PAST MASTERS 235

Annie S Swan
Scott Campbell
J. S. Fletcher
William Le Queux
Morley Roberts
Robert Louis Stevenson
R. Austin Freeman
Edgar Wallace
Edwin L. Arnold

and more

PAST MASTERS 235

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

16 Sep 2025

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1: Justice

F. J. Randall

Frederick John Randall, 1875-1942
The Story-teller, UK, Feb 1910
Evening Journal (Adelaide) 26 Feb 1910

MR BOOKIE BRIGGS sat patiently in his cell at the Grape Street Police Station. The door stood open. Outside a very respectable and well-fed constable awaited the signal to convey Bookie into the Court.

The crime with which Bookie Briggs was to be charged was that of being a suspicious person. A constable had found him loitering without being able to get any distinct reason for it. On being searched at the station it was discovered that Bookie had no money— nothing, in fact, but an empty clay pipe. This clearly heightened the offence, for, having no money, there as no reason for loitering except to get some or its equivalent by unfair means. It will be seen,then, that the case looked black against him.

Somebody at the end of the corridor having called the constable away, Bookie Briggs sat contemplating the open door for some time. Getting tired of this, he looked into the corridor. It was clean, cold, and empty.

Bookie Briggs had not merely earned his nickname by a fancy for check suits; he was believed to have a nose for winners, and to know a soft thing when he saw it. He decided to go in search of the constable.

Not finding him in the next corridor he ascended a large flight of steps, and entered the precincts of the Court itself. There were constables here, but not that particular well-fed one with whose broad back Bookie had become familiar.

A further excursion failed to find him, and at last Bookie Briggs stood on the outside steps. He was a young man of impulse, and when a cabman held up his hand he at once crossed the pavement and stepped into the waiting vehicle.

"Tube Station," said the fare nonchalantly.

The cab rattled away at a smart pace, now rounding a lumbering van, now running neck and neck with an omnibus. Occasionally it swerved out of the main road to cut through a narrow turning. The journey was not a long one, and within a quarter of an hour the station was reached. Mr. Briggs alighted and stretched himself.

"Change for a quid?" he said briefly, cocking an eye at the cabman.

"Lord love yer, no. sir! It ain't to be done with a 'ansom in these days, worse luck!"

"Wait 'arf a minute, then," Bookie Briggs entered the station, and looked critically at the first pigeon-hole of the booking office. It did not appear to be the

one he wanted, so he penetrated farther. Once out of sight he approached the farther entrance, and from there stealthily watched the waiting hansom.

The cabman had been years the road, and had had some experience. He allotted the fare a good five minutes, and then got off his perch. As he disappeared in the first entrance, Bookie crossed the pavement and entered a taxi.

"Paddington," he said; "sharp!"

The taxi wheeled round and zipped away. Mr. Briggs took a peep through the small window at the rear and smiled. It doesn't take a taxi long to murder distance.

As they whizzed through a wide thoroughfare near the Edgware road, Bookie recognised an old landmark and tapped at the window.

"I shan't catch that train; better pull up here," he said.

The driver slowed down at once, and drew up at the saloon entrance.

"Coming in?" said Briggs genially, with a nod.

"Thanks," said the driver, "I don't mind if I do."

Mr. Briggs selected a quiet corner, and flicked round a swivel window above the bar. A youth in a short apron slid forward.

"Give it a name," said the fare.

"Mine's a bitter," said the driver respectfully; "in a tankard, if you don't mind, young feller."

"And a glass," added Mr. Briggs.

The order was executed perfunctorily. Bookie Briggs picked up his glass, and placed it critically between his eye and the light. The result did not appear to satisfy him.

"A bit thick, isn't it?" he said, putting it down again. The barman held it before his own eye, while the taxi driver tried to peer into the depths of his tankard. Eventually he said he would chance it, but Mr. Briggs waited patiently for a fresh glass.

"That's better," he said, after submitting it to a similar examination. "What 'ave you got to eat? Any cold meat?"

There was a nice cut of cold beef, the barman said. That would do, Mr. Briggs agreed. He urged the driver to eat with him.

"Thanks," said the man, "I'll 'ave a bit o' pork pie."

"Pork pie," repeated Bookie. "Wait minute; got a telephone 'ere?"

"In the lounge. That door on the right."

The fare found the telephone box, and ran his eye over it swiftly. Returning, he beckoned the driver.

"Understand the telephone?" he queried.

"Easy," said the man.

"Well, then, I'm a bit bit deaf. Ring up 1029 Chancery, and say that Brooks of Sheffield is doing well. Just that message, nothing more. Remember the number—1029 Chancery. Brooks of Sheffield is doing well."

The man entered the little box. Bookie closed the door behind him, and silently turned the key in the lock. Returning to the saloon bar, he gave a quick glance at the counter and slipped out of the door. Once round the corner he took to his heels and ran.

The neighbourhood was familiar to him. By diving into a court, crossing a yard, taking another court, and scaling a wall, he put himself into comparative safety. But comparative safety is not quite so good as complete safety. A few yards away a big motor car was on the point of starting. A moment's deliberation, and Mr. Briggs became a passenger, but this time on the back axle. His destination was not of great moment: when the car stopped he would get off. When a man has empty pockets it matters little if he be in Southwark or Soho. Just at present Bookie had only a disinclination for the neighbourhood of the Edgware road.

He hung on tightly as the great gliding monster whirled almost silently through street, avenue, and square. He didn't even bother to look up the names of places. In whatever spot they happened to drop him it would be convenient. But here he miscalculated for once. As the car at last slowed down he dropped on to his feet and sought the pavement. It didn't take him long to find out that he knew the place. With a shiver he recognised the long, broad steps leading up to Grape Street Police Station.

Bookie Biggs possessed at least one quality that, successful men admire—tbe faculty of rapid action., Within 10 seconds he was walking up the steps. The first real smile of satisfaction sat on his features when he had found his way undetected to the cell he had left earlier in the day.

It was here a little later that a police sergeant found him. There was some astonishment in the officer's look. He consulted the slate outside the cell carefully, and then stared at the prisoner.

"Name o' Briggs?" he said.

"Right," answered Bookie.

" 'Ow many people been 'ere since the constable first left you?"

" 'Aven't seen one," said the prisoner truthfully.

The sergeant looked at Briggs, and then drew a long breath.

"Come on!" he said briefly.

In the prisoner's dock Bookie Briggs looked the picture of persecuted innocence— a little weary, and a little sad. The Magistrate appeared to be interested in him.

"So you have found the prisoner, sergeant? Now tell me where you found this man who so mysteriously disappeared."

The sergeant threw out his chest as a forewarning that be had a dramatic announcement to make.

"In his cell, your worship."

"In his cell! You tell me you found this man in his cell, and the constable who left him there failed to do so? This is remarkable. Where is the constable who searched the building?"

The wretched man came forward.

"Is this your prisoner, constable?" deanded the Magistrate.

The officer was forced to admit it.

"The prisoner tells me, your worship," cut in the sergeant, with a cough and a glance of mild severity at his subordinate, "that he 'aven't seen no one since the constable first left him."

"But I may 'ave fell asleep," added the prisoner humbly.

His Worship looked over his spectacles at the prisoner, scanned the sergeant's lightens features, glanced at the constable, and then considered the charge.

"I am forced to the conclusion," he said, "that this poor fellow is more sinned against than sinning. The constable says he was loitering, but then the same constable says the prisoner escaped from his cell, whereas another officer found him there patiently awaiting the justice of the court. The evidence of such a man is not to be relied upon. The prisoner will be discharged. Constable, just oblige me by handing him this half-crown!"

Mr. Bookie Briggs went out into the street, and turned into the nearest hostelry.

"Gimme a drop o' brandy, old sport," he said to the barman. "Six penn'ort; I've 'ad a shock."

The man complied, rang the half-crown, and deposited the change on the counter. As Mr. Briggs picked up the glass he looked into the eyes of a cab driver in a big overcoat.

"Bill," said this individual, turning to a friend, "jest 'old my coat, will you? "Ere's an old friend who wants to go to the Tube Station. I'll take 'im in me shirt sleeves."

"Get 'old of it," said Bookie, sliding the florin along the counter. "The fare was only a bob. I bin looking for you."

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2: Review

The Green Hat, 1924 (Michael Arlen)

Terry Walker, 1944-

In: *A Century of Sensational Fiction*, 2013

"Downwards to my door I looked, and there was a green hat before my door. The light from the one lamp in Sheep Street fell about it, and that was how I saw it was a green hat, of a sort of felt, and bravely worn; being, no doubt, one of those that women who have many hats affect pour le sport*."*

THIS NOVEL haunted me for years; not because I had read it, but because I hadn't, and I kept stumbling over references to it, or its author, or quotes from it, in all sorts of improbable contexts— including in a solemn non-fiction book on vintage cars. It crops up in *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, and in one of the *Dance to the Music of Time* sequence of novels by Anthony Powell..

I understood vaguely that the book was about low jinks in high society, and I further understood that it was written in very high style. I also knew it was so huge a seller as to be a legend in its own time.

About a year or so ago, finally overcome by curiosity, I started combing second hand bookshops for a nice cheap paperback copy. It proved to be as elusive as the mythical snark, and I have never yet seen a single Arlen paperback, although I have seen a few by his son Michael J. Arlen. It's doubtful if any Arlen book made it into paperback at all, so I was forced willy-nilly into the more serious, and infinitely more expensive, antiquarian book stores, where I eventually tracked down a hard cover edition (seventeenth printing, August 1926) of this elusive tome. I blenched a little at the $20 price tag, but what could I do? It was probably the only copy in town.

The book is rather an interesting physical object in its own right. It is bound in dark brown cloth, with the title and author gold-blocked on the front cover in a stylish script. The dust jacket is missing, which is a pity, because the cover painting was interesting. It depicted a green…

No, you're wrong. A green FAN.

It was sold with the pages uncut, a once-prestigious format. On the title page THE GREEN HAT is printed boldly in red, and at the top of the contents page is a very 1920s art-deco-ish line drawing of a very 1920s flapper in cloche hat, black mask and rope of pearls. Downright quaint.

This fabulously overwrought melodrama roared off the presses at a dazzling rate in the 1920s and helped make British author Michael Arlen (Dikran

Kouyoumdjian, 1895-1956) a millionaire. The original British hard cover edition went through thirteen reprints in just twelve months. By the end of 1926 sales in hard cover of the five novels Arlen published between 1922 and late 1926 exceeded 450,000 copies, an astounding figure. In 1926, in a spasm of excitement, publishers William Collins even offered a special deluxe set of leather bound editions of his major works, which were *"Piracy"*, *The Green Hat*, *The Romantic Lady*, *These Charming People* and *May Fair*, for 7/6d a pop. Yet by 1940 Michael Arlen's writing career was over; his books were already as outmoded as the spats, cloche hats, and shingled hairstyles that decorate them, not to mention the ornate prose in which they were written. The collapse didn't faze Arlen. Still very rich, he hung up his quill, moved to New York and lived in luxurious retirement for the rest of his life. Not bad going for an Armenian who fled to England from Bulgaria as a lad, one jump ahead of the notorious massacre of the Armenians by the Ottoman Turks.

Baroque Prose

TO DESCRIBE Michael Arlen's prose as "ornate" is perhaps an understatement. It is downright baroque. He seems incapable of writing a simple declarative sentence. Consider, for instance, his description of a parked car:

This car charmed the eye. Like a huge yellow insect that bad dropped to earth from a butterfly civilisation, this car, gallant and suave, rested in the lowly silence of the Shepherd's Market night. Open as a yacht, it wore a great shining bonnet, and flying over the crest of this great bonnet, as though in proud flight over the heads of scores of phantom horses, was that silver stork by which the gentle may be pleased to know that they have just escaped death beneath the wheels of a Hispano-Suiza, as supplied to His Most Catholic Majesty.

Translation: it was a large yellow Hispano Suiza tourer with a polished bonnet and a stork mascot on the radiator; and I would have said "an" Hispano-Suiza. (I saw this specific quote years ago in a book on vintage Hispano Suiza cars).

The characters are all lethally infected by the inimitable Arlen style, as a character's dying words show:

"Avoid dreams," he said, "Never stop to listen to the clouds passing overhead. You will be run over. Never sympathise with the moon when you bear it, cold and lonely and blind, crooning to itself like a corpse singing a hymn. You will catch pneumonia. Never dream of a world in which men are men and women are women. You will go mad…"

Clouds you can hear, blind moons that croon, singing corpses... Arlen has an inexhaustible supply of ormolu metaphors and rococo similes. Even the sun can't come up in a simple sentence:

I drew my eyes from her eyes to see that the dawn had slyly thrown a grey handkerchief over the window. It was but the shape of the dawn creeping out into the night, it was but a ghostly breath of the night but it was the dawn.

The whole book is written in this high-flown style. It was soon clear to me that Michael Arlen was one of those writers whose vast success depended upon lavish over-writing, the sort of thing Victorian novelist "Ouida" did so floridly in her numerous three-volume romances of the high life, and James Gould Cozzens essayed in the 1950s in his bizarre *By Love Possessed*. If the high style suits the times perfectly, success is assured; but when tastes change, the author is doomed. Ouida, Arlen, and Cozzens are all out of print, and it's no coincidence. Once the very last word in high style, they are now objects only of curiosity, amusing examples of high camp.

Skinny-dipping in the Thames

TAKE AWAY the dense encrustation of decorative style and the story itself is remarkably thin; and is told almost entirely indirectly, not to mention obscurely. Although there are three suicides and a murder in the book, none of them happen on-stage, so to speak. Even a skinny-dipping sequence is off-stage in the sense that it occurs at night in total darkness, and we have to infer what's happening from the dialogue. I'm not absolutely sure they really were skinny dipping, although I think that's the sense of the scene. I am sure they were all very brave, though: they were skinny-dipping in the Thames.

The novel opens in 1922 and is about the last year or so in the life of beautiful, doomed Iris Storm, a twice-married socialite with a tragic past. The narrator, an author not unlike Michael Arlen, meets Iris Storm late at night in his dingy apartment building in Shepherd's Market, then a very downmarket area of London's otherwise upmarket West End. They discuss her drunken sot of a twin brother Gerald March, the narrator's upstairs neighbour. Gerald is endlessly mourning the death of his idol, one of those upper class golden youths of virtuous saintliness prevalent in 1920s English novels. They also talk about any number of other things, from contemporary pulp literature to pseudo-philosophy, in incredibly elevated prose. It is possible, and at least one academic commentator on Arlen thinks so, that the narrator and Iris Storm also had sex at this stage. If they did, the act was very thoroughly concealed under thickets of

very dense prose. I've re-read that section a couple of times I'm still not convinced.

A day or so later the narrator bumps into Iris's dipso brother Gerald, who is briefly in between bouts of drunkenness, and they talk about Iris. Then we meet the narrator's acquaintances Hilary Townshend and Guy de Travest and further information about Iris seeps into the reader's consciousness. After a while we gain a faint inkling of Iris's past.

Boy Fenwick

IN 1913, at the age of 19, Iris married Boy Fenwick, the aforesaid upper class golden youth. It is one of the world's shortest-lived marriages. In the light of dawn after the wedding night, the dead body of Boy Fenwick is found in the courtyard of their French honeymoon hotel, three stories down. He died of a broken collarbone (well, that's what it says). The cops decide he fell over the balcony while half stunned on champagne, but in order to preserve his golden image amongst his worshipping acolytes (comprising her brother Gerald, plus Hilary Townshend and Guy de Travest, as far as I can work out), Iris tells them later that he "died for purity". What this phrase is supposed to mean is incredibly obliquely presented. I had to tilt the book to 45 degrees and squint my eyes before concluding (rather uncertainly) that Fenwick had discovered that his bride was not a virgin and was hence impure, and had turfed himself out of the window in his chagrin. True to form, Michael Arlen tells you about the suicide not by having us watch it in a flashback, but by having his characters gossip about it a decade later.

For the life of me I couldn't see how Iris's false explanation ("for purity") could protect Fenwick's memory any better than the official police version (accident). Surely a newlywed husband, fresh from the joys of his wedding-night marriage bed, could be forgiven by even the most censorious of his acolytes for getting mildly plotzed on Dom Perignon. His "*oops— aaaaaargh*!" header over the balcony is surely a case of legitimate human error and all too understandable. But apparently Boy Fenwick's adoring acolytes would be shattered by that sort of seamy revelation. Fenwick drunk? Oh shame oh horror! Say it ain't so!

In due course, we learn, widowed Iris married Hector Storm VC, who finished up dead in a ditch in Ireland with five bullets in him, courtesy Sinn Fein. This murder, which happened about two years before the story opened, is also a matter of reminiscence in Arlen's unbearably elevated prose. Hector Storm, one gathers through the thick fog of metaphor, is another victim of Iris's loose living. He volunteered for duty in Ireland after overhearing Iris whispering another man's name in her sleep, which he takes as proof that Iris has a lover. The man

whose name was whispered might have been (a) an ex-boyfriend, (b) imaginary, (c) a character in a Mills and Boon novel, or (d) a movie actor Iris dreamed about; but these are possibilities that never seemed to have entered the poor deluded man's head.

Exit Gerald

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS the narrator and various friends visit a nightclub where they meet Napier Harpenden, a childhood friend of Iris. Unexpectedly, Iris Storm arrives too, on the arm of an elderly rake, but she and Napier are soon talking over old times. Then Iris's dipso brother Gerald kills himself: once again we are not there to see it happen; we turn up at the flat shortly after the event, and the reader has to guess that he blew his brains out, something which is only confirmed several pages later.

Soon Iris Storm retreats to her usual base, France, intending never to return to England. There she is hospitalised with one of those languishing illnesses found in movies and romance novels, where the heroine hovers attractively on the edge of death without actually dying. It may, or may not be, the result of an abortion; the text is so opaque that you can only guess. If that's true, then it may be the narrator's child, but since there is no sign of the narrator knowing, what chance has the reader got? The narrator visits her, and so does Napier Harpenden, recently wedded to a delectable sweetmeat named Venice Pollen (*sic*).

It now begins to emerge, with glacial slowness and through a dense purple smokescreen, that Iris and Napier have loved each other desperately since they were in their teens. They were separated at the orders of Sir Maurice Harpenden, who opined that Iris came "from rotten stock". Sir Mo visualised a bright future in the Foreign Office for his son, with a much more suitable marriage arranged further down the track. Napier has been moping miserably after Iris ever since, but has kept the vow he made to his father as a teenager not to see Iris again. The accidental meeting at the nightclub more than a decade later, and the reunion at the French hospital between attractively ailing Iris and just-married Napier brings the whole pot to the boil. Napier announces his intention of divorcing his adoring bride Venice and abandoning his hated FO career so that he can marry his life-long love, Iris March Fenwick Storm. His father hits the ceiling.

Showdown at Sutton Marle

THE CLIMAX comes when Iris, recovered and back in England, motors down to Sutton Marle, the estate of Sir Maurice Harpenden, to sort Sir Mo out about

Napier and herself. The subsequent scene is extraordinary, with everyone prosing away at each other in the usual elevated flapdoodle with little being achieved. Then Napier himself turns up with still-adoring Venice in tow. When Sir Maurice in an unwary moment suggests that Iris murdered Boy Fenwick, the bitterly aggrieved Napier reveals the last secret: the truth about Boy Fenwick's death.

Over Iris's anguished protests Napier explains that Boy Fenwick, that apostle and symbol of moral and sexual purity, was a phony and a fraud. He was syphilitic, and knew it. The ugly realisation of what consummating the marriage may have done to his virgin bride Iris, whom he loved, was too much even for Fenwick. He confessed to her, and then defenestrated himself in anguish and remorse. This was the truth that Iris was shielding from Boy Fenwick's acolytes. It was the only lie she ever told in her life. Iris is absolutely aghast when the truth comes out, even though it jolts the pompous Sir Mo out of his smug complacency (if only for a few minutes).

"You have taken from me the only gracious thing I ever did in my life," Iris says to Napier in heartbroken tones. A few pages later Iris Storm is dead, having deliberately driven the Hispano flat-out into a tree. And, true to Arlen form, this is not only offstage but in total darkness to boot. It is also the tear-jerking grand finale, with the narrator left standing sadly in the darkness holding Iris's crumpled green hat.

Sir Mo, who had finally been showing faint signs of recognising what tragedy he wrought back in 1916, immediately reverts to character, trying to conceal the fact of Iris's suicide from his son Napier and his young wife Venice by pretending it was all an accident. This would seem utterly futile; it had to be blindingly obvious it was suicide. The reason why she killed herself remains a complete mystery, making exactly as little sense as the behaviour of anyone else in the book.

Well, a demon has at last been exorcised. I know all about *The Green Hat* at last. And I know enough to know not to buy any more Michael Arlen novels.

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3: The Legend

Anonymous

Western Star and Roma Advertiser (Qld) 8 April 1911

"I THINK," said Lady Bertrand, on the point of rising from the dinner table, "the best plan will be to put it to the vote!"

"Electric light versus moonlight, don't you know," exclaimed Freddy Carthew.

"The drawing-room or the terrace," said Lady Bertrand.

"All those who are in favor of the terrace will please signify the same in the usual manner!"cried Guy, the son of the house, and amidst an outbreak of laughter a dozen hands-went . up.

"Carried unanimously," said Gertrude Sinclair, at Freddy's right hand, and then Lady Bertrand, rising from her chair, led those guest of her own sex out of the room.

Lord Bertrand set a good example by lighting a cigar, the decanters were passed round, and ten minutes later, Guy opened one of the long windows and the men trooped forth to the terrace. There Guy, without a moment's hesitation, made his way towards Gertrude. who was talking to her sister Rosaline, over whose chair he bent.

"The moon is almost at its zenith," he whispered as if the circumstances were fraught with the most pregnant meaning.

"It seems to lend a consecration to the ruins," she answered.

"Anyhow," said Guy, "distance will lend enchantment to the view."

"I think it is quite perfect from here,"' she insisted. "

"Distance from the— the crowd, I meant," whispered Guy, with an expression of entreaty.

Rosaline arose, drawing the, edges of her long white cloak more closely over her low frock, and together they walked down the broad stone steps to the park, turning to their right in the direction of the ivy-covered ruined castle, within a stone's throw of which Lord Bertrand's present Beat had been built.

"Don't you think," murmured Rosaline, "that the spirit of romance must be abroad this glorious night?"

"A rather intoxicating, spirit," suggested Guy.

"On the contrary," she retorted, "it seems everything that is soothing and reposeful!"

"The sort of night t when ghosts do walk—"

"If they have anything resembling good taste," cried Rosaline, with a laugh. It was her first visit to the neighborhood: "Of course," she added, "the place has its legend?"

