Father; I will send for him. The wind sets right. I'll call him in." Slipping on his beaver jacket, he

stepped outside and struck two blows on the great iron ring, a bent rail, that swung from its gibbet like a Chinese gong. A singing roar, like a metal bellow, sprang into the clear, unresisting air, leaped and echoed, kissed the crags of the Bijou and recoiled again, sending a shiver of sound and vibration through snow-laden trees, on, till the echoes sighed into silence. Crossman's over-sensitive ear clung to the last burring whisper as it answered, going north, north, to the House of Silence, drawn there by the magnet of Silence, as water seeks the sea. For a moment he had almost forgotten the reason for the smitten clamour, hypnotized by the mystery of sound. Then he turned, to see Aurore, a distant figure of scarlet and black at the edge of the wood road, shuffling northward on her long snowshoes, northward, as if in pursuit of the sound that had gone before. She raised a mittened hand to him in ironic salutation. She seemed to beckon, north— north— into the Silence. Crossman shook himself. What was this miasma in his heart? He inhaled the vital air and felt the rush of his blood in answer, realizing the splendour of this beautiful, intensely living world of white and green, of sparkle and prismatic brilliance. Its elemental power like the urge of the world's youth.

But Aurore? His brain still heard the echo of her laugh. He cursed savagely under his breath, and turned his back upon the Curé, unable to face the scrutiny of those kind, troubled eyes.

"Jakapa will be here presently," he said over his shoulder. "That gong carries ten miles if there's no wind. One ring, that's for the Boss; two, call in for the whole gang; three, alarm— good as a telegraph or the telephone as far as it goes. Meanwhile, if you'll excuse me, I'll have a look at the larder."

Without a doubt, he reasoned, Aurore would have left their mid-day meal ready. She would not return, he knew, until the guest had gone. In the little overheated cook-house he found the meal set out. All was in order. Then his eye caught a singular decoration fastened to the door, a paper silhouette, blackened with charcoal, the shape of a cassocked priest. The little cut-out paper doll figure was pinned to the wood by a short, sharp kitchen knife driven viciously deep, and the handle, quivering with the closing of the door, gave the illusion that the hand that had delivered the blow must have only at that instant been withdrawn.

Crossman shivered. He knew that world-old formula of hate; he knew of its almost innocent use in many a white caban, but its older, deeper meaning of demoniacal incantation rushed to his mind, somehow blending with the wizardry with which he surrounded his thoughts of the strange woman.

A step outside crunching in the snow. The door opened, revealing Antoine Marceau. The huge form of the log-brander towered above him. He could not read the expression of the eyes behind the square-cupped snow spectacles.

"She tell me, Aurore," he rumbled, "that I am to come. We have the company."

"Yes, the Curé of Portage Dernier." Crossman watched him narrowly.

Antoine took off the protecting wooden blinders and thrust them in his pocket.

Crossman stood aside, hesitating. Antoine drew off his mittens with businesslike precision, and placed a huge, capable hand on a pot-lid, lifted it, and eyed the contents of the saucepan.

"The Curé, he like ptarmigan," he observed, "but," he added in a matter-of-fact voice, "the Curé like not Aurore— he have tell you, *hein*? Ah, well, why not? For him such as Aurore *are* not— *voilà*."

"The Curé says she is a devil." Crossman marvelled at his temerity, yet he hung on the answer.

"Why not? For him, as I have say, she *is* not— for *me*, for *you*, ma frien', *that* is different." Antoine turned on him eyes as impersonal as those of Fate; where Crossman had expected to see animosity there was none, only a strange brotherhood of pitying understanding.

"For who shall forbid that the dawn she shall break— *hein*?" he continued. "The Curé? Not mooch. When the Dawn she come, she come; not with his hand can he hold her back. For me, now comes perhaps the sunset; perhaps the dawn for you. But what would you? Who can put the dog-harness on the wind, or put the bit in the teeth of the waterfall to hold him up?"

"Or who with his hand can draw the Borealis from heaven?" Crossman cut in. He spoke unconsciously. He had not wished to say that, he had not wanted to speak at all, but his subconscious mind had welded the thought of her so fast to the great mystery of the Northern Lights that without volition he had voiced it.

Antoine Marceau nodded quietly. The strangely aloof acknowledgment of Crossman's possible relation to this woman, *his* woman, who yet was not his or any man's, somehow shocked Crossman. His blood flamed at the thought, and yet he felt her intangible, unreal. He had but to look into her shifting, glittering eyes, and there were silence and playing lights. Suddenly his vision of her changed, became human and vital. He saw before him the sinuous movement of her strong young body. He realized the living perfume of her, clean and fresh, faintly aromatic as of pine in the sunlight, and violets in the shadow.

Antoine Marceau busied himself about the cook-house. He did not speak of Aurore again, not even when his eye rested on the paper doll skewered to the door by the deep-driven knife. He frowned, made the sign of the cross, jerked out the knife, and thrust its point in the purifying blaze of the charcoal fire. But he made no comment.

Crossman turned on his heel and entered the office-building. Through the south window he saw Jakapa snowshoeing swiftly up the short incline to the

door; beside him walked the Curé, pleading and anxious. He could follow the words as his lips framed them. In the present mood Crossman did not wish to hear the Curé's denunciation. It was sufficient to see that the Foreman had, evidently, no intention of acting on the advice proffered.

As he softly closed the door between the main office and the living room at the rear, he heard the men enter on a quick word of reproof in the Curé's rich bass.

"She does her work sufficiently well, and I shall not order her from the camp," Jakapa snapped in reply. "She is with Marceau; if he keeps her in hand, what do I care? She leave him, that *his* affair, *mon Dieu, mon père*."

"She has bewitched you, too, Jakapa. She has bewitched that other, the young man who is here for the healing of his soul. What an irony, to heal his soul, and she comes to poison it!"

"Heal his soul?" Jakapa laughed harshly. "He's had the weak lung, shell-shock, and he's a friend of the owner. *Mon père*, if he is here for the good of his soul, that is *your* province— but me?— I am here to boss one job, and I boss him, that's all. I hope only you have not driven the cook away, or the *pot-au-feu*, she will be thin." He tried to speak the latter part of his sentence lightly, but his voice betrayed his irritation.

Crossman opened the door and entered. "Antoine will be here in a minute," he announced. "Aurore sent him back to feed the animals." He took down the enamelled tin dishes and cups and set their places. Jakapa eyed him covertly, with a half-sneering venom he had never before shown.

It was a silent meal. The Curé sighed and shook his head at intervals, and the Boss grumbled a few comments in answer to an occasional question concerning his lumberjacks. Crossman sat in a dream. Could he have understood aright when Antoine had spoken of the dawn?

Jakapa dropped a plate with a curse and a clatter. The sudden sound ripped the sick man's nerves like an exploding bomb. White to the lips, he jumped from his chair to meet the Boss's sneering eyes. The Curé laid a gentle hand on his arm, and he settled back shamefacedly.

"Your pardon, *mon père*— my nerves are on edge— excuse me— an inheritance of the trenches."

"Emotion is bad for you, my son, and you should not emotion yourself," said the Priest gently.

"Do you travel far when you leave us now?" Crossman asked self-consciously, anxious to change the subject.

"To the camp at the Chaumière Noire, a matter of ten kilometres. It is no hardship, my rounds, not at all, with the ground like a white tablecloth, and this good sun, to me like to my dogs, it is but play." He rose from the table, glad of

the excuse to hasten his going, and with scant courtesy Jakapa sped his guest's departure.

As the sled disappeared among the trees, bearing the queerly bundled figure of the Priest, the Boss unhooked his snowshoes from the wall. He seemed to have forgotten Crossman's presence, but as he turned, his smouldering eyes lighted on him. He straightened with a jerk. "What did he mean when he say, *she* have bewitch *you*?" As always, when excited, his somewhat precise English slipped back into the idiom of the habitant. "By Gar! Boss or no Boss, I pack you out if I catch you. We make no jealousies for any one, not where I am. You come here for your health— *hein?* Well, better you keep this place healthy for you."

As if further to complicate the situation, the door opened to admit the woman herself. She closed it, leaned against the wall, looking from one to the other with mocking eyes.

"Well, do I leave? Am I to pack? Have you wash the hand of me to please the Curé, yes?"

Jakapa turned on her brutally. "Get to the cook-house! Wash your dish! Did I give orders to Antoine to leave hees work? By Gar! I feel like I take you and break you in two!" He moved his knotted hands with a gesture of destruction. There was something so sinister in the action that, involuntarily, Crossman cried out a startled warning. Her laugh tinkled across it.

"Bah!" she shrugged. "If you wish to kill, why do you not kill those who make the interferre? Are you a man? What is it, a cassock, that it so protect a man? But me, because I do not wear a woman's skirt, you will break me, hey? *Me!* Nevair mind, I prefer this man. He at least make no big talk." She slipped her arm through Crossman's, letting her fingers play down from his wrist to his finger-tips— and the thrill of it left him tongue-tied and helpless.

Jakapa cursed and crouched low. He seemed about to hurl himself upon the pair before him. Again she laughed, and her tingling, searching fingers stole slowly over his throbbing pulses.

She released Crossman's arm with a jerk, and snapped the fingers that had just caressed him in the face of the furious lumberman. "*Allons!* Must I forever have no better revenge but to knife one paper doll? Am I to be hounded like a beast, and threatened wherever I go? I am tired of this dead camp. I think I go me down the river." She paused a moment in her vehemence. Her next words came almost in a whisper: "*Unless you can cross the trail to Chaumière Noire— then*, maybe, I stay with you— I say— maybe." With a single swooping movement of her strong young arm she swept the door open, and came face to face with Antoine Marceau. "What, thou?" she said airily.

He nodded. "Shall I go back, or do you want that I go to the other side?" he asked the Foreman.

"Go to the devil!" growled Jakapa, and slinging his snowshoes over his arm, he stamped out.

"*Tiens*!" said Antoine. "He is mad, the Boss."

"I think we are all mad," said Crossman.

"Maybe," said Antoine. Quietly he gathered together his axe, mittens, and cap, and shrugging his huge shoulders into his mackinaw, looked out at the glorious brightness of the stainless world and frowned. "Come, Aurore," he said quietly.

A little later, as Crossman rose to replenish the dwindling fire, he saw him, followed by Aurore, enter the northern end of the timber limit. Were they leaving, Crossman wondered. Had the silent woodsman asserted his power over the woman? Crossman took down the field-glasses from the nail on the wall. They were the sole reminder, here in the North Country, of his years of war service. He followed the two figures until the thickening timber hid them. Idly he swept the horizon of black-green trees, blue shadows, and sparkling snow. A speck moved— a mackinaw-clad figure passed swiftly across the clearing above the Little Bijou— only a glimpse— the man took to cover in the burned timber, where the head-high brush made a tangle of brown above which the gaunt, white, black-smeared arms of dead trees flung agonized branches to the sky.— "The short-cut trail to Chaumière Noire"— "Shall I forever have no better revenge but to stab one paper doll?" Her words echoed in his ears.

Jakapa was on the short cut to the Chaumière Noire! Only Crossman's accidental use of the field-glasses had betrayed his going. For an instant Crossman's impulse was to rush out and ring the alarm on the shrieking steel gong, but the next instant he laughed at himself. Yes, surely, he was a sick man of many imaginings. The gang boss was gone about his business. The log-brander had called upon his woman to accompany him. That was all. Her angry words were mere threats— best forgotten.

With nervous haste he bundled into his heavy garments and ran from himself and his imaginings into the dazzling embrace of the sun.

He tramped to the gang at work above the Little Bijou Chute, where they raced the logs to the iron-hard ice of the river's surface far below. He even took a hand with the axe, was laughed at, and watched the precision and power of the Jacks as they clove, swung, and lopped. From the cliff he looked down at the long bunk-house, saw the blue smoke rising straight, curled at the top like the uncoiling frond of a new fern-leaf. Saw the Chinese cook, in his wadded coat of blue, disappear into the snow-covered mound that hid the provision shack, and watched the bounding pups refusing to be broken into harness by Siwash George. It was all very simple, very real, and the twists of his tired mind relaxed; his nervous hands came to rest in the warm depths of his mackinaw pockets. The peace of sunned spaces and flowing, clean air soothed his mind and heart.

The blue shadows lengthened. The gang knocked off work. The last log was rushed down the satin ice of the chute to leap over its fellows at the foot. The smell of bacon sifted through the odours of evergreen branches and new-cut wood. Crossman declined a cordial invitation to join the gang at chuck. He must be getting back, he explained, "for chow at the Boss's."

Whistling, he entered the office, stirred up the fire, and crossed to the cook-house. It was empty. The charcoal fire was out. Shivering, he rebuilt it, looked through the larder, and hacked off a ragged slice of jerked venison. A film of fear rose in his soul. What if they were *really* gone? What if Antoine *had* taken her? It looked like it. His heart sank. Not to see her again! Not to feel her strange, thrilling presence! Not to sense that indomitable, insolent soul, throwing its challenge before it as it walked through the world!

Crossman came out, returned to the office, busied himself in tidying the living room and solving the disorder of his desk. The twilight sifted over wood and hill, crept from under the forest arches, and spread across the snow of the open. He lit the lamps and waited. The silence was complete. It seemed as if the night had come and closed the world, locking it away out of the reach even of God.

The meal Crossman had bunglingly prepared lay untouched on the table. Now and then the crash of an avalanche of snow from the overburdened branches emphasized the stillness. Dreading he knew not what, Crossman waited— and loneliness is not good for a sick soul.

Thoughts began crowding, nudging one another; happenings that he had dismissed as casual took on new and sinister meanings. "Two and two together" became at once a huge sum, leaping to terrifying conclusions. Then with the silence and the tense nerve-draw of waiting came the sense of things finished— done forever. A vast, all-embracing finality— "*Néant*"— the habitant expression for the uttermost nothing, the word seemed to push at his lips. He wanted to say it, but a premonition warned him that to utter it was to make it real.

Should he call upon the name of the Void, the Void would answer. He feared it— it meant that She would be swallowed also in the great gaping hollow of nothingness. He strained his ears for sounds of the living world— the spit of the fire, the fall of clinkers in the grate, the whisper of the wind stirring at the door. He tried to analyse his growing uneasiness. He was sure now that she had followed Antoine's bidding— forgetting him, if, indeed, her desires had ever reached toward him.

Now she seemed the only thing that mattered. He must find her; he must follow. Wherever she was, there only was the world of reality. Where she was, was life. And to find her, he must find Antoine— and then, without warning, the door gaped— and Antoine stood before him, like a coloured figure pasted on the black ground of the night. Then he entered, quiet and matter-of-fact. He

nodded, closed the door against the biting cold, pulled off his cap, and stood respectfully.

"It is no use to wait for the Boss; he will not come," said the log-brander. "I came to tell Monsieur, before I go on, that le Curé is safe at Chaumière Noire. Yes, he is safe, and Monsieur Jakapa have turn back, when I catch up with him and tell him—"

"What?" gasped Crossman.

"It was to do," the giant twisted his cap slowly, "but it was harder than I think. It was not for jealousy, I beg you to know. That she would go if she want—to who she want, she can. I have no right to stop her. But she would have had the Curé knifed to death. She made the wish, and she put her wish in the heart of a man. If it had not been this time— then surely some other time. She always find a hand to do her will— even this of mine— once. I heard her tell to Jakapa. Therefore, Jakapa he has gone back to watch with her body. I told him where. Me I go. There are for me no more dawns. You love her, too, Monsieur, therefore, I come to tell you the end. *Bon soir, Monsieur*."

He was gone. Again there was silence. Crossman sat rigid. What had happened? His mind refused to understand. Then he visioned her, lying on the white snow, scarlet under her breast, redder than her mackinaw, redder than her woollen mittens, redder than the cardinal-flower of her mouth— cardinal no more! "No, no!" he shrieked, springing to his feet. His words echoed in the empty room. "No— no!— He couldn't kill her!" He clung to the table. "No— no! No!" he screamed. Then he saw her eyes; she was looking in through the window— yes, they were her eyes— changing and glowing, eyes of mystery, of magic, eyes that made the silence, eyes that called and shifted and glowed. He laughed. Fools, fools! to think her dead! He staggered to the door and threw it wide. Hatless, coatless, he plunged headlong into the dark— the Dark? No! for she was there— on high, wide-flung, the banners of the Aurora Borealis blazed and swung, banners that rippled and ran, banners of rainbows, the souls of amethysts and emeralds, they fluttered in the heavens, they swayed across the world, streamed like amber wine poured from an unseen chalice, dropped fold on fold, like the fluttering raiment of the gods.

In the north a great sapphire curtain trembled as if about to part and reveal the unknown Beyond; it grew brighter, dazzling, radiant.

"Aurore!" he called. "Aurore!" The grip of ice clutched his heart. Cold seized on him with unseen numbing hands. He was struggling, struggling with his body of lead— for one step— just a step nearer the great curtain, that now glowed warm— red— red as the ghost of her cardinal-flower lips— pillars of light, as of the halls of heaven. "Aurore!— Aurore!"

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18: A Hasty Judgment

Hume Nisbet

1849-1921

Telegraph (Brisbane) 3 Feb 1900

"THE meanest skunk that it was ever my lot to know, and to abhor, was undoubtedly John Jagers, and when I tell you about his dastardly conduct, I think you will agree with me."