"Oh, dear, yes," said Guy.

"Are you going to tell it?"

"I inveigled you here for the express purpose of telling you—"

"Is it about the founder of your house?" she asked hastily.

"A namesake of my own," he answered. "But he lived-it must be 300 years ago. You can see his portrait in the gallery, so that the story must be true. I want to keep to truth to-night, you understand. He fell in love—"

"I suppose," said Rosaline, "that goes without saying."

"They were to have been married within a week; then she disappeared."

"Where did she go?"

"The legend sayeth not. Guy was in no— no end of a bad way; he shut himself up in what was then the castle; refused to see anybody; became something resembling an ascetic, and took his walks abroad at midnight."

They had reached the entrance to the ruin, and now strolled slowly along the well-trimmed lawn, which was enclosed by the roofless, ivy-covered wall.

"You already make me feel a little creepy," said Rosaline.

"Will you take my arm?" suggested Guy, and after a moment's hesitation, she placed her fingers upon his sleeve. "One night, several months afterwards," he continued, "my predecessor saw something who, at first he thought must be the woman he had lost; she was dressed in white, bareheaded, entirely alone!"

"Her ghost, of course," said Rosaline, with a rather nervous laugh.

"He approached and spoke; she seemed to smile upon him, and seeing she was unattended, he offered his escort. This she declined, nor would she tell him where she came from or anything about herself."

"I think," suggested Rosaline, "if you don't much mind we will walk towards the terrace again."

"Night after night," continued Guy, leading Rosaline towards the entrance, "they met in the same place, and presently his melancholy forsook him; he made inquiries in the neighborhood, but could hear of no one who answered her description."

"Why," demanded Rosaline, as they came to the park again, "didn't he appeal to the fountain head?"

"He did, but she refused to gratify him. He told her of his loss, and she approved of his constancy—"

"That ought to have enlightened him surely—"

"You must understand," said Guy, "that he was on the horns of a dilemma; because while she reminded him of her who was lost, he could not believe she was the identical being. He could not make up his mind whether she was the woman he had loved, who had come back to him, or whether she was a beautiful phantasm sent to prove his constancy."

"Poor young man!" murmured Rosaline.

"He had never been able to, put a hand upon her, although he longed to take her in his arms—"

"Whether she was his first love or not!" suggested Rosaline.

"Until at last," said Guy, "curiosity seemed to overwhelm every other feeling!"

"What was the result?" she asked.

"Well, that is wrapped in mystery."

"Oh, but what a dreadful anticlimax," answered Rosaline. They were by this time well into the park which surrounded the house, and one or two of the other guests might have been seen strolling amongst the trees. But Guy, with Rosaline's fingers still on his arm, led her towards the lake, which shone like silver in the moonlight.

"One night," he continued, "my namesake determined to put an end to the doubts which seemed to be driving him mad. He began an eager petition for information— who was her father, who was her mother? had she a sister, had she a brother?— when in the midst of things she looked so entrancing that he fell on his knees and poured out his tale of love instead."

"Was he rewarded?" asked Rosaline, as she was led slowly towards the lake.

"With a condition. If my predecessor could be content to take her on trust, just as she was, without knowing anything further about her, she promised by-and-by to be his."

"Did he agree to that?"

"Oh, well, I suppose the poor chap was in a mood to consent to anything."

"Then the old order has changed," she suggested, turning to look into Guy's face.

"You know," he returned, "we are a conservative race. Anyhow, he consented eagerly enough, and they continued to meet night after night at the same hour. Sometimes people saw them— it is said people see them still, you must understand, walking arm in arm—"

"Where?" asked Rosaline, lightening her fingers on Guy's arm.

"Usually to and fro in this avenue."

"I fancy I can make out Gertrude and Freddy Carthew," exclaimed Rosaline.

"But," continued Guy, "one night—"

"They seem to be coming towards us," said Rosaline.

"I daresay Freddy is bringing your sister to the copse where the nightingales sing," answered Guy. "One night," he added, "the couple separated close to the castle which is now a ruin; he held her in his arms, and kissed her, and she tripped off, refusing, as usual, to let him, accompany her. But his curiosity had broken bounds. He had made up his mind to disregard her conditions; to play the spy upon her—"

"Then he followed her?" said Rosaline. "I wish," she added, "you would be quick and tell me before those, others get here!"

"It was a pitch dark night," Guy explained; "I daresay he had selected it purposely. He waited till she had run a few yards, then treading lightly, followed in her footsteps. They must, have come along this avenue—"

"Towards the lake?" asked Rosaline, and again Guy felt her fingers tighten on his arm.

"Perhaps," he said, "the keenness of the chase prevented, him from realising his direction. You must imagine her flitting white figure, her light steps over the grass, the black night, and Guy following fascinated in her wake."

"But where did she lead him?"

"That is the whole of the legend;" returned Guy. He disappeared precisely as his earlier love had done. Whether his fascinator was not a thing of the earth, whether the fate to which she seems to have lured him was miserable or blissful beyond compare, or merely nirvana— all that must be left to one's imagination."

"Well," said Rosaline, "whether she was natural or supernatural, I think she was extremely foolish!"

"Why?" asked Guy, as they stood by the brink of the lake.

"The suggestion is that she lured him to his death in the water, whereas she might have lived happily ever after inside the far , more comfortable castle. I should have preferred that."

Guy turned abruptly, and one of her hands being already on his arm, he grasped the other.

"Should you?" he whispered.

"Oh well," she answered promptly, "that would be nicer than the bottom of the lake amongst the eels."

"Will you?" asked Guy.

"You forget that I— I am not a ghost!" cried Rosaline, and immediately a laugh rang out from the edge of the copse a few feet away.

"Upon my word, I'm most awfully glad to hear that, don't you know," exclaimed Freddy.

Flushing quite painfully in the moonlight, Rosaline tried vainly to withdraw her hand.

"Is it really and truly only you, Rosaline?" cried Gertrude.

"You see," explained Freddy, coming to the, fore, "Lady Bertrand had been telling us the legend of the castle."

"So— so Freddy suggested we should go and look for the ghosts," said Gertrude.

"By Jove, we thought we had come across them," exclaimed Freddy, with another laugh.

"We saw the two shadowy forms in the avenue," persisted Gertrude, "exactly where Lady Bertrand declared they walked. And she was dressed in white and he was bending over her—"

"Upon my word," said Freddy, "it was enough to give one a shock. Seriously, I began to think we had dropped upon Guy and his betrothed, don't you know."

"Well, so you had," answered Guy, and as Rosaline raised her eyes in mute expostulation, he stooped, kissing her lips.

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4: The Gray Wolf

George MacDonald
1824-1905
Collected in: *Works of Fancy and Imagination*, 1871

ONE EVENING-TWILIGHT in spring, a young English student, who had wandered northwards as far as the outlying fragments of Scotland called the Orkney and Shetland Islands, found himself on a small island of the latter group, caught in a storm of wind and hail, which had come on suddenly. It was in vain to look about for any shelter; for not only did the storm entirely obscure the landscape, but there was nothing around him save a desert moss.

At length, however, as he walked on for mere walking's sake, he found himself on the verge of a cliff, and saw, over the brow of it, a few feet below him, a ledge of rock, where he might find some shelter from the blast, which blew from behind. Letting himself down by his hands, he alighted upon something that crunched beneath his tread, and found the bones of many small animals scattered about in front of a little cave in the rock, offering the refuge he sought. He went in, and sat upon a stone. The storm increased in violence, and as the darkness grew he became uneasy, for he did not relish the thought of spending the night in the cave. He had parted from his companions on the opposite side of the island, and it added to his uneasiness that they must be full of apprehension about him. At last there came a lull in the storm, and the same instant he heard a footfall, stealthy and light as that of a wild beast, upon the bones at the mouth of the cave. He started up in some fear, though the least thought might have satisfied him that there could be no very dangerous animals upon the island. Before he had time to think, however, the face of a woman appeared in the opening. Eagerly the wanderer spoke. She started at the sound of his voice. He could not see her well, because she was turned towards the darkness of the cave.

"Will you tell me how to find my way across the moor to Shielness?" he asked.

"You cannot find it to-night," she answered, in a sweet tone, and with a smile that bewitched him, revealing the whitest of teeth.

"What am I to do, then?"

"My mother will give you shelter, but that is all she has to offer."

"And that is far more than I expected a minute ago," he replied. "I shall be most grateful."

She turned in silence and left the cave. The youth followed.

She was barefooted, and her pretty brown feet went catlike over the sharp stones, as she led the way down a rocky path to the shore. Her garments were scanty and torn, and her hair blew tangled in the wind. She seemed about five

and twenty, lithe and small. Her long fingers kept clutching and pulling nervously at her skirts as she went. Her face was very gray in complexion, and very worn, but delicately formed, and smooth-skinned. Her thin nostrils were tremulous as eyelids, and her lips, whose curves were faultless, had no colour to give sign of indwelling blood. What her eyes were like he could not see, for she had never lifted the delicate films of her eyelids.

At the foot of the cliff, they came upon a little hut leaning against it, and having for its inner apartment a natural hollow within. Smoke was spreading over the face of the rock, and the grateful odour of food gave hope to the hungry student. His guide opened the door of the cottage; he followed her in, and saw a woman bending over a fire in the middle of the floor. On the fire lay a large fish broiling. The daughter spoke a few words, and the mother turned and welcomed the stranger. She had an old and very wrinkled, but honest face, and looked troubled. She dusted the only chair in the cottage, and placed it for him by the side of the fire, opposite the one window, whence he saw a little patch of yellow sand over which the spent waves spread themselves out listlessly. Under this window there was a bench, upon which the daughter threw herself in an unusual posture, resting her chin upon her hand. A moment after, the youth caught the first glimpse of her blue eyes. They were fixed upon him with a strange look of greed, amounting to craving, but, as if aware that they belied or betrayed her, she dropped them instantly. The moment she veiled them, her face, notwithstanding its colourless complexion, was almost beautiful.

When the fish was ready, the old woman wiped the deal table, steadied it upon the uneven floor, and covered it with a piece of fine table-linen. She then laid the fish on a wooden platter, and invited the guest to help himself. Seeing no other provision, he pulled from his pocket a hunting knife, and divided a portion from the fish, offering it to the mother first.

"Come, my lamb," said the old woman; and the daughter approached the table. But her nostrils and mouth quivered with disgust.

The next moment she turned and hurried from the hut.

"She doesn't like fish," said the old woman, "and I haven't anything else to give her."

"She does not seem in good health," he rejoined.

The woman answered only with a sigh, and they ate their fish with the help of a little rye bread. As they finished their supper, the youth heard the sound as of the pattering of a dog's feet upon the sand close to the door; but ere he had time to look out of the window, the door opened, and the young woman entered. She looked better, perhaps from having just washed her face. She drew a stool to the corner of the fire opposite him. But as she sat down, to his bewilderment, and even horror, the student spied a single drop of blood on her white skin within her torn dress. The woman brought out a jar of whisky, put a

rusty old kettle on the fire, and took her place in front of it. As soon as the water boiled, she proceeded to make some toddy in a wooden bowl.

Meantime the youth could not take his eyes off the young woman, so that at length he found himself fascinated, or rather bewitched. She kept her eyes for the most part veiled with the loveliest eyelids fringed with darkest lashes, and he gazed entranced; for the red glow of the little oil-lamp covered all the strangeness of her complexion. But as soon as he met a stolen glance out of those eyes unveiled, his soul shuddered within him. Lovely face and craving eyes alternated fascination and repulsion.

The mother placed the bowl in his hands. He drank sparingly, and passed it to the girl. She lifted it to her lips, and as she tasted— only tasted it— looked at him. He thought the drink must have been drugged and have affected his brain. Her hair smoothed itself back, and drew her forehead backwards with it; while the lower part of her face projected towards the bowl, revealing, ere she sipped, her dazzling teeth in strange prominence. But the same moment the vision vanished; she returned the vessel to her mother, and rising, hurried out of the cottage.

Then the old woman pointed to a bed of heather in one corner with a murmured apology; and the student, wearied both with the fatigues of the day and the strangeness of the night, threw himself upon it, wrapped in his cloak. The moment he lay down, the storm began afresh, and the wind blew so keenly through the crannies of the hut, that it was only by drawing his cloak over his head that he could protect himself from its currents. Unable to sleep, he lay listening to the uproar which grew in violence, till the spray was dashing against the window. At length the door opened, and the young woman came in, made up the fire, drew the bench before it, and lay down in the same strange posture, with her chin propped on her hand and elbow, and her face turned towards the youth. He moved a little; she dropped her head, and lay on her face, with her arms crossed beneath her forehead. The mother had disappeared.

Drowsiness crept over him. A movement of the bench roused him, and he fancied he saw some four-footed creature as tall as a large dog trot quietly out of the door. He was sure he felt a rush of cold wind. Gazing fixedly through the darkness, he thought he saw the eyes of the damsel encountering his, but a glow from the falling together of the remnants of the fire revealed clearly enough that the bench was vacant. Wondering what could have made her go out in such a storm, he fell fast asleep.

In the middle of the night he felt a pain in his shoulder, came broad awake, and saw the gleaming eyes and grinning teeth of some animal close to his face. Its claws were in his shoulder, and its mouth in the act of seeking his throat. Before it had fixed its fangs, however, he had its throat in one hand, and sought his knife with the other. A terrible struggle followed; but regardless of the

tearing claws, he found and opened his knife. He had made one futile stab, and was drawing it for a surer, when, with a spring of the whole body, and one wildly contorted effort, the creature twisted its neck from his hold, and with something betwixt a scream and a howl, darted from him. Again he heard the door open; again the wind blew in upon him, and it continued blowing; a sheet of spray dashed across the floor, and over his face. He sprung from his couch and bounded to the door.

It was a wild night— dark, but for the flash of whiteness from the waves as they broke within a few yards of the cottage; the wind was raving, and the rain pouring down the air. A gruesome sound as of mingled weeping and howling came from somewhere in the dark. He turned again into the hut and closed the door, but could find no way of securing it.

The lamp was nearly out, and he could not be certain whether the form of the young woman was upon the bench or not. Overcoming a strong repugnance, he approached it, and put out his hands— there was nothing there. He sat down and waited for the daylight: he dared not sleep any more.

When the day dawned at length, he went out yet again, and looked around. The morning was dim and gusty and gray. The wind had fallen, but the waves were tossing wildly. He wandered up and down the little strand, longing for more light.

At length he heard a movement in the cottage. By and by the voice of the old woman called to him from the door.

"You're up early, sir. I doubt you didn't sleep well."

"Not very well," he answered. "But where is your daughter?"

"She's not awake yet," said the mother. "I'm afraid I have but a poor breakfast for you. But you'll take a dram and a bit of fish. It's all I've got."

Unwilling to hurt her, though hardly in good appetite, he sat down at the table. While they were eating, the daughter came in, but turned her face away and went to the farther end of the hut. When she came forward after a minute or two, the youth saw that her hair was drenched, and her face whiter than before. She looked ill and faint, and when she raised her eyes, all their fierceness had vanished, and sadness had taken its place. Her neck was now covered with a cotton handkerchief. She was modestly attentive to him, and no longer shunned his gaze. He was gradually yielding to the temptation of braving another night in the hut, and seeing what would follow, when the old woman spoke.

"The weather will be broken all day, sir," she said. "You had better be going, or your friends will leave without you."

Ere he could answer, he saw such a beseeching glance on the face of the girl, that he hesitated, confused. Glancing at the mother, he saw the flash of wrath in her face. She rose and approached her daughter, with her hand lifted to strike

her. The young woman stooped her head with a cry. He darted round the table to interpose between them. But the mother had caught hold of her; the handkerchief had fallen from her neck; and the youth saw five blue bruises on her lovely throat— the marks of the four fingers and the thumb of a left hand. With a cry of horror he darted from the house, but as he reached the door he turned. His hostess was lying motionless on the floor, and a huge gray wolf came bounding after him.

There was no weapon at hand; and if there had been, his inborn chivalry would never have allowed him to harm a woman even under the guise of a wolf. Instinctively, he set himself firm, leaning a little forward, with half outstretched arms, and hands curved ready to clutch again at the throat upon which he had left those pitiful marks. But the creature as she sprung eluded his grasp, and just as he expected to feel her fangs, he found a woman weeping on his bosom, with her arms around his neck. The next instant, the gray wolf broke from him, and bounded howling up the cliff. Recovering himself as he best might, the youth followed, for it was the only way to the moor above, across which he must now make his way to find his companions.

All at once he heard the sound of a crunching of bones— not as if a creature was eating them, but as if they were ground by the teeth of rage and disappointment; looking up, he saw close above him the mouth of the little cavern in which he had taken refuge the day before. Summoning all his resolution, he passed it slowly and softly. From within came the sounds of a mingled moaning and growling.

Having reached the top, he ran at full speed for some distance across the moor before venturing to look behind him. When at length he did so, he saw, against the sky, the girl standing on the edge of the cliff, wringing her hands. One solitary wail crossed the space between. She made no attempt to follow him, and he reached the opposite shore in safety.

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5: How Christmas Came to Flinders Court

Annie S. Swan
1859-1943
Australian Town and Country Journal, 7 Dec 1910

Scottish romantic novelist, short story writer, suffragist, social activist, and a founder member of the Scottish National Party.

"I BET A BOB, Sally, that she don't come."

Joe Wackitt took his pipe from his mouth, put his head a little on one side, and looked with a half smile in the face of the girl standing so near him under the gas lamp that the folds of her shabby black skirt touched him.

The lad had a very honest face, and a twinkle in his grey eyes which played sad havoc with the girls' hearts, but so far he had been faithful and true to his first love, little Sally Meadows, with whom he had played in the gutter in their somewhat sad childhood.

Both were orphans, who by some miracle of diplomacy on their part or strange neglect on the part of the proper authorities, had escaped the Union. They had supported themselves and helped one another for the last eleven years, and were only waiting a favorable opportunity to take up a house together, as man and wife. They were very young, and hard work and insufficient food had retarded their growth so that both were a little undersized. But since he had been elevated to the post of drayman, and his life was spent in the open, Joe had become decidedly more healthy looking, while the girl's club, with its drill and health exercises had done wonders for Sally. She was a blouse hand in a Fore-street factory, and spent the most of her time stooping over her work.

"She'll come right enough, Joe, bor or no bob. 'Tain't necessary to bet on 'er " she answered, and there was a somewhat sad note in her voice. "I dunno as I wants 'er to come partlcler, Sally. She's agin me, that's wot she is, art' ' I think it's time, if yer asts me, that we 'ad a 'pine of our own. A feller like me, earnin' good money, didn't oughter to be lyln' round promiskus like in lodgings. I mean to 'ave me own 'ome this. side 'o' Christmus or t'other at least, am 'lfycr won't, well theer's some as won't sy no."

A rebellious drop started to Sally's eye, but she shook her head.

"I ain't goin' to marry till we've got enuff saved for our 'ome, Joe. Miss Emmy she ses 'tain't rite. Yer should 'ear 'er talk. She'd soon mike yer see that 'tain't rite to 'ave wot yer can't pay fer."

Joe spat upon the ground, and muttered something under his breath.

"It's all verry well fer toffs to some down like your blamed Miss Emmy does an' preach to pore folks, as to wot's rite an' wot's wrong. Set 'em dahn 'ehe any

bloomin' toff among 'em, rite 'ere in Flinders Court, an' see what they'll make o' it."

Sally's eye's dwelt a little wistfully on his face.

It was a curious place to keep tryst, just under the gas lamp at the entrance to the Court, but though people constantly passed and repassed them nobody took the slightest notice.

"I'm dead sick on it, Sally, an' me 'ome I inust 'ave. Boxing Day on the followin' week. Thet's me mind on it, tike or leave it, as yer likes."

"I've only got eleven shillin's saved, Joe, on account of Tim being so poorly and needin' so much medicine. Miss Emmy, she promised to come 'ere yistiday an' to bring a letter fer the Convalescent 'Ome, but ' she ain't come." .

"No, nor won't," put in Wackitt, a trifle savagely. 'An' I wish to bloomin' goodness she'd stick to 'er own plice, an' mind 'er own business."

"You don't talk like that abart my Miss Emmy, Joe Wackitt, or I don't stand 'ere wiv yer anuvver minnit."

"All rite, chuck it. Boxin' Day or not at all, I gits me answer to-morra, Sally, and ef it ain't what I likes, wy then I speaks to Tilda thet's all."

So saying Joe sauntered off, not once looking back, and after standing a few moments looking wistfully after him, Sally ran back to the door of the big tenement house, at the top of which in one tiny attic room she dwelt with her brother Tim.

Tim was only thirteen years old; poor Sally herself not yet eighteen. Her face, however, had many lines upon it, such as experience and the grim reality of life carve on human faces, tolling their own pathetic tale. She loved Joe Wackitt dearly, but she likewise loved Miss Emmy, the dear friend who came down one night in each week from the West End to spend three hours in the girls' club, and who never allowed any engagement, however tempting, to stand in the way.

Now, Miss Emmy did not approve of Joe, that whs the crux of the whole matter. She was very fond of Sally, who, it was very evident, was pretty, very pretty indeed, but Miss Emmy, regarded her as a child and had wrung from her a promise not to marry for another two years at least.

Miss Emmy had not worked so faithfully in the East End all these years without discovering some of the causes of the misery which abounded. Next to drink, she placed early marriage, before either of the parties realised the responsibility, or had made any provision for the future. She had talked so much, and so earnestly on this vory subject to her girls, that she had at last succeeded in making them agree partly with her views.

A few, Sally among the rest, had faithfully promised not to marry any man who would not fulfil certain conditions. Two of these, Miss Emmy urged to be all important, viz., that the bridegroom should take tke pledge for his love's sake,

and also that he should provide a home for her, paid for out of his own earnings before she married him.

At first Joe had made no objection to these conditions, and had started manfully saving for the purpose. He had been very steady then, but, after he was elevated to the drayman's seat, temptations wheremore frequent, and of late he had fallen away. He became irritable, exacting, and above all, indignant and resentful about the girls' club and all its ways. Two ultimatums he had already laid before Sally, and her failure to accept them would mean titp . withdrawal of the light of his countenance from her, which was a catastrophe Sally was not preared for. She had told Miss Emmy part of her trouble the last club night, and had written to her the next day after she had received Joe's ultimatum. Miss Emmy had written that she would come down to have a talk with them both, and had set the time, but the day had passed, and another day, without bringing news of her.

Sally was desperate, and after Joe left her she ran up to see whether Tim was all right, and whether he would mind if she left him for an hour. Tim did not mind. He was a sunshiny little chap, who could, always amuse himself, and since Miss Emmy had taught him flower-making and found a market for his wares, he had been very happy indeed.