"I knew a John Jagers once, who was one of the finest fellows going, so he was not likely to be your enemy," replied the stranger, slowly, as he took up his glass and looked at the fire through its amber contents.

"Couldn't have been," said mine host, who had started the subject. "There must be Jagers and Jagers. Likewise, I cannot say that this man Jagers was exactly my enemy, although I despised him for his dirty conduct towards Nancy Bing, the belle of our village. Otherwise I had no cause to hate him, since he once saved my life from drowning."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and I won't gainsay but what he was a plucky enough chap where animal courage was concerned. It was in the moral and honourable qualities that he was deficient, us you shall hear."

"Drive ahead," muttered the stranger.

"In the first place, let me give praise where praise is due, and do him all the justice I can, so that you may know why such a girl as Nancy Bing fell in love with him.

"He was a tall, strapping fellow of twenty-three when he first came to our village, able to hold his own at a wrestle, boxing or running bout, and dance with the best of us.

"He was, likewise, a handsome young fellow, with merry brown eyes, a mouth always on the laugh, and a set of splendid teeth to show when he did open his mouth to laugh or to make a joke.

"He had been a sailor and a ship's carpenter, and had seen a deal of foreign parts before he came to our village. He was passing through on his way to London when he caught sight of Nancy at her own gate, and that stopped him. He just smiled upon the maid and went into her father's workshop and asked for a job straight away.

"Now old Bing was the host wheelwright in the countryside, and us it happened at the time he was short handed, with a heap of work to got done in a hurry; so, seeing that the young man was handy all round, both with his. tools and the paint brush, he gave him not only work but lodgings at his own house. And that was how the trouble began.

"It was not very long before both the daughter and her father grew remarkably partial to this John Jagers. Indeed he was at this time well thought of by everyone who came in contact with him for he was always ready to oblige, and thought no more of what he did than if it had been a pleasure to do it."

"You are giving him the character that might, have suited my John Jagers," remarked the stranger.

"Wait a bit. I haven't come to the bad party yet. He did his work well and cheerfully at this time, getting up at daybreak and working as long as he could see. I daresay he put more pounds into the old man's pockets than any of the hands he had before, and as we thought, all for the sake of Nancy.

"She was worth it, too; for a prettier and better lass never stood in shoes. He went with her to church regular, and walked out with her on moonlight nights and Sunday afternoons, until she grew fairly wild about him, as ho seemed to be of her.

"You see, he could sing as well as dance and had a deal more to say than the young fellows she had known all her life; besides he made up poetry, and played a flute beautifully, and those gifts, when united to good looks and youth, always fascinate the girls. Along with all these, although he was always ready to take part in the games, he never took more then what was good for him. Altogether he was, or appeared to be, the sort of young man any well conducted girl might have trusted to make her happy.

"For six or eight months this kind of thing went on, until we had all made up our minds there was going to be a speedy match between the pair, Old Bing scorned to be of the same opinion, for he encouraged the two, and spoke about it as being a great satisfaction that he could leave his business and daughter to such an honest and trustworthy young man. Nancy went about as smug and contented as an old maid's tabby cat, while as for John Jagers, he seemed to be the happiest lover alive.

"About four months after the coming of Jagers, old farmer Jenkin's wife died, and after putting up a first-class tombstone for her, he began to cast his eyes about for a successor, and who should he fix upon but Nancy Bing.

"He was an ugly carl and filled with the rheumatics, but was perhaps the warmest man in these parts, and had, besides, a good many of his neighbours under his thumb, for he was a rare old money lender.

"I don't know if Bing owed him anything; perhaps he did, for the wheelwright was mainly civil to the old curmudgeon when they met, and when he began to pay nightly visits to the cottage the father made him heartily welcome, much to the disgust of Nancy and John, as it interfered greatly with their courting, two being company and four none.

"All of a sudden the change took place in John Jagers which turned my regard for him and made me despise him, even in spite of my obligations to him.

He had rescued me from the river when I was at my last gasp almost, so that I was bound to stand up for him as long as I could with decency, but even I had to turn from him and drop him like the bad potato he was.

"One evening he and Nancy passed me as loving as turtle doves, and the following day I saw him as I had never seen him before— drunk and behaving as disgracefully us a low-lived soldier. He had the most drabbish gaolbird hussy in the village on his arm, and was parading her too in front of Nancy's cottage without the least shame, while the poor thing watched his mad antics from behind the window with a white face and horrified eyes.

"Where he got the drink from I could not say, for he had none from me. Possibly he got it from the town, his brazen mate fetching it for him.

"From that day he went from bad to worse, taking up with the lowest in the countryside, and flaunting his vice in the eyes of the outraged village. He was seen no more with Nancy, for even if she could have forgiven his first offence, his shameful persistence and open mockery at decency and religion must have disgusted her, even while it broke her heart.

"She grew pale and thin with her shame and sorrow, and although she did her best to show him a proud and disdainful front, still we all knew how much she suffered, and treated him accordingly. You would have thought he gloated over the sorrow and disgust he caused, for he would pass both his old sweetheart and the rest of us with the mocking laughter of a devil.

"Old Bing also went about with a bent head, yet he was strangely kind to the dastardly blackguard, and would not dismiss him until the scoundrel took his own leave of absence and one day left the village as poor us he had entered it, but a deal less respected.

"A few days after this Nancy accepted old Farmer Jenkins, and in two mouths afterwards married him. Never did I see such a miserable looking bride in my life. She looked us if all that was worth living for had been plucked from her, all owing to the scoundrel who had broken her heart.

"Her father died before summer was over; he had never done a good day's work after Jagers left him. As for Nancy, we saw her once or twice before her father died, at church, but after passing the last night with him and closing his eyes, she never entered the church door again.

"Old Jenkins did not enjoy his white-faced bride long, for he also died before the year was done, leaving her all his belongings. I heard that alia sold up his property and went out to America; but we have never since seen or heard about her. Now, am I not right, mister? The man who could win the heart of a true girl and break it in this low-bred way, must be the meanest skunk going."

"On general principles perhaps you may be correct," admitted the stranger, reflectively, "Yet even looking at it generally, I would say that the man who

could act in this irrational manner must have been suddenly seized with lunacy. Have you ever read the life of David Garrick the actor?"

"No. What has that got to do with this John Jagers?"

"A lot; for I think our separate Jagers most be the same individual after all. The John Jagers I know told me a story similar to yours, but from a different standpoint— his own.

"He had been in love with a girl once for all he was worth, and at the same time was us fond of her father as any son could have been. As he said himself, he would have laid down his life for the woman, and given the best part of it for the dad, if the sacrifice could have been of any service.

"Matters had gone smoothly for him until one night he was let into the secret which blasted his happiness. What that secret was he would not tell me, but it involved the very life of the old man he was so fond of. The sacrifice asked of him was to give up his sweetheart, so that she might save her father by marrying the man who held the secret.

"My John Jagers had once seen David Garrick play, when the actor shams drunkenness and debauchery, to disillusionise the mind of a girl who had fallen in love with him, and the idea occurred to John to do the same. The difference, however, between him and David Garrick lay in him being really being in love with his girl, whereas the actor was not; which made the task a deal harder for poor John.

"He could not expose the father to his daughter, as, woman-like, she might, have sacrificed her father for her lover; and he felt he had only strength enough to deceive her, but not enough to have resisted her appeal to his heart. Thus he began his game of sham, and succeeded, as you have just told us, in blinding you all and ruining his character."

"Then he was a fool for his pains," said the landlord gruffly. "But what came of him?"

"He sailed away on a long voyage and had a had time of it for a year, until one day he got a letter from his old sweetheart telling him she had found him out, was at last free and rich, and intended to marry him in spite of himself."

"So that's where Nancy went to after her old husband's death?"

"I expect so. If your John Jagers and mine are the same man then I think Nancy Bing must now be his loving and happy wife."

"And where be they now, mister?"

"Do you really want to know, landlord?"

"Of course I do. You don't think when an Englishman owes his life to a man and has, besides, done him a wrong, as I have done John Jagers, that he could rest before he has repaired it as far as possible. To fight is English when in the right, to own up is likewise English when in the wrong. Where is he, so that I may apologise for my hasty judgment?"

"You'll find him at the old Blackbird, Yorkstown, when wanted. He is the landlord there— and a good one too."

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19: 3 Mistakes

William Merriam Rouse

1884-1937

Clues Detective Stories, July 1935

IF THE WHOLE SOUL of Jeff Clifford had not been centered upon his burning purpose he would have enjoyed a smile at himself. Clothed in gray flannels which had been tailored in London, he plunged through dense mountain undergrowth with the speed and skill of a born woodsman.

His long arms parted branches with a mere rustle; his fine benchmade shoes instinctively found good footing; his head and broad shoulders ducked and sideslipped among low-growing limbs of trees. He covered rapidly rising ground with unhurried breath, although every muscle was driven by haste.

A spot of red, sharpened by contrast with the lush of green, caught his eye. The red was not of the forest and for an instant Clifford hesitated. Then he drove on, no longer trying to make his feet feather-light. He crackled over a drift of twigs and dead leaves and came out into a little, natural glade.

A young man about his own age stood there, motionless, with a rifle lying across his arm. The stranger wore a lightweight, red-and-black checked shirt, and corduroys tucked into half-length, laced boots. There was, in his steady eyes, a look of suspicious inquiry. One hand rested on the grip of the rifle at the trigger guard.

They looked each other up and down. Clifford pushed back his damp, wavy hair and tried his best smile, which he knew very well would put humorous wrinkles around his eyes and show a good set of teeth. It usually worked when he wanted to make friends.

"Which way," he asked, in a pleasant voice, "is Stovepipe City?"

At the mention of that name something like a shadow cast by a sailing summer cloud passed across the face of the other man.

"Bear a little south of the way you were going," he replied. "South and uphill. You'll fetch it in a couple of hours if you keep moving right along."

"Thanks," said Clifford. "Now I've got a proposition to make to you. We're about the same size— six feet and a hundred and seventy. Is that right?"

The man in the checked shirt nodded.

"I'd like to trade clothes with you. I'll give you my clothes and shoes and a hundred dollars in cash for yours, and your rifle. What about it?"

"I don't calculate I want to trade."

"Two hundred in cash?"

"What's to hinder you from taking the money back after I give you my rifle?"

"If you won't take my word for it I'll prove good intentions. Do you notice that I'm holding my chest as though I were short of breath? Well, my hand is just three inches away from an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. I could draw it and shoot you before you could swing that rifle around, if I wanted to use that kind of an argument. I don't. But I want to trade."

The stranger's eyes flickered. "You act to me as though you were in a powerful hurry to get away from something, mister!"

"I'm in a hurry," agreed Jeff, "and I don't want to argue any longer. Will you trade?"

"Listen," said the man in the checked shirt. "It ain't often a man cornes crashing through the woods with store clothes on that must have cost a heap and asks for a place like Stovepipe City. You're going to be a lot easier to find in them clothes you got on! No, I ain't going to trade !"

"You're wrong," contradicted Jeff. With a scarcely perceptible movement his hand brought a flat automatic into sight. "Drop that rifle!"

The woodsman's lips tightened grimly but he let the rifle drop to the grass-padded earth. Clifford threw down his pistol.

"Now I'm going to make you trade," he said, and he stepped forward.

If every nerve and muscle had not been alert Clifford would have been in serious trouble. For the mountaineer lowered his head and charged with a rush that made of him a human battering-ram. Clifford swung forward to meet the attack and launched an uppercut with his weight under it. His left hand followed his right. On his toes and off balance, the charge carried him over backward and they fell together, with the checked shirt on top.

But Clifford rolled him off easily. The man's eyes were glazed and his jaw hung slack. Clifford had made the change of clothing, from shoes to shirt, before he began to revive. He sat up, shaking his head.

"Here," said Jeff, "is the two hundred I offered. Sorry to be so rude but I needed your clothes in a hurry. You're getting much the better end of the bargain."

JEFF CLIFFORD lay on his stomach on a flat, sun-warmed rock and watched events in a little valley that lay before him. The valley might once have been the crater of a volcano, when the mountains rose from the primordial sea, but now it was grass-grown and lightly wooded, a dimple in the top of an Adirondack peak. It held a collection of shanties known as Stovepipe City because of the extemporized chimneys which rose through the nondescript roofs of the buildings. Most of them were rusty stovepipe held in place by wires.

Stovepipe City had grown in the shape of a frying pan, with the handle running toward marshy ground at one side of the crater, where subterranean springs came to the surface. This little line of shacks was known as Frog Alley,

and there, if there were any such thing as caste in this ingrown mountain hamlet, lived the lower stratum of the local society.

This much Clifford had learned by inquiry in the valley towns, for this was his first glimpse of this handful of human dwellings where dogs and children tumbled on the hard-packed earth about the shanties; where men whittled in the shade and women gossiped or hung out washing.

All of Clifford's attention, after the first searching survey, centered on a shack at the extreme end of Frog Alley. He watched patiently, making himself as comfortable as possible, until he had tabulated the inhabitants of that building. A man appeared and ambled off with a dog at his heels. He went into another shack and came out with a gun. That had been a visitor.

Next, from the dwelling under observation came a figure in voluminous skirts, leaning on a cane. White hair, uncombed, straggled over bent shoulders. The cane lifted and beat the air while a torrent of abuse, not understandable at the distance, was directed at the shack.

One of the biggest men Clifford had ever seen came tumbling out. His hair gleamed yellow in the sunlight as he shrank away from the waving stick. His voice, a deep bass, boomed loud enough for Clifford to distinguish the words.

"Now, Maw, don't take on! I'll get the wood split right off."

He sprang back into the house and appeared an instant later dragging a girl by the wrist. With a whirl he sent her spinning toward a small pile of wood and a chopping block.

"Ain't you heard what Maw said?" he boomed. "Get to work!"

Clifford was already going rapidly down the hill. What he had seen checked with his information. The home of "Maw" Dooby was inhabited by one young giant, her youngest, and one good-looking, brown-haired girl of about eighteen. This was the place where he had been in such a hurry to arrive.

He approached the end of Frog Alley through some alders that grew thickly along the edge of the marsh. At last, thirty feet away from the woodpile where the girl was working, he halted and peered out. Slowly his chest swelled and is hands closed on his rifle until the nails were white.

Good-looking? The girl was a beauty; fit, so far as appearance went, to adorn a palace. Her hair rippled in shining waves to her waist— a rich, golden-brown that Clifford had never seen equaled. Her arms, perfectly molded, smooth, milk-white, swung the ax and brought it down on the stick she was splitting in a movement of singing grace.

Her skin was milk and rose. The legs which were only half concealed by her ragged skirt had been cast in such a mold as the gods use when they desire perfection. Clifford looked for the lantern jaw that he had seen on so many mountain girls and found a rounded chin and a dimpled cheek above it.

"BUB" came out of the shack again and stood with his hands in his pockets of his overalls, a leering grin on his somewhat vacuous face. He towered head and shoulders above the girl. The muscles of his corded neck twitched. He sent a stream of tobacco juice at a grasshopper and shifted his chew from cheek to cheek.

"Well, Floss," he said, "how you like it?"

The girl let the ax head rest on the block and looked up at him. Now Clifford had a square look into her face. He saw blazing, hazel eyes, and a face suddenly stricken white by mingled fear and contempt.

"I'd rather do this than let you paw me," she said, in a low and naturally musical voice. "It's better exercise than the city folks get playing golf."

"I was just fooling with you, gai," announced the giant. "When I get good and ready I'll take that knife you tried to stick into my ribs away from you and you won't amount to no more than a skeeter with me! You'd ought to be glad Maw and me took you in."

"You! And Maw! You're a bunch of crooks! If I had known what I do now, I'd never have come up here. You lied to me!"

"They ain't no chance of you fooling time away any more with book learning. You're going to be my girl, Floss!"

"Bub!" exclaimed the girl. Her voice had sunk to a whisper that sent a chill through Clifford. His body swung a little forward as her hands left the ax helve. "If you ever lay a hand on me again I'll cut your heart out!"

The enormous young man laughed. His lips curled away from yellow teeth and he hitched up his overalls, swaggering toward her.

"You draw blood on me and I'll sell you to Bull Gowan!" he promised. "Bull wants you!"

Bub's long arm shot out. A knife flashed, and the cry o£ the man and the scream of the girl mingled as Clifford released himself like a coiled spring. He saw one secondlong tableau as Bub twisted the girl's wrist. Her voice was shaped by utter despair and the young man, bending above her, looked with a promise of the worst he could do to her in his pale eyes.

Then Jeff rapped the back of his skull sharply with the butt of his pistol.

"Turn around, you!"

Bub whirled. Jeff's left hand slapped at his eyes; Jeff's fist sank to the wrist into the front of Dooby's greasy shirt. Bub Dooby slowly pitched forward and lay among the chips.

The girl screamed again. Jeff sprang backward just in time to miss the hardwood cane of Maw as it came sweeping down toward his head. He looked into a brown face, seamed and wrinkled, radiating evil. The cane was swinging again in knotty hands. Clifford snapped up his pistol and fired. The stick went

whirling into the air and slowly the legs of Maw let that beskirted form down to the chopping block. Pain twisted the bony face.

"You nigh busted my fingers!"

The girl stood motionless, wonder and admiration lighting her face. Bub sat up, holding his stomach with both hands.

"What call you got—"

"Shut up!" croaked Maw. "Go get Bull Gowan!"

"I'll break an arm for him if he starts," promised Jeff. "Get up, you old hag, and go into the house. You, too, lummox. I want to talk to both of you. Move!"

With a look of deadly hatred Maw rose and started for the doorway of their shack. Bub put a hand to the ground and sprang up quickly for such a big man. He stood nearly six feet and a half tall, Jeff realized now, and he could not have weighed less than two hundred and thirty or forty.

The girl advanced a step toward Clifford, and hesitated. Her lips parted and her eyes were shining. She was going to thank him.

"Will you bring my rifle, please?" asked Jeff. "I left it there in the alders. And watch in the doorway while I'm inside. Can you shoot?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. "I can and I will!"

Clifford moved toward the shanty only to hait as a broad, squat man appeared around a corner. No introduction was needed to tell him that this was "Bull" Gowan. His big, animal eyes had the peculiar stare of a bull, at the same time cunning and inhumanly vicious. His shoulders were like ledges; his forehead a mere strip between eyebrows and hair.

"What's going on here?" he de-manded. "Who be you and what you shooting at?"

"Gowan," said Clifford, in a low voice, "are you boss of Stovepipe City?"

"I be. Want me to prove it, hey?"

"Go ahead and boss it," Clifford told him, "but leave me alone. I've got business with Maw Dooby and Bub, and that's ail the business I have in Stovepipe City. Is it a bargain, or have I got to do some shooting?"

Clifford made a fast draw from his shoulder holster and it seemed to him that he caught a hint of surprise in the bovine face.

"What you want of Maw and Bub?"

"I'm going to ask them some questions."

"You one of the sheriff's men?"

"No."

"Go ahead and ask questions. Only don't try no funny business. They's enough of the boys here to take that popgun away from you, even if one or two of 'em does get plugged."

Bull Gowan stared at the girl standing beside Jeff with the rifle. He swung his head in an invitation to her to go with him.

"Bub and Maw don't want me to leave here," she said, in a low voice.

"Bub'll get something he don't want, maybe!" growled Gowan. He turned away with slow steps and Clifford knew that he would be watching the shack.

"I wish you'd take me away!" whispered the girl.

"I will if I live to get away myself," answered Clifford, and then he advanced toward the shack.

He glimpsed Bub inside, with a double-barreled shotgun lying across his knees. Jeff fired. His bullet slapped the stock of the gun and flung it to the floor with a clatter.

"You and Maw stand up where I can see you," he called. "Then I'll come in. One more trick like that and you'll both wake up shoveling coal !"

JEFF stepped over the threshold with his pistol in his hand. He saw a squalid interior, with a broken stove and two or three wooden chairs. There was a bed in the room, and a table, and through a doorless opening he glimpsed another bed and a battered chest of drawers.

"Sit down!" he ordered.

Maw sank down, with yards and yards of musty-looking cloth spreading out on each side of the chair. Bub doubled up like a jackknife on a wooden box.

"What you come picking on us for?" he demanded. "I bet you see Floss somewhere and want her."

"He can't have her!" barked Maw. "She ain't to trade. Not for any price."

"Not if I got anything to say!" flared the young man.

"Who's boss in this shack?"

Maw's face became suffused with blood. Bub wriggled and looked down at the floor.

"I'm going to take her anyway," Jeff told them. "But I didn't corne for her. I came to ask a question. Where is your husband, Maw? Where's Stub Dooby?"

There was an almost imperceptible quiver in the bodies of the two Doobys. A glance flashed between them. Maw's face took a darker shade and the mounting blood throbbed up through the skinny neck that rose from the collar of a ragged sweater.

"I ain't seen that worthless, no-account, thieving critter I married for a good twenty year! I don't want to see him or ever hear of him! If you didn't have a gun on me I'd— I'd put some finger marks on that grinning mug of yours."

"It won't do," Jeff told her. "Ezra Dooby, known as Stub locally, was in Valeboro yesterday and he headed for here. He's either in Stovepipe City now or he's gone down to the lake to cross over into the Vermont mountains. He can't go north or south because the troopers have got the roads and trains watched."

Maw and Bub again exchanged glances.

"What you want to see him for?" asked Bub.

"I've got something to tell him."

"What is it?" asked Maw.

"I'll tell Stub himself."

"We don't know nothing about the old man," answered Bub, sulkily, with a glance at the doorway where the girl stood with the rifle in her hands. She had turned and was looking at him steadily.

"Mister," she said to Jeff, "they had somebody here last night, I'm pretty sure. Maw was a cousin of my father's. She sent word down to Valeboro when my mother died last week and said she had a farm up here and I could corne and stay on it for a rest before I went to work. Bub came after me yesterday. He said Maw was sick in that room there. There was somebody in there, ail right. I heard voices. And moving around. In the night they took somebody out. This morning Maw showed up."

"He's dead and buried, if you got to know, you snooping, mis'able skunk!" cried Maw. The hoarse voice cracked and broke. "Want to dig him up?"

"Maybe," answered Clifford, calmly. "Anyhow, you two are going to take me to the grave—"

"Mister!" Floss, white to the lips, turned from the doorway where she had just looked out again. "Mister, Bull Gowan is spreading out a lot of men both sides of the swamp. I'm afraid he's coming— coming

"He won't get you!" snarled Bub. "Him nor nobody else!"

Clifford sprang to one of the grimy windows. Frog Alley was surrounded. At one end lay the main part of Stovepipe City. At the other was the swamp where a fleeing man would be trapped. To the right and left denizens of the hamlet were taking stations about twenty feet apart. Every one of them was armed, with shotgun, rifle, club, pitchfork.

Jeff's heart beat faster. Gowan was coming for the girl and Jeff would have to shoot his way out, if he could. He looked at Floss and made up his mind that she was going with him. Better a bullet than the things which would happen to her if she were held in Stovepipe City.

"Hold the rifle on Maw and Bub," he said, as he took a little roll of surgeon's tape from his pocket. "And shoot if either of them makes a move that looks like trouble."

With a choice cursing ringing in his ears he taped Maw's hands, crossed the wrists and bound them firmly together. He did the same for Bub, and told them to stand up.

"You're coming along," he said, "for a windshield. If Gowan wants to knock you off that will be just too bad for you!"

"Bull would like to put a slug into me, mister!" pleaded Bub. "Don't make me go! I'll tell—"

"You'll get your mouth slit around to the back of your head if you start talking!" screamed Maw.

Floss cried out and sprang inside the room. The opening was darkened by the form of Bull Gowan. For an instant he stood outlined against the brilliant sunlight.

Jeff leaped like a panther; the butt of his pistol cracked against the matted hair that grew low over Gowan's eyes. Another man would have fallen. Bull Gowan merely reeled away. Clifford went after him, pivoted on one foot and drove the toe of one of the heavy boots he had got from the stranger into Gowan's stomach.

BULL sat down with a grunt, but he was a long way from being knocked out, and Jeff made a mistake. He ran in too close. A hand thick as a plank gripped his ankle. He soared into the air, struck with a breath-taking thud among some loose sticks of firewood, and thought quickly that the end had corne.

For he could not rise. One of those sticks had been driven against a nerve center, or the shock had paralyzed him, or something as bad had happened. For his legs and arms were water. They refused to obey his will.

Gowan came on a dog trot, with his bull-like head lowered. He swung back a heavy leg and Jeff watched that copper-tipped toe as it aimed for his face. But it did not strike. For from somewhere came the crack of a rifle and a little spurt of dust sprang up in front of Gowan. At almost the same time another rifle shot sounded and Gowan clutched his arm, swinging around unsteadily.

Jeff got up to his hands. Then he pushed himself erect and lunged for his pistol, which lay mocking him from the chip dirt. He saw Floss standing in the doorway, with a little wisp of smoke curling up from the rifle. He heard scattered shots ail around him. Then somebody yelled:

"Drop that pistol!"

The man who had worn the red-and-black shirt was standing in front of Jeff, with the muzzle of a rifle only a foot away. The graceful flannels which Clifford had put on him were much the worse for wear. Out of the corner of his eye Jeff saw that half a dozen men were crowding around the Dooby woodpile.

"All right," said Jeff. The pistol fell to the ground. "Don't get excited! Don't you like your trade? And who are you, anyway!"

"I'm the sheriff of this county! John Barnaby's my name! And I'm looking for a fugitive from justice. I brought a posse up here to get you, for you act to me mighty like a fugitive."

Floss cried out. The smack of flesh on flesh came from the doorway and one of the sherifif's men staggered back with a hand to his cheek. The girl plunged for Jeff and took a defiant stand beside him.

"Don't you dare hurt him!" she cried to the muzzle of the sheriff's gun. "He's going to take me away from this awful place. And, besides— he's— he's a gentleman!"

A roar of laughter went up from the posse. Jeff, very careful to keep his hand still, looked into the sheriffi's eyes and spoke.

"I forced a trade on you because if I'd come here in the clothes you've got on I'd have been taken for a detective. I haven't had ten minutes to spare between New York and here. If you'll look in the breast pocket of my coat you'll find that I'm a Federal man— Department of Justice. I have a warrant for one Dooby, known here as Stub. He's wanted on a counterfeiting charge. You'll get a circular in a few days."

"All right." The sheriff grinned, after he had cautiously verified what Clifford said. "Do you want your money back?"

"A trade's a trade! I'm satisfied!"

Jeff walked over to Bull Gowan, held by two of the sheriff's deputies.

"Bull," said Clifford, "do you want to finish what we started? If you do I'll agree to come back when that arm of yours is all right again."

The big, animal eyes did not change expression. But Gowan waited a moment before he spoke.

"You keep off my pastures and I'll keep off yours!" he rumbled.

"Then that's settled!" Jeff turned to Sheriff Barnaby. "Let's go inside. Clear everybody out except my two prisoners and then come in with Miss Floss— I don't know her last name."

Clifford stood in front of Maw and looked down into the bloodshot eyes that glared balefully up at him.

"So Stub is buried, is he?"

"Buried where you can't get at him, you damned gumshoe!"

Jeff's hand flashed out and his fngers wound themselves into Maw's long, stringy hair. He lifted. The hair came up and revealed a closecropped, pepper-and-salt scalp. And suddenly that lined and wrinkled face became the face of a man.

"You must have had to shave and put on your make-up three times a day, Stub," said Jeff. "It was Maw you buried, wasn't it?"

Dooby, panting, heaved against the tape on his wrists. Then he evidently realized the folly of anything but resignation— for the present, at least.

"The old woman died the night I got here," he said. "I knowed the Feds were after me. I figgered I had the best hide-out in the world in Maw's clothes. How— how did you know?"

"You made three mistakes, Stub!" Jeff told him. "Once you started to put your hand into a trouser pocket and there wasn't one there. Once you tried to hitch up your belt. But I was certain before I saw those things. You wouldn't take

any price for Floss! Another woman would have sold her, glad to have her out of the way. But not a man. There isn't a man in the world who'd take a hundred million for a girl like her!"

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20: The Child Who Loved a Grave

Fitz-James O'Brien
1828-1862
Harper's New Monthly Magazine, April 1861

FAR AWAY in the deep heart of a lonely country there was an old solitary churchyard. People were no longer buried there, for it had fulfilled its mission long, long ago, and its rank grass now fed a few vagrant goats that clambered over its ruined wall and roamed through the sad wilderness of graves. It was bordered all round with willows and gloomy cypresses; and the rusty iron gate, seldom if ever opened, shrieked when the wind stirred it on its hinges as if some lost soul, condemned to wander in that desolate place forever, was shaking its bars and wailing at the terrible imprisonment.

In this churchyard there was one grave unlike all the rest. The stone which stood at the head bore no name, but instead the curious device, rudely sculptured of a sun uprising out of the sea.

The grave was very small and covered with a thick growth of dock and nettle, and one might tell by its size that it was that of a little child.

Not far from the old churchyard a young boy lived with his parents in a dreary cottage; he was a dreamy, dark-eyed boy, who never played with the children of the neighbourhood, but loved to wander in the fields and lie by the banks of rivers, watching the leaves fall and the waters ripple, and the lilies sway their white heads on the bosom of the current. It was no wonder that his life was solitary and sad, for his parents were wild, wicked people who drank and quarrelled all day and all night, and the noises of their quarrels where heard in calm summer nights by the neighbours that lived in the village under the brow of the hill.

They boy was terrified at all this hideous strife, and his young soul shrank within him when he heard the oaths and the blows echoing through the dreary cottage, so he used to fly out into the fields where everything looked so calm and pure, and talk with the lilies in a low voice as if they were his friends.

In this way he came to haunt the old churchyard, roaming through its half-buried headstones, and spelling out upon them the names of people that had gone from earth years and years ago.

The little grave, nameless and neglected, however, attracted him more than all others. The strange device of the sun uprising out of the sea was to him a perpetual source of mystery and wonder; and so, whether by day or night, when the fury of his parents drove him from his home, he used to wander there and lie amidst the thick grass and think who was buried beneath it.

In time his love for the little grave grew so great that he adorned it after his childish fashion.

He cleared away the docks and the nettles and the mulleins that grew so sombrely above it, and clipped the grass until it grew thick and soft as the carpet of heaven. Then he brought primroses from the green banks of dewy lanes where the hawthorn rained its white flowers, and red poppies from the cornfields, and bluebells from the shadowy heart of the forest, and planted them around the grave. With the supple twigs of the silver osier he hedged it round with a little simple fence, and scraped the creeping mosses from the grey head-stone until the little grave looked as if it might have been the grave of a good fairy.

Then he was content. All the long summer days he would lie upon it with his arms clasping its swelling mound, while the soft wind with wavering will would come and play about him and timidly lift his hair. From the hillside he heard the shouts of the village boys at play, and sometimes one of them would come and ask him to join in their sports; but he would look at him with his calm, dark eyes and gently answer no; and the boy, awed and hushed, would steal back to his companions and speak in whispers about the child that loved a grave.

In truth, he loved the little graveyard better than all play. The stillness of the churchyard, the scent of the wild flowers, the golden chequers of the sunlight falling through the trees and playing over the grass were all delights to him. He would lie on his back for hours gazing up at the summer sky and watching the white clouds sailing across it, and wondering if they were the souls of good people sailing home to heaven. But when the black thunder-clouds came up bulging with passionate tears, and bursting with sound and fire, he would think of his bad parents at home, and, turning to the grave, lay his little cheek against it as if it were a brother.

So the summer went passing into autumn. The trees grew sad and shivered as the time approached when the fierce wind would strip them of their cloaks, and the rains and the storms buffet their naked limbs. The primroses grew pale and withered, but in their last moments seemed to look up at the child smilingly, as if to say, 'Do not weep for us. We will come again next year.' But the sadness of the season came over him as the winter approached, and he often wet the little grave with his tears, and kissed the grey head-stone, as one kisses a friend that is to depart for years.

One evening towards the close of autumn, when the woods looked brown and grim, and the wind as it came over the hills had a fierce, wicked growl, the child heard, as he was sitting by the grave, the shriek of the old gate swinging upon its rusty hinges, and looking up he saw a strange procession enter. There were five men. Two bore between them what seemed to be a long box covered with black cloth, two more carried spades in their hands, while the fifth, a tall stern-faced man clad in a long cloak, walked at their head. As the child saw these men pass to and fro through the graveyard, stumbling over half-buried

head-stones, or stooping down and examining half-effaced inscriptions, his little heart almost ceased to beat, and he shrank behind the grey stone with the strange device in mortal terror.

The men walked to and fro, with the tall one at their head, searching steadily in the long grass, and occasionally pausing to consult. At last the leader turned and walked towards the little grave, and stooping down gazed at the grey stone. The moon had just risen, and its light fell on the quaint sculpture of the sun rising out of the sea. The tall man then beckoned to his companions.

'I have found it,' he said, 'it is here.' With that the four men came along, and all five of them stood by the grave. The child behind the stone could no longer breathe.

The two men bearing the long box laid it down in the grass, and taking off the black cloth, the child saw a little coffin of shining ebony covered with silver ornaments, and on the lid, wrought in silver, was the device of a sun uprising out of the sea, and the moon shone over all.

'Now to work!' said the tall man; and straightaway the two that held the spades plunged them into the little grave. The child thought his heart would break; and, no longer able to restrain himself, he flung his body across the mound, and cried out to the strange leader.

'Oh, Sir!' he cried, sobbing, 'do not touch my little grave! It is all I have to love in the world. Do not touch it; for all day long I lie here with my arms about it, and it seems like my brother. I tend it, and keep the grass short and thick, and I promise you, if you will leave it to me, that next year I will plant about it the finest flowers in the meadows.'

'Tush, child, you are a fool!' answered the stern-faced man. 'This is a sacred duty that I have to perform. He who is buried here was a child like you; but he was of royal blood, and his ancestors dwelt in palaces. It is not meet that bones like his should rest in common soil. Across the sea a grand mausoleum awaits them, and I have come to take them with me and lay them in vaults of porphyry and marble. Take him away, men, and to your work.'

So the men dragged the child from the grave by main force, and laid him nearby in the grass, sobbing as if his heart would break; and then they dug up the grave. Through his tears he saw the small white bones gathered up and put in the ebony coffin, and heard the lid shut down, and saw the men shovel back the earth into the empty grave, and he felt as if they were robbers. Then they took up the coffin and retraced their steps. The gate shrieked once more on its hinges, and the child was alone.