Having seen that he was comfortable, and had a nice bit of fire to keep him company till she came back, Sally set off to the station at Aldgate, whence she proceeded to Baker-street, for the West End. It was not the first time she had paid an evening visit to her dear Miss Emmy, and she was in no doubt as to her welcome. Even the grim-faced butler had a word and a smile for her, though he had brought him from his evening meal. She was shown into a pretty morning room whore in a few minutes' time Miss Emmy appeared, a beautiful vision in a shimmering white frock, with a necklace of shining stone on her neck.

"How are you, Sally, and whatever has happened to bring you all the way from Mile Em Road on such a wet night?"

"I 'ad to come, Miss Emmy, an' oh my, I'm glad I did! you do look lovely, like a real angel, an' no mistake!"

Miss Emmy blushed a little not so much at Sally's compliment, as at the fact that someone else had hot long ago made the same observation to her with an added fervor from a pair of handsome blue eyes which had mightily stirred her heart.

"Well, and what is it, dear? I hope Tim is not any worse," she said.

"Oh, no, Tim's all rite. It's Joe, Miss, 'e's goin' on somethink orful, ses we must sit married Boxin' Dy or the week arter, an' not a minnit later. Ses ef I don't he'll tike up wiv Tilda."

She wiped her eyes, and flopped down into a low chair the imago of despair.

"That's a very arbitrary way for Master Joe to take, Sally, I thought it was usually the bride who fixed the day. Well, and what did you say to this?"

"I said I wouldn't, 'cos you see, I ain't got hardly nuthink laid by."

"And Joe?" asked Miss Emmy anxiously, knowing full well that it was the wife in nearly every case who had to bear the burden of the dual life after its bonds had been forged.

"Oh, 'e ain't got a penny, and t'other nite I met 'im wiv Tilda, jes goin' inter the Blue Boy in Dean-street. I've never gone into no pub wiv 'im or any man, Miss Emmy, since ever you told us not to, but my! it did 'urt to see 'im wiv Tilda, an' 'er wiv a new fevver from 'er club, I aint never 'ad a fevver in me life."

"Poor old Sally, but you shall have a feather for Christinas. I'll see to that. Let me see, well, it's only three weeks till Christmas now, not very long in which to get ready."

Sally shook her head.

"No, Miss, an' thet it ain't. I don't wants to git married at Christmas. I ain't ready fer it like, nor is Joe. But thet ain't wheer it 'urts most. If'n 'e was steady an' nice like 'e used I'd— I'd maybe stretch a point, see, seein' as he wants a 'ome so bad. It's jes since 'e's took odd times wiv Tilda 'e's got on to me like that, an' I knows wot she 'opes I do, thet she can git 'im away from me, for she don't care whether she pays for things or not, or whether, 'er chap be drunk or sober. 'E 'ad some drink to-nite, Miss Emmy, though on Sunday he promised me faithful to tike the pledge."

Here a fresh stream of tears blinded poor Sally's eyes, and Miss Emmy's filled for company.

"Theer's anuvver thing, Miss Emmy, 'e's begin to kick about Tim livin' wiv us, though I told 'im, oh, ever so long ago, I'd never leave go of Tim. 'E even 'ad the cheek to sy as I mite ast you to git 'im into some insitootion. I up an' tells 'im insitootions is only fer them pore critters who ain't got no folk. As long as I can work for Tim, 'e 'as a 'ome wiv me, and it would break 'is 'eart besides."

"Sally, I do think you're a brick, and far too good for Joe Wackitt. Well, and when are you going to give him a final answer to all this?"

"To-morra, Miss, so please tell me wot to do." Sally sat up, dried her eyes, and waited with a perfectly submissive air for guidance.

Miss Emmy looked much perplexed.

"Dear, I'm afraid I must leave this to you. I can only help and advise. I cannot act for you. You know I have often told you that life would; be happier for all us women if we took a little thought about matrimony. I only ask you to consider what are your chances of happiness. You have feared that of late Joe is less steady."

"I know 'e is, Miss, and it's along o' Tilda. Joe, 'e never spoke a word about gittin' married till e' began to tike up wiv 'er. An' she doesn't care a fig whether a chap is drunk or sober, so long's he's got the money to spend."

"Sally, dear, there isn't anything in the world I want more than to see you a happy wife. I wouldn't stand in your way for worlds, but I'm very much afraid of Joe Wackitt."

"So am I; Miss Emmy, so am I," said Sally, without a moment's hesitation, " 'E ain't wot 'e was. I know what it would be like. I've seen too much of it dahn there, an' I ain't, no I ain't agoin' to git meself an' Tim inter sech a 'ole."

"But, on the other hand," went on Miss Emmy earnestly, "there is the saving of Joe to be considered. Do you honestly think that if you married him on Boxing Day he would reform and settle down into a good husband."

"No, an' thet I don't, Miss Emmy. 'E won't give up a blessed think for me now, an' is it likely 'e will arter? No, it ain't! I'knows wot men is."

The small and experienced philosopher deliv ered this crushing statement with much deliberation.

Miss Emmy did not even smile. "It is a matter, dear, you must fight out with yourself. I've only one thing to say. If you do decide to marry I'll help to furnish your rooms. I am determined that you shan't start your married life under a cloud of debt, after the brave fight you've made."

"Thank you, Miss, but I shan't tell Joe thet. 'E's too much a one fer thinkin' we should git more from the likes o' you. Good-night, Miss, and thank you ever so much; my, you do look like a hangel, an' I'll try to tell Tim abart you."

"Just wait until I get something for him from the dining-room," said Miss Emmy, and shortly returned with a small basket packed with fruit and biscuits. And she gave poor Sally a kiss at the door, which sent her off in the seventh heaven of reverent delight.

Miss Emmy was very busy with her own engrossing affairs just then, and though she gave much consideration to Sally's case and also wrote to her it was a whole week before she saw her again. And then it was a Sunday afternoon, when with her soldier lover she made a pilgrimage to Mile-end to inquire concerning Sally. She found her very depressed, and learned that the breach with Joe was almost complete. It was not till long after that Miss Emmy learned how nobly Sally had stood up for her rights, and how she repudiated the idea put boldly forward by Joe, that Miss Emmy should be asked to provide the wherewithal to start the home.

A week later Miss Emmy heard from Sally that he had engaged himself to Tilda, and that they were to be married on Boxing Day. Miss Emmy was at her father's country house then, a long way in the country, and could not pay a visit of condolence and encourage ment to Sally, but she did not fail to write and to send a Christmas hamper for her and the boy. But it was a very dreary,

Christmas, and in spite of all her efforts Sally could not keep a bright face. She had been very fond of Joe, she had mothered him in a way for so many years, that his sudden slide into the broad road of self-indulgence had wrung her heart. She did not envy Tilda, which showed that after all her deepest feelings remained untouched.

On Boxing Day she decided that she must get out of Flinders Court so as not to come in contact with the wedding party, which would be certain to flaunt itself in the neighborhood of the girl whom Joe had cut. That was how Tilda spoke of Sally, and certainly she was determined that Sally should miss nothing of the pang of the final renunciation.

But on Boxing Day morning, just when Sally was tidying up the house, and wondering what excuse she could make to Tim for leaving him for a whole day, something happened.

Christmas came to Flinders Court!

He did not come in a white robe, with a hood over his snowy hair, but in the guise of a seafaring man, whose face was bronzed and tanned with suns of many climes and many seas. He had a great asking for those of the name of Meadows, and finally with much noise and deep breathing, made his way up ricketty stairs, of the tenement house where the orphans dwelt. He knocked loud and long at the door, and Sally with a mop in her hand ran to open it, wondering whoever the intruder might be.

"Anyone of the name of Meadows 'ere, little maid?" said the big stranger, with a half-twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, sir, please sir, I'm Sally Meadows, an' Tim 'e's inside."

"Right-o!" said the stranger, and before she could resist he had swooped down upon her small sweet face, and kissed it heartily. "Kiss me, my dear, I'm your uncle Ted, an' proper glad I be to see yer, I kin tell yer. You're very like your pore mother, an' she was the prettiest girl on Bromley Common when I went away. Where's the boy?"

" 'Ere!" piped Tim's small shrill voice, and the big man stepped into the clean bright little living room. When he saw the pale-faced lad lying on the old settle, something thick came in his throat, and a moisture rose in his eyes.

"Well, I'm dashed!" he said, and stooped over the little lad with such tenderness on his big kind face that Sally, though very excited, loved him for it on the spot. "So you lives, 'ere all by your little selves, eh, an' keeps the wolf from the door?"

"Sally, does!" piped Tim, whom much reading of Miss Emmy's gift books had made familiar with the expression.

"An' you've 'ad rather a dull Christmas, eh? Well, you ain't goin' to 'ave any more dull Christmasses, see, not keep any more wolves from the door, 'little woman, now Uncle Ted's got a 'old of you. I've got' a bit of brass, and, dash it, ef

we don't make it spin together. An' we'll go to the country to live and among the green fields and the cows an' the lams, the little chap will get strong enough to run about, eh, won't that be fine?"

Sally could not speak for her tears. Deep down in her heart was a warm, comforted feeling that Somebody up high, the Somebody about whom Miss Emmy had told them, had watched over them, and made Himself the father of the fatherless.

The bridal party came through Flinders Court in the course of the day, with much noise and laughter, hoping to attract the attention of the pair in the upstairs room. But Father Christmas had come to Flinders Court and spirited them away.

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6: The Case of the Stolen Cipher

Scott Campbell

Frederick W. Davis, 1858-1933

Popular Magazine April 1904

The third of 24 short stories with the series title "Below The Dead Line," featuring detective Felix Boyd. A second series of 24 stories, "The Adventures of Felix Boyd", followed, commencing February 1906.

IN Wall Street, wealth and power stride hand in hand. Quite frequently the combination makes a man autocratic, arrogant and severe. Such a man was Mr. Jason Barlow, of Graves & Barlow, bankers, who entered the Pine Street office of Mr. Felix Boyd at half-past eight one breezy September morning.

Mr. Felix Boyd, that mysterious individual whose vocation below the "Dead Line" was a persistent thorn in the sides of the curious, was seated in his private make-up room, when his office boy entered, and quietly announced the visitor.

"Mr. Jason Barlow, sir."

"Of Graves & Barlow?"

"Yes, sir. He wants to see you at once, sir."

Boyd laid aside his pipe, drew from over his knee a blond wig he carefully was combing, and placed both wig and comb on the dresser. Pointing to a flashy plaid suit, which he had had occasion to wear professionally the previous night, he said, quietly:

"Stow those traps away, Terry, and close the door when you come out."

"Yes, sir. Trust me to close the door, sir."

Boyd knew Barlow well, and he had a way of handling such men with a sort of frigid blandness not easily overridden. He found him, a portly, forceful man of fifty, nervously pacing the floor.

"Good-morning, Mr. Barlow," said he, sedately. "You're downtown early."

"Yes, and I'm mighty glad to find you in," cried Barlow, bluntly.

"Why? Anything wrong?"

"Something very serious threatens us."

"Ah!" murmured Boyd, with a subtle gleam from his keen, gray eyes. "That is better than a blow already dealt. One that only threatens may possibly be warded."

"That's precisely what I want done, and why I am here so early."

Boyd complacently took the chair at his desk, and waved his visitor to one near by.

"Sit down," said he. ''You interest me. What's the trouble?"

"Are we alone here?" Barlow curtly demanded.

"Except my office boy," drawled Boyd, just as Terry Gowan emerged from the side room, snapping the catch lock after him. Boyd turned to him, and added: "You may hang about the corridor, Terry, until I call you."

"Yes, Sir."

"Can that boy be trusted, Boyd, not to listen at the door?' asked Barlow, after the lad had left the room.

"Better even than that. He will insure us against other listeners. You may speak freely, Mr. Barlow."

"And confidentially!" was the sharp reply. "What I have to say to you, Felix Boyd, must never go further."

Boyd glanced indifferently at a red leather book on his desk.

"The house of Graves & Barlow is listed among those responsible for my very important duties and secret operations in this part of the city," he said, with rather dry significance. 'You already should know, Mr. Barlow, that you may confide in me as freely as one trusts his attorney— or his confessor."

"Surely; surely!' muttered Barlow, a little perturbed by the quiet rebuke. "But this is a very serious business, Boyd. Very serious!"

"The more binding my obligations, then. Come to the point, Mr. Barlow."

The Wall Street magnate no longer demurred. He drew from his pocket a document envelope, yet before he opened it he jerked his chair nearer that of his companion, and said, forcibly:

"As you are well aware, Boyd, our firm operates very heavily in the stock market, and frequently engineers deals which involve many millions of dollars."

"Yes, I am well aware of it."

"Necessarily such tremendous operations are very secretly planned and conducted," Barlow went on, with an energy quite in contrast with Boyd's odd quietude. "If our designs and plans were prematurely published, or so much as suspected by rival operators and the great army of habitual speculators, market values might be affected in a way that would cost us millions— millions, Boyd! and perhaps hopelessly thwart our designs."

"It is not at all necessary to impress these facts upon me," said Boyd, dryly. "Does your business with me this morning relate to such tremendous operations ?"

"Precisely, as I will show you," said Barlow, now instinctively lowering his voice. "After nearly four months of cautious work in several of the great markets, we have acquired control of most of the stock necessary to rushing through a deal that already has cost millions."

"Well?"

"Briefly put, it is to consist of a merger of two large midland railway systems into one of the most powerful Western roads. Confidentially, Boyd, in case we now are able to rush it through, this merger may meet with serious opposition

from the attorney-general at Washington,. and perhaps be turned down as illegal; but we are going to take chances against that, and fight to a finish any litigation that arises."

"I see," nodded Boyd, not just liking the project.

"Our firm," continued the financier, "has not been alone in this work. We have had the co-operation of some of the strongest banking houses both in Boston and Chicago. The work has been very gradually and cautiously done. From their very inception, Mr. Boyd, our designs have been concealed even from most of the employees of the several firms engaged in the work; while that done by us, who are solely directing the work, has been removed from our main office to temporary quarters in the same building, where we employ only a stenographer and one thoroughly trustworthy clerk."

"Continue."

"One of us, either Graves or myself, is constantly there during business hours, to guard against any miscarriage of our plans, for the successful execution of which we are directly responsible,' Barlow continued. "We have deemed absolute secrecy to be so imperative, moreover, that we have not relied upon ordinary communication with our Boston and Chicago correspondents, lest a mislaid letter or a leak in a private wire should betray our designs."

"Then you have been using a code, I infer, or a secret cipher ?"

"Yes and no," replied Barlow, now reverting to the envelope in his hand. "Can you make anything of this, Mr. Boyd?"

With the last he displayed a sheet of paper, foolscap size. It was thin and nearly transparent, yet was quite strong, and was irregularly perforated with rectangular holes of various sizes, each of which was carefully numbered with pen and ink. In appearance, though on a much smaller scale, it somewhat resembled the perforated music sheet recently invented for attachment to an organ or piano.

Felix Boyd merely glanced at it.

"I should have known," said he, "had your remarks given me no hint of it; it is a part of your secret cipher, or code. By properly placing that sheet upon some printed page, a duplicate of which is possessed by each correspondent, and reading in numerical order the words visible through the perforations, a communication easily and safely is imparted. That sheet alone conveys absolutely nothing. To use it at all, one must possess a printed page corresponding with that on which the sheet was laid when the perforations were made and numbered. That method of secret correspondence is not new or original, Mr. Barlow."

"True," admitted Barlow; "yet it is the one we adopted. We have not used a page from any book, however, very few of which would contain such a diversity

of words as our business requires. Instead, we had a printed page expressly prepared, containing a vocabulary adequate to our needs, and a copy of which is possessed by each of our correspondents."

"Certainly."

"Now, Boyd, to state my business," said Barlow, bracing back in his chair. "I told you that we were very seriously threatened. In a nutshell, we suspect that a copy of the printed page from which our secret correspondence sheets are prepared is possessed by some outside party."

"Is that so?" rejoined Boyd, his brows knitting slightly. "Yet in that case, even, the printed page alone would convey nothing. For an outside party to read one of your secret letters, he must possess also the perforated sheet."

"We believe, also," cried Barlow, "that duplicates of several of these sheets have gone into outside hands, either from our own office or those of our correspondents of the cities mentioned."

Boyd leaned forward with increased interest.

"Why do you believe that, Mr. Barlow?" he demanded.

"It is indicated by recent heavy operations in the market, on the part of a house we have serious occasion to fear."

"Kennedy & Peck?"

"Precisely. Not only have they opposed us from the first, being interested in one of the roads of which we aim to get control, but lately they have gone very long of the stock. Every act on their part points to the fact that they suspect our designs. Furthermore, we have learned that they recently have employed a private detective, from some agency below here, in an effort to secretly ascertain what we are about. I am quite confident of this."

"Why so? From whom do you get your information?"

"Frankly, Boyd, we get it from Jimmie Coleman, of the central office, whom we secretly employed as a foil to the other."

"Coleman, eh? Why, then, have you called upon me?"

"You should know why," said Barlow, bluntly. "Because our operations in the market have reached a stage where the least slip may ruin all, and we require the services of a man of the greatest acumen and ability. Our affairs have taken an unexpected and serious turn within twenty-four hours."

"Ah, I begin to see."

"Upon receipt of advices expected from Chicago, we must be prepared to go into the New York market at once, and strike a culminating blow. There can be no delay in this, no hesitation, owing to lack of funds, or because of failing courage. Our entire project is involved; and if, on receipt of such a letter from Chicago, its contents were to be disclosed to those opposed to our immediate operations in the market, the perversion of our entire scheme might result, and ruin come where we look for success. That is why I have come to you, Felix

Boyd, and why I am here so early this morning. For all I know to the contrary," quickly added Barlow, "our morning mail may bring the Chicago letter."

"A perforated sheet?"

"Surely! surely!"

"Then you as surely can prevent its being removed from your office, or any duplicate of it treacherously sent out," said Boyd. "Although my contract with you insures you my best services, Mr. Barlow, I do not quite understand just what you require of me."

"I'll tell you, what I require," declared Barlow, with an emphatic nod. "I want to learn whether or not Kennedy & Peck have any definite knowledge of our designs, and if so, how it was acquired. This cannot be done too quickly, either."

"Yet you give me but brief notice, sir, if this game that you are secretly playing has suddenly become so strenuous. Still, I will do my best for you, Mr. Barlow."

"No man could do more."

Boyd swung round to his desk, and prepared to take a few notes.

"Now, tell me," he cried. "Who printed the several pages from which your perforated sheets are prepared? I mean the pages sent to your several correspondents."

"The work was done in our own office. A typewritten page, having six columns of words covering our needs."

"Do you suspect any person in your own Office of treachery?"

"Not one."

"What about the offices in Boston and Chicago?"

"I have assurances from both."

"That everything is all right?"

"Certainly."

"That brings the trouble very near home," said Boyd, bluntly. 'Who is the clerk employed by you in this work?"

"A man named Gardner, who has been in our service for twenty years. I could not distrust him."

"You spoke of a stenographer, also."

"Yes. A Miss Dole, who—"

"Wait," interrupted Boyd, quickly. "Dole, did you say? Describe her."

"She is a tall, handsome girl, with reddish hair, and has been in our employ for nearly a year," replied Barlow. "She came to us with recommendations from—"

He again was interrupted, now by the sudden, sharp ringing of the telephone bell; and Felix Boyd, with eyes glittering in a way indicating his mental excitement, caught up the receiver from the stand on his desk.

"Hello! Yes— yes!" he at first cried; then hurriedly added, to his visitor : "It is Mr. Graves, your partner. Did he know you were coming here this morning?"

"I told him I should stop here on my way down," cried Barlow, hastening to take the instrument.

Boyd silently waited.

At first only the conventional calls passed: between the two men using the wire. Then Barlow listened silently for several moments— and then Felix Boyd saw the color leave his face until his skin was as gray as ashes.

"My God— oh, my God!" he abruptly gasped, with eyes half starting from his head.

Then the instrument fell from his shaking hands, and the Wall Street operator sank back in his chair like a man suddenly stricken with overwhelming illness.

Boyd instantly caught up the tele phone receiver, crying sharply:

"What's wrong, Mr. Barlow? What's wrong?"

"The worst— the very worst!" groaned Barlow, staring with ghastly despair at Boyd's forceful face. "The Chicago cipher sheet came in our morning mail. Graves had it— had it—"

"Had it!" shouted Boyd, when Barlow choked and faltered as if bereft of speech. "Hasn't he still got it? You don't mean that he has lost it?"

"Yes— yes! It is missing from our office, and—"

"Silence! Wait!"

Boyd spoke with a half-smothered growl of excitement, then caught up the telephone, and quickly commanded Graves to do absolutely nothing about the matter until he and Barlow arrived. Next, with countenance grown dark and threatening, he seized a revolver from his desk drawer and thrust it into his hip pocket.

"Pull yourself together, Mr. Barlow," he cried, hurriedly rising. "This is no time for going lame. Do you know that the stolen cipher requires your move in the market this very day?"

"There can be no doubt of it— no doubt of it!"

"Look lively, then! It is just nine o'clock! In one hour the market will open!" Boyd rapidly cried, with a glance at his watch. "Within an hour, Mr. Barlow, that missing sheet must be recovered! To your office without delay!"

Boyd's influence over others at such crises was irresistible. The invincible spirit of the man imparted new strength to his hearer, and Barlow already was upon his feet. Together the two men rushed from Boyd's office, and down the stairway leading to Pine Street.

SINCE this narrative relates chiefly to the remarkable detective work of Mr. Felix Boyd, there is no occasion for details of the extraordinary game then being played in the stock market, the magnitude of which already has been suggested. Men of the street will promptly recall the bitter strife of that brief but strenuous period, and will at once recognize the extreme gravity of the situation threatening the house of Graves & Barlow that morning.

It is needless, too, to point out at this time the causes for Felix Boyd's suddenly increased interest in the case. This will become apparent as the story progresses.

As the two men emerged to the sidewalk, Boyd collided heavily with a third, just about entering.

"Beg your— ah, Jimmie, is it you? How lucky!"

This third man proved to be Boyd's most intimate and confidential associate— Detective Jimmie Coleman, of the central office.

"What's up, Felix?" he cried, before he fairly had caught his balance. "Are you going for a doctor?"

Boyd did not answer him. He had hailed a passing cab.

"Tumble in, Jimmie! I want you with me!" he commanded, in a way precluding any delay for discussions. "You'll have to walk, Mr. Barlow."

"But," protested Barlow, "I wish to reach my office as quickly as ?