He returned home silent, and tearless, and white as any ghost. When he went to his little bed he called his father, and told him he was going to die, and asked him to have him buried in the little grave that had a grey head-stone with

a sun rising out of the sea carved upon it The father laughed, and told him to go to sleep; but when morning came the child was dead!

They buried him where he wished; and when the sod was patted smooth, and the funeral procession departed, that night a new star came out in heaven and watched above the grave.

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21: Mrs. Sweeny's Suitor

Charles R. Barnes
1877-1931
Popular Magazine, Aug. 1909

MRS. SWEENY gave the Boarder two letters and a-newspaper, the morning contribution of the postman., "It's fierce to be poor," she declared.

"Poverty has its disadvantages," the Boarder corrected subtly.

"A lady without no money in New York has more trouble than a automobeel cop on a bright Sunday afternoon," supplemented Mrs. Sweeny grimly.

"Hm-h!" coughed the Boarder, inserting his letter opener beneath the flap of an envelope.

"Once I had so much money that I was carriage trade," came next from Mrs. Sweeny's lips.

Her persistent harping on financial conditions struck the Boarder as unusual. He glanced up into her face. There he noted a determined expression, as of venturesome things contemplated. And, as though in answer to the question in his eyes, she solemnly announced:

"Mister, I got a invite to go out in a automobeel!"

"That's fine," commented the Boarder.

"It's with Tim Lacy, the fellow that owns Prince Larry and June Bug and all them other famous horses," she went on. "Tim was a fr'en' of my Danny b'fore he died. Honust, mister, them two was thicker than a Chink laundryman and a Sunday-school teacher. Once Tim and Danny was in partnership at the race track, Tim puttin' up the money and Danny bettin' it. They made sixteen thousand dollars in two weeks, and I had the awfullest time gettin' Danny sober again."

"You certainly led an exciting life as a gambler's wife— and I'll hazard a guess that you wished he did something else," said the Boarder. There was a sad note in his voice which neither escaped Mrs. Sweeny nor was appreciated by her.

"My Danny had his faults," she snapped, "but they wasn't faulty faults! They was just sort of hives on his disposition. Honust, mister, he was the loveliest husban' in the whole world; and when people slurs him it makes me so mad I could throw ink at my best white shirt-waist. Danny wasn't the kind of a man to go crazy over religion, but he was good to me. W'y, he usta smoke twenty-five cent cigars in the house, so I wouldn't have to breathe no cheap nicotine. And it ain't all men that's so considerate of their wives. Of course he's dead now, and I s'pose I got to put up with that pipe of yours, as long as the board of health won't set a kibosh on it "

"Why, Mrs. Sweeny," cried the Boarder, in surprise, "I never knew that you objected to my pipe! I'm sorry."

"Oh, now, you just go on smokin' your pipe,' advised Mrs. Sweeny hastily. "I didn't mean nothin', I was just sort of put out b'cause you hinted that my Danny wasn't a good person for me to ussociate with. I'm used to that pipe now, and if you stopped smokin' it I'd feel lost, like I would if the people overhead quit practicin' on the piano."

But, notwithstanding this assurance, the Boarder refused to dismiss his sulky demeanor until Mrs. Sweeny was well along in her narrative again. Then bygones tacitly became bygones, and the maligned pipe faded into the yesterday of things, only to be unconsciously resurrected and filled before the very eyes of its accuser.

"Dan liked Tim Lacy," Mrs. Sweeny continued reminiscently. "Them two was like two brothers, only they never got into no fights. And when Dan was all shot full of holes that time, and he was countin' up how many carriages we'd have to hire for the funeral, it was Tim that got out his pencil and paper and done all the 'rithmetic for me. He was a true fr'en' to me and Danny, Tim was; and you can see what I thought of him when I let him hang around the house durin' them awful times. It was him that kept me from jumpin' out of the window and doin' all them other crazy things I was goin' to do, the day they brought Danny home. And now he's goin' to take me out ridin' in his automobeel, and—" lowering her eyes— "maybe I ain't goin' to be poor like this no more."

She did not meet the quick, inquiring glance of the Boarder; but turned to the window and. regarded the traffic, while her fingers picked. nervously at the folds of her gown. Presently she faced him, and asked:

"Nobody ever was good all the time, was they?"

"I never knew any one who was, Mrs. Sweeny," said the Boarder.

"Oh, well, it don't matter much, I guess," she half sighed. Then, with an effort, she began to tell of a recent meeting with her husband's former friend, Mr. Tim Lacy.

"He stops me on the street— that was two weeks ago— and he spends quite a long time tellin' me how I oughtn't to be poor like I am; and I says: 'How am I goin' to help it?' And he didn't say nothin' right off, but sort of stammered and says: 'Hem— hem!' and such a line of talk. Then he got into his gait again, and begins to tell that he has got enough in the bank to keep fifty wives. And continuin', he laughs kinda foolish and says: 'Belle Sweeny, you look like the little lady that can take the milk bottles off my dumbwaiter.'

" 'Gwan, Timmy!' I tells him, 'and put another film in your movin'-picture machine. The heat's pretty fierce today,' I says, 'and I won't hold you to them statements.'

"But he kept on insistin' and insistin', and me turnin' him down and turnin' him down. He was up here the other afternoon, and got me to promise to go out in his automobeel with him."

"Then you seriously consider him?" suggested the Boarder. ;

"Him— ugh!" She shuddered. Then, more deliberately, she explained:

"He's got a lot of money; but he's a shifty-eyed, weazened-up little shrimp that got rich runnin' a gamblin' house where poor clerks and them kind of people set in and gave up their wages every Saturday night. Nobody respects him, like they do the real gent'manly gamblers that only takes over the bank rolls of the idle rich. And they do say that he puts up money to get a lot of low-down people out of jail with, and charges 'em a big fee for it."

"You mean that he is a professional bondsman," supplemented the Boarder.

"That's it," cried Mrs. Sweeny, "that's it. I couldn't think of the name, but I know it was somethin' that the papers is alwus sayin' is a shame. And that ain't all about him, neither. He's just a miserable, low-down man that no woman can know without shiverin' for six weeks after talkin' with him. He was a fr'en' of my Danny and he was alwus kind to me; but I never could stand havin' him near me. He gave me the creeps, he did. Mister, if there's a man on earth that I loathe, it's Tim."

"Then why do you have him around?" the Boarder asked.

"Well, this is why," she answered. "Here I am, keepin' a flat in Central Park West, because me and Danny usta live in this street and so I can't bear to move away. W'y, I can look out of the window and see the very pleeceman he usta punch in the ribs and give cigars to. And there's the sidewalk he usta walk on, and step over the cracks, so's he'd have good luck. I can't give up this place, mister; I'd die if I had to move. But it's harder than beatin' the races to get the rent money together, and keep up any kind of a front. I go round like a ragpicker's dream most of the time. I haven't got no good clothes nor nothin', like I usta have when Danny was livin'. And if I married Tim Lacy I'd be carriage trade again."

There was in Mrs. Sweeny's eyes an expression which the Boarder did not - like. He saw that she was swaying between the influence of her better nature and the lure of wealth.

"Think," he cautioned her, "before you do anything. Id be true to myself, Mrs. Sweeny, if I were you."

"Do you expect a person in my state of mind to do any real-lace thinkin'?" she queried sharply. "My head ain't built for workin' out problems like that. Most all I can get through it these days is the plain housekeepin' problems, such as: 'What are you goin' to do when the rent comes round?' There's only one answer, and it don't take a college education to get to it. And another little example is this one: 'When you just have got to have a new hat, and there ain't no money to get it with, do you get it, or don't you get it? That's what I've been sayin' to myself for the last two weeks and longer. Do I get that hat, or do I leave it down there in Miss Toohey's millinery emporium? I need it— oh, my gee, how

I need it! But do I get it? The answer is about the easiest thing I ever tried to figure out— I don't."

"Perhaps," said the Boarder soothingly, "something will turn up."

"if you ain't the limit!' sneered Mrs. Sweeny. "You know very well that you don't sit around and hope for somethin' to turn up, and here you are tellin' me that there's a chance! Things don't turn up. They're nailed down, and you have got to push somethin' under 'em and pry real hard when you © make 'em turn up. Maybe I'll get that hat and be swellin' round here in a bunch of cheer-up clothes, pretty soon, that will make the other womén I know look like a dozen cast-off door mats."

"Exactly," assented the Boarder. "You never can tell."

"But I can," she said positively.

"I'm interested," he insinuated.

"Didn't I tell you I was goin' out in a automobeel?" she reminded him. "And don't folks that rides around in them things usually have pretty good clothes? And they don't look as if they was ashamed to look their butcher in the face, owin' to their habit of buyin' dog meat instead of the good cuts — now, do they? Right now it's up to me whether it'll be tenderloin and Tim, or dog meat and me. And it seems like Dog Meat's a mud horse, and the track's dry and fast."

The Boarder decided that hé was quite incapable of directing this amazing woman along the right course. "I don't exactly admire your frame of mind," he said hopelessly.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" she flashed. "I ain't alone in this marryin' a check book. There's Mrs. Powers, now. Everybody knows she married old man McGorray for his money; and, honust, mister, he's the limit. W'y, one night, when they was havin' dinner in a swell hotel, Mac was whistlin' so loud at his soup, to cool it, that some one sends along a waiter with the request for him to whistle 'Cavilleria Rusticana' next. He's awful, he is. But Mrs. McGorray has got her own automobeel, with a fellow all lit up in a flunkey uniform to make it go; and she dresses just splendid. You'd think, to look at her, that a paint shop blew up, and she was all the pretty colors mashed into one. All the women that knows her is so envious that they go round the corner and stick pins in theirselfs whenever they see her. And all she has got to put up with, to get all them things, is Mac. I ain't sayin' that she don't earn'.all she gets. Stayin' around where Mac is is worth ten thousand dollars a minute— and a lot of di'mon's thrown in."

"But could you stand a life like that?" asked the Boarder, in a most discouraging tone.

"Tim ain't as bad as Mac is," she declared, rallying to the defence of her suitor. Then, in the next breath, she exclaimed: "Oh, my goodness, yes, he is— he's worse! But— but he's awful well off, mister." There was a wistful ring in her

voice. It was the pleading hesitancy of one who would justify a contemplated wrong.

The Boarder noticed it, and his thoughts reverted to the race-track days of this woman. In the vicious, worldly influences there, he sought an explanation of her hard, cynical views— her willingness to sacrifice herself for gain. His mental process was mirrored in his observation, the language of which he purposely put over her head to soften its sting:

"Your habit of thought was developed under degenerate auspices."

"Huh!' said Mrs. Sweeny disdainfully. "You can't scare me with any bundle of conversation like that. I never did anything that sounded like it; so I can plead not guilty." When in doubt, she resorted to satire, in her word tilts with the Boarder, and, as she informed her friends, many times he should have felt stingingly rebuked, if he felt at all.

Having thus let him realize the overwhelming force of a superior intellect, she vouchsafed him a moment for reflection, before returning to the matter at hand.

"This here wooin' of Tim's has been goin' on a long time, though I never suspected it before. He's as shy and craity as a burglar, Tim is. And, after all, he's a real good-hearted man. If I could get over despisin' him, mister, I think I might learn to stay in the same room with him, and not feel like yellin'. Now, after Danny was killed, he drops round to cheer me up.

" 'Belle,' he says, 'if rent day ever gets to happenin' a little bit too often. for you to get away with it, let me know. There's a bank downtown where I shove a piece of paper through a hole, and a fellow gives me real money for it.'

"Now, mister, that was nice of him, wasn't it? But I just took one look at him, and them old shivers come over me. He seemed like somethin' inhuman with his little shiftin' eyes, and the yellow teeth, and his collar— ugh! I couldn't stand for him, then— no, sir!

"So I says: 'Mr. Lacy, as a widow lady in a most terrible hole,' I says, 'and dead sure to go in deeper, I thank you for your offer, of a boost. I can't take nothin' now,' I says, 'nor next week, nor the week after; but if the double cross comes my way, there's no tellin' what I'll do. "When a lady is real poor, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'she'll even live with her husban's relatives. But as for the present, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'Tl run my own book.'

"But in them days, mister, I hadn't been up against New York alone, or perhaps I wouldn't of had the nerve to tackle it. If I'd known then what I know now, it's a dead sure thing that I'd of thought:twice b'fore turnin' Tim down so cold and haughty. I didn't know then that he was strong for marryin' me, or I'd of kept him around just' on general principles.

"He done more wooin', too, but it was in such a way that you'd never know it. Once he meets me on the street and says:

" 'Hello, Belle Sweeny, how's things goin'?

" 'Fine as silk,' I says, for I don't go round advertisin' my membership in the Down-and-Out Club. He looks me -over, and he sees how worn my clothes was. Nobody could help noticin' it— and it made me so ashamed, too. So he says:

" 'The silk's got a pretty loud shine on it, Belle, for so elegant a woman as you alwus was. It ain't right, neither. Listen here— to-morrow, in the second race, Prince Larry is goin' to start, and he's won already. I'm goin' to put a hundred on him for you. Can't I do that much tor the wife of my old fr'en'?' he says, pleady like.

" 'Thanks, Mr. Lacy,' I says, 'but Pll do my own bettin'. I got ten dollars at home that ain't workin', I says, 'and I'll take your tip and have a little flyer for myself, just on account of old times.'

" 'Let me take it, and I'll place it at big odds for you, Belle,' he says. And I don't know what made me do it, but when I got home I sent him the money by a messenger boy, and Prince Larry won at ten to one, and next day out comes a envelope with my little ten dollars in it, and a hundred-dollar note on the side. That's what I call wooin', mister. It's a better game for the lady than havin' some red-faced loafer sittin' around in your parlor, with the 'lectric light burnin' up your income— ain't it?"

"The money part of Lacy seems all right," admitted the Boarder, "but I think you'd get more sadness than joy out of such a marriage. There's a lot of good in you, and you ought to let it win in this case."

"Yes, and get a pail of water and a rag, and wash my windows like a proper scrub-lady, for evermore!" she snapped. "No, sir— I want you to understand that I am through with bein' a good lady. I'm goin' to be like the rest of them from now on, and watch out for the main chance. W'y, I'd marry— I'd even marry you, mister, if you had more'n four hundred dollars in the bank. I would, I would, I would— so there! And just you remember this, mister— Tim Lacy is comin' for me in his big red automobeel, this afternoon, and I have got a idee that Belle Sweeny is goin' out on a hunt for a softer snap."

"Now, Mrs. Sweeny," expostulated the Boarder. But the mistress of the house had rushed from the room. The Boarder, greatly disturbed, paced up and down in his little study, endeavoring to arrive at some method of procedure which would turn the agitated woman from her contemplated course. But, before a solution of the problem had occurred to him, he heard the hall door slam, and he knew that she had gone out on her regular daily marketing expedition. Still pondering over the situation, he departed for his work downtown.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when he returned, but the flat was deserted. He tried to read, but his mind was so filled with apprehension that he found this diversion impossible. At six o'clock he had reached a state of nervous

excitement which almost sent him out into the streets in search of a big red automobile.

Suddenly a key was fitted into the lock of the hall door. He heard it click, and then there was a rustle of skirts in the corridor. Then, with a flushed, happy face, Mrs. Sweeny presented herself at the doorway of his room.

"Gee!" she announced. "I had the time of my life. We went clear to Yonkers!"

"Yes?" encouraged the Boarder.

"And we run over a dog and got our number took by a cop, somewhere up in Harlem, and I've had the grandest time!" She was fairly bubbling over with the sweetness of her experience. As she went out of the room to lay aside her wraps, she laughed softly to herself.

"This flat ought to have a good sweeping out," she observed on her return. "I never noticed how dirty it was before. To-morrow I'll just tie a cloth around my. head, like a good chambermaid, and make the dust. fly faster'n a man catchin' a car. I guess that gettin' aut like I did this afternoon makes me notice things more, now I'm back." She cast a sly, interrogatory glance toward the Boarder, to see if he caught the deeper meaning of her words. But he continued to regard her in a questioning manner, and so she relapsed into the babbling chatter that would eventually clear her, if she were but given time.

"Tim is a great gent'man," she averred. "When he come for me this afternoon, I couldn't help feelin' like I was a porch climber, as you might say, takin' things that wasn't meant for me. I didn't have no good excuse for bein' seen in a automobeel, for I haven't got enough money to support a puncture in the hind tire. That's the way I felt, mister. But Tim— he was that fine and sussiety-like, when he come for me! He jumped out himself, and helped me in like I was a chorus girl in the front row, that carries a spear and marks time and hollers: 'The king— the king? Gee— it was grand, mister! I haven't had that uppish feelin' since Danny usta help me in a hansom and say to the driver: 'Take us to Forty-Second and Broadway, you lobster!'

"Well, Tim tucks me in, and then he says to the shuffer: 'See if you can't get arrested gettin' out of town, Carl.' And right afterward, there come a groanin' and poppin' of the machinery, and— my gee!— we lit out of there so fast that I left my breath on the front steps. The houses and lamp-posts skipped by like a string of words jumpin' out of a runaway phonograph, and every. time we pretty near hit a little boy in the street, I squealed. Honust, mister, you just can't imagine how real heavenly it was!