"There are no buts about it," Boyd decisively interrupted, as he followed Coleman into the cab. "If I'm to do you any good, I must do it in my own peculiar way. To the office of Graves & Barlow, cabbie, and don't spare that horse. A dollar a minute is yours if we bag our game. Away with you!"

They were away before the promise was fairly uttered, leaving Barlow resentful and frowning on the curb, while Boyd settled himself on the seat beside the central office man.

"Whats the meaning of all this, Felix?" demanded Coleman, as the vehicle swung quickly into Nassau Street and headed for Broad.

In a very few words Boyd outlined the situation, adding, in a way that left no room for doubts :

"Every instant is now of value, Jimmie. Weve got to recover that perforated sheet before its message can be learned, or Graves & Barlow are dead dogs. And we have mighty few minutes in which to turn the trick."

"Youre off on some clew," cried Coleman, quickly.

"One as fine as a spider's thread, but I've an idea 'twill hold."

"State it."

"They have a stenographer named Dole, tall and red-headed— you remember her," Boyd rapidly cried. "That girl employed by Curry, Gale & Fiske, at the time we nailed that bond robbery in the Howard Building, when you sent Mason Gorman over the Styx."

"Surely!"

"If this girl is the same, Jimmie, we certainly have our game uncovered, and it remains only to drop 'em. If I am right about this girl, I am convinced of another fact."

"Namely?"

"That we again are up against that obscure and crafty gang in which that fellow Wykoff figures, as a subordinate to some head infinitely superior to his own. 'Twas Wykoff, you know, whom we suspected in that bond case, also in that affair which cost Dickson, the diamond dealer, his life; but the crafty scamp was so shrewdly directed, and both knaveries so craftily planned and executed, that we could get no hold on him. Jupiter Ammon! I'll not sleep nights until I get some traceable clew to the master back of these ordinates."

Felix Boyd never rattled on in this fashion except when he was deeply stirred and bitterly determined; and his glowing eyes, his unusual paleness, his drawn lips and fixed jaws, all indicated that he was launched into this affair for Barlow in a way quite irregardless of himself.

Coleman read these signs aright, and hastened to rejoin:

"You'd better have a care, Felix. This girl may recognize you as the man who queered the game against Curry, Gale & Fiske."

"Not likely," Boyd quickly answered. "I guarded against her seeing me when at their office."

"Bear in mind that you wish to remain in the background, Felix, until some clew to the chief of this gang can be obtained."

"I have all in mind, Jimmie," cried Boyd, impatiently. "Even if this girl should recognize me, she can report no more of me than already is suspected. At any cost, Jimmie, I must recover that cipher sheet in time to save these men by whom I am secretly employed. We have not an instant to spare— ah, here we are! Do you know where their temporary offices are located?"

"Top of the building," tersely cried Coleman, as both sprang from the cab. "I'll nail the elevator."

"Wait here, cabbie!' commanded Boyd, pausing for an instant on the curb. "Not a move, if you value your license. I may want you again in three minutes."

"And it's here you'll find me," shouted the cabman, as Boyd dashed up the steps of the skyscraper before which the vehicle had halted, and vanished into the corridor.

Coleman luckily had discovered the elevator just about starting up, and in precisely six minutes after telephoning to Graves from his quarters in Pine Street, Boyd led the way into the banker's Office.

It consisted of two rear rooms, with a door between them, located on the top floor of one of New York's loftiest buildings. That into which Boyd entered opened upon the corridor, and had only a single side window looking down

upon the street. It was conventionally furnished after the fashion of a broker's office, and Boyd found Graves and his clerk, Gardner, anxiously waiting his arrival. There was no sign or sound of the stenographer, and the door between the two rooms was closed.

Graves quickly sprang up when Boyd entered, and was about to speak, but the latter cut him off with a gesture, crying sharply:

"Not a word! Not a word, Graves, except in answer to my questions, I know just what you wish to tell me, but every second is of value, and PII not hear a needless word. Just answer my questions, sir, and as briefly as possible."

There was no dodging such a beginning as this, say nothing of the look on Felix Boyd's white face, and for an instant Banker Graves was fairly nonplused. Before he could open his mouth, however, Boyd had sprung his first question, with a voice that had the ringing snap of a steel trap.

"Just when did your Chicago letter arrive?"

Graves caught his breath and steadied himself to answer.

"At quarter-past eight this morning."

"Were you then here?"

"Yes."

"Did it come direct to you?"

"It was sent up from our lower offices

"Was it opened down there?"

"No. All secret letters bearing on this business are marked personal, and sent directly up here."

"Did you open it personally?"

"Yes."

"Have you transcribed its contents?"

"Yes."

"Where was that done?"

"On yonder desk."

"By whom?"

"Gardner and myself."

"Where was your stenographer then?"

"In the next room."

"Has Gardner been out of this office since you missed the cipher sheet ?"

"No, sir; not out of this room."

"How long since you missed it?"

"I at once telephoned to your office. You can estimate the time as well as I."

Boyd snatched out his watch from his pocket. It was precisely ten minutes after nine.

"Eleven to twelve minutes," he muttered. "Now answer! When did you last see the missing sheet?"

"I took it into the next room to dictate a letter to my stenographer," replied Graves, now talking as rapidly as possible, and wondering in a vague way what sort of a brain this man Boyd could have, to determine with such celerity the significance of each and every atom of evidence which his avalanche of questions might suggest.

"Go on! Go on, sir!" cried Boyd, impatiently stamping his foot. "You must see the need of haste. Go on, I say!"

Again the banker steadied his shaking nerves.

"While dictating the letter to Miss Dole," he hurriedly continued, "I laid the cipher sheet on a table near by. When done, I returned to this room to plan my morning work in the market. I was thus engaged for about twenty minutes. Then I wanted the cipher sheet again, and I sent Gardner into the other room to get it. It was not there. Miss Dole at once informed me that I had brought it out here, which I absolutely know to be wrong. We at once began a vain search for it—"

"Stop!" cried Boyd, sharply. "You now have told me all you really know about it?"

"Everything. We cannot find it, or—"

"That's enough!" snapped Boyd, with indescribable asperity. "If you value my efforts, don't get in the way of any move that I now may make."

Few men, in fact, would have cared to oppose one so intensely exercised as Boyd appeared to be. Yet his every word was uttered, and his every niove made, with such amazing celerity and decision that one could not deubt that he was working along a clearly perceived and very definite line.

With an ugly look in his eyes, with his forceful white features severely drawn, Boyd now threw open the closed door and strode into the adjoining room, where a single glance at the banker's stenographer revealed her to be the girl he suspected, the same one he had seen in the office of Curry, Gale & Fiske at the time of the famous bond robbery.

Halting abruptly, Boyd pointed his finger straight at the breast of the startled girl, and cried, with terrible sternness:

"Tell me, girl! Tell me at once! What do you know about this missing sheet?"

Miss Dole instantly sprang up from her chair at the typewriter, and turned to face him. She was trembling violently, and was as white as the lace at her pulsing throat; yet her flashing eyes, her frowning brow, her attitude of mingled resentment and defiance, all indicated not only that she was a girl of superior nerve and daring, but also that she was fully prepared for just such a scene as this.

"I know nothing about it!" she cried, indignantly. "I've not seen it since Mr. Graves took it into the other room."

"You are sure of that?" thundered Boyd. "He says he left it here, and—"

"I don't care what he says!" Miss Dole passionately cried. "I have eyes, sir! I have eyes, and saw him take it from this room! If he charges me with—"

"He makes no charges against you," Boyd sternly interrupted, at once perceiving that the girl felt sure of herself and of the attitude she had assumed.

To search the girl, or the room, he now was convinced would prove vain.

With one swift glance he took in the pertinent features of the room. It had no exit except into the room adjoining. To have reached the corridor of the building, or to have communicated with any person there, Miss Dole must have passed through the office occupied by the two men..

"Has this girl left this room since entering it this morning?" cried Boyd, swinging sharply around and addressing Graves, then at the open door.

"No, she has not," cried the banker.

"You are sure of that?"

"Absolutely. I can swear to it."

Boyd instantly turned to the two broad windows, the only avenue by which, under the conditions stated, the missing sheet could have been conveyed to any outside party. With a bound he reached one of the windows, and threw it open to look out.

At a glance he took in the meager possibilities presented. The two windows were in the rear elevation of the building, and near one corner of it, that in the next room being in the side elevation and above the adjoining street. Far below him, so far that they appeared dwarfed, was a maze of smaller buildings, the numerous roofs of which appeared in uneven and disorderly confusion from the altitude at which he gazed. To have dropped the missing sheet with any accuracy to a person on one of the roofs below would have been next to impossible; and Boyd saw at once that so hazardous an attempt to dispose of so valuable a paper would not have been made.

"Who occupies the room under this?" he hurriedly demanded, glancing back at Graves.

"Cavendish & Page, publishers," cried the banker.

"Do they employ many hands in the room just below ?"

"Yes. A dozen or more."

Boyd instantly dropped the theory which had impelled these hurried questions ; a theory that the sheet might have been tied to a string and lowered to some person at the window below.

"Not feasible!' he muttered, under his breath. "Too many observers down there! This affair precludes many confederates! Yet that missing sheet, to have been made available this very morning, which Barlow assures me would be impetative, must have in some way been conveyed to an outsider."

While thus measuring the situation, Boyd drew back into the room, then paused to gaze at the flat roof of a much lower building about a hundred yards

distant. Of this building only two of the upper windows commanded a view of that in which he stood, the view from the others being obstructed by the irregular roofs of the intervening buildings.

Suddenly Boyd wet the palm of his hand with his tongue, then thrust his hand far out of the window to learn the precise direction of the wind— a method . common enough among sailors. Then, moving like a flash, he sprang back into the room.

"Graves, don't let that girl go until I return," he cried, vehemently. "Keep her here until—"

"I will go if I wish—"

"If she attempts to leave this room, call an officer and place her under arrest!" thundered Boyd. "This way, Jimmie! Come with me at once! This way— this way!"

And Felix Boyd, with Coleman close upon his heels, tore out of the banker's office, and headed for the stairway making to the street.

Just a minute later Mr. Jason Barlow rushed into the office.

"Isn't Boyd here?" he demanded. "Hasn't Boyd arrived?"

"Arrived— yes! And gone!" replied Graves.

"Gone!"

"Yes. He asked several questions, and then left in a hurry. He has some plan. I do not know what it is, but if he doesn't find that cipher—"

"We will go under as sure as fate," finished Barlow, despairingly.

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FELIX BOYD did not wait for the elevator. People who observed them stared dumfounded at the two men, one close after the other, descending at breakneck speed' the successive flights of stairs, with never a word one to the other, and never a stop for breath until they reached the busy street and the waiting cab.

In a few hurried words Boyd gave the driver his directions, adding, breathlessly:

"Don't lose a moment, cabbie! Make your own price for the service, but don't lose an instant! Millions depend upon you!"

Like all who had encountered Boyd during the past ten minutes, the cabman was a little rattled. Boyd's potent influence over others at such times constrained prompt obedience, however, and well within three minutes the cabman drew up his horse at the building which Boyd had particularly observed from the bankers' office windows.

"Find the janitor, Jimmie,' cried Boyd, as he leaped to the sidewalk. "Rush him up to the top floor in case I require his keys. Pll go right up. Follow me as quickly as possible."

Most of this was spoken while both men dashed up the steps and into the building. While Coleman began a hurried search for the janitor, Boyd caught the elevator just about rising, and at once started for the top floor. On his way up he studied the face of the elevator conductor, a crooked-back Irishman, with decidedly crafty gray eyes, and asked in a casual way:

"Who occupies the office farthest east on the rear corridor, top floor?"

The Irishman glanced sharply at him.

"How wud I know," said he, with an oily brogue. "I niver waz afther hearing his name."

"Do you know him by sight?" inquired Boyd.

"I've sane him, but he's not afther being here long."

"Do you know whether he now is in his office?"

"Sure, sur, I couldn't soy if I wud."

Boyd needed no more to convince him that the Irishman had been cautioned against being communicative, very possibly by the tenant in question, and he let the matter drop. On arriving at the top floor, however, he hastened to the rear corridor, and presently reached the door of the office mentioned. He had located it with absolute precision; it was the office containing the windows which commanded a view of the lofty. offices of Graves & Barlow.

Boyd tried the door and found it locked. Then he vainly attempted to open it with several keys which he had in his pocket. Next he stood for a second or two impatiently stamping the floor, vainly waiting for Coleman to bring the janitor. The delay irritated him like nettles. He glanced up and discovered a transom above the door.

"Glass!" he muttered, half in his throat. "I must get in at once. If I'm on the wrong track, I can make apologies later. If on the right track, however, one second's delay may cost me the game. I'll force an entrance!"

Leaping up he seized the sill below the transom window, and fixed his foot on the knob of the door. Then he drew his revolver, gripping it by the barrel, and with several rapid blows he scattered the pane of glass in fragments over the office floor.

The noise caused by the breaking glass brought half a score of men rushing from the adjoining rooms, from whom cries for the janitor and the police quickly arose. To none of them, however, Boyd paid the slightest attention; and before any could arrive to prevent him, he worked his way with the agility of a contortionist through the broken transom, and dropped headlong into the office.

There he sprang to his feet, and darted to the window to make sure he was right. A glance assured him. Far away over the intervening roofs, and high above him in the lofty skyscraper, the windows of Graves & Barlow's office were quite plainly visible.

Still moving with unabated haste, and ignoring the uproar now in the adjoining corridor, Boyd looked sharply about the office. In every way it was inferior, containing only a cheap desk and two wooden chairs, with a small stove and hod in one corner— a condition which instantly convinced him that the place had been rented only temporarily, as a means for some project out of the ordinary lines of business.

The temperature of the room was higher than in the corridor, a fact which Boyd promptly detected, and he darted to the stove and opened the door.

"Ha! there has been a fire here!" he muttered, peering sharply at the smoldering black refuse in the stove. "No embers left! Yet this burned rubbish has been vigorously disturbed, as if to destroy all indications of its character. Was it excelsior— no! Aha, I have it! It was— string! The poker— by Jove! the poker!"

This humble adjunct to a stove was lying upon the floor near the hod, and Boyd now pounced upon it like a terrier upon a rat.

"Warm!" he muttered, feeling of the crooked iron end. "Still warm! I am right, and must be close upon his track. The poker is not yet cold. He can have left here but a few moments ago. I'm right— and now to get out again. Now to get out, and after him."

With eyes glowing brighter, even, and reflecting the triumphant fervor that was inspiring his haste, he darted towards the office door. Yet before he had reached it a key was thrust into the lock, the door thrown violently open, and Coleman and the janitor appeared upon the threshold.

Before the astounded janitor could speak, Boyd brushed rudely by him, and fell to forcing his way through the excited crowd of men in the corridor, at the same time shouting loudly:

"Follow me, Jimmie! Ive hit the nail on the head! Lose not a moment. Follow me, and—"

"Not yet!" roared the janitor, springing upon him from behind. "You have broken into this office. The police shall—"

"Police be blowed!" thundered Coleman, throwing open his coat to display his detectives badge. "Make way there! I'm a central office man, and will answer for this. Room, gentlemen, room! Make way, I say! Make way!"

He had hurled the janitor aside while speaking, and now the awed crowd fell back and opened a way for the two men to pass. Boyd led the way, again at breakneck speed, through the corridor and down the stairs, and again the previous scene with the cabman was repeated.

"To the corner of Broad Street and Exchange Place!" shouted Boyd, as he followed Coleman into the waiting vehicle.

As they sprang down at the corner mentioned, Boyd caught Coleman by the arm and pointed to a huge office building some fifty yards away, in which were located the offices occupied by Kennedy & Peck, bankers and brokers.

"To the rear door, Jimmie!" he cried, rapidly. "If you see a man resembling Paul Wykoff, arrest him on the spot. You may head him off there if he attempts to sneak in a back way— barring that we are too late! Leave the rest to me"?

Coleman hastened towards the narrow street making to the rear of the building, and just thirty seconds later Mr. Felix Boyd walked composedly in the elaborate rooms occupied by Kennedy & Peck. With merely a glance at the numerous clerks in the several inclosures, he made his way unceremoniously into the private office of the firm, and promptly closed the door. Precisely as he expected, he found both members of the firm seated in the room; and, which gave him a quick thrill of triumphant satisfaction, he observed that they were alone.

By the clock on the wall it was precisely half-past nine— just thirty minutes since Boyd left his office in Pine Street.

In an open grate at one side a wood fire was burning briskly, the September morning being a little cool. The -two members of the firm were seated in the sunlight near one of the broad windows, apparently discussing some business matter. Both looked up sharply when Boyd entered. The latter at once removed his hat.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, politely.

Kennedy started to his feet.

"Excuse me! This is our private office," he snarled.

"Precisely where my business brings me," retorted Boyd, dryly. "Sit down again, I beg."

"I cannot call you by name, sir," cried Kennedy; "and I know of no business that warrants this intrusion. Leave our private office at once; or I'll call the police, if you

"Stop right there, Mr. Kennedy!" said Boyd, sternly. "I have business here, very serious business, as you presently may discover. Until that business is completed, gentlemen, not one of us "will leave this room!"

"Are you a madman?" Kennedy exclaimed.

"No, sir; but I am a very determined man! Now, understand me, gentlemen! If I am mistaken, I shall offer you very humble apologies a little later. If I am not mistaken, however, a man named Paul Wykoff will soonénter this room.

"Now once again— understand me! When that man enters, if he does, the first word or slightest sign from either one of you will bring a bullet from this

revolver. If you doubt that I mean all I say, attempt to leave this room! Sit down, Mr. Kennedy! That's right, sir! Now not a word while we sit and wait!"

It was a remarkable scene, so quickly yet forcibly was it enacted. Boyd had drawn his revolver, and advanced to take a chair near the table in the middle of the room. That each of his hearers was quelled more by his own guilty conscience than by Boyd's weapon, appeared in that each had glanced apprehensively at the other, and both had grown deathly pale. At Boyd's final command Kennedy had resumed his seat, and a silence covering several minutes ensued.

Then hurried steps were heard approaching through the outer office.

Boyd glanced sternly at his observers, then took his revolver from the table and concealed it back of his hip. He scarce had done so when the office door was rapidly opened, and the very man he expected, Paul Wykoff, rushed into the room.

At such a moment, and under the sudden stress of excitement and dismay he must have felt on seeing Felix Boyd, only one man in ten thousand could have commanded his emotions. But the nerves of Paul Wykoff evidently were as firm and flexible as steel. His dark features scarcely changed. Only one sharp gleam and glitter showed in his coal-black eyes, like the glitter seen at times in the eyes of a snake.

Without an instant's hesitation he said, in perfectly conventional tones:

"Mr. Kennedy, I wish to borrow five hundred shares of Atchison common. Can you let me have them until tomorrow ?"

Even while speaking, and without so much as a second glance at Boyd, Wykoff turned a little to one side and brought his back within a foot of the open grate. The very next instant Felix Boyd beheld the flames of burning paper directly behind the crafty scoundrel.

With a bound like that of a leopard, Boyd left his chair and sprang towards the grate— only to catch sight of a charred sheet of thin, perforated- paper just as the draught caught it and wafted it swiftly up the chimney.

"Hello!" coolly exclaimed Wykoff, thrusting Boyd aside. "What the devil's the matter with you?"

"Nothing at all," said Boyd. "Why do you ask? Why do you push me away from the grate?"

"Grate?" echoed Wykoff, inquiringly, with a backward glance to see if the sheet he so quickly and craftily had dropped into the flames had been consumed. Then he turned with a smile, one not easily described, it was so like a mingled sneer and threat, and added, coolly :

"I pushed you aside, sir, only because I thought you were about to lay violent hands on me."

Felix Boyd came one step nearer to him, and for a moment fixed his piercing eyes upon the fellow's sallow, cold face.

"I shall lay violent hands on you some day, Wykoff, and when I do— I shall confine them in bracelets!" he retorted, slowly.

Then Boyd turned abruptly to Kennedy and Peck, and saw that both were smiling.

"There is no occasion for apologies, gentlemen," said he, with icy sarcasm. "Plainly enough you all know why I am here. Also that my business now is completed— and, in a very great measure, successfully completed! Gentlemen, I bid you good-morning."

And without another word Boyd strode out of the office, and went to seek Coleman.

"Its all off, Jimmie," said he, upon rejoining him.

"Not failed!" cried Coleman, anxiously.

"Not by a long chalk, Jimmie!" laughed Boyd, with a toss of his head. "Failures are not in my line. I have queered the game of Kennedy & Peck all right, yet I have not turned the trick quite as nicely as I would have liked. Drop round to my office in time for lunch, and I will explain the whole business. I first must hasten to reassure my clients."

It was a quarter of ten when Boyd re-entered the offices of Graves & Barlow. He silenced both men with a gesture, then turned to the inner room, and confronted their stenographer.

"Miss Dole," said he, with quiet severity, "if you are at all wise, you will immediately make a decided turn for the better. If you do not, I shall land you behind prison bars some day. Not a word! Put on your hat and go!"

The girl grew very red, frowning resentfully, but the gleam in Boyd's steadfast eyes awed her to silence. She arose and put on her hat, then hurriedly departed.

Boyd turned to the amazed bankers, over whose faces the light of reviving hope had begun to appear.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I understand that you have a copy of the message conveyed by your missing cipher sheet?"

"Certainly!" cried Graves. "I transcribed it myself."

"All is well, then," said Boyd, smiling oddly. "I congratulate you. The cipher sheet has gone up in smoke. I saw it burned in the office of Kennedy & Peck less than ten minutes ago' I give you my word that it has not been read since leaving this office, and I trust that my positive assurance of that will enable you to enter the market with perfect confidence this morning. Gentlemen, it is for such emergencies as this that you employ Mr. Felix Boyd, and the provisions of my contract with you are very properly executed."

BOYD SMILED when Jimmie Coleman asked him about the case at lunch that day.

"It was simple enough in a way, Jimmie," said he. "The only disturbing feature of it was the serious need of extraordinary haste. To run down that cipher sheet in a single half hour certainly was a task to have staggered most men, and I am inclined to think that most of our observers thought us out of our heads."

Coleman laughed as he recalled some of the incidents of that wild pursuit.

"But the line on which you worked, Felix," said he. "I don't quite see it."

"Simple as two and two, Jimmie," said Boyd, carelessly. "To be of any use the cipher sheet had to be conveyed to outside parties this very morning. Miss Dole was the only person who had any opportunity to do this, yet she dared not leave her office for that purpose. A brief investigation there showed me that it could have been done only by the window, and this girl's previous relations with Wykoff convinced me that he again was her confederate."

"That's plain enough, Felix."