"After we'd got out where there wasn't so much traffic, Tim begins to talk to me. 'Belle,' he says, 'this here automobeel . cost eighty-five hundred with the top and gas lamps,' he says, 'and there's a room in my private garage for a nice little "lectric that a lady can run,'

" 'Ain't that nice?' says I, settin' back in the cushions.

"Them 'lectrics is easy to run, Belle,' he says. 'You have a little lever at your left, and you work it this way for the speeds.' He grabbed my hand and kept twistin' my arm up and down, like it was part of the machine. 'Right in this position is your first speed,' he says, givin' my arm a shove, 'and here's the second speed,' he says, shovin' my arm a little farther forward, 'and here's the third speed, and—'

" 'Oh,' I says, 'cut it out, Tim!'

" 'But there's more speeds,' he says.

" 'Not for me,' I says. 'And as for you, you're goin' fast enough now. Let go my hand, Tim, and quit them school-boy tricks. If you want to hold a lady's hand, grab it like a man and hold on.' I jerked it away from him, and pointed out some of the swellest scenery; but he wouldn't fall for it.

"'I got things besides scenery on my mind,' he says, and he looked in my face with them eyes of his, and I felt just like squeezin' into one of them little crevices in the leather, or any place else, to get away from him. He kinda got on my nerves, mister. And pretty soon I began to remember some things that my Danny had told me a long time ago. Danny was forever settin' me right about the ways of the world.

"Once he told me: 'Nine-tenths of this here life is trouble, little girl, and if you overbet your bank roll it's all trouble.' Then he went on to tell me that it meant somethin' about there bein' some happiness around loose all the time, but if you ain't satisfied with what you've got you're pretty sure to spoil all of it.

"So, the more I looked at Tim, bein' real close to him and viewin' him from a box seat, you might say, the surer I got that Danny's little sayin' was got off for me to do some thinkin' about, just at this particular time.

"First, I looked the automobeel over, with Carl there on the front seat, and I says to myself: 'They've got to come stronger than that for Belle Sweeny.' Then I sized up the elegant hunk of glass in Tim's necktie. It looked good to me, 'specially when I thought how p'raps I could talk him into havin' it set in a ring for me. But I got to balancin' Tim against the automobeel and that stone, and I says to myself: 'Come again, come again!' After while I had figgered up in my mind his place in the country and his home in Seventy-second Street, and all he had in the world that I knew about, and still the little voice inside me was sayin': 'Come again, come again!' "

"What happened?" demanded the Boarder. "Are you going to marry him?"

"I wish you wouldn't be so pryin'," she complained. "It ain't no good story unless I can put some trimmin's to it. It ain't a good story at all, told right, out like you wanted me to tell it. W'y, it didn't amount to nothin'. When Tim said he had somethin' besides scenery on his mind, he went on and told me about how lonesome he was, and how he wanted a wife."

" 'I'd treat you swell if you'd be it,' he says.

" 'Not me,' I says. 'You got the wrong number, Mr. Lacy.'

" 'Does that go, Belle?' he says.

" 'Nothin' ever was meant stronger,' I says. 'It goes both ways and includes the lookout, as my Danny usta say.'

" 'I'm sorry,' he says.

" 'I ain't,' says I.

" 'Hem!' says he.

"Then we come home."

22: Creating the Ideel

Booth Tarkington

1869-1946

Saturday Evening Post, 4 Jan 1936

IN HUMAN affairs cause and effect often behave not like the inseparable twins science says they are, but liked two harebrains never even acquainted. Young Howard Cattlet's acting as an usher at a classmate's wedding settled his destiny, not by means of a marvelous bridesmaid but because he was unable to borrow an usher's uniform and had to have one made.

Thus, just out of college, owning a cutaway, some other clothes and nothing more, he began commuting between his native Hackertown, New Jersey, and New York, seeking to join the diminished army of the employed.

Systematic, he began an orderly geographical combing of northern Manhattan in mid-June, and was dishearteningly down as far as Seventeenth Street by the end of the month. Anything but an electric, eye-to-eye, make-it-happen young man, he was large, slow-spoken, good-looking somewhat solemnly; and a solemn sort of thoroughness was a sturdy element in his character. Nothing less could have led him to include in his list an advertisement for an Art Dealer's Assistant.

On the morning of the first of July, he crossed over from West Seventeenth Street— where his offer to become a Night Watchman had been declined — and walked valiantly to the address of the Art Dealer on the eastern stretch of that same thoroughfare. Arrived at the shop, he found it to be upon the ground floor, and paused to learn what he could from its rather dusty exterior. There was a recessed half glass door and a single display window; not a large one, yet imposing, even a little pompous, because of the gilt lettering it bore.

RUMBIN GALLERIES
Chefs-d'Oeuvre– Peintures– Old Masters
Objets d'Art– Sculptures– Period Furniture

Inside the window were two candelabra— black bronze Venuses or Muses, or somebody, upholding gilt flowers from which rose the candles— and between the candelabra, upon a mound of green velvet, was a venerable murky landscape painting from which young Howard Cattlet got only the impression that he wouldn't like to own it. Already discouraged, he, nevertheless, doggedly stuck to his routine, opened the half-glass door and went in.

Within the oblong room he was aware of dark old-looking paintings upon brown walls, of old chairs and sofas in faded colors, of stools, tables and commodes in unfamiliar shapes; and beyond this daunting foreground he saw at

the shadowy other end of the room two people— a fair-haired young woman at a desk, and a thin, baggy-kneed man who spoke to her urgently.

She interrupted him. Her clear, light voice was but too audible to the young man near the door.

"Professor Ensill, your experience with the Amwilton Museum and on the Institute's art faculty would be valuable, of course; but there isn't the slightest use for you to wait till Mr. Rumbin comes in. I mustn't hold out any false hopes to you, Professor Ensill. I'm sorry."

Professor Ensill's shoulders drooped. "Well, I'll keep on with that damn Orcas," Howard Cattlet heard him say. I'd hoped for almost any kind of change— but all right." He turned from the desk, and, on his way out, set, drearily, a soiled fedora hat upon his scholarly head. Before the door closed behind him, young Howard decided to depart also. He was in motion toward the street when the young woman at the desk rose, came forward and spoke to him.

"Can I show you something?"

"No," he said. "No, I believe not."

"No? Perhaps you came in answer to Mr. Rumbin's advertisement?"

"I— yes, I believe I

"Then why don't you—"

"Thank you," Howard said. "I wouldn't do."

To his astonishment, she said thoughtfully, "I don't know," and for a strange moment the scrutiny he had from her intelligent gray eyes was appreciative. "I think I'll take your name."

He gave it, wistfully adding his address; then again moved toward the door. But she still detained him.

"Wait here." She went to a door at the rear of the shop, opened it, called "Mr. Rumbin," and returned to her desk. A wide silhouette appeared in the doorway; she said, "Mr. Howard Cattlet, Hackertown, New Jersey," and applied herself to a typewriter.

Mr. Rumbin came forward, a middle-aged active fat man with a glowing eye. His features were flexibly expressive, like an actor's, and just now, oddly, seemed anxious to be ingratiating. "Hackertown?" he said to the solemn applicant. "Mr. Howard Cappits, you know Mr. and Mrs. Waldemar Hetzel that built the macknificent country house outside Hackertown?"

"Hetzel? No, I—"

"Then you couldn't intaduce 'em to me," Mr. Rumbin said regretfully, a foreign accent of elusive origin becoming a little more noticeable in his speech. "Hanover Galleries sold 'em a Claude for hundut seventy-two t'ousand dollars. It's nice money; it's a crime." He sighed; then smiled almost affectionately. Where was you before?" he asked.

"Before? Where was I?" However, comprehending that the question sought for his previous business experience, the young man explained that he hadn't any; but mentioned a possible qualification. In his junior year he had attended a course of lectures on Aesthetic Fundamentals and had passed the examination. He hadn't passed it prominently, he thought right to add; but still he had passed.

Mr. Rumbin, though looking at young Mr. Cattlet attentively, listened with indifference; and, when the applicant produced a written approval of his morals from the rector of St. Mark's, Hackertown, gave it but an absent glance and returned it.

"Listen," Mr. Rumbin said." You got a cutaway suit?"

"A what?" Howard said. "Yes. I've only had it on once."

"You got a useful face, too," Mr. Rumbin observed, frank in meditation. "You don't show nothing on it. Like you ain't got no feelings. Look like maybe you got high educated brains, too, or not; nobody would be surprised which." Suddenly he smiled beamingly, glanced back toward the girl at the typewriter. "Putty good. Oddawise Georchie wouldn't kept you for me to look at. I take you."

"What? You say—"

"On prohibition," Mr, Rumbin added quickly. "On prohibition the first couple weeks. After that, if I commence liking you, it's permanent. Twelve dollars a week. Make it fourteen."

"Fourteen?" Dazed, Howard seemed to perceive that his wedding garment, supplemented slightly by his face, was perhaps launching him upon a career. ''Fourteen? When would you— when do I— when—"

"When you commence, Mr. Howard Cappits? Today, now; it's got to be sometime, ain't it?" Mr. Rumbin became confidential. "Fourteen a week, payable mont'ly. It's awful good; it's splendid. You got everything to learn there is. Besides the cutaway, you got to have some overalls."

"Overalls?"

"Howard," Mr. Rumbin said, "part of the work being my assistant, it's maybe some like a janitor. Sometimes you'll be using the floor mop; you get to wash the windows, too, and I'm going to teach you how to dust objets d'art— it's puttikler. Today, though, immediately I got to teach you something else quick. Come to the stock room; I show you." Then, followed dumbly, the astounding man walked to the rear of the shop, but paused for a moment near the desk. "I intaduce you to Georchie; but don't you call her Georchie— her name's my secretary, Miss Georchina Horne. When I ain't here, she's the same as me. Got me, Howard?"

Miss Georgina Horne gave Howard a nod that didn't interrupt her typing. Howard murmured, and then said more distinctly, "Yes, sir."

"'Sir," Mr. Rumbin repeated, pleased again. Sir, that's nice. Calling me 'sir' natural I won't got to keep hollering at you for not doing it like that Bennie feller

I had last mont'." He spoke to Miss Horne. "He's got the cutaway. Georchie, at the elevenst hour you picked one with. It's like a providence!"

He passed through the doorway that had admitted him only a few decisive minutes previously, and the owner of the cutaway went with him into a cluttered and confusing room. Long wide shelves, several feet apart, occupied two of the walls; and upon these shelves dozens of framed pictures stood, not leaning against one another but separated by fixed uprights of wood. Against the third wall other pictures leaned, too large for the shelves; the middle part of the floor was crowded with old chairs and sofas, and close to the fourth wall stood cabinets, chests, consoles, commodes and an iron safe.

Mr. Rumbin put a fond, fat hand upon a panel of one of the cabinets. "Locked," he said. "Some day if I commence liking you, I show you. Ivories, porcelains, little Renaissance bronzes maybe. Ha!" He patted the black metal door of the safe. "Treasures! Some day maybe." The glow of his eyes became a glisten. Maybe a couple pieces Limoges enamel. Maybe even one Byzantine enamel on gold— Saint Luke, size of a calling card, elevenst century maybe. Maybe a couple little Got'ic crosier heads. Maybe a fourteent'-century pyx. Who I sell 'em to?'' Abruptly he became somber. "Where's a real collector not dead that ain't busted or some pig dealer ain't got him?" He sighed; then brightened and said briskly, "We commence! You got to learn a program. We start it with the Follower of Domenico Theotocopuli."

"Sir?" The course in Aesthetic Fundamentals wasn't helping Howard much; he didn't know what Mr. Rumbin had been talking about or was talking about now. "Sir?"

"Domenico Theotocopuli, it's El Greco's right name," Mr. Rumbin explained kindly, completing his listener's incomprehension. "He had Followers. Here; I show you." He took a picture from a shelf, set it against a chair in the light, and asked, "How you like it?"

Howard hopelessly thought it was terrible. What he saw seemed the likeness of a gigantic sentimental bearded person with a minute head. Clad in a robe of twisted blue tin, he walked barefooted among either rocks or clouds of lead foil. Howard wondered if the job depended upon his liking such a picture; but he couldn't lie flagrantly.

"I don't, sir."

"Right!" the astounding Rumbin said. "In odda worts, this fine splendid picture of mine, we wouldn't say it's a painting by El Greco himself nor by El Greco's son, because El Greco's son you can't tell from El Greco himself; but this picture you maybe could. That's why it comes first on the program. Got it?"

"Not— not yet, sir" Howard admitted. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean by the program."

"No? Sit down. I'll —" Mr. Rumbin interrupted himself. "Not in that chair! It's Régence needle-point; it's real. Here, we sit on this Louis Treize sofa; it ain't." Then, as they sat together upon the sofa, he spoke suavely. "I got just time to teach you the A P C of the alphabet. In art how you handle a program it's your heart and pants. Oddawise give up hoping you'll ever get the ideel client."

"Client, sir? You mean—"

"Client!" Mr. Rumbin said emphatically. "In art it ain't customers. Listen hard. What a dealer needs, it's ideel clients. Ideel clients, the kind that won't trust no odda dealer, there ain't many. Some the piggest dealers ever was didn't had but two. Me? Give me just one that's ideel enough and I move up to Fifty-sevent' Street! I got one coming this afternoon that might be; it's a chance. Got it?"

"Well, I— I—"

"If she gets made into a picture collector, it's all Mr. Rumbin became so confidential he spoke in little more than a whisper. "Six up to nine millions her husband the last seven years took in. Just found out she ought to collect. Some odda dealer'll get her if I ain't quick. You see, Howie?"

"— more or less, sir."

"Right!" Rumbin said. "Now we come to what's a program. Howie, it's universal if you got a important article you want somebody to buy, only a bum would right away show him this article. If he likes skyscrapers and you want to sell him the Empire State Building, you wouldn't say nothing about it until after you got him discouraged showing him t'ree-story buildings and a couple carbarns maybe. Then you spring the Empire State, just before you got him too tired out to be excited. That's a program. It's execkly what we do in the Galleries this afternoon."

"The Galleries?" Howard asked. "Where—"

"The Galleries it's the whole place; but in puttikler it's, too, a room from a door across the shop. When the client comes, I take her in the Galleries; but you are waiting here. When you hear the buzzer, you pick up the Follower of Domenico Theotocopuli, bring it into the Galleries, put it on a easel, stand looking at it just natural till I tell you go beck and bring the next."

"The next, sir?"

Mr. Rumbin jumped up, replaced the Follower of Domenico Theotocopuli upon its shelf. "Listen, I got a feeling it's the most important day in my life! Here, one next to the odda, it's fixed in order the program, these special five pictures you bring in the Galleries one at a time. After that you don't do nothing at all, because it ain't any of these five is the one I got to sell her. That's my great Clouet; and it I'm going to bring in myself. All you do is carry pictures. Got it?"

"Yes, sir, I— I think I—"

"Right!" Mr. Rumbin said abruptly. ''Go put on the cutaway suit."

"Sir? But it's out at—"

"Hackertown, New Chersey," Mr. Rumbin said. "Be beck execkly half-past two o'clock in it."

"I doubt if " young Howard began; then he had an important second thought and said, "Yes, sir."

His doubt had been of the time allowed; but, by moving more rapidly than was usual with him, he made it sufficient and re-entered the shop at almost. the precise moment named. His employer, whose shining broad face showed excitement, approved of him.

"Pyootiful!" Mr. Rumbin exclaimed, and turned to Miss Georgina Horne. She was delicately passing a small feather duster over the landscape in the display window. '"Georchie," Mr. Rumbin asked dramatically, "Georchie, you see it?"

Howard, slightly offended, wasn't sure whether "it" applied to himself or to his brave apparel; then discovered that something more elaborate than either was intended. Miss Horne nodded seriously at Mr. Rumbin and said, "It'll do."

"Do?" the dealer cried. "It's double a hundut per cent perfect! Me in only a nice sack suit, but with a cutaway to order around— it's a picture!" Between thumb and forefinger he took a fold of his new assistant's sleeve, examined the texture. "Fine! Listen, Howie, I ain't going to ring no buzzer for you. After I got her in the Galleries, I commence the program myself with my great Dutch lentscape from the window here; then next I open the door and call to Georchie. 'Miss Horne,' I'll say, 'send me the Head Assistant with the Follower of Domenico Theotocopuli.' Got it, Howie? It's more connoisseur than a buzzer and like there's more of you than just you. Get back in the stock room, so she don't see you right first when she comes in."

"Yes, sir." Then, on his way to the rear of the shop, Howard heard Mr. Rumbin speaking further, though in a lowered voice, to the gray-eyed secretary:

"That puttikler dumb look he's got, it's good, too; it's aristocratic."

Howard, reddening somewhat, went into the stock room, closed the door and sat down on the Louis Treize sofa that wasn't. He stared at the strange furniture and at the racks of paintings, which he suspected of being even queerer than the furniture. The Follower of What's-His-Name certainly was. " Doman: " he said aloud. " Domanigo— Follower of Domanigo Tea—" He didn't believe he'd ever be able to remember all of El Greco's real name. Maybe, though, he could learn to be a good Assistant Art Dealer without having to know how to pronounce everything distinctly. ''Domanigo Teacupply," he murmured, and thought that coughing in the middle of such names might help. He tried it, wasn't satisfied, gave up, and sat apprehensive— just waiting.