"A brief survey from the window," continued Boyd, "showed me that she could not have safely dropped the sheet, and that other means must have been employed. Necessarily, since Wykoff could not have known just when the cipher sheet would arrive, some signal from the girl must have informed him of its arrival this morning. The only available point from which Wykoff could have been constantly watching for her signal, was the window of the office I next visited."

"Ah, I see!"

"I tried to get there before Wykoff could leave, not then feeling sure just how the job had been done. I began to suspect it, however, when I observed the direction of the wind. I arrived too late to catch Wykoff in his office, but in the stove there I found a lot of burned paper and string."

"Oh, ho!" cried Coleman, quickly. "A kite!"

"Precisely," laughed Boyd. "I since have learned that two of the janitor's children have lately been in the habit of flying a kite from the flat roof of the building. Probably they were put up to this by Wykoff himself, that the incident of this particular morning might not be specially observed. Wykoff certainly did the work this morning, and so skillfully manipulated the kite that Miss Dole was able, from her window in the skyscraper, to attach the cipher sheet to the tail of the kite without being seen. You remember that the window of the adjoining room, where Graves and Gardner were, was in the side elevation, and probably the girl's clever work required but a few minutes."

Coleman laughed deeply.

"That was the way of it, surely," said he. "Boyd, you're all right!"

"All that saved us, however," smiled Felix Boyd, "was the fact that Wykoff required considerable time in which to reel in the kite, and afterwards burn the string and kite itself, thus destroying this evidence against him."

"Oh, he's a crafty dog, for a fact!'

"On finding the stove and poker still warm, I knew he had been gone but a few moments, and I at once aimed to head him off before he could deliver the cipher sheet to Kennedy & Peck, where Graves & Barlow knew it was wanted."

"I see the point," nodded Coleman.

"I got there ahead of Wykoff all right," laughed Boyd. "The moment Wykoff entered and saw me, however, he very quickly and cleverly decided to sacrifice the cipher sheet in order to save himself and Miss Dole. It was done before I could prevent it, for which I'm a bit sorry; yet I served my clients very successfully, for all that."

"It now is plain enough, and it was well done," bowed Coleman, approvingly. "After the burning of the sheet, you really had no good hold on these scamps."

"None worth anything," replied Boyd. "Hence I made no arrests. I am convinced that Kennedy & Peck hired this job done, however, and that it was the work of the same gang that perpetrated that bond robbery, and attempted to relieve Dickson of his diamonds."

"No doubt of it, Felix," cried Coleman. "Yet as for this obscure gang, and the prospect of locating it, you are not much better off than you were this morning."

"Not a whit better, Jimmie," grimly answered Boyd, laying aside his napkin. "But I will land them! Jimmie, take my word for it— I will land them!"

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7: Security

Hilary Lofting

Hilary Joseph Francis Lofting, 1881-1939
The Australian Woman's Mirror, 24 Dec 1928

Older brother of Hugh Lofting of "Dr Doolittle" fame; born in London, emigrated to Sydney, Australia in 1917. Novelist and journalist.

WALKING in her prim, self-contained way from her boarding-house to her shop in High-street, Miss Beresford congratulated herself on the fineness of the morning. She greeted each trim garden with admiration and liking, the affection she felt for all orderly things. Orderliness and security were the best things in the world— that couldn't be questioned; and she had always considered that she had achieved them. But to-day, in spite of the brightness and charm of the morning, a faint doubt seemed to be oppressing her. Why, she couldn't imagine. In life, this lingering uncertainty reminded her, you could never be quite sure. It seemed to be all right; but you really couldn't tell.

There was her business, a safe, quiet business, with its small but very satisfactory clientele. The same people, the same families, came to her for hats season after season, year after year. Her profits were not large, but a bad debt was unknown on her books. For five years— ever since her twenty-fifth birthday— the little prim shop and her careful management had made a comfortable living for her. For the last two years it had also provided Aliss Poulter with a regular salary. It had put a nest-egg into the Savings Bank, a nest-egg which, like the number of regular clients, had slowly but surely increased. The business was quiet and firm and orderly. Nothing could be more secure.

Yet that lingering doubt wouldn't vanish. Supposing something were to happen— any one of the hundreds of things that might happen— to break that apparently unbreakable security. It was not clear to Aliss Beresford's usually precise and methodical mind what any of these disastrous things could be; she told herself so with some emphasis. Nevertheless, the faint flutter of misgiving wouldn't be still. Surprised and fugitively hurt at her mind's lack of calmness and poise, she arrived at "Janet Beresford, Milliner," in High-street. Even the reserved good taste of the lettering and design of the sign failed wholly to bring back her sense of impregnable security.

Aliss Poulter being as much a friend as a salaried assistant, Aliss Beresford was always careful to be a little more cordial than their formal relations warranted Sometimes, but not often, Aliss Poulter took a slight advantage of this.

"You don't look quite yourself to-day, Miss Beresford, though it is such a lovely day."

"Don't I?" Aliss Beresford's smile was a faint deprecation of the assumed importance of her looks. "I feel much as usual, thank you, Miss Poulter."

"That's just what you don't look." Miss Poulter's sympathetic scrutiny of her employer's face was distinctly more like that of a friend than an assistant. "You look lonely, that's what it is— I've been trying to find the word for it ever since you came in."

"Do I? Well, I don't feel it. You won't forget that Mrs. Saunders is coming for her cerise vagabond this morning, will you?"

Miss Poulter was careful not to show that she was hurt. She assured Miss Beresford that Mrs. Saunders's vagabond hat was completed and in its box waiting for her.

Miss Beresford retired to her little room behind the shop. She read her notes of the day's business, ticking off Mrs. Saunders as completed, reminding herself that the three Alisses MacIntyre's school beavers were to be ready for despatch to-night; that this friend of Mr. Shorter was to be communicated with about the new Papuan woven straw that Mr. Shorter liked so much; that a cheque should be sent for

the electric light. Other less important matters engaged her attention. One or two clients came in and asked to see her personally. A traveller called. In fact, the morning's business went on its quiet, orderly way.

Yet this word "lonely" remained in the background of her mind. She wasa't conscious of being lonely. If it was so, she preferred it. Perhaps she had been a little sharp with Miss Poulter; one should guard against that. "Lonely" was such a silly word to use. How could one's face express loneliness? Still, Miss Poulter had meant to be sympathetic, and she ought not to have sat on her.

Something of this feeling communicated itself to Miss Poulter, who took full advantage of it.

"I wonder that you have never married, Miss Beresford. I should think it would suit you."

Miss Beresford stiffened. But that necessity of guarding against unsympathetic thoughts, that slight uncertainty of life of her walk to the shop, that absurd word "lonely" and, perhaps, the beauty of the day made her pause before she spoke and look out of the open door into sleepy High-street instead.

"I was going to be, once," she found herself saying, to her surprise. "But he was a wanderer, sort of vagabond man, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Not bad, I don't mean— just unsettled and insecure. Adventurous. Father thought it would be unwise, and so did Mother. The township and neighborhood had never taken my— my man seriously. You couldn't, somehow, I can see now. So— well, he just vanished again."

Miss Beresford withdrew her eyes from sleepy High-street.

"Those beavers for the Macintyre girls don't you think we'd better telephone Clarkes'? I promised the hats should go to-night, you know."

But Miss Poulter was not hurt this time. She telephoned to Clarkes' at once, and was very assiduous and anxious to establish a particularly friendly feeling in the shop.

The day continued to be lovely, with that vague uncertainty, and early in the afternoon Miss Beresford thought that it would be nice to take advantage of the weather and go to Sydney to see this friend of Mr. Shorter. He had a room at Mr. Shorter's office, where his samples of the Papuan woven straw could be seen. She put the letter in her bag, and in half-an-hour was being ushered into this unnamed gentleman's room by Mr. Shorter himself.

Seeing him, she stiffened suddenly and was still. His roving, vagabond eyes, his half-mocking smile banished ten years from time. He was heavier, and grey at the temples; but—it was he.... Miss Poulter and the silly word she had used, the day, the lingering doubt, all crowded unaccountably into her mind as she watched him rise from his chair, saw the smile flickering in his eyes.

"Well, Janet," he said.

"Jim— After all these years." Her eyes searched his face. "You've hardly changed at all."

"The same old rolling stone, you know. Here to-day and Lord knows where tomorrow. I thought you might come yourself."

"You thought I might come myself? Then you knew I was a milliner, had a business— or did you just guess from hearing Mr. Shorter mention my name?"

He laughed and sat down again as she sank into the chair beside his table. "Oh, I knew. We ne'er-do-wells know a lot of things. Our friends the birds tell us. I knew."

Miss Beresford watched him, considering this knowledge of his. Somehow it didn't seem so very astounding that he should be sitting there and she here. The little laughing wrinkles beside his eyes made something stir in her spirit. Suddenly she too laughed, conscious of a certain almost unholy vigor rising from this faint stir.

"What have you been doing, Jim, all these years?" she asked, half blushing for the softness in her voice.

His eyes hardened for a moment as he sensed the dim caress. He glanced warily at her. "Oh, kicking about, you know, Janet. The Islands, the States, a bit of Europe. Nothing real— nothing that you safe people would call 'secure.' Just knocking about."

"Security is not everything, Jim," she heard herself saying.

He glanced at her again. "Broke one month and fairly flush the next," he went on.

She laughed lightly. "No time to grow moss. Or grow old. Money isn't everything either, Jim."

"It's a great help, though." He watched his pencil making vague marks on his blotter.

"Did you remember me, in the years?" Her voice was full of caress now.

"Sometimes." He looked up from the pencil, the little wrinkles dancing beside his eyes. "Not often," he added impudently.

But manners were, for Miss Beresford now, in another world. She smiled gently at him, but didn't speak.

"You see, I was so busy going broke and trying to recover"

"Not often, Jim?" she interrupted softly.

"Well, not very often." Some dim cadence in his voice made her eyes widen and glow. He saw this and leaned back in his chair, his vagabond nonchalance suddenly vanishing. "You know, this is no good, Janet. You're asking for trouble," he said seriously.

But all the bridges were burnt by now.

She saw nothing but his adventurous face and those flickering wrinkles.

"Do you think so, dear?" she said shamelessly. "Why did you find out about my business and want to sell me Papuan straw? Just asking for trouble, was it?"

He considered this a moment, his wary eyes watching her face. "All the same," he said, "I'm no good. And how do you know I'm not married?"

She laughed. "I know," she told him. "Why did you think I might come myself? Did you hope I would?"

"Look, Janet," a note of desperation sounded in his voice as he stood up and walked to the window. "Yet I don't know what to say . I'm not safe, you know. You wouldn't have a day's security. I'm a—"

"Was that just asking for trouble too, dear?" she continued implacably.

For a long moment he watched the bustle of Kent-street hurrying along beneath him. Round the corner a sharp dip took you down to the ships, the tall ships that nosed in and out of all the ports in the Seven Seas. No bonds to hold you, no shackles on your wandering feet.... Presently the confident, nonchalant light crept back into his eyes. He had been his own man long enough to know how to stay his own man. He turned back to the room.

But Janet Beresford was beside him, close to him, her young, sweet eyes looking up into his face. The tall ships flickered and were gone even while he felt his spirit's deep longing for them, in their place he saw a sleepy township and an apple-tree in bloom. Far away, this was, and yet here were the same young eyes looking radiantly up at him, the same hands touching his shoulders. Presently it all slipped away into nothingness and he found his arms round Janet, his lips on hers. A quietude, warm and happy, descended upon him; somehow he knew that in surrender he had become truly his own man.

"Happy, Janie?" he asked.
"Oh, happy, Jim, dear," she whispered. "And so —so safe at last."

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8: The Boomerang

Edward Woodward

1882-1951

Western Mail (Perth, W. Aust), 25 July 1929

THE FLARING WORDS of a newspaper edition poster brought Eustace George Carr to a halt just as he was entering his club.

MURDER OF A WELL-KNOWN TRAINER

He cocked an eye at it and, purchasing a paper, entered the club. Then, after nodding in return to a salute, he sought details.

"The body of Mr. Joseph Bender," he read, "the owner and trainer of Warm Up, the very highly thought-of Sydney Cup candidate, was found in the small hours of the morning in Kensington a few yards away from the training quarters of Arthur Webster, who, it will be recalled, is the popular owner and trainer of Dash Along, an equally favoured candidate for the same race. The deceased had evidently been savagely attacked and mauled to death, and, as there is no evidence of a struggle, it is presumed the assault came from the rear. The police have the matter in hand and hopes of an early arrest are entertained."

Following his military career, Carr had spent a good many years in the more hazard spheres of the detective force. That experience had made his eyes very wise, and had powdered his sleek, dark head with grey, but it had given him an appe-tite for problems, the solving of which had kept him agile and alert when other men of fifty were showing signs of the wear and tear of club life.

"Brief and unsatisfying," he mused, as be dropped the paper and strolled into the smoking room. "Wonder who's been getting their own back on Vender? "

There were not many men about, and Carr had just picked up the "Clarion" and was sinking into a chair when a bell-hop entered.

"May-jer Car-r-r!" he called. "May-jer Car-r-r!"

Carr snapped his fingers.

"Here you are, boy," he said.

"Wanted on the telephone, sir," said the lad. and held the door open.

Carr wandered off to the telephone-box.

"Yes?" he said. "Yes.... This is Major Carr.... Who's that speaking? Oh, ves ... Captain Webster's valet, Chaters.... Well?..."

There followed a pause during which a frown slowly gathered on Carr's face.... "Good God!" be said presently. "When was Captain Webster arrested? Half an hour ago.... What exactly is the charge? Implication in the murder of

Vender?... Captain Webster told you to ring me up?... Right, I'll run down to Dene Wade at once."

He hung up the receiver, and left the box with a rather quicker step than was habitual to him. He was very fond of the hot-tempered lad, "Click" Webster, and although he had known for some time that mighty ill-feeling existed between "Click" and Vender, the possibility of the enmity ending in this way had never occurred to him.

Consequently it was in a worried frame of mind that he tooled his Chrysler towards Randwick at a rather dangerous speed. He arrived at the local police station just after two, and was met by Inspector Davis, to whom Carr had been of service in one or two little turf affairs when expert knowledge of the wealthy race rings was needed.

"How d'you do, Davis?" nodded Carr. "Hear you're taking care of a pal of mine, Captain Webster.... Any chance of a friendly word with him?"

The police inspector looked disconsolate. "Yes, sir," he said. "I needn't tell you that having to lay my hands on him went against the grain with me; but..."

"We'll dock the evidence for a bit if you don't mind, Davis." said Carr. "Let me go and have a word with him...."

The inspector departed, and presently returned with Captain Arthur Webster, looking white faced and a trifle jerky of eyes.

He greeted Carr with a forced smile, and a click of the tongue, a habit which had given him his sobriquet.

"Good of you to come along so quickly, Major," he said. "When the sleuths laid hands on me this morning I told Chaters, to S.O.S. to you..." He paused, and watched Davis move discreetly to the far end of the room.

"Of course," he added, in a lower tone, "there is no need for me to tell you that I didn't put that swine Vender out..."

There was a questioning expression in Webster's eyes ns he spoke, and Carr shot his monocle and polished it.

"I've never thought you a fool. 'Click', " he said. "Why have they picked on you? Vender must have had dozens of enemies.

"Because they dropped on the fact that Vender and I were in the midst of a hell l of a row about our horses. Vender was planning a coup over his Warm Up, and my Dash Along was his only snag. He came to me with a show of friendship, and asked me to scratch my horse in return for a lump sum payment from him. Of course. I refused... I am planning a coup of my own on Dash Along."

"Of course." nodded Carr. "When did you see Vender last?"

"Last evening, just after evening stable," said Webster. "I was talking to my head Iad, Ellis, just by my gallop, and Vender came over. It was then he made his suggestion, as soon as we were alone. He went off breathing fire and brimstone when I refused his offer with a l few crisp comments, and the next I heard of him

was that Ellis had found bis body this morning close by where we had been talking. They pumped the lad, and he gave the— gave the— the facts of the row."

"H'm." mused Carr, uotiug the hesitation, and wondering whether "Click" had been the prime ass the authorities evidently suspected hiin of being. "Just exactly what do you want mfc to do?"

"Get me out of this hole," said Webster.

"I'll do what I can," smiled Carr, and shook his pal's hand.

Five minutes later, when Davis returned to the room. Carr was smoking a cigarette, and staring out of the window.

"You've got the body in the mortuary. I suppose, Davis, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes. Major," answered Davis.

"Any objection to my haring a look at it?"

"You're a privileged person, sir," said the officer; and taking a key from a hook, led the way across the yard.

Entering the grim building, Davis uncovered the body, and Carr bent over it.

"I saw in the paper that the attack was supposed to have come from behind, because of the absence of struggle. The injuries show that the main blow was in the face."

"It's a queer business, sir," said Davis guardedly. "Seemingly, the bones of the nose and jaw are fractured, and yet the skin is hardly broken; and he seems to have had his hands to his nose, as all the blood is on them.The doctor says the deed was done with a blunt and heavy instrument."

"When is the inquest?" asked Carr. "To-morrow, at twelve, sir."

"Right," said Carr. "By the way, what was in the dead man's pockets?"

"I'll show you, sir," said Davis, and lcd the way back to the office. He un: locked a desk and produced a pocketi book containing some odd papers and ten pounds in notes, a small key and fifteen shillings in silver, and a gold watch.

"Robbery wasn't the motive, evidently," commented Carr.

"Not the ordinary sort of robbery, sir," said Davis, cryptically.

Carr looked at the inspector in silence for a second, and then, with a nod. returned to his car.

Leaving the police station, Major Carr drove direct to Webster's stables. He found the head lad, Ellis, mooning disconsolately round the boxes, and in a few words explained to the young man the object of his visit.

"Can you recall what you heard between Captain Webster and Mr, Vender?" asked Carr.

"Pretty near, sir," answered Ellis. "Vender came up with a smirk, and made some suggestion to the boss, and the boss told him to go to hell, and that if he caught him making up to young Torr again, he'd knock the life out of him."

"Torr? Who's Torr?" interrupted Carr.

"The lad as looks after Dash Along."

"Oh," commented Carr, "Mr. Vender was friendly with young Torr, was he? .... Er— let me baye a look at, the horse will you? I love a good thoroughbred."

Ellis turned to one of the loose boxes, and at sight of it Carr's eyes narrowed.

"Had an accident here?" hé asked, indi-cating the splintered wood round the spring latch.

"No, sir. But Torr has gone off with the key of the box. and I had to break it open this morning to get in."

"Torr seems to be a regular trouble maker," smiled Carr, following Ellis into the box. "Where's he gone off to?"

"To 'is 'ome, in Coogee, I expect, sir," answered Ellis. "The boss gave 'im a piece of 'is mind about 'im talking to Vender, and the young devil waited until it was dark, and then took 'is 'ook."

Dash Along, the big son of The Swift, moved arrogantly away as Carr approached him.

"I shouldn't go to lay a hand on 'im. if I was you, sir." warned Ellis. " 'E's as' quiet ns a lamb in the open, but 'e's a bit touchy with strangers in the box."

"I won't take any liberties," smiled Carr. "Fine-looking animal."

He stooped as he spoke, and pulling the straw aside in one or two places exam-ined the foundation whilst Ellis was gentling Dash Along's head.

"Nothing like a foundation of firm, cool chalk," commented Carr presently. "You've not had time to do this box out to-day, have you?"

"No, sir," murmured Ellis. "What with Torr being away and the upset about the boss, it's got overlooked."

"Quite understandable." said Carr. "And I won't hinder you any more. Good-day, and thank you."

THE DOCTOR was the first to give evidence at the inquest the following day. He was a personal friend of Webster's and obviously disliked his job. Death, he said, was due to heart failure following the attack. The wounds themselves were not sufficient to kill, but he had attended the dead man for heart complaint, and knew that any sudden excitement was likely to prove, fatal.

Ellis was then called, and retailed what he had heard of the conversation between his master and the deceased. Then the coroner invited Captain Webster to give evidence, and, having got him on his feet, drew from him particulars of the fierce dislike which existed between the two trainers.

"Presumably," said the coroner, "the deceased was done to death about twelve o'clock at night. Where were you at that hour on the night of the murder?"

"I was walking about in Kensington somewhere.... I reached my home again about one."

The cononer glanced at his papers.

"Somewhat unusual, is it not, for a man who has been afoot all day to wander around the streets until that late hour?"

"Unusual," agreed Webster. "But in this case I was searching for a stable boy with whom I had found fault. He had run away in consequence, and I wanted to catch him before he could get to town..."

"Why were you so anxious to catch him?"

"Because he had a stable key with him which I did not wish to fall into unauthorised hands."

The coroner hesitated and at that moment the door opened and Major Eustace George Carr strolled into the room, hat in hand.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said. "Forgive my intrusion, but I have a little information which I fancy will interest you."

Inspector Davis spoke to the coroner, and then, after going through the formalities of oath-taking, the Major regarded the jury.

"Have you any theory, Major Carr, who killed Mr. Vender?" enquired the coroner.

"I know the author of his wounds," answered Carr.

A stir went through the room, and the coroner looked at the speaker sharply.

"Can you give me the name?" he asked.

"Dash Along!" smiled Carr.

"Dash Along! Do you mean a horse?" exclaimed the coroner.

"Yes. The horse the late Mr. Vender desired Captain Webster to scratch from the Sydney Cup. I visited the animal's box yesterday, and in the straw found a hypodermic syringe, and a pencil electric torch. The number of the patent lock on the stable door tallies with the number on the small key found in Vender's pocket, and young Torr, the stable-lad, has confessed to me that he handed the key to Vender, in exchange for five pounds, and then, in fear, ran away."

"But— but— if the horse was in the box and the body was found in the street, how can the animal have done the deed?" exclaimed the coroner.

"Let me reconstruct the incident," said Carr. "When Captain Webster refused to scratch his horse, Vender decided to take matters into his own hands. Having got the key from Torr, and not knowing that Dash Along, though quiet in the open, is a savage if touched by a stranger in his stall, he entered the loose-box and was in the act of injecting the dope when the animal turned and savaged him. He managed to break away, and pulled the door to behind him to prevent the horse following; but the shock had been great, and just after he

reached the street, his heart gave out, end he fell dead! Thus Joseph Vender was killed by a boomerang of his own throwing...."

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9: The Mouse

Morley Roberts
1857-1942
World's News (Sydney), 11 Dec 1920

British novelist, poet and short story writer

MRS. PURDY was much upset, in spite of her pleasure in the fact that her daughter had written such a successful play. In the name of heaven, how would the canon take it when he heard that it had actually been put on at a matinee, and was thought not only witty, but revolutionary? The notion of Grace being witty, though amazing, and of course, absurd, might perhaps be borne. but for her to be regarded as a social pioneer would wreck his orthodox peace! And yet the news must somehow be told him. If It was not, he would hear of it suddenly, and probably die of apoplexy.