Miss Horne opened the door. "It'll be easy," she said, comprehending the apprehension, though his expression was merely stolid. "Just watch Mr. Rumbin

carefully and be natural. Mrs. Hollins is here. You're to take the El Greco into the Galleries."

"El Greco? He said it was a Follower of—"

"It's changed," Miss Horne informed him, not smiling. "It's the same picture. Take it in."

By the One Symbolic and Prophetic Word He Triumphantly Whispered: "Ideel!"

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He took the painting from the shelf; then paused. He'd begun to like Miss Horne's appearance and had an impulse to talk to her. "Suppose the— the client asks me a question about one of the pictures—"

"Mr. Rumbin'll answer it," Miss Horne said. "When you've put the picture on the easel don't stand between it and Mrs. Hollins. Go ahead."

He obeyed, carried the picture out of the stock room, across the shop and into the Galleries. In the center of the rather small room, a lady sat in a velvet chair, looking peevishly at the murky brown landscape, which was upon an easel at a little distance before her. She was fragile, restless-looking, thinly pretty, and what she wore was of a delicate prettiness, too; a dress of ivorine silk, a hat of cream and old rose— colors that were echoed in the frail rose-and ivory wrap drooping from the back of her chair. Mr. Rumbin moved deferentially between her and the displayed picture; he seemed unaware of his assistant's entrance.

"Not two people in a million," he was saying, "not two people in t'ree million would right away said like you this great seventeent' century Dutch School Italian lentscape it's too dark. In some people it's a instinck to be a connoisseur; it's born. Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins, I congratulate you !"

"Oh, I don't know," Mrs. Hollins said. "I only know I know that picture's too dark."

"Too dark is right! Look!" The dealer made a gracefully negligent gesture toward his new employee. "Look, it's a young *Herr Doktor* from the university, the Galleries' Head Assistant. Even he ain't never noticed it's too dark. Me? It shows I could be twenty-five years a art dealer and still got something to learn. It's mirackalous!"

He removed the landscape, set it against a wall; and Howard, inwardly upset by the doctor's degree just conferred upon him, placed the Follower upon the easel.

"There!" Mr. Rumbin cried. "My great El Greco. You like?"

"Murder, no!" Mrs. Hollins said. "I should say not!"

Mr. Rumbin's enthusiasm for her was unbounded. He appealed to Howard passionately. "Didn't I tell you she's a collector? Simply, it's proved!" More calmly, he addressed the client. "You're right it ain't no positive El Greco, Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins. More it's like a Follower. If I had Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins' eye for collecting, I wouldn't been no art dealer; I'd be a Museum Director." He spoke again to Howard. "Bring my great Diaz flower—"

I don't like pictures of flowers," Mrs. Hollins said discontentedly. ''Have you got anything by Leonardo da Vinci?"

"By who?" Mr. Rumbin's ample voice was suddenly small; he seemed enfeebled. "Who?"

"Leonardo da Vinci," Mrs. Hollins repeated. "I like his Mona Lisa immensely. Haven't you—"

"Frangkly, no." Mr. Rumbin, swallowing, convalesced after shock. "Frangkly speaking, I ain't never carried no Leonardo. Leonardos they're more or less scarce; some people think there ain't almost any." Completing his recovery, he beamed upon her again. "It's good taste, though. Wonderful taste!" He spoke hurriedly to the Head Assistant. "Leave out that next picture, the flowers."

"Yes, sir." Howard intelligently returned to the stock room, came back to the Galleries bringing the third picture of the program, not the second. He placed it upon the easel from which Mr. Rumbin had removed the Follower. The new offering was an aged wooden panel with a surface of colors once violent, but now dulled into a dingy harmony.

"Adoration of the Magi by a Pupil of the Master of the Holy Kinship of Cologne." Standing beside the easel, Rumbin moved his right thumb in exquisite curves as though using it to repaint the ancient picture. "Them Madonna's robes! Sweetness! Them beards on the Wise Men! Macknificent Flemish influenced prim—"

"Not as a gift!" Mrs. Hollins said. "You must think I'm crazy." She looked at a diamond-bordered wrist watch. "Listen. Kingsford J. and I're going on a three weeks' motor trip tomorrow; I can't sit around here all day."

The new assistant, who was beginning to understand programs a little, was certain that this one had gone too far in discouraging the client and that she'd passed the precise degree of fatigue after which she could be made to get excited. He had not yet learned that his employer was himself an artist.

"Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins," Rumbin said, in a low and breathless voice, "it makes me feel senseless. Simply, it shows a *grande dame* can be also a

connoisseur. One look and you recognized a Flemish influenced primitive ain't tasteful in your apartment. Ah, but wait!" He became dramatically commanding. "Bring my great Rosa Bonheur!"

"Yes, sir," Howard said, and turned to go; but, behind Mrs. Hollins' chair, Rumbin strode to him, whispered fiercely,

"Ask Georchie!"

Instantly the dealer turned smiling to his client. Howard went out to the shop and approached Miss Horne. "I think he must be mixing up the program. He told me to bring his great Rosa Bonheur."

"It's the size of a house; you'll need help," she said. "Come on."

She led the way into the stock room, and there went to an enormous picture, the largest of those that leaned, backs outward, against the wall. Coincidentally there began to stir within Howard Cattlet, as he followed the competent young figure, a new and pleasurable feeling. It seemed to him that he might become warmly interested in his new calling on its own account. An art dealer's life, he perceived, could be absorbing.

"What's he want to show her this one for?" he asked. "She's beginning to be pretty sore; why doesn't he spring the one that he really wants her to buy?"

"He's still preparing her mind for that climax." Miss Horne took a soft cloth from a shelf and applied it carefully to the edges of the big picture's frame. "He knows, of course, she'll say this Rosa Bonheur is preposterously too large; that's just what he wants her to say. Then he'll suddenly show her the Clouet, the portrait of a handsome Valois gentleman in jewels and velvet— a lovely small size and a. really beautiful picture too."

"Clouet? He was French, wasn't he?"

"Flemish and French," Miss Horne said, continuing to wipe the great gilt frame. "Of course, there aren't more than ten or eleven fairly certain Clouets— the French Revolution wiped out so many records and pictures, too, you see— but likely enough one of the Clouets painted Mr. Rumbin's Clouet."

"One of them? One of the—"

"Yes, or one of the shop staff of one of the Clouets. Of course, though, it just might be a sixteenth-century police portrait."

"Sixteenth cen—" Howard looked at the shelves laden with baffling and oppressive pictures. "Police what?"

"They didn't have photographs in those days," she explained. "Pretty often they sent around copies of portraits of somebody who was wanted or escaped. Then take all the copies they gave their friends, and naturally you hear a good many small French portraits being called Clouet or Corneille de Lyons or—"

"Corneille— Corneille de who?" He looked at her humbly. "Do you have to know all these things about every picture in the world? How does anybody ever learn such a business?"

She gave him a glance in which there may have been some compassion; then was brisk. "You'll pick up a good deal from Mr. Rumbin— if you stay. We'd better be getting ahead with the Rosa Bonheur; he's had about as much time as he wants for talking between. I'll only go as far with you as the door to the Galleries."

One at each end of the heavy picture, they lifted it, carried it from the stock room and across the shop. Miss Horne proved to be one of those surprising girls who don't look very strong but are; she was also capably executive. Near the door of the Galleries she whispered, "Stop here," and the two stood still. Mr. Rumbin could be heard speaking appetizingly of paintings of animals— of Paulus Potter's immortal Bull, of superb cows by Troyon, of Monticelli's jeweled fowls, of mellow cats by Nicolas Maas, of splendid goats by Salvator Rosa. Other great names rolled out from the unctuous voice; and Howard Cattlet, beginning to be fascinated, wished he knew something about them. Also, he hoped they were impressing Mrs. Hollins, and thus almost unconsciously had the first symptoms of a loyal apprenticeship.

Miss Georgina Horne coughed rather loudly; her employer interrupted himself. "Ah! She arrive', my great Rosa Bonheur!"

He came hurrying forth, took Miss Horne's place; and then, as he and his assistant brought their burden into the Galleries and placed it before Mrs. Hollins, reproached him gaily. "Ah, these young *Herr Doktors*! Never should you lift such a picture alone! Why didn't you call Schmidt or Raoul to help you?"

"Sir?"

"Never mind," Rumbin said hastily. "She's too pig to go on the easel, set her down on the floor; we each hold her up at a corner. There! Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins, the greatest of all animal painters, Rosa Bonheur! You seen her works in the Louvre, in the Metropolitan. I ask you as a connoisseur, which? Them or this, which?" He used his free thumb as if repainting again. "This left ear of this horse! That little passage there! Organization! Seven horses— four great grand foreground horses putty near life size, and t'ree behind in the background— altogedda seven horses. Action! Simply, it's majesty !"

Howard looked at Mrs. Hollins expectantly, awaiting her denunciation of the seven horses; but, to his astonishment, her mood of bored annoyance seemed to change. She stopped smoking.

"Listen!" she said. "Why didn't you show this one to me in the first place? I got an uncle used to have horses like that on his stock farm. I always did like horses. Yes, sir; that's a right good picture." Her appreciation increased; she nodded decisively. "I'll take that one," she said.

"Madame?" Mr. Rumbin stared at her, chopfallen. "You say— you say you wish to acquire this great pig Rosa Bonheur?"

"I'll take it," she said, rising. "I'll take it if you can find a nice place for it in my apartment. Send it up this afternoon." She turned to Howard amiably: "Doctor Um, do you mind telling my chauffeur to bring up the car?"

Howard went out to the street and found a glossy cream-colored touring ear already before the door. He spoke to the chauffeur, who descended and stood by. Mrs. Hollins came from the shop; Rumbin accompanied her, voluble upon the lifelong joy she'd have in her great Rosa Bonheur and the honor her visit had done him. Bowing from where his waist should have been, he kissed her gloved hand, bowed her into the car and bowed thrice again as it moved away. Then, with a stricken face, he rapidly preceded his assistant into the shop.

"Georchie!" he cried hoarsely to Miss Horne, who was replacing the Italianate Dutch landscape in the window. "Georchie, complete hell she knocked out of the program! The Clouet she never even seen, buys the Rosa Bonheur, never asks the price. I'm ruined!"

This lament of his, one sustained outcry, he uttered as he strode tragically through the shop, and the last and loudest of it, I'm ruined!" was heard from within the Galleries, where he seemed to wish to seclude himself with his anguish. To his assistant, art dealing appeared to be utterly confounding. Here was the very largest picture in the place sold— and the fortunate dealer expressing agony in a Latin manner! Howard again sought enlightenment from the serious, gray eyed secretary.

"What on earth's he mean? How's he—"

" 'Ruined?' " she said sadly. "It might be. It's a long time since we've made a sale. He really hasn't had any client at all and he'd set all his hopes on getting her down here today; he was pretty sure it was his last chance. It's a pity. He's an extraordinary man and lovely to work for. I'm afraid you ought to know, Mr. Cattlet, because maybe you'd better not count on— on—"

"On my wages?"

"Yes. He mightn't be able—"

"Yours, too?" Howard asked. For a moment the two young people looked at each other in comradely concern; he had a sympathetic inspiration. "You haven't had yours for a long time, have you, Miss Horne?" Then, as she didn't reply, he protested, "But since he's just sold that big picture, why on earth— ?"

"It's because—"

She got no further; Mr. Rumbin, looking as haggard as a heartily healthy fat man can, came striding vehemently from the Galleries. "Try to sell her a white mice; no, she buys an elephant! Buys a work of art. because she likes horses! Menacheries I could sell. Old masters? No! I'm a animals seller!"

"Don't give up," Georgina said. "Mr. Rumbin, it isn't certain

"Certain? It ain't certain I'm bankrupt, either; it just looks like it!" The dealer sank into a chair, wiped his forehead. "In the first place, how would I make a

price? Year eighteen eighty-five a Rosa Bonheur sold twenty-one t'ousand dollars Christie's. Nineteen twenty-nine it sells again, the same picture identical, at Christie's, forty-six pounds; it's two hundut twenty dollars. Ask anybody rich under ten t'ousand dollars for a picture that size, they think it's no good. If I ask Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins twenty t'ousand dollars, somebody comes in, tells her, *I seen a Rosa Bonheur good as yours, two hundut twenty dollars." Right away she sues me!"

"No, she wouldn't," Miss Horne said. "She wouldn't want her husband to know she'd been that foolish."

"Georchie, what's the use talking the price of a mountain that starts her screeching. 'Take it beck out!' soon as it's inside her apartment where I would got to hire an architect to block up windows to—"

"Mr. Rumbin, you don't know there isn't wall space. You haven't seen Mrs. Hollins' apartment. Aren't you even going to try?"

"Try? Am I going to try?" A change almost startling took place within and upon Mr. Rumbin; he rose, grimly Napoleonic. "Them seven horses goes into Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins' apartment! The price it's t'irteen t'ousand eight hundut fifty, sued or not. Georchie, get me Schwankel's truck on the 'phone.... Howie, put on your hat; me and you ride in the truck with the Rosa Bonheur. It safes a taxi and teaches you handling pictures. I create Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins into my ideel client if it kills her!"

ONE ITEM of this desperate declaration the apprentice found warranted. After getting the Rosa Bonheur into and out of the freight elevator at the Park Avenue apartment building, and moved from one to another of Mr. and Mrs. Hollins' costly rooms, Howard Cattlet indeed had learned something about the handling of pictures. The more skill he acquired, however, the less hopeful dared he be that Miss Horne's arrears of salary might be paid— he put this first— and that he could establish himself permanently as an Art Dealer's Assistant.

It was his chief who snuffed out the last glimmer. The two were left alone together by Mr. Hollins' valet, who had accompanied them throughout most of the laborious tour. Mr. Rumbin descended from a stepladder, a tape measure dangling from his flaccid hand.

"It's over!" He spoke in a husky whisper. "The last chance— and she'd stick out nine inches across them window curtains!" His voice grew somewhat louder and much bitterer. "The both drawing rooms, the reception room, the music room, dining room and Mr. Hollins' den— if it ain't a door, it's a window, and if it ain't a window, it's a fireplace, and if it ain't a fireplace, it's a alcove. Look! Decorated by Moultons; I'd know 'em anywhere— reds, whites, silvers, choc'lates, overstuffed brocades, new golds, silver-gilt French phones, black

marble shiny Egypt cats— it ought to be against the law! What Moultons must stuck 'em, anyways a hundut t'ousand, I know their prices, they're hogs, it's criminal!" He drooped again, smiled piteously. "Howie, I might commenced liking you some time. The cutaway worked good too. I'm sorry you ain't going to have no chob with me. I'm finish'. It's a receiver."

Howard had an innocently barbarous bright idea. "Mr. Rumbin, why couldn't you trim off part of this picture and—"

"Orcas would; he's a wandal." The dealer shook his head. "No, any way you try to cut this picture down it leaves part of a horse. Even a chauffeur would get upset to look at it."

"Thus the end seemed to have come definitely. Master and apprentice stood silent, sharing calamity and listening to approaching voices.

Mrs. Hollins came in, accompanied. by a bored little girl of thirteen, recognizably her daughter; and Howard despondently observed that the mother had changed her clothes, but not her colors, and that the daughter's garments were similar in tint. Mrs. Hollins at the Rumbin Galleries had worn a silk dress, cream or old ivory, with a hat and wrap in which the same color was patterned with tones of rose. Hatless, she now wore a rose chiffon dress with creamy lace; and the little girl had on a skirt of palest tan, pink socks, light tan slippers and a tan blouse embroidered in rose. The young assistant hadn't much of an eye for ladies' dress and he was gloomy; but the irrelevant thought came into his mind that Mrs. Hollins' taste must run pretty strongly to these two colors.

"Well, Mr. Rumbin," she asked brightly, "have you found a nice place for my horse picture to go?"

"You don't get it!" Again Howard was startled by a change in his employer. Stooped in despair but a moment ago, the dealer stood erect; his voice was commanding, his look imperious and stern. "Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins, you are a connoisseur and I am a connoisseur. I wouldn't sell you my Rosa Bonheur for a hundut t'ousand dollars!"

"What? What's the matter?"

"Matter? What ain't?" Rumbin's sternness increased to a passionate severity. "How long you had this apartment, all hot reds, cold whites, hot choc'lates, cold silvers, hots next to colds, hot overstuffings, gilt phones, marble cats? How long?"

"What?" She was annoyed but puzzled. "About a year. What's that got to do with—"

"A year!" Rumbin seemed to swell with a noble fury. "A year and already you are sick of it! I know it. What connoisseur such as you could endure this rhodomontado of colors? I don't ask who you let decorate or what you got charged; but if it was t'irty t'ousand dollars it was a murder! For execkly half that much in t'ree weeks I would make this apartment so pyootiful it would look like

connoise and angels dreamed it and Mr Kingsford J. Hollins lived in it. Fifteen t'ousand dollars, t'ree weeks while you're away, and it's a heaven!"

"Nonsense! If you aren't going to hang up that picture—"

"The Rosa Bonheur?" he cried. "Never! I sell people what they ought to have; Rosa Bonheur you shall not. Pictures come after, not before. What you shall have, it's this apartment all over— every room, all, all the whole of it— in just shades of two colors and no more."

Mrs. Hollins frowned. "What two colors?"