"Nonsense," said Grace Purdy.

"Grace, he's thin, but I don't know that it's such nonsense," said her mother. "And you will be saying 'Nonsense' to your father presently."

"I do— under my breath," said Grace, "especially when I say 'Yes, papa.' But I don't see how to tell him. You may, when you speak about Hilary."

"I suppose I must tell him that, though I never tell him anything if it can be helped," said Mrs. Purdy. "I made a rule not to, after trying the other way."

"Then that's why dad's so ignorant," said her daughter. "When I marry I shall tell Hilary everything."

"Everything? Even what you think? Oh, my dear, how little you understand, for all your cleverness! But your father, and your play, and Hilary Seaton! Oh. my dear!"

"Yes," said Grace; "to think of me, his little mouse, as he calls me, writing anything and getting married. And I'm twenty-six, and weigh over nine stone. Mouse, indeed! If I hadn't been so much of a mouse at home I mightn't have gnawed my way into a theatre, mother."

Mrs. Purdy threw up her hands.

"I'm sure we've done everything to make you comfortable."

"Yes, dearest, so you have, dreadfully comfortable. But just suppose I don't want to be comfortable."

It was an incredible supposition.

"Good heavens! Not want to be comfortable. Not—"

And Grace laughed.

"Mother, we don't want to be comfortable."

"And who are we, pray?" asked Mrs. Purdy, suspiciously.

"Really modern women, mother."

"Grace, surely— surely you don't want to be a really modern woman?"

"Oh, but I do! Bear it, darling, but I am! Didn't the play prove It? And I'm not going to be a mouse any more with a piece of cheese. Dad in his cage must think the play cheese."

"My dear, you must not talk so. You know the play almost shocked me."

Again Grace laughed.

"Dearest. I meant it to stir up you and dad and everyone else."

"Grace, you must not say such things to your father."

"I shouldn't think of saying to Mw what I say to you," said Grace; "but if he reads Rabelais and *Tom Jones*, why shouldn't he read my innocent play?"

"Rabelais is literature, I suppose," said Mrs. Purdy doubtfully, "but I wouldn't read it for worlds. Surely you don't compare yourself with Rabelais?"'

"And who is actually talking of Rabelais?" asked Canon Purdy as he entered the library. "Good morning, Mousie."

"Good morning, dad."

"Kiss me. Mousie."

"It was I who spoke of Rabelais, dad. I said I once tried to read him."

"Ha-hum," said the canon. "I hope, I hope SMC sincerely, that you did not succeed."

"I didn't." said Grace. "But I know why you keep him locked up."

The canon shook his head solemnly.

"There are forms of literature, my dear, which it is not desirable to allow everyone to read in their youth. Rabelais, and Fielding, and Smollett, and— and plays, though, of course, Shakespeare to always allowable."

"My dear John." said his wife, "there were things in Shakespeare that I could never approve of Grace reading."

"Of— of course not," said the canon, hastily: "but when she comes to such passages, I should hope she would have the sense— the sense—"

"Not to understand them," said Grace.

"Ha-hum," said the canon, and he went to the window to inspect the weather-cock.

"The wind is in the west," said the canon, cheerfully.

"Thank heaven." said Mrs. Purdy, who knew what an east wind meant.

"I do," said the canon. "But I shall now be much occupied, my dears. Ha-hum!"

And when Grace and her mother got outside Grace laughed.

"I've thought of a way to tell him. Ha hum!"

"You mustn't mock your father," said Mrs. Purdy. "How will you do it?"

"I got duplicates of the press cuttings from two different firms last night," said Grace, "so I'm going to put in one set with his letters and see what happens."

"Will you put in the one which says who you are?"

"Yes," said Grace, "but I'll put it last."

"I almost think I should like to go out early," said her mother.

"Poor darling, I'm so sorry," said Grace. "But we must get it over. Here are his letters."

And she put the cuttings among them.

"That's a good one. I'm a genius. That's a bad one. I'm horrid. That's a jolly one. I'm a new note. And here's the one that says I'm the only daughter of the Reverend Canon Purdy."

THE CANON'S EYES brightened when he observed several green-covered documents among his letters.

"Ha, so soon; this is indeed good," said the canon. On the desk, and close to his left hand, lay a volume entitled *Addresses to the Orthodox*, by the Reverend Canon Purdy, D.D., LL.D., etc. He patted the volume affectionately.

"I never expected reviews so early," said the canon. "I must tell Mary."

He went to the door and called his wife. "Yes, dear." she answered, from the upstairs landing.

"Reviews already, darling."

"Oh," said Mrs. Purdy. "I'm— I'm—"

And the door closed.

"Grace," said Mrs. Purdy. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes," said Grace. "I heard it."

The canon was a methodical man, and treated his letters as be treated his dinner and wine. There was no hurry in his movements. He enjoyed anticipation, since instinct and life itself had taught him that anticipation was nine-tenths of enjoyment when enjoyment was secure. He opened his envelopes with a paper knife, and disposed of them and the green covers in the waste-paper basket before he read a word. Then he tackled his correspondence.

"The reviews last," he said, with gusto. He thought of them as he thought of 1847 port after dinner.

He read the letters carefully, docketed three, put five in the basket, and the others, being bills, due or receipted, went to their proper pigeon-holes. He then cleared out one pigeon-hole for reviews of *Addresses to the Orthodox*, and, taking the first, was struck at once by a sentence in the middle of it. The writer said, "Undoubtedly a very brilliant piece of work."

"Good!" said the canon, and, following his custom of postponing fruition to expectation, he laid the paper down and took up the next.

"Good heavens," said the canon, "who would have expected the *Express* to review a book like mine? Let us see what it says."

He adjusted his spectacles, and read that, though it was the unhappy lot of the critic to be bored to tears at frequent intervals, it was seldom his fate to have to endure ribaldry and dullness at the same time.

"Ribaldry," said the canon, starting, and as he started his spectacles fell off. He found them, wiped them with trembling bands, and adjusted them upon his aquiline nose. "Ribaldry! My book! It cannot be."

But as be read on be found that the whole thing was pointless, and that it was a wonder anyone could be found to stage such a show.

"A show!" said the canon. "A show! Stay, what am I reading? Actors! Ah, I see. This cutting is about a play. It must have been sent to me in error. The others will be my reviews."

But it turned out that the very brilliant piece of work was not the *Addresses*. The critic who found something brilliant had not discovered it in that volume, but at a theatre.

"They are all, all about a play, and the very same play Mary spoke of," said the disappointed canon. "But so far as a cursory perusal informs me, this particular piece of work is both good and bad, dull and brilliant, witty and utterly pointless, while the actors and actresses actually revelled in the parts given to them, and dragged through an endless evening with obvious reluctance and distaste. Now, how did these cuttings come to me?"

He picked out some addressed covers from the waste-paper basket, and found that they were for a Miss Gratiana Purvis, at the Royal Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue.

"The mystery deepens," said the canon. "How it happened I cannot say, but it may very well be that the lady in question, who has written this brilliant dull play, is now engaged in reading my reviews. I wonder what she will think of them. I do so wonder what the real reviews said. I must tell Mary a mistake has been made by the post-office people."

He opened his door and found his wife on the mat. Some suspicious people might have imagined that Mrs. Purdy had been looking through the keyhole, but even if she had not risen with a piece of white thread in her fingers, such a notion would never have occurred to the canon.

"My dear, the reviews have not come, after all," said the canon. "By some peculiar error, I have been sent notices of a play by Miss Gratiana Purvis."

"By— an error!" said Mrs. Purdy. "I'm so sorry they are not reviews."

"I cannot imagine how they came to me," said the canon, with the long Slips dangling from his delicate fingers. "They were addressed, as I observed later, to the authoress."

"Were they?" asked Mrs. Purdy.

"Her play is poorly spoken of by some papers," said the canon. "I daresay it deserves it."

"Oh, John, many were greatly pleased. I told you I saw it myself and liked it," said Mrs. Purdy.

"To be sure; but I know it disturbed you," said the canon. "I am very observant. Nothing escapes me. I think you said it was advanced."

"Yes, rather advanced," said his wife reluctantly.

"Could anything be worse than that?" said the canon. "Why, if we continually advance, where shall we be in the end?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Purdy.

"And no one else does," said the canon triumphantly. "And all the tfme, no doubt, this objectionable Miss Purvis has my reviews. Didn't Mr. Seaton say the *Times* had one in type?"

"Yes, and your speaking of Mr. Seaton reminds me, John, that I wanted to talk about him. He seems very fond of Grace."

The canon started.

"What, fond of Mousie? Oh, no, you must be mistaken. A mere journalist! It's impossible, and she's so young."

"She's not quite a child, John." said Mrs. Purdy, more firmly. "And I think she likes him."

"I never observed it," said the canon. "A mare's nest, a mare's nest, my dear."

Mrs. Purdy was nettled. She almost felt as If she were spoken of disrespectfully.

"Indeed, it is not, John. I have observed it, if you haven't."

"Tut, tut," said the canon. "Then we must get rid of him."

"But I happen to have observed also that Grace is fond of him, too," said Mrs. Purdy.

"Oh!" said the canon,

"And I like him myself," said Mrs. Purdy.

"Oh!" said the canon.

"And it wouldn't surprise me in the least if he came in this very morning and asked to see you about it," said Mrs. Purdy.

"But you do suprise me," said the agitated canon. "Yesterday she was a little girl."

"Yesterday she was twenty-six," said Mrs. Purdy.

"It seems yesterday that I used to carry her about," said the canon, in increasing amazement.

"Try it to-day," said Mrs. Purdy, who was rapidly becoming courageous. "She weighed nine stone last week."

"Nine stone! You don't say so," said the canon.

"Daughters grow up, John. And if they have clever fathers, they may be clever, too."

"True," said the canon, "quite true. But why do you say that? Is Mousie clever?"

Mrs. Purdy groaned.

"I wish I dare tell you how clever. She said just now she was tired of cheese."

"Of cheese!" said the canon. "Of cheese! Pray, what does she mean?"

"And of being a mouse," said Mrs. Purdy desperately; "and that she means to many Hilary Seaton."

"Means to?" said the canon.

"Yes, she is determined to."

"Cheese!" said the canon. "And my daughter determined! And only yesterday—"

What had happened yesterday remained untold, for the parlor-maid asked if the canon could see Mr. Hilary Seaton.

"Yes! No! Wait! Go away a moment," said the canon. "A mere journalist, connected with theatres. Ah, theatres! I shall tell him to take these cuttings away and give them to the person they belong to."

"And what will you say about Grace?" demanded his wife.

"What do you think I shall say?" asked the canon.

"I never tell you what I think," said Mrs. Purdy.

"I shall say—"

And as he spoke he was rolling up the press cuttings. A short one caught his eye. Mrs. Purdy knew which it was, and gasped.

"What?" said the canon. "What is this? 'We understand that the writer of this brilliant play is a young lady, the only daughter of Reverend Canon Purdy, who has just published *Addresses to the Orthodox*, which is reviewed in another column.' Good heavens! My own daughter."

"And mine, John," said Mrs. Purdy.

"Our daughter!" said the canon. "Mousie! A play! Advanced! My book! In another column! Oh, I cannot understand it."

"No more could I," said Mrs. Purdy, "but now begin to, since she spoke of Hilary."

"They've got to that, eh?" asked the canon. "Hilary and Grace! But my daughter write a play! Mary, when did you know this?"

"During the second act," said Mrs. Purdy.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I never tell you anything disturbing," said Mrs. Purdy. "I leave you to observe it."

"Ha-hum," said the canon, "and now I do. When did you know about Mr. Seaton?"

"During the third act," said Mrs. Purdy, "and, John, I do hope you'll be nice to him, though though the house will seem very empty when Grace has gone."

"Don't cry," said the canon. "So it will! So it will! But a play by Mouse! Cheese! I wonder what the reviewer said of my book."

"I think Mr. Seaton knows," said Mrs. Purdy. "I'm sure he does."

"I will see him," said the dtaon. "Send him in."

"I'll tell him," said Mrs. Purdy. And when she met Hilary Seaton in the hall she whispered, hurriedly:

"Oh, Hilary, have you the review?"

"In my pocket," said Hilary.

"Is it good?"

"Absolutely magnificent," said the lover. "I wrote it myself."

As the door closed Grace ran downstairs.

"Your father knows," said Mrs, Purdy, "and Hilary is with him now."

"With the review?" ashed Grace eagerly.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Purdy. "Thank heaven for it"

They sat and waited, but a less than ten minutes the door opened and the canon appeared.

"A most exceedingly, even extraordinarily, favorable review, my dears," he said joyfully. "Read it! Read it, Mary! Grace, my darling, it seem, then, that you have inherited my powers of observation and the terse, perhaps witty, way in which I put things Come and kiss me, and then you can go and speak to Mr. Seaton. Ha-hum!"

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10: The Fortune Teller

Edward Dyson (as by Ward Edson)

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 12 March 1903

ANNIE GONE WAS a nice girl. Not particularly clever or altogether sensible, but a nice girl; and she had an income of eleven pounds a week left by an aunt, who hated all the rest of her relatives, but could not do too much for Annie because the little niece had her hair and eyes.

Being a nice girl, with a pretty face and a pretty figure and a fixed income, Annie had many admirers and not one of the many objected to her because she was neither clever nor sensible.

"Ugly girls should be clever, and poor ones should be sensible," said George Glover, "but one would rather a pretty girl with money were she neither clever nor sensible. It gives a fellow a decent chance."

George was a young doctor with hopes of a big practice. He was quite convinced that a pretty young wife with eleven pounds a week was a was a very desirable adjunct to a rising young doctor. In congratulating himself on the fact that Annie was neither sensible nor clever he tacitly admitted his own extreme sensibility and remarkable cleverness and saw few difficulties to the attainment of his object, Annie Gone and her eleven pounds a week.

George liked Annie very much and the fact she had a decent income only made him a little more anxious than he might otherwise have been to win her for his wife.

Mr. Glover was progressing well with Annie. She liked him. He was a fine, manly, open, hearty youth, good looking and a doctor. Annie's people had been in trade in a not very large way and looked up to genteel professions with all the reverence and respect they do not deserve.

But then there was Tom Holden. youth, up professions Tom Tom was a quiet young lawyer, dark, clean shaven, immobile of face, keen eyed and showing that premature tendency to greyness so common amongst young lawyers. Tom had recently gone into city offices with another quiet young lawyer, but how the partners were doing nobody knew, as prematurely grey young men don't tell tale out of court. For the same reason nobody knew what Tom thought of Annie's want of common sense. Apparently, however, he was satisfied that he had common sense enough for one household, as he was a very warm admirer of Miss Gone's, and was pressing his suit with all the ardour a girl could reasonably expect in a quiet young lawyer.

Glover, too, was progressing well with Annie. She liked him. He too, was good looking in his way. His seriousness impressed her, and he also was a member of a genteel profession. There were others but these two were the only

suitors who seemed to have a chance of taking the prize, with £11 a week added money. At present they were running neck and neck. Both had proposed, neither had been accepted neither had been refused.

"I must be given time to make up my mind," said Annie, with a pretty heiress petulance, when pressed on the point.

"Just as if the darling had any mind to make up," commented Glover, jocularly.

"No, dear," Holden had answered her. "Don't bother making up your mind about me, make up your heart."

But Annie could neither make up her heart nor her mind. She felt more at ease with Glover and he was certainly the nicest looking but there was something delicious in the awe with which Holden's gravity inspired her. They were both dear boys; she hated to have to choose between them, and no sooner had she determined that she liked one best than all the perfections of the other came rushing in upon her heart and her consciousness and swept her back into her former indecision.

"I like you," she said to George, "but I'm not sure that I don't like somebody better. I must have time to find out."

"Certainly, little one," said George, "marry me, and then find out at your leisure."

"I'm sure I like you," she said to Tom, "but I'm not positive that I do not like someone else a little bit more."

"Ah dear," said the diplomatic young lawyer, "He could bear the loss of you better than I. His nature is buoyant it would soon revive. If I lost you I should suffer for all my life."

It was by artful little appeals of this kind that Tom kept himself abreast of George in Annie's affections, despite the doctor's advantage in the matter of personal attractions. During all this however the rivals were excellent friends.

"If you win her, old man, you'll get a prize I want very badly, but if I don't get her I know of nobody else more worthy of her, and I'll give your wife a nicer wedding present than I can afford, whoever pays for it," said George.

"Thanks, old man," was the reply, "but I'm afraid I shall be in the unfortunate position of having to buy the wedding present."

It was about this time that Abdhur Chand, the Indian palm-reader, star-gazer, crystal-gazer, fortune-teller and general necromancer, was being talked of by sentimental and silly young ladies, most of whom were ready to swear that the distinguished-looking foreigner with the glittering eye knew more than any man who was not in touch with Satan ought to know. Some of them said he was the devil himself, but evidently they found him a fascinating devil, for they flocked to his gorgeous Oriental parlour daily, and presented their pretty pink palms, duly crossed with silver, for his inspection. Having one's fortune told by

Abdhur Chand became a sort of fashionable dissipation with the girls and matrons of the suburb, and Abdhur was doing well. The men voted him a theatrical humbug, but they made no noise about it, as his charges were small, and he wrought no particular mischief.

Of course there were numerous stories of the amazing powers of the Indian. Girls went to Annie with tales of astounding predictions in connection with births, marriages and deaths. But engagements and love affairs were Abdhur's speciality. That no girl should marry without first finding out from Abdhur Chand the virtues and vices of the selected man was the opinion of all Annie's acquaintances, married and single. Naturally this put ideas into Annie's not too common-sensible little head, and one afternoon when George was sitting in the garden of the villa in which Annie Gone lived with her mother, Annie's bosom friend, vivacious Florence Stanson found her way to his side.

"Well," she said, looking at him archly under her brows, "your fate is to be settled to-morrow."

"My fate? If it's a riddle I give it up."

"No riddle. Annie is going to make up her mind or have it made up for her, to-morrow afternoon."

"And how do I stand? Of course I'll get your good word. Can I bribe you with a lovely ring for the principal bridesmaid?"

"No, no. Bribery and corruption are out of the question. Not I, but Abdhur Chand, is to settle your fate."

"You don't mean to say Annie is going to consult that greasy Dago, that Dago, camel-driving Asiatic."

"I do, and if he favours the fair man, the fair man will win the day. If he favours the dark one, the fair one may as well go angling for those better fish still in the sea."

George uttered a few derisive, criticisms, but the news made him very moody and thoughtful, and later that evening, muffled in a coat and wearing a slouch hat, he found his way into the parlour of Abdhur Chand, and presented his palm with a half-crown in it.

He found Abdhur looking the part remarkably well. He was a tall man with a trimmed Oriental beard, beard, and the skin the colour of leather. He wore splendid flowing robes and his parlour was furnished with divans and great cushions and decorated with quaint and mysterious objects. When Glover had had his fortune told and it was the usual absurd balderdash, he entered into conversation with Abdhur, who was extremely taciturn.

"I have a proposal to make," said the young man. "Tomorrow afternoon a young lady is coming here to consult you. Now, it matters little to you what fortune you give a client. It is mainly for fun that they visit you. It is only a prank that brings this one here."

"Well, I want you to give her the fortune I make out for you. It will be accurate, and will tend to improve your reputation. If you will do this I will give you ten pounds."

"And the young lady: how shall I know her?"

"This is her photograph. She will call at about three in the afternoon. Of course you must not say a word about this visit."

"Very good."

"You will do it?"

"For ten pounds."

"The money is yours. I suppose you are to be trusted?"

George Glover paid Abdhur Chand ten pounds in gold to tell Annie Gone the fortune he had written, a fortune that told her she was desired by many suitors, but that she could only hope for happiness by selecting the truest of them all, and the man who loved her the best. Here followed a description of himself.

Annie Gore went to Abdhur Chand's parlour the following afternoon, and came away looking pale and trembling with excitement.

When Tom Holden went to visit Annie that evening he passed George Glover on the garden path. George was evidently greatly agitated. His greeting was curt, and he hurried on, as if his rival would discover his emotion.

Annie received Tom more warmly than she had ever done before, and at the first opportunity he gave her, she stole into his arms, and nestled against his short-front with the air of a girl who has resolved to make that her abiding-place.

"Do you mean it, do you mean it, dear?" cried Tom.

"Yes, yes!" she answered. "I do love you as you love me— disinterestedly, dearly."

Tom kissed her.

Abdhur Chand had used those words, "disinterestedly, dearly," in describing the feelings of Annie's true lover.

Annie and the young lawyer were married two months later. George Glover was at the wedding. After the honeymoon Holden, meeting Glover one day, pressed ten pounds into his hand.

"It is your own money," he said.

"My money? Why, you owe me nothing."

"Not now. I have given it back."

"Was it borrowed?"

"No, old fellow. The fact is I obtained it under false pretences. You remember railing upon the Indian fortune-teller? Well, I got ahead of you in that little business. You bribed Chand to put your case in a favourable light, but a few hours earlier I had bribed him to hand over his whole business to me for forty-eight hours. That was an excellent makeup of mine, wasn't it, George, my boy?"

George cursed for two minutes, but he laughed for ten, and Annie never knew how it happened that Abdhur Chand, the fortune-teller, was so fervent in his praises of her dark suitor, but, being happy, she is content to ascribe it to his miraculous power.

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11: An Old Master

Lawrence B. Jupp

1871-1954

The Bulletin, Sydney, 24 Jan 1918

MR. WILLIAM GUTTERIDGE waited, with the patience of a cat at a mouse-hole, outside the barriers of Princes-bridge Railway Station.

He cut a venerable, not altogether unimposing figure, in a faded frock-coat of an earlier regime; his sparse grey hair, worn unfashionably long, escaped from beneath the broad brim of a rusty black wide-awake hat; his frayed trouser-ends sagged over canvas shoes that had once been white. His beady little eyes allowed nothing to elude their roving, rather furtive glances.

The particular barrier beside which Mr. Gutteridge lingered was slowly disgorging a homogeneous crowd. Clearly a train from some remote country district had just arrived. Possibly Mr. Gutteridge was expecting a friend. His look seemed to indicate as much. Presently, a short, sturdily-built man of early middle-age, whose features were almost lost in an acre or so of unimproved whiskers, collided with Mr. Gutteridge. In so doing, he let fall an envelope that belonged to a letter he held open in one hand, while in his other brown and hairy fist he gripped a carpet-bag of mid-Victorian coloring and design. With a swift but stealthy movement, Mr. Gutteridge stooped and pounced upon the envelope. He glanced surreptitiously at the superscription thereof, then slipped it into his breast-pocket. Close at hand, on the kerb, the countryman stood irresolute, deaf to the beguilements of persuasive cabbies.

Mr. Gutteridge tapped the stranger gently on the arm.

"Might I kindly arsk if I 'aven't the pleasure of addressin' Mr. 'Amlet Kopp, of Milton Vale?" inquired Mr. Gutteridge ingratiatingly.

"Hamlet Kopp—that's my name," retorted the other, edging off a pace or two. Mr. Gutteridge smiled blandly and extended a claw-like hand, which Mr. Kopp, breathing hard, regarded with manifest disfavor.

"Thought as much. Why, I'd ha' knowed you anywhere," declared Mr. Gutteridge. "You an' 'im are as like one another as two peas. Eggstraordinary!"

"Like 'oo?" questioned Mr. Kopp, still on the defensive.

Mr. Gutteridge hesitated, but only for an inappreciable space.

"'Oo? Why, yer uncle, o' course," he said.

"Wot. my ole Uncle Joe?" replied Mr. Kopp. He reflected a moment. "Well, yes. I'm said to favor Uncle Joe. His last words to me—I was on'y a nipper at the time— was, 'You go on being like me, 'Amlet, my boy, and you won't go fur wrong.' He left a tidy bit, too, did Uncle. Some of it come my way, in a manner o' speakin'."

"And I'm sure it couldn't be in better 'ands," said Mr. Gutteridge impressively. "Ah, 'Amlet! 'Amlet! if on'y I'd took more notice of wot your Uncle Joe said to me I'd 'a' bin a better and a 'appier man this day."

His voice faltered a little.

Mr. Kopp's bewliiskered features softened.

"You knew him well?" he asked.

"We was boys together," remarked Mr. Gutteridge simply.

"Come an' 'ave a drink," said Mr. Kopp, throwing all unworthy suspicions to the winds.

They had a drink— several drinks. Mr. Kopp acted as paymaster-in-chief. The bundle of notes he produced conferred upon him a status that would have attracted a retinue but for the ministrations of Mr. Gutteridge, who hovered over him very like a hen over a chicken.

"Where d'you think o' putting up, 'Amlet, my boy?" he inquired, when at last his companion, whose head seemed to be made of cast-iron, suggested that it was perhaps time to make a move.

"I did think of the Imperial Coffee Palace. I've 'eard say it ain't too bad," said Mr. Kopp tentatively.

Mr. Gutteridge frowned.

"Shouldn't go there, if I was you," he remarked disparagingly. "B'lieve it's clean enough and all that; but there's bin several cases o' people bein' took down by their room-mates in the papers lately... Stop a minute!" He smote Mr. Kopp affectionately on the shoulder. "Why not come an' share my room along o' me, same as yer Uncle Joe used to do whenever he run up to town fur a few days."

" 'Ow much d'you by the day?" asked the business-like Mr. Kopp.

Mr. Gutteridge started so dramatically that he upset a couple of fortunately-empty glasses.

"Oh, 'Amlet! 'Amlet!" he murmured in tones of deepest reproach. " 'Ow can you arst sech a question? Why, if your dear Uncle Joe had put them unfeelin' words to me, I'd never 'ave spoke to 'im ag'in. He knew 'is ole friend better."

"Oh, well, if that's the ticket, right you are," said Mr. Kopp cheerfully.

Mr. Gutteridge, with one longing, lingering look at the spectacular array of bottles behind the bar, took his companion firmly by the arm and led him out.

It took the persevering Mr. Gutteridge three days of almost incessant persuasion, together with innumerable allusions to the sacred memory of Uncle Joe, before he could prevail upon Mr. Kopp to regard him in the light of a banker, and Mr. Kopp himself as a depositor to the amount of nearly forty pounds sterling.

"Think wot 'd be my feelin's if while you was stayin' beneath my roof you was to be robbed by one o' them crooks wot's alwiz 'angin' 'round waitin' to

take innercent people down. I should never fergive meself," declared Mr. Gutteridge, in an outburst which seemed so genuine and unaffected that Mr. Kopp, in an amenable moment of incipient intoxication, literally thrust thirty-seven pounds ten in notes on his guide, philosopher and familiar friend, only holding five pounds in reserve.

Thus it became the problem of Mr. Gutteridge's life, while accepting one incubus, to rid himself of another, even if it were only for an hour, a space of time which he reasonably considered would be quite sufficient for him to shake the dust of Tillot Row from his feet for ever.

But he was reckoning without Mr. Kopp. That gentleman never left him. However drunk Mr. Kopp went to bed at night, did Mr. Gutteridge venture to make a midnight move of the most stealthy description his guest was immediately wide awake. And during the daytime Mr. Gutteridge found it equally impossible to shake off a hirsute Presence that threatened to become intolerable. In addition to all this, the five pounds being soon spent, Mr. Kopp sought to exercise his legitimate right as a depositor to withdraw certain of his effects from Mr. Gutteridge's safe-keeping. Here, however, the latter was adamant. Two-and-sixpence a day was the amount he grudgingly disbursed on account of incidental expenses; and in vain Mr. Kopp, whose thirst was perennial, fulminated and fumed. Mr. Gutteridge remained inexorable.

"I got a dooty I owes to your Uncle Joe," he assured Mr. Kopp. "I fancy I can see 'im now, standin' over there in that dark corner jest be'ind you" (Mr. Kopp started violently), "shakin' 'is sorrowful grey 'airs at me. Often an' often I wakes up o' nights fancyin' I can 'ear 'is voice," pursued Mr. Gutteridge with unusual eloquence, "tellin' me to watch over and guard 'is nephew from them as 'd take 'im down soon as look at 'im as if he was my own son."

"Damn my Uncle Joe and you, too!" remarked Mr. Kopp, with bitterness. "Funny thing if a man can't spend his own money without 'avin' his Uncle Joe chucked in his face every five minutes."

It was now Mr. Gutteridge's turn to start violently, which he did very well indeed, considering.

"Don't tell me I 'eard you damn yer Uncle Joe," he said incredulously. "Damn me as much as you like, 'Amlet, my boy. but as you vally my friendship, don't Jet the name of your Uncle Joseph pass your lips in vain."

"I don't value your friendship at tuppeno-farthing," retorted the parsimonious Mr. Kopp. "And all I got to say is, are you or are you not cornin' out along o' me, 'cos if not. I'm goin' alone?"

"I am," said Mr. Gutteridge concisely. He knew Mr. Kopp too well to regard the last clause of the latter's sentence as anything but a figure of speech.

Taking advantage of the lunch-hour crowd in Collins-street Mr. Gutteridge succeeded, after infinite pains, in giving his tenacious companion the slip. It was

a heaven-sent opportunity. It is likely enough that Mr. Gutteridge beat all records for men over sixty between Collins-street and Tillot Row. He was breathless and purple in the face when he arrived at the one room he had been sharing with Mr. Kopp during the week past.

It did not take him many minutes to deposit his few available belongings in a small and dilapidated handbag. Then he removed a loose brick from the centre of the empty fire-place and drew from their seclusion the thirty-five one-pound notes for which he was still accountable to Mr. Kopp. These he put carefully in his breast-pocket. He had just reached the head of the stairs, and was preparing, as a precautionary measure, to descend on tiptoe, when the front door was flung open and Mr. Kopp stood on the threshold. Mr. Gutteridge smothered an imprecation.

"Oh, here you are," said the former. "Pretty dance you've led me. I've been lookin' the place for you. Where'd you get to? An' wot you got in that blessed bag o' yers?" he added suspiciously.

"If you must know, I was jist a-goin' to take my week's washin' round to the laundry," snarled the disappointed Mr. Gutteridge.

"You shouldn't —not without somebody to take care o' you," said Mr. Kopp reprovingly. "You might ha' lost yerself— lookin' fur the place."

"Funny thing," continued Mr. Kopp, as he seated himself on the bed and a short black pipe from his pocket, "but 'oo should I bump inter jest arter I missed you but Charley Stevens."

"'Oo's 'e— when 'e's at 'ome?" asked Mr.

Gutteridge disparagingly.

"He has the farm wot joins mine," explained Mr. Kopp. "He's 'avin' a few days in town, stayin' at the Imperial, where I oughter— meantersay, where I thought o' stoppin'. But that ain't all. You remember me tellin' you of a grand art union— tickets 'arfa crown, first prize a val'able paintin', said to be a Ole Master."

"You never told me nothing about it," interrupted Mr. Gutteridge. "And wot's a Ole Master, might I arsk?"

"He's a bloke wot paints pictures," said Mr. Kopp confidently. "You see the letters O.M. arter their names in the papers."

"And wot's that gotter do with me an' you, 'Amlet?" inquired Mr. Gutteridge loftily.

"It's got this much to do with me," replied Mr. Kopp. "I was silly fool enough to sell Charley Stevens me ticket for five bob, and damme if he hasn't bin and won first prize!"

"Well, I don't reckon the picture 'd be worth much more than five bob, even if you 'ad ha' won it," said Mr. Gutteridge consolingly. "I knows a little place

where you can buy luverly colored pictures— big 'uns, too— in gold frames, for a couple o' bob the pair."

"Go on, this ain't one o' them sort," said Mr. Kopp contemptuously. "It's a Ole Master; and listen to this bit out of to-day's paper: 'It is rumored that Mr. Mac Gill, the celebrated conno— conno— somethin' or other and collector, who has just returned from a trip to America, has announced his intention of offering the lucky winner of the first prize in the grand Art Union the sum of one thousand pounds for the fine example of Van— Van— Dago bloke, can't manage his name— work which constitutes the prize in question. Mr. Mac Gill states that he has long coveted this partic'lar picture by Van etceterer, as 'itherto 'is gallery has bin without an example of the famous artist's incom— incom— incomparable work.' There, wodyer say to that, Bill?"

"Wot's the use o' sayin' anythin'?" grunted Mr. Gutteridge. "If you 'adn't ha' bin sich a mug as to sell yer ticket fur five bob, I might 'ave 'ad somethin' to say. A thousand pound fur a picture! My Gawd!"

Suddenly Mr. Kopp rose from the bed and smote his companion on the back with such good will that Mr. Gutteridge was moved to remonstrances.

"Oh, stow it!" requested Mr. Kopp. "Listen; how'll this do? Wot money o' mine have you got?"

"Thirty-five quid," said Mr. Gutteridge reluctantly.

"Well, continued Mr. Kopp, "get the stuff and come along with me to the Imperial and I'll buy the picture off o' Charley Stevens for thirty-five pounds and sell it again to Mr. Mac Gill for a clear thousand— see?"

"I don't see where I come in," said Mr. Gutteridge definitely.

"Five 'undered of that thousand quid is yours in lovin' memory o' Uncle Joseph," said Mr. Kopp in a voice that shook with emotion.

" 'Amlet, my boy." said Mr. Gutteridge, equally moved, "if I'd ha' 'ad a son I could 'ave wished 'im to be jist like you— not a shadder o' difference."

Mr. Gutteridge nodded and tapped his breast-pocket significantly.

Upon arriving at the Imperial Coffee Palace, Mr. Kopp requested Mr. Gutteridge to remain in the lobby while he ascertained if Charley Stevens was within. Presently, after what seemed to Mr. Gutteridge an interminable interval, he returned; and his countenance was that of one who is the bearer of glad tidings.

"It's orright," he said exultantly. "I've seen him, and he'll let me have the picture for thirty-five quid, cash down! Come along in with me and we'll fix things up straight away."

Mr. Charles Stevens, who had been indulging in an after-dinner nap, was sitting on the side of his bed when the two confederates entered the room. His flaxen hair was very much on end, and he wore no collar and no coat. He was clean-shaven but for a bristly growth— the aftermath of his bi-weekly shave. His

eyelids were red and inflamed. His general appearance suggested alcohol, very slightly diluted. He eyed Mr. Gutteridge with a glassy stare, as Mr. Kopp murmured a few hurried words of introduction.

"Ole friend of me Uncle .Toe," concluded the Master of the Ceremonies. "He's bin showin' me round town. Reg'lar bird, I can tell yer."

Mr. Stevens yawned cavernously.

"If he's the 'oof-bird you was tellin' me of, get 'im to moult a feather or two," he suggested.

Mr. Kopp dug his banker in the ribs.

" 'And 'em over, Bill," he said.

Mr. Gutteridge fumbled for the notes, and after counting them ostentatiously on the counterpane, handed the amount over to Mr. Stevens.

"Dessay they're orl right," remarked the latter. "Here, catch hold, 'Amlet! Mind 'em fur me till to-morrer mornin', old son, and don't give 'em to me then unless I'm a sight soberer than wot I am now. That 'ere's the picture, done up in brown paper, leanin' against the wall. See you later, I spose. S'long."

He threw himself back on his bed, and at once started snoring aggressively.

Mr. Gutteridge pulled reflectively at his ragged whiskers. " 'Adn't you better let me take charge o' them notes, 'Amlet, my lad?" he suggested.

Mr. Kopp shook his head.

"Not this time, Bill," he said gently. "Not arter they've bin give inter my charge by pore Charley Stevens, 'oo a child might rob. It wouldn't be right. I shouldn't be doin' my bounding dooty. Wot 'd Uncle Joe say? Arsk yerself the question, Bill."

"I ain't a-goin' to arst nobody no questions," retorted Mr. Gutteridge gloomily.

"Orright then: you catch hold o' the picture," said Mr. Kopp briskly, "and we'll get a move on. And fer the Lord's sake don't let anybody hump inter yer goin' along, or there's a thousand pounds busted."

"Trust me," replied Mr. Gutteridge, whose whole life had been one long and usually unavailing request to the same effect.

Immediately on arrival at Tillot Row Mr. Kopp proceeded to collect his scattered belongings and cram them into his cauliflower-patterned carpet-bag.

"Wot's the meanin' o' this, 'Amlet?" inquired Mr. Gutteridge severely. "You wasn't surely never thinkin' o' leavin' me?"

Mr. Kopp cleared his throat.

" 'Fraid I . must," he said. "I promised Charley Stevens. Put it to yerself, Bill—would I dare to leave 'im in the state you saw 'im in an' nobody to look arter 'im? I'll leave the picture along o' you, and to-morrow mornin' I'll be round, and we'll take it to Mr. Mac Gill. By to-morrow night you'll be five 'undered pounds

richer than wot you are now. Well, s'long, an' many thanks fur orl you've so kindly done fur Uncle Joe's, I 'ope, not ungrateful nephew."

Having delivered himself of this irreproachable sentiment. Mr. Kopp took a hurried departure, urged thereto by certain symptoms of hostility which manifested themselves in Mr. Gutteridge's manner. Mr. Gutteridge had hardly been alone for five uncomfortable minuted when the door was flung open, and his friend Mr. Augustus Storror bustled into the room.

" 'Ullo, Bill!" announced Mr. Storror cheerfully. "Wot you got done up in that parcel— fly-papers?"

Mr. Gutteridge spat viciously into the fireplace.

"It's a paintin'," he said curtly. "A Ole Master, worth I dunno 'ow many thousands o' pounds."

"The devil it is!" said Mr. Storror incredulously. "Let's 'ave a look at it. Rip off his overcoat, mate, an' then you can tell me 'oo you stole 'im from."

Mr. Gutteridge grinned sourly, but complied.

"There you are, Gus, my lad," he said, when the picture at last stood revealed. "A genuine Ole—" his voice tailed off and died away.

On a large sheet of paper, secured with brass-headed pins to a piece of deal, an unpractised hand had scrawled a dreadful caricature of humanity, with a nimbus of dishevelled hair and profuse whiskers. Beneath it was written in sprawling characters: "Uncle Joe. In loving memory."

"Well, I'm damned!" ejaculated the bewildered Mr. Storror.

Mr. Gutteridge fought valiantly against an almost overpowering emotion.

" 'E's a older master than wot I thought 'e was," he said at last, in strangled tones.

12: Tested For Service

J. L. Hornibrook

1862-1934

Examiner (Launceston) 2 Jun 1900

British author; setting is the Boer War

"TROOPER 184B— Marshall!" bawled the sergeant, reading from a slip of paper in his hand.

"Hulloa!" I shouted back, catching at my own name. Judging by his look that Sergeant Connolly had some important communication to make, I hurried across to where he stood.

"What is it?" I asked.

"You're wanted," he answered.

"Who wants me?"

"The chief. You'll find him in his room inside there. Look sharp, my lad; he doesn't like to be kept waiting."

For a raw recruit like myself, who stood somewhat in awe of an ordinary troop sergeant, to be suddenly summoned into the presence of his commanding officer, was rather calculated to knock one off his balance a bit. Knowing that on account of the war the discipline of the force— the Mounted Police— was doubly strict, I began to wonder whether I had already made some slip or other, and was half afraid that I was in for a smart wigging.

I found the chief waiting for me in his room. The moment I entered he ran his eye over me in a very keen and critical manner, as if quietly taking my measure. I may be wrong, but it struck me that this close scrutiny ended rather in may favour.

"I have sent for you," he said, "because I have decided to entrust you with a very important and responsible duty. It will call for tact and resourcefulness on your part, as well as promptness of action at the right moment. I wish to impress upon you also that a slip of any kind may cost you your life. The man you will have to deal with is as daring as he is resolute, and not easily hoodwinked. In other words, a spy!"

A spy! This was something very different from what I had expected. I caught the chief's eye fixed searchingly upon me, as if to see how I took the announcement, so I tried to look as though spy-catching was the simplest thing on earth.

"The matter is briefly this," he went on, after a pause. "Here, in Maritzburg, we are surrounded by secret enemies, in the shape of disloyal Dutch. I have reason to know that they have been in correspondence with the Boer

commander up, at Ladysmith; and if not put a stop to at once, important information may leak out.

"The man who acts as go-between is a member of the Afrikander Bund named Villiers, who has much influence with the Cape Dutch. He is of Dutch extraction himself, but owing to his long residence in the colony might pass for an Englishman anywhere.

"I have received information that this man Villiers is now on his way down from the Mooi River, bringing with him important despatches for the Dutch here. For certain reasons, which I need not go into, we must be very careful how we deal with this gentleman; but one thing is clear and certain— those papers must never reach their destination."

He paused once more, and looked me straight in the face again. I began to see how the land lay. In plain language, I was to waylay Meinheer Villiers before he gained the town, and do a bit of highway robbery.

"You must start off at once," continued the chief, "lie in wait for the man on the veldt, and get hold of those despatches, however you manage it. You must contrive to do so also without inflicting any serious injury upon the bearer. If you acquit yourself well in this matter, it is probable that you will be sent up to, the front to join ,our detachment there; if not—"

He did not trouble to complete the sentence, but I could see plainly enough that unless I came out of this affair with flying colours I would be labelled one of the "incompetents," and left behind to cool my heels in Maritzburg.

The chief gave me a description of my man, told me I had better hang around out near Herman Hill until he came along, and again impressed upon me that if I found it necessary to employ force I was to refrain from disabling my opponent or injuring him to any extent.

"And, by the way," he added, just as I was leaving the room, "if you get hold of the papers, make sure they are the right ones. Don't be tricked into walking off with a dummy packet."

"Very good sir," I answered, "I'll see to that."

There was little of the trooper about me as I rode out from the town half an hour later. I had laid aside my uniform, for I knew that the sight of it would make my friend Villiers fight shy of me at once, and I wanted, above all things, to take him off his guard.

Herman Hill lay about ten or twelve miles out on the veldt. A very lonely and deserted place it was, too, for it was right away from the beaten track across the plain. When I reached my destination the first thing I did was to make sure of my ground. A little to the north of the hill I came upon a nullah, with shelving banks, which cut right across the plain, and which it was impossible to detect until one was close upon it. It was too wide for any horse but a regular steeple-

chaser to take at a leap, though it was easy enough to scramble down one side and up the other.

Beyond there was an open expanse, about a mile or so across, and then the ground was broken up into scattered kopjes. I rode on until I got in among these kopjes; and there lay in wait.

As the afternoon wore on I grew uncommonly restless and fidgety. Once the sun went down the brief African twilight would shade away rapidly into night, and Villiers might easily slip through my fingers in the darkness.

I was riding slowly back between the kopjes, brooding over the whole business, when— whew!— I came plumb upon a horseman sitting quietly in his saddle behind one of the hillocks, in the very act of lighting his pipe.

It was Villiers without a doubt; but—

One glance at him, one swift survey of the man, was enough to knock all the conceit out of me, and send my heart right away down to my boots! Instead of the skulking, slouching Dutchman I had expected to find, I beheld a great, broad-shouldered, powerful fellow— six feet two if he was an inch— who looked as if he could pluck me out of the saddle and snap me across his knee with the greatest ease. There was something so grim and uncompromising about him, too, and he sat his horse in such a straight, soldierly manner that really I could only stare at him in blank and speechless surprise. Here was a nice handful for me to tackle!

He withdrew the match from his pipe the moment he caught sight of me, and, holding it suspended in the air, scowled at me from under his heavy brows. So intent was he upon scrutinising me that the flame reached his fingers before he was aware of it, which drew a growl from him as he cast the match hastily to the ground.

"Ugh." he said, taking the pipe from his mouth, and gazing at it rather ruefully. "The last match I've got!"

"I can help you there," I slipped in, glad to get an opening with him; and diving my hand into my pocket, I pulled out my box of vestas. Dropping the match, he puffed away contentedly at his pipe, and appeared more disposed towards conversation.

"Bound for Maritzburg?" I asked, as a sort of leading question.

"Thereabouts," was his cautious answer.

"Any news from the front?"

"Not that I've heard of."

"You've been up in that direction, though, I suppose?"

He shot a keen, suspicious glance at me.

"What makes you think so?" he asked sharply.

"Well, that nag of yours looks as if he had done a pretty stiff journey," I answered, eyeing the great, raw-boned creature he bestrode. "You haven't spared him much, wherever you came from."

"He isn't one of your showy' animals," he said, glancing down at the brute, "but he's as hard as nails, and a famous stayer. He can do his 50 or 60 miles a day without turning a hair."

"Pooh!" I retorted, "this day's work has pretty well crippled him. He's quite done up as it is."

This was touching the Dutchman on a sore point, for I saw that he prided himself a bit upon this nag of his. He flashed round upon me at once.

"Look here, my friend," he said, putting a strong constraint upon himself, "I'd back this nag of mine, such as he is, against that flashy animal of yours any day."

"Would you?" I cried, jumping at the suggestion, for I was getting him on the right tack at last.

"Ay, that I would."

"Very well; we can soon put that to the test," I answered. I rode on towards the stretch of open ground that lay between us and Herman Hill.

"You see that hill yonder?" I said, pointing across the plain. "I'll lay a sovereign that I get to it a good hundred yards ahead of you."

"Done!" he cried. "You have the advantage of me in weight," he remarked, taking a tight grip on his reins, "but no matter. Who gives the word?"