"Rose! Rose and ivory!" he shouted. "Old rose and old ivory. Walls, curtains, draperies, carpets, everything! No reds, no whites. Just rose and ivory, Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins, rose and ivory!"

Mrs. Hollins' lips parted; her startled eyes grew large. Like a magician, Rumbin, glaring, held her fixed gaze with his, while the little girl, boredom suddenly gone, jumped up and down.

"Mamma, it sounds perfectly deevine!" she squealed. "Mamma, all we got to do, I'll tell Papa it'll get you nervous again if he don't like it. Let's do it!" Listen," Mrs. Hollins said. "I believe it'd be right pretty. Kingsford J.': just come in and gone to his den. Yes, sir, I believe I'll go tell him. It sounds good... Come on, Lulu; we'll spring it on him."

"Yay, Mamma!" The little girl, screaming with pleasure, ran out of the room and her mother followed. Rumbin called after them.

"Rose and ivory! All in shades of rose and ivory except Mr. Hollins' den. He likes it; it stays. All the rest rose and ivory. All finish' done complete when you get beck from your t'ree weeks' motor trip you start on tomorrow. Rose and ivory!"

He strode to a glossy oval table, picked up an instrument of silver gilt and placed himself in communication with the Rumbin Galleries. "Georchie, tomorrow morning I get me t'ree weeks' more lease life again from the benk. Call up them inside house painters, Bort and Zolex, tell 'em be six o'clock this afternoon at the Galleries. Get me Frank the carpenter six-t'irty. Call up Orcas; tell him I maybe got a use for his Beauvais sofa and his six rose-and-cream petit-point chairs, hold 'em, I see him tomorrow. The Rosa Bonheur it's out for good; forget it. I got a deal fifteen t'ousand dollars costs me twenty; I lose five. If it comes off t'ree weeks from now, Georchie, we move to Fifty-sevent' Street. If it don't, your salary's maybe not and I'm sick in chail!"

HOWARD CATTLET, listening, comprehended that he was— though only by a hair— an Art Dealer's Assistant. He perceived also that the Rosa Bonheur was a dead issue; that his employer, penniless, intended to redecorate Mr. and Mrs. Hollins' apartment in rose and ivory at a cost to himself of twenty thousand dollars, for which he would receive fifteen thousand— and at this point the

young man's mind seemed to be failing him. Mr. Rumbin, tense, made no explanation as they returned with the seven horses in Schwankel's truck to Seventeenth Street; nor did Miss Georgina Horne enlighten Howard at the Galleries, either then or later. She couldn't, because she didn't know.

"There are times," she said, "when Mr. Rumbin hardly dares to let himself know what he's up to. He never does like questions much, anyhow; and we must just remember he's a remarkable man." She paused, then added conscientiously, "That is, I mean if you feel you'd like to stay— and can take the chance?"

Howard did wish to stay, would take the chance, and told her so. His unmentioned thought was that, even at the worst, three weeks of intimate association with old paintings, objets d'art and Miss Horne would add much to his knowledge; but here he erred. Rumbin moved as the whirlwind; his employees whirled with him, and, beginning next morning— in overalls— Howard was kept too furiously busy to learn anything except how to hurry unnaturally. During the whole of the vital period, his association with Miss Horne was fragmentary, flitting and. never anything like intimate.

He had an intimate association with Sehwankel's truckmen, however, moving the furniture, carpets, rugs, curtains and ornamental garnitures of the absent Hollins family out of their apartment and into a storage warehouse until not a trace of Moultons was left, except in Mr. Hollins' den. Also, he brought to Park Avenue momentous truckloads from the Galleries, and crates from auction rooms wherein Rumbin had plainly been plunging. At the apartment, the assistant, jostled by workmen, measured floors, ran errands, mixed buckets of paint and carried them up stepladders to a fevered chief turned painter and working passionately to obtain exquisite accuracies in color.

Rumbin had begun to look like a thin fat man. On the last morning of the Hollins family's absence, he came into the Galleries pallid, having worked at the apartment all night, alone.

"We take my great Clouet in a taxi, Georchie," he said. "You get a sandwich in your left hand for lunch and dinner. You come, too, today. She wires me from Glouchester they're home eight o'clock this evening. Up to date, twenty-four t'ousand eight hundut forty-one dollars sixty two cents, and noon comes the second drawing room's carpet eighteen hundut fifty. Hurry, Georchie!"

Thus the assistant, unrolling a beautifully faded Aubusson rug, had the pleasure of seeing morning sunlight momentarily gild the fair head of the secretary as she came into the apartment and passed a window in the hall. Until late in the afternoon he had only glimpses of her, mostly through doorways; then Mr. Rumbin sent him to help her hang the Clouet above the narrow mantel in the reception room, and they were alone together.

"Even I can see it's a grand little thing," he said from the stepladder, in allusion to the glowing small picture she lifted to him. "It goes in for the fifteen thousand, too, does it? Either he's crazy or I am."

Georgina was pale. "Even at auction this Clouet ought to bring four to seven thousand dollars. He's put the Largilliére Duchess over the mantel in the first drawing room and the Franc Cotes Lady Blount over the mantel in the second, with the English eighteenth century furniture. He's got the Troyon in the dining room, and Thomas Sully's Madame Malibran in the music room. They're by far his five best pictures. Besides that, he's brought up here most of the best objets d'art and every bit of the furniture that's really good ! He'd already borrowed over the limit on everything he owns, long before this began. Now he owes over twenty-six thousand dollars more!" She took from a box two slim statuettes of faintly gleaming, almost black bronze, and placed them upon the marble mantelshelf. "With their patine, these look beautiful here against the ivory wall. Italian Renaissance is pleasant with a Clouet. They're by Francesco de St. Agata. I do wonder—"

"Wonder what?"

Georgina seemed to struggle with the pressure of her loyalty; then she burst out, "I've guessed his idea— I mean I'm afraid I have. It's just too— well, people do lose their minds and still go about talking rationally and—"

"Georchie!"

Rumbin summoned her to him in the broad hallway and set her upon a task there. He came into the reception room, had the Clouet lifted an inch, then gave Howard the key to the locked-up Galleries and sent him all the way to Seventeenth Street for a tiny patch box, eglomisé mounted on ivory, that had been overlooked.

When the young man returned, the workmen were gone and Mrs. Hollins' staff of servants had begun to come back to the apartment and stare; but Rumbin and Georgina were still busy.

Rumbin stopped at last. "I can't do no more; I can't tell what I'm doing. If I got them crystal chandeliers and crystal sconces cleaned enough, I don't know. It's o'clock seven-twenty. Georchie, in them boxes on the hall Directoire consoles, it's four dozen pale pinky roses, four dozen pale yellow; you place 'em. Howie, I borrowed from the butler one the guest rooms; the suitcases they're in there— we go put on our tuxedo suits. If we get drowned, anyhow we go under dressed up!"

In the process of dressing, however, even this consolation seemed not to console. He sat sagged upon the bed, spoke hollowly from the inside of the shirt he drew over his head. "Howie, what's a art dealer's life?"

"Sir?"

"It's a eggony!" Rumbin's head emerged; he began with feeble fingers to insert small gold studs in the shirt. "It's a eggony of always struckling to create the ideel. Clients got to be made; they ain't born. Howie—"

"Sir?"

"I used to have NRA on the show window, Howie," Rumbin said. "It meant Not Running Any. Comes tomorrow I put up some more letters, different. I make it 'Rumbin Galleries, S. I. G?' "

"S. I. G., sir? What—"

"Socked In the Jaw," Rumbin explained. "Howie, you and Georchie come see me sometimes when the U. S. Governament sends me to Leavenworse." He rose, completed his change of clothing, looked drearily in a mirror, and then, shifting his gaze to his assistant, showed a little interest. "Listen, Howie, when Hollinses come, you stand around looking at 'em just like that— like you know you're more fashionable than them, but wouldn't say so. That cold solemn look you got, it's good; it's a big effect."

Howard grew red, spoke impulsively: "I don't feel cold. I— I wish I could do something. I don't understand at all; but I— I do wish I—"

"No, don't break it," Mr. Rumbin said sadly. "Just keep looking natural; it's good. Come on; let's go get arrested."

Returned to the drawing rooms, fine vistas through the suite seemed to please him mournfully, not making him more hopeful. "Space," he said. "Looks anyhow twice as large as Moultons done it. Space and coolness. no hot tones— all cool tones of rose— some ivories a little warmed, for richness; it's rich but yet cool. Georchie, you got just the right spots palish roses. Flowers lifts a place to life. It's all pyootiful; but does it happen?" There was a sound of little bells, servants hurried through the hallway, and Mr. Rumbin crumpled, yet even in despair was practical. "Georchie, keep in the beckground; you look like you been working. My Lort, I got not the muscle of a kitten—"

With rolling eyes he sent one panic stricken glance about the great place he'd so utterly changed; then upon the instant stood smiling, his abdomen distended, his gaze beaming, his whole person bold, confident and sleek. Indulgently, sure of praise, he waved both hands in wide and gracious gestures.

"Welcome home!" he cried. "Welcome home to all rose and ivory, Mr. and Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins and little Miss Lulu. Look what a home you got now! Welcome home!"

Mr. and Mrs. Kingsford J. Hollins and little Miss Lulu paused in the open, wide doorway before Rumbin. Mr. Hollins, a small, dried, gray man with icy nose glasses, looked annoyed. Mrs. Hollins and little Miss Lulu stared into the room, gazed up and down the hall and through all vistas visible to them. Their eyes widened and widened; then both began to scream softly.

"Beautiful!" Mrs. Hollins cried.

"Perfectly dee-vine!" little Lulu shouted.

They came in, exclaiming rapturously. Then they began to flutter from: room to room, making outcries:

"Perfectly gorgeous!"

"Look at this heavenly sofa!"

"Oh, the lovely, lovely picture!"

"Oh, look at this one, too, Mamma!"

They were heard calling to each other from the farthest rooms:

"Heavenly!"

"Dee-vine!"

"Grand!"

"Oh, scrumptious!"

Mrs. Hollins, radiant, preceded by her whooping child, swept back to Rumbin. "Mr. Rumbin, I never dreamed anything could be so beautiful! It's worth all that horrible boresome trip we've been on. It's a dream!"

Lulu was already calling from the reception room: "Mamma, come look! Here's something we missed. It's a man with lovely jewelry on. It's grayand!"

Mrs. Hollins flew jubilantly to the summons; but Rumbin's expression, as he looked after her, became almost theatrically solicitous. He shook his head, made lamentant sounds. "Ts, ts, ts!" With an air of deepest concern he approached Mrs. Hollins' husband. "Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins, please, please! Please don't let your wife get so excited!"

"What?" Mr. Hollins said crossly. "I'm doggone glad she's tickled, myself. What's the matter?"

"It'll break her heart," Mr. Rumbin said in a low, deeply troubled voice.

"She didn't let me time to explain. When she finds out— but you know her nerfs yourself, Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins. She's delicate; and such a disappointment could send her moaning in bed. She thinks she owns all these pictures, all these objets d'art, all the furniture, all the antique—"

"What? What you mean she doesn't own 'em? She said you said fifteen thousand dollars for—"

"Certainly," Rumbin agreed benignly. "Fifteen t'ousand dollars for the apartment, Mr. Hollins— the pyootiful old-ivory walls, white-ivory ceilings, the rose curtains, rose carpets, rose rugs— four Aubusson, Mr. Hollins— and you got antique crystal chandeliers, crystal sconces, all macknificent. Of course, it couldn't include no paintings, no old masters, no Renaissance bronzes, no eighteent'-century furniture, no details like snuffboxes, patch boxes, Riccio inkstands. I put all these pyootiful masterpieces in here for this one evening just to make it a bright welcome home for her, so she gets a treat looking at 'em a little, Mr. Kingsford J.—"

Mr. Hollins said "What?" so insultedly that two listeners across the room, affecting interest in an old silver vase of roses, looked at each other miserably. "What? Just for this evening? You mean you intend to move all this stuff out tomorrow?"

"But all your Moultons I move beck in, of course, Mr. Hollins." Rumbin's solicitude increased poignantly. "Please! Please, Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins, run stop your wife from getting used to thinking she owns all these pyootiful things. Tell her she's got her lovely rose-and-ivory apartment but, of course, not no Clouet nor Troyon nor— Listen! She's hollering louder over the Clouet! You got to think of yourself, Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins, too, because what'll her nerfs be the longer you put off telling her

"See here!" Mr. Hollins' expression was concentratedly bitter. "What's your figure?"

"My figure? For—?"

"For the whole damn jamboree! What's it got to cost me? Here, come out to my den where there's some paper and ink."

"Monseigneur!" Rumbin bowed as profoundly as ancestors of his had bowed to their ensnared princes. ''Certainly, Mr. Kingsford J. Hollins," he said, and his voice, beginning with the bass viol, ended with the flute. "It's a pleasure!"

Then, as he followed the crossest millionaire in the United States out through the doorway, he looked back over his shoulder at two excited young people who'd given up pretending not to listen. He slowed his step and paused; Mr. Hollins could be heard stamping down the corridor. Rumbin rolled shining round eyes in that direction, thus by a purely ocular gesture designating whom he meant by the one symbolic and prophetie word he triumphantly whispered:

"Ideel!"

Another thought detained him yet another moment. "Don't wait no longer, Georchie and Howie. You're both raised ten a week, payable weekly. You're permanent, Howie. I commenced liking you."

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23: A Visitor From Mars

Ernest R. Suffling

1855-1911

In: *The Story Hunter; or, Tales of the Weird and Wild*, 1896

Thoroughly Victorian confection

THAT A SPIRIT could visit this earth from such a distant planet as Mars, my wife would not believe for a moment, explain it how I would.

She required a proof, and proof I could have given her had she only attended to her household duties and kept my pockets in proper repair, instead of prying into things that did not concern her; beside, was not the verbal description of my shadowy visitor and his extraordinary conversation sufficient to convince any one but an obstinate woman that what I spoke was solid truth?

Why should she imagine that the inordinately hot weather of the past summer had had such a soporific effect upon me, that, in wooing Morpheus, I simply *dreamed* of my visitor?

Why should she think that because I had my spirit flask with me during my afternoon ramble that I—? But allow me, my intelligent reader, to lay my story before *you*, and I think you will bear me out that there is a foundation in it.

To begin at the beginning.

It was a hot, dreamy day in the middle of August, and I was staying at the old-fashioned, out-of-the-world, under-the-hill town of Minehead in Somersetshire. The atmosphere being too hot for sitting indoors, and the water much too clear for fishing, I thought I would take a stroll to Horner Woods, which lie under the great hills, just this side of Stoke Pero, and in the immediate neighbourhood of Dunkery Beacon, which is precisely one-third of a mile high.

Opening my umbrella and using it as a sunshade, I wandered listlessly along the two or three miles which intervene between Minehead and my haunt, and took a long time in reaching the recumbent tree upon which I loved to sit and sketch or read. A more charming or solitary spot cannot be found in all the West Country.

The walk leads up a narrow valley, skirted on either side by hills rising abruptly to a height of many hundred feet, culminating in the giant Dunkery Beacon, whose bald head, as I have said, breaks the horizon seventeen hundred feet above sea level. The feet of these giant hills are clad in trees and underwood of such an impenetrable nature, that as one walks in the valley and looks up the acclivities, one can see but a few score yards, and then the mass of wood and foliage becomes so black and dense that the eye cannot penetrate it.

Of course, as in all western valleys, a bubbling, murmuring trout stream flows through it towards the sea, into which it falls at the pretty village of

Porlock, some miles distant; and as it twists and falls from and among the great boulders with which the bed of the stream is thickly strewn, it is easy to fancy one hears persons conversing at no great distance, so peculiar is the murmuring noise of the waters. Perhaps the water has its familiar spirits! Why not? We know that spirits and water are frequently very intimate with each other, and produce much talk and idle chatter, and possibly they are spirit voices that we hear, although we cannot make much sense of them.

It was a fairy spot I had selected, and as I sat on my comfortable seat on the mossy old fallen monarch of the woods, with my back resting comfortably against a bough, which gave it the support of an arm-chair, I could not help imagining that such a spot would just have suited Robin Hood and his merry men. In fact, I amused myself by peopling the glade in my imagination.

There— under that great branching oak might rest several mighty casks of ale, round which the men in Lincoln green would cluster, lying in various picturesque attitudes, with their bows and arrows hanging from the branches of surrounding trees, ready to be snatched down at a moment's notice in case of any alarm. There— where that patch of yellow-green grass crept out from the withered oak, I would have a party of dancers tripping it to pipe and tabour; and down yonder precipitous path should come the lofty Little John, with a fine deer across his broad shoulders; while in the arbour formed by those three hawthorn trees, I could imagine the sturdy form and graceful figure of Robin himself and the fair Maid Marian. Then Friar Tuck must be among them; yes, he should have a large horn of ale and— thud!!

"Why, where in the name of fortune came you from?" I cried, as a little fat man in cassock and hood plumped down on the soft turf beside me. "Have I the pleasure of addressing his reverence, Friar Tuck?"

"Friar Tuck! No, my friend— never heard of that gentleman. *My* name is Friar Bacon."

"Friar Bacon!" I exclaimed. "Why, surely *you* never had anything to do with this jovial company— Robin Hood and his merry men?"

But as I swept my arm round to give emphasis to my speech, I perceived, to my astonishment, that nought but trees and rocks met my view on every side, my foresters had vanished, and I found myself in the presence of a short, stout, rubicund monk, who should have been dust these six hundred years.

"Bacon," I murmured, looking doubtingly at my visitor; "why, how is it possible that you, who died, if my memory serves me rightly, ere the close of the thirteenth century, can be here before me at the end of the nineteenth? You are joking with me, my friend."

"Oh no," replied my visitor, "it is extremely simple. You must know that I, with many other learned men, have formed a scientific colony, so to speak, in the planet Mars. We have many among us known to you by repute. St. Dunstan,

Newton, Archimedes, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Euclid, and many others, are of our company, and right harmoniously we live together. Live, I say, but of course you will understand I mean exist, for we have for many ages passed from the flesh, and are now simply etherealized bodies, or, if you will, spirits!

"You would ask how came we in Mars?

"Well, let it suffice if I inform you, that by the sanction of the Great Spirit, we, Advancers of Mankind, are allowed a special parole, as a recompense for our toil on earth, and there in Mars we exist, instead of perambulating this dense earth of yours, in a spirit form, till we are required 'At the Last.'

"Just place your hand upon my breast."

I did so, but my fingers meeting no resistance, I extended my arm, and could see my hand emerge beyond the figure as the jolly friar remarked:

"There, you see, I am pure spirit, double distilled, and I trust highly rectified.

"Well," he continued, "I have not long to stay, so I will have a short chat with you, and then, heigh presto! back to my cosy planet. You see it is only once in two years we get very close to your earth, that is, at a certain time we are only 35 millions of miles from you, whilst at another time we are as much as 244 millions of miles away. Therefore as we travel fast I must not linger long, or I shall be late at our monthly scientific meeting, which takes place to-morrow."

I could not refrain from asking him what the planet Mars was like, and he very civilly informed me that it was prettier than the earth, and its climate milder; "beside which," said he—

"The genial seasons are longer; we have a spring of 192 days, and a summer of 180; whilst the autumn is of 150, and the winter of 147 days' duration only. A longish year, as you will observe, nearly 690 days; but then we are so busy and so happy that we do not notice the flight of time. Time is an object to you mortals, but we philosophers totally disregard it. If you visited our planet you would find one thing in particular very trying to you in your present gross form— we have no atmosphere to speak of.

"We neither eat, drink, nor sleep; require no clothing, that is no *renewal* of clothing, for this cassock is the shade of the last costume I wore when on earth, and will probably last me till the Crack of Doom; consequently we are enabled to employ the whole of our time in scientific research."

"Might I venture to inquire into the nature of your scientific studies?" I timidly inquired.

"Why certainly," he replied, rubbing his forehead reflectively; and as he drew his hand across the noble expanse of his frontal bone, I could see a rush of little sparks follow his shadowy fingers. This set me to gaze more intently at his phenomenal person, and as I did so I was surprised to find that I could see quite through what should have been the frontal bone, and there, in the cavity of the cranium, I beheld his brain at work thinking. It simply appeared like revolving

smoke curling this way and that, and taking fantastic forms; halting, and then moving on again in complex but orderly movement.

Seeing my utter astonishment, he good-naturedly enlightened me as to the strange appearance.

"The brain," said he, "is *the man*, it never dies, and in our case is the only part which does not entirely become spirit, that is, *transparent* spirit. It always remains a foggy, cloudy kind of ether, visible to mortals; and they are constantly walking through and sitting surrounded by it, though they know it not.

"You probably do not believe in ghosts or spirits, yet you are surrounded by them day and night, and when, by a variety of accidental causes, one becomes materialized you see it, and immediately write off to a newspaper about it as something wonderful. Ha! ha! If I could only open your eyes and show you the number of ghosts in this silent and solitary spot you would scarcely believe your eyes; there are thousands!"

Then looking at me with his peculiar, luminous eyes he inquired, "Did you ever notice a kind of mist floating over graveyards during certain days of damp, muggy weather?"

"Yes," I replied, "often; but what of that?"

"What of that!—why," continued Bacon, "that is the spirit, the soul, *the brain* of disembodied mortals, which floats till the Final Day just above the ground, the rock, the sea, or wherever the body was buried."

I marvelled at this, whereupon my communicative friend went further, and said:—

"Do you not know that these spirits may be conversed with by mortals? You have a certain control over electricity, you have the phonograph, the electrophone, and the telephone— trifles in comparison to what we have invented in Mars— but with these you have only to proceed in this way. You simply—"

But ere he uttered another word a wind swept through the wood with a crackling sound, at which the Friar bowed his head and quietly uttered the words "I obey!" It was evident by his uneasy movements and facial expression that he had been stayed from enlightening me further by some unseen spirits, so, to turn the subject, I said:—

"What is there appertaining to this earth in which we might advance our knowledge, by invention or otherwise?"

The little monk looked at me with a mirthful face, putting his jolly head on one side, and with a look in his eyes as if he would say, "Don't you wish you may pump me?" said:—

"I must tell you plainly, that by our bond we are forbidden to tell to mortals the secrets we possess, but I will just give you a little idea or two that you may

experimentalize upon, and see what you are clever enough to make of notions that *we* have already established as practical scientific facts.

"Electricity with you is only in its infancy, it is but just born— yet you have taken several steps in the right direction; you have the phonograph, the electrophone, and the telephone, all of which are very well in their way, but you must go further with them. If you are clever enough you can make the phonograph convey *thought* as well as speech, so that you and I, being a mile apart, could, with the help of an improved phonograph, convey our *thoughts* to each other. With a certain instrument conversation with departed spirits might be held and the very secrets of the grave revealed, and the great—" But here the wind again sighed through the valley, and the monk again bowed and meekly crossed himself, having evidently ventured too far beyond the bounds of his suggestions.

"The electrophone," said he, "may easily be improved, so that in combination with a certain machine which I may tell you is *on the eve of being invented* in America, will not only give you the voice of the person speaking at a distance, but also his or her likeness with every line of the features expressing the individuality of the person under notice.

"Electricians of the Nineteenth Century! why, you have only reached 'A' in the alphabet of electrical possibilities. How absurd of you to use horseflesh to draw loads, and raise or lower heavy masses, and to use steam— noisy, bulky steam— for locomotives and marine engines, and to write with ink and even use hand-power to sew with, when everything could be done quicker, easier, cheaper, and cleaner by the *touchstone of all future motion*— electricity!

"There, get along, ye mortals of to-day!" and the little man rolled about with laughter, "ye laggards, why, if half-a-dozen of our company in Mars had had *your* scientific instruments and delicate machinery in *our* day we should have made an entirely different world of this earth. Why, my old friend Archimedes would have obtained a fulcrum for his lever long before now, and if no one had prevented him would have attempted to hurl the earth right out of the planetary system into space. Oh, he is even now a most mischievous fellow, though you would not think it to look at him; his ambition is boundless, and his scientific pranks are at times very reprehensible. Only last week, just for the fun of the thing, he blew Sir Isaac Newton nearly to the sun, and when the poor fellow returned to Mars after several days' absence we scarcely knew him, he had become so sunburnt with his visit to the suburbs of the great luminary. It was beyond a joke, you know." Then the little man went off into another paroxysm of laughter at the thought of poor Sir Isaac's burnt spirit-face.

"What," queried I, "can you tell me of ships and navigation? Have we reached the limit of speed in the merchant service, and the zenith of offensive and defensive power in the Navy?"

These questions sent the little man off into a fresh fit of laughter, and he looked at me as much as to say, “You ignoramus, you type of mortal feebleness and conceit.” Presently having calmed down he proceeded:—

“I must tell you that Nelson is with us in spirit, and has turned out a capital inventor. He follows eagerly all that takes place, navally, in the little dots on the globe called Great Britain, and you will scarcely believe it when I tell you, that he has invented a *wooden* ship that would in one brief hour destroy your entire navy.”

“How could it be done?” said I.

“Ah! there you are! I cannot *tell* you, I can only give you an idea. My lord’s ship is of wood, compressed india-rubber, and cork! The only thing you have to discover is how to place your caoutchouc so that when a shot is fired at your ship it passes clean through it and the hole immediately closes, just as the water closes after it is cloven by the ship’s hull. Firing at Nelson’s ship would have the same effect as if you thrust your walking-stick through me or through your own shadow.”

“But,” I asked eagerly, “how would he destroy our navy in an hour?”

“Why,” said the Friar, “he and Sir Humphrey Davy have invented an explosive of such vast power, that a single pound weight would destroy the strongest ironclad afloat, and he can fire it from an ordinary shoulder gun, with which he delights to practise at the mountains of Mars. He can chip a thousand-ton mountain top off with a single shot; we have to stop him at it, for he quite spoils the scenery, and alters it so completely that we are in danger of losing ourselves. He calls his destructive agent ‘infernite,’ and it really is quite diabolical.”

“And of speed in merchant vessels,” I remarked, “what of that?”

“There you are all wrong again, you have gone right off the proper path. Why, your passenger vessels actually float on the *surface* of the sea, instead of fathoms below it; consequently you have both wind and waves to contend with, which is absurdly and palpably wrong to any one who gives the least reflection to the matter.

“Set your inventive faculties to work, control and compress your air— by the way, see that you get it pure, sea air is always best and safest— sink your hermetically-sealed ship by hydraulic arrangements, pitch your great thumping steam monsters overboard, and propel your vessel with civilized and cleanly electric force, and there you are! America in twenty-four hours! India in three days! China in five! and Australia in a week!!

“This speed should have been attained years since; but your engineers are so in love with great smoky furnaces, steel monsters, and grimy coal and grease, that it will take some time before they get off with the ugly old love (steam) and on with the elegant new one (electric force).”

I nodded approval, and put another query. “Can we do anything more to improve the locomotive engine both as to safety and speed? Of course I gather from what you have just said that electricity could be made to take the place of steam, and then we should get a much quicker and safer service of trains than at present.”

“Quicker service of trains?” he echoed, and looked at me in feigned amazement. “Trains and locomotives, did you say? Why, my dear friend, you astonish me. To improve your service, gather up all your network of iron rails, but leave your stations intact for the present, and pitch both the rails and the horrid shrieking engines into the midst of the Atlantic, not into the North Sea, for that is so shallow that the immense pile of old iron would cause an obstruction to submarine navigation, and quite spoil the fishing-ground, though it would be an excellent iron tonic to the fish.

“Then, having done that, invent a neat little electric aërostat— it can and has been done by us— and simply fly from point to point, from station to station if you will, noiselessly and expeditiously. Edinburgh or Dublin in three hours, or St. Petersburg in ten, would be a fair speed. What are they made of, do you say? Well, there is that bothering bond that seals my lips, or I would willingly make a sketch and give you a specification with pleasure.

“You know that certain chemicals produce certain gases. Gas is a power: it may be converted into a motive power. Do you follow?”

I bowed.

“For the fabric: do you know that six goose quills will support a man?— if not, I can assure you they will; there is lightness and strength for you! What can, with equal economy, be beaten thinner or is lighter than aluminium?— a new metal with you, I find. For propelling mechanism, study the wing of the swift-flying birds, created by our Great Spirit; you cannot *improve* on that, but you can modify and adapt it to your particular purpose.”

Then casting his eye upon my umbrella, which was lying open beside me (for I had used it to keep the sun off), he bade me observe its form, which I did.

“In that worm-produced fabric,” said he, pointing to the silk shade, “you have the form of the best sustainer (parachute) that even we have yet discovered. There! I have mentioned your principal materials, now set to work, and do not longer disfigure your beautiful islands with iron webs, rabbit burrows, and crawling beetles, for such, I am told, your railway systems appear to the inhabitants of your satellite the Moon, who have very powerful telescopes, and are fond of gazing at their big brother the Earth.

“Really, when I come to reflect upon the condition of you mortals, your whole system seems strange; here, six centuries after I have left the earth, you are actually eating and drinking just as when I was among you (and I was no mean connoisseur of a bottle of Sack or Malmsey), and, consequently, you are

always ill and ailing. It therefore follows, as a matter of course, that half of you die before there is any necessity for you to do so.

"For the first thousand or two years after the Creation, people knew what was good for them, and partook of everything fresh and good, and lived for centuries; but now it appears to me that you have a system in vogue among you called adulteration, by which one half of the community seeks to partially poison the other half, simply to gather together as many pieces of gold as they can hoard in a few years, and when they die they leave these gold coins to some one else to scatter to the four winds and the Evil One, for their so-called amusement. All very nice, I dare say, but why do you not do as I did— work, and discover the Philosopher's Stone and Elixir Vitæ! Then, having discovered them, you could be as rich as you pleased, and live as long as you had any desire to."

"Interrupting you," I ventured, "would it be against your bond to impart to me, a mortal, the secret of those two great discoveries you claim to have made when on earth? Would you be induced by anything I could offer you, or do for you, to divulge the component parts of your Elixir Vitæ?"

The jolly little man laughed till his sides vibrated like a blanc-mange, at the very idea of *my* being able to do anything for *him*, or offer him any equivalent for his priceless secret of continued life.

"Ha! ha! Ho! ho! My friend, you would be the death of me if it were possible to kill a spirit; I declare I feel quite a curious feeling just where my ribs ought to be, by indulging in such hearty laughter as I have not experienced for quite a century.

"My friend, I will give you the recipe for the Elixir of Life with pleasure, as it was my own discovery *previous* to my death, so that I may divulge it to any one I choose. The ingredients are so simple that it is a wonder scores of alchemists did not discover it as I did, but doubtless it was the simplicity of the various items that caused them to miss the mark. They searched for curious and complex mixtures, for crystals and ores, powders and nostrums, distillations and subtle gases, and other things of a complex nature, when the real articles were right under their very noses, and *in everyday use*!

"Here is the solution to the buried secret; for buried it was when they laid me in the grave six centuries agone, for I told it to no man, nor did I take advantage of it to prolong my own life, as I had worked so hard that I longed for a thorough rest, and am now enjoying it, for we spirits never tire.

"Take one ounce of acetic acid, it is a preventive of frivolity; one pound of pure alcohol, which gives spirit and vigour whenever used; of laudanum three drams, as a soporific giving a quiet and steady demeanour; and add two drams of ground cloves, for spice is very preserving to the body.

“Next you add three pints of distilled water, which is a very cleansing agent, and with it put in a few twigs of birch, which is a capital corrective, and every man requires somewhat of the kind at times.

“Then you take a few— but I am sure you will forget all these things, so, if you will lend me a piece of paper and a pencil (which are things we lacked in our day), I will write down the various ingredients and quantities for you, and you can get them made up at any chemist’s; here are twenty-seven ingredients in all, each good for something; miss one, and you spoil the harmony of the whole, and the prescription is useless. Everything must be absolutely free from adulteration, or only a partial success will be the result.”

Then for a quarter of an hour he scribbled away, occasionally pausing, and cocking his head upon one side to recollect things which he had stored in his busy memory centuries ago.

His smoky brain revolved at a great rate as I watched him write the formula.

“There,” said he at last, as he handed me the wonderful secret, which was to make me live to see ships float under water, people fly through the air, and electricity the great motive power of the world, “I think you will find that correct, and I shall be glad to meet you here this day one hundred years hence, to see how matters are going with you. By the way, what is the time?”

I now perceived that it was grown quite dark, and the stars were twinkling through the trees, a fact which I had not before noted, so absorbed had I been with the strange conversation of my visitor.

I looked at my watch.

“It is five minutes past ten o’clock,” I said.

“Goodness me!” said the friar; “how I shall have to hurry. I should have left at seven o’clock, as I am due at Mars not later than midnight, or I forfeit my liberty for one generation; and thirty years without a fly to some planet or other is no joke. Ta, ta!”

And as I looked at my jolly friend he scared me by suddenly becoming perfectly incandescent; he glowed for an instant like a furnace at white heat, then with a whizz and a flash he was gone so quickly that the eye could only follow him for a trice, and then he disappeared into space; at least his bodily form disappeared by apparently transforming itself into a star, which grew smaller and less brilliant, till it was entirely lost amid the myriads of others which studded the sky.

I smelt for brimstone, but there was not even a sign of it that I could detect.

I felt dizzy, and stiff, and stupid, but gathering my umbrella, books, and flask together (the latter quite empty, by the by, possibly upset), I made for Minehead, but found it a long and difficult walk. Sitting so long in one position had cramped and affected my legs to such a degree, that it was with much meandering and uncertainty that I reached my apartments near the little pier.

My wife, good soul, was waiting up for me, and as I entered she pointed to the clock, which was then striking twelve.

Thinking of Friar Bacon, I exclaimed half aloud— “I wonder if he reached home in time? What a flight, thirty-five million miles in less than three hours!”

At this my wife shook her head, and remarked that bed was the best place for me; and as she kindly assisted me to undress, I did not contradict her.

When I awoke next morning I felt in a very unsettled state of mind, and collecting my wandered senses, I endeavoured to account to my wife for my absence of the previous day, by telling her of my adventure with the monk in Horner Woods. She was moved when I told her that the paper in my waistcoat pocket would *prove* what I asserted to be true.

“Kindly feel in the right-hand pocket of my waistcoat, get out the paper, and read for yourself,” I remarked quietly but triumphantly.

She felt as directed.

Nothing was there save a large hole!

I had lost the paper; and with it my character for veracity and the knowledge of “How to Live for Ever” into the bargain.

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