"You can, if you like."

"All right, then. Look out! One— two— three— off."

As we thundered along side by side I was so carried away by the excitement of that wild dash across the veldt that I nearly lost sight completely of the object I had in view. I remembered it just in time, however, and when we had got about two-thirds of the way across I took a stealthy pull on the reins.

When Villiers saw that he was gaining ground he threw a swift glance back over his shoulder, and gave vent to his delight in a wild whoop. Then' he redoubled his efforts, as if determined to shake me off completely. But his triumph was short lived. A little further on he suddenly hurled himself back in the saddle, and tugged with all his might and main, at the reins. As I had foreseen, he found himself confronted by the nullah which I have already mentioned. He pulled up almost on the very brink; but before he could get out of the way I had cannoned into him, and sent horse and man down into the hollow. Villiers' great strength enabled him to keep the animal from rolling head over heels, but the brute toppled on its nose for all that. The rider was sent flying off, and lay at the bottom as if stunned by the fall. Now was my chance. I had planned the whole thing beforehand, of course, and unless I looked sharp, my little scheme might sadly miscarry.

In an instant I was off my horse, and scrambled down into the nullah. I got my arms around the Dutchman as if to raise him up, but in doing so slipped my hand into his breast pocket— where I fancied I had noticed a suspicious-looking bulge— and pulled out a bulky packet. Passing my hand rapidly over his body to make sure it was the only one he had about him, I made what haste I could to clear out. Just as I got one foot in the stirrup, Villiers pulled himself together and sat up. The first thing he did was to clap his hand to his breast pocket, and when he found the papers gone— well, he simply roared like a bull!

"All right, old chap," I called down to him. "It was a good race; but it was I who won after all, you see."

The next moment I was clattering away from the spot, leaving him sitting there to bemoan his loss.

I think I did the ride back to Maritzburg in record time, for I was quite elated with my success, and much disposed to congratulate myself upon the way I had pulled this affair off. It was with a proud step and head in the air that I 'marched into the presence of the chief.

"Back already!" he exclaimed, looking at me in some surprise. "Well, have you got the papers?"

For answer I drew the packet from my pocket, and laid it triumphantly on the desk before him.

"Good!" he cried, glancing down at it; but, somewhat to my surprise, he showed no haste to examine the contents.

"How did you secure it?" he added. I told him. "You haven't opened it, I see," he observed.

"No, sir," I answered. "It was the only packet he had about him, so I knew it must be the right one."

"Well, you had better taken, look at it now," he said.

I stared at him.

"Open it," he repeated.

I tore off the cover; and— and— what in the name of all that was wonderful was this?

Each paper I drew out was simply a blank sheet, without a scrap of writing of any kind upon it. Almost the last I came to bore one single line, however, and when I read what was written there I fairly gasped. It was just this:

"*Tested for service at the front*."

I looked up; and there stood the chief, watching me with a most amused smile on his face.

"Well," he said, "do you, begin to understand it?"

"I think I do, sir," I answered. "It was a put-up thing, of course?"

"Exactly," he returned. "We have to make sure that the men we send up to the front, where they are employed as scouts and despatch riders, are capable

of performing their duties in an able and intelligent manner. For that reason we subject them to a preliminary test of this kind. You have made a good start; I have no doubt they will find you a very useful man up there, and that you will prove a credit to the force. "

"But— but that man Villiers, sir?" I hinted, as I prepared to withdraw.

The chief laughed.

"Oh," he said, "that's one of my gruff old, sergeants from Greytown. Kennedy is his name, and he's quite used to acting the part of spy by this time. You'll probably see him in here before long, and I daresay he'll growl a bit at the shaking you gave him."

And so he did. At the same time he did me the justice to admit that I had scored off him neatly.

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13: The Mystery of the Sand-Hills

R. Austin Freeman
1862-1943

Pearson's Magazine Dec 1924
Collected in: *The Puzzle Lock and other stories*, 1927

A Doctor Thorndyke case. Also known as "A Mystery of the Sand-Hills"

I HAVE OCCASIONALLY wondered how often Mystery and Romance present themselves to us ordinary men of affairs only to be passed by without recognition. More often, I suspect, than most of us imagine. The uncanny tendency of my talented friend John Thorndyke to become involved in strange, mysterious and abnormal circumstances has almost become a joke against him. But yet, on reflection, I am disposed to think that his experiences have not differed essentially from those of other men, but that his extraordinary powers of observation and rapid inference have enabled him to detect abnormal elements in what, to ordinary men, appeared to be quite commonplace occurrences. Certainly this was so in the singular Roscoff case, in which, if I had been alone, I should assuredly have seen nothing to merit more than a passing attention.

It happened that on a certain summer morning— it was the fourteenth of August, to be exact— we were discussing this very subject as we walked across the golf-links from Sandwich towards the sea. I was spending a holiday in the old town with my wife, in order that she might paint the ancient streets, and we had induced Thorndyke to come down and stay with us for a few days. This was his last morning, and we had come forth betimes to stroll across the sand-hills to Shellness.

It was a solitary place in those days. When we came off the sand-hills on to the smooth, sandy beach, there was not a soul in sight, and our own footprints were the first to mark the firm strip of sand between high-water mark and the edge of the quiet surf.

We had walked a hundred yards or so when Thorndyke stopped and looked down at the dry sand above tide-marks and then along the wet beach.

'Would that be a shrimper?' he cogitated, referring to some impressions of bare feet in the sand. 'If so, he couldn't have come from Pegwell, for the River Stour bars the way. But he came out of the sea and seems to have made straight for the sand-hills.'

'Then he probably was a shrimper,' said I, not deeply interested.

'Yet,' said Thorndyke, 'it was an odd time for a shrimper to be at work.'

'What was an odd time?' I demanded. 'When was he at work?'

'He came out of the sea at this place,' Thorndyke replied, glancing at his watch, 'at about half-past eleven last night, or from that to twelve.'

'Good Lord, Thorndyke!' I exclaimed, 'how on earth do you know that?'

'But it is obvious, Anstey,' he replied. 'It is now half-past nine, and it will be high-water at eleven, as we ascertained before we came out. Now, if you look at those footprints on the sand, you see that they stop short— or rather begin— about two-thirds of the distance from high-water mark to the edge of the surf. Since they are visible and distinct, they must have been made after last high-water. But since they do not extend to the water's edge, they must have been made when the tide was going out; and the place where they begin is the place where the edge of the surf was when the footprints were made. But that place is, as we see, about an hour below the high-water mark. Therefore, when the man came out of the sea, the tide had been going down for an hour, roughly. As it is high-water at eleven this morning, it was high-water at about ten-forty last night; and as the man came out of the sea about an hour after high-water, he must have come out at, or about, eleven-forty. Isn't that obvious?'

'Perfectly,' I replied, laughing. 'It is as simple as sucking eggs when you think it out. But how the deuce do you manage always to spot these obvious things at a glance? Most men would have just glanced at those footprints and passed them without a second thought.'

'That,' he replied, 'is a mere matter of habit; the habit of trying to extract the significance of simple appearances. It has become almost automatic with me.'

During our discussion we had been walking forward slowly, straying on to the edge of the sand-hills. Suddenly, in a hollow between the hills, my eye lighted upon a heap of clothes, apparently, to judge by their orderly disposal, those of a bather. Thorndyke also had observed them and we approached together and looked down on them curiously.

'Here is another problem for you,' said I. 'Find the bather. I don't see him anywhere.'

'You won't find him here,' said Thorndyke. 'These clothes have been out all night. Do you see the little spider's web on the boots with a few dewdrops still clinging to it? There has been no dew forming for a good many hours. Let us have a look at the beach.'

We strode out through the loose sand and stiff, reedy grass to the smooth beach, and here we could plainly see a line of prints of naked feet leading straight down to the sea, but ending abruptly about two-thirds of the way to the water's edge.

'This looks like your nocturnal shrimper,' said I. 'He seems to have gone into the sea here and come out at the other place. But if they are the same footprints, he must have forgotten to dress before he went home. It is a quaint affair.'

'It is a most remarkable affair,' Thorndyke agreed; 'and if the footprints are not the same it will be still more inexplicable.'

He produced from his pocket a small spring tape-measure with which he carefully took the lengths of two of the most distinct footprints and the length of the stride. Then we walked back along the beach to the other set of tracks, two of which he measured in the same manner.

'Apparently they are the same,' he said, putting away his tape; 'indeed, they could hardly be otherwise. But the mystery is, what has become of the man? He couldn't have gone away without his clothes, unless he is a lunatic, which his proceedings rather suggest. There is just the possibility that he went into the sea again and was drowned. Shall we walk along towards Shellness and see if we can find any further traces?'

We walked nearly half a mile along the beach, but the smooth surface of the sand was everywhere unbroken. At length we turned to retrace our steps; and at this moment I observed two men advancing across the sand-hills. By the time we had reached the mysterious heap of garments they were quite near, and, attracted no doubt by the intentness with which we were regarding the clothes, they altered their course to see what we were looking at. As they approached, I recognized one of them as a barrister named Hallett, a neighbour of mine in the Temple, whom I had already met in the town, and we exchanged greetings.

'What is the excitement?' he asked, looking at the heap of clothes and then glancing along the deserted beach; 'and where is the owner of the togs? I don't see him anywhere.'

'That is the problem,' said I. 'He seems to have disappeared.'

'Gad!' exclaimed Hallett, 'if he has gone home without his clothes, he'll create a sensation in the town! What?'

Here the other man, who carried a set of golf clubs, stooped over the clothes with a look of keen interest.

'I believe I recognize these things, Hallett; in fact, I am sure I do. That waistcoat, for instance. You must have noticed that waistcoat. I saw you playing with the chap a couple of days ago. Tall, clean-shaven, dark fellow. Temporary member, you know. What was his name? Popoff, or something like that?'

'Roscoff,' said Hallett. 'Yes, by Jove, I believe you are right. And now I come to think of it, he mentioned to me that he sometimes came up here for a swim. He said he particularly liked a paddle by moonlight, and I told him he was a fool to run the risk of bathing in a lonely place like this, especially at night.'

'Well, that is what he seems to have done,' said Thorndyke, 'for these clothes have certainly been here all night, as you can see by that spider's web.'

'Then he has come to grief, poor beggar!' said Hallett; 'probably got carried away by the current. There is a devil of a tide here on the flood.'

He started to walk towards the beach, and the other man, dropping his clubs, followed.

'Yes,' said Hallett, 'that is what has happened. You can see his footprints plainly enough going down to the sea; but there are no tracks coming back.'

'There are some tracks of bare feet coming out of the sea farther up the beach,' said I, 'which seem to be his.'

Hallett shook his head. 'They can't be his,' he said, 'for it is obvious that he never did come back. Probably they are the tracks of some shrimper. The question is, what are we to do? Better take his things to the dormy-house and then let the police know what has happened.'

We went back and began to gather up the clothes, each of us taking one or two articles.

'You were right, Morris,' said Hallett, as he picked up the shirt. 'Here's his name, "P. Roscoff," and I see it is on the vest and the shorts, too. And I recognize the stick now— not that that matters, as the clothes are marked.'

On our way across the links to the dormy-house mutual introductions took place. Morris was a London solicitor, and both he and Hallett knew Thorndyke by name.

'The coroner will have an expert witness,' Hallett remarked as we entered the house. 'Rather a waste in a simple case like this. We had better put the things in here.'

He opened the door of a small room furnished with a good-sized table and a set of lockers, into one of which he inserted a key.

'Before we lock them up,' said Thorndyke, 'I suggest that we make and sign a list of them and of the contents of the pockets to put with them.'

'Very well,' agreed Hallett. 'You know the ropes in these cases. I'll write down the descriptions, if you will call them out.'

Thorndyke looked over the collection and first enumerated the articles: a tweed jacket and trousers, light, knitted wool waistcoat, black and yellow stripes, blue cotton shirt, net vest and shorts, marked in ink 'P. Roscoff,' brown merino socks, brown shoes, tweed cap, and a walking-stick— a mottled Malacca cane with a horn crooked handle. When Hallett had written down this list, Thorndyke laid the clothes on the table and began to empty the pockets, one at a time, dictating the descriptions of the articles to Hallett while Morris took them from him and laid them on a sheet of newspaper. In the jacket pockets were a handkerchief, marked 'P. R.'; a lettercase containing a few stamps, one or two hotel bills and local tradesmen's receipts, and some visiting-cards inscribed 'Mr Peter Roscoff, Bell Hotel, Sandwich'; a leather cigarette-case, a 3B pencil fitted with a point-protector, and a fragment of what Thorndyke decided to be vine charcoal.

'That lot is not very illuminating,' remarked Morris, peering into the pockets of the letter-case. 'No letter or anything indicating his permanent address. However, that isn't our concern.' He laid aside the letter-case, and picking up a pocket-knife that Thorndyke had just taken from the trousers pocket, examined it curiously. 'Queer knife, that,' he remarked. 'Steel blade— mighty sharp, too— nail file and an ivory blade. Silly arrangement, it seems. A paper-knife is more convenient carried loose, and you don't want a handle to it.'

'Perhaps it was meant for a fruit-knife,' suggested Hallett, adding it to the list and glancing at a little heap of silver coins that Thorndyke had just laid down. 'I wonder,' he added, 'what has made that money turn so black. Looks as if he had been taking some medicine containing sulphur. What do you think, doctor?'

'It is quite a probable explanation,' replied Thorndyke, 'though we haven't the means of testing it. But you notice that this vesta-box from the other pocket is quite bright, which is rather against your theory.'

He held out a little silver box bearing the engraved monogram 'P.R.,' the burnished surface of which contrasted strongly with the dull brownish-black of the coins. Hallett looked at it with an affirmative grunt, and having entered it in his list and added a bunch of keys and a watch from the waistcoat pocket, laid down his pen.

'That's the lot, is it?' said he, rising and beginning to gather up the clothes. 'My word! Look at the sand on the table! Isn't it astonishing how saturated with sand one's clothes become after a day on the links here? When I undress at night, the bath-room floor is like the bottom of a bird-cage. Shall I put the things in the locker now?'

'I think,' said Thorndyke, 'that, as I may have to give evidence, I should like to look them over before you put them away.'

Hallett grinned. 'There's going to be some expert evidence after all,' he said. 'Well, fire away, and let me know when you have finished. I am going to smoke a cigarette outside.'

With this, he and Morris sauntered out, and I thought it best to go with them, though I was a little curious as to my colleague's object in examining these derelicts. However, my curiosity was not entirely balked, for my friends went no farther than the little garden that surrounded the house, and from the place where we stood I was able to look in through the window and observe Thorndyke's proceedings.

Very methodical they were. First he laid on the table a sheet of newspaper and on this deposited the jacket, which he examined carefully all over, picking some small object off the inside near the front, and giving special attention to a thick smear of paint which I had noticed on the left cuff. Then, with his spring tape he measured the sleeves and other principal dimensions. Finally, holding the jacket upside down, he beat it gently with his stick, causing a shower of sand

to fall on the paper. He then laid the jacket aside, and, taking from his pocket one or two seed-envelopes (which I believe he always carried), very carefully shot the sand from the paper into one of them and wrote a few words on it— presumably the source of the sand— and similarly disposing of the small object that he had picked off the surface.

This rather odd procedure was repeated with the other garments— a fresh sheet of newspaper being used for each— and with the socks, shoes, and cap. The latter he examined minutely, especially as to the inside, from which he picked out two or three small objects, which I could not see, but assumed to be hairs. Even the walking-stick was inspected and measured, and the articles from the pockets scrutinized afresh, particularly the curious pocket-knife, the ivory blade of which he examined on both sides through his lens.

Hallett and Morris glanced in at him from time to time with indulgent smiles, and the former remarked:

'I like the hopeful enthusiasm of the real pukka expert, and the way he refuses to admit the existence of the ordinary and commonplace. I wonder what he has found out from those things. But here he is. Well, doctor, what's the verdict? Was it temporary insanity or misadventure?'

Thorndyke shook his head. 'The inquiry is adjourned pending the production of fresh evidence,' he replied, adding: 'I have folded the clothes up and put all the effects together in a paper parcel, excepting the stick.'

When Hallett had deposited the derelicts in the locker, he came out and looked across the links with an air of indecision.

'I suppose,' said he, 'we ought to notify the police. I'll do that. When do you think the body is likely to wash up, and where?'

'It is impossible to say,' replied Thorndyke. 'The set of the current is towards the Thames, but the body might wash up anywhere along the coast. A case is recorded of a bather drowned off Brighton whose body came up six weeks later at Walton-on-the-Naze. But that was quite exceptional. I shall send the coroner and the Chief Constable a note with my address, and I should think you had better do the same. And that is all that we can do, until we get the summons for the inquest, if there ever is one.'

To this we all agreed; and as the morning was now spent, we walked back together across the links to the town, where we encountered my wife returning homeward with her sketching kit. This Thorndyke and I took possession of, and having parted from Hallett and Morris opposite the Barbican, we made our way to our lodgings in quest of lunch. Naturally, the events of the morning were related to my wife and discussed by us all, but I noted that Thorndyke made no reference to his inspection of the clothes, and accordingly I said nothing about the matter before my wife; and no opportunity of opening the subject occurred

until the evening, when I accompanied him to the station. Then, as we paced the platform while waiting for his train, I put my question:

'By the way, did you extract any information from those garments? I saw you going through them very thoroughly.'

'I got a suggestion from them,' he replied; 'but it is such an odd one that I hardly like to mention it. Taking the appearances at their face value, the suggestion was that the clothes were not all those of the same man. There seemed to be traces of two men, one of whom appeared to belong to this district, while the other would seem to have been associated with the eastern coast of Thanet between Ramsgate and Margate, and by preference, on the scale of probabilities, to Dumpton or Broadstairs.'

'How on earth did you arrive at the localities?' I asked.

'Principally,' he replied, 'by the peculiarities of the sand which fell from the garments and which was not the same in all of them. You see, Anstey,' he continued, 'sand is analogous to dust. Both consist of minute fragments detached from larger masses; and just as, by examining microscopically the dust of a room, you can ascertain the colour and material of the carpets, curtains, furniture coverings, and other textiles, detached particles of which form the dust of that room, so, by examining sand, you can judge of the character of the cliffs, rocks, and other large masses that occur in the locality, fragments of which become ground off by the surf and incorporated in the sand of the beach. Some of the sand from these clothes is very characteristic and will probably be still more so when I examine it under the microscope.'

'But,' I objected, 'isn't there a fallacy in that line of reasoning? Might not one man have worn the different garments at different times and in different places?'

'That is certainly a possibility that has to be borne in mind,' he replied. 'But here comes my train. We shall have to adjourn this discussion until you come back to the mill.'

As a matter of fact, the discussion was never resumed, for, by the time that I came back to 'the mill,' the affair had faded from my mind, and the accumulations of grist monopolized my attention; and it is probable that it would have passed into complete oblivion but for the circumstance of its being revived in a very singular manner, which was as follows.

One afternoon about the middle of October my old friend, Mr Brodribb, a well-known solicitor, called to give me some verbal instructions. When we had finished our business, he said:

'I've got a client waiting outside, whom I am taking up to introduce to Thorndyke. You'd better come along with us.'

'What is the nature of your client's case?' I asked.

'Hanged if I know,' chuckled Brodribb. 'He won't say. That's why I am taking him to our friend. I've never seen Thorndyke stumped yet, but I think this case will put the lid on him. Are you coming?'

'I am, most emphatically,' said I, 'if your client doesn't object.'

'He's not going to be asked,' said Brodribb. 'He'll think you are part of the show. Here he is.'

In my outer office we found a gentlemanly, middle-aged man to whom Brodribb introduced me, and whom he hustled down the stairs and up King's Bench Walk to Thorndyke's chambers. There we found my colleague earnestly studying a will with the aid of a watchmaker's eye-glass, and Brodribb opened the proceedings without ceremony.

'I've brought a client of mine, Mr Capes, to see you, Thorndyke. He has a little problem that he wants you to solve.'

Thorndyke bowed to the client and then asked:

'What is the nature of the problem?'

'Ah!' said Brodribb, with a mischievous twinkle, 'that's what you've got to find out. Mr Capes is a somewhat reticent gentleman.'

Thorndyke cast a quick look at the client and from him to the solicitor. It was not the first time that old Brodribb's high spirits had overflowed in the form of a 'leg-pull,' though Thorndyke had no more whole-hearted admirer than the shrewd, facetious old lawyer.

Mr Capes smiled a deprecating smile. 'It isn't quite so bad as that,' he said. 'But I really can't give you much information. It isn't mine to give. I am afraid of telling some one else's secrets, if I say very much.'

'Of course you mustn't do that,' said Thorndyke. 'But I suppose you can indicate in general terms the nature of your difficulty and the kind of help you want from us.'

'I think I can,' Mr Capes replied. 'At any rate, I will try. My difficulty is that a certain person with whom I wish to communicate has disappeared in what appears to me to be a rather remarkable manner. When I last heard from him, he was staying at a certain seaside resort and he stated in his letter that he was returning on the following day to his rooms in London. A few days later, I called at his rooms and found that he had not yet returned. But his luggage, which he had sent on independently, had arrived on the day which he had mentioned. So it is evident that he must have left his seaside lodgings. But from that day to this I have had no communication from him, and he has never returned to his rooms nor written to his landlady.'

'About how long ago was this?' Thorndyke asked.

'It is just about two months since I heard from him.'

'You don't wish to give the name of the seaside resort where he was staying?'

'I think I had better not,' answered Mr Capes. 'There are circumstances— they don't concern me, but they do concern him very much— which seem to make it necessary for me to say as little as possible.'

'And there is nothing further that you can tell us?'

'I am afraid not, excepting that, if I could get into communication with him, I could tell him of something very much to his advantage and which might prevent him from doing something which it would be much better that he should not do.'

Thorndyke cogitated profoundly while Brodribb watched him with undisguised enjoyment. Presently my colleague looked up and addressed our secretive client.

'Did you ever play the game of 'Clumps,' Mr Capes? It is a somewhat legal form of game in which one player asks questions of the others, who are required to answer 'yes' or 'no' in the proper witness-box style.'

'I know the game,' said Capes, looking a little puzzled, 'but— '

'Shall we try a round or two?' asked Thorndyke, with an unmoved countenance. 'You don't wish to make any statements, but if I ask you certain specific questions, will you answer 'yes' or 'no'?'

Mr Capes reflected awhile. At length he said:

'I am afraid I can't commit myself to a promise. Still, if you like to ask a question or two, I will answer them if I can.'

'Very well,' said Thorndyke, 'then, as a start, supposing I suggest that the date of the letter that you received was the thirteenth of August? What do you say? Yes or no?'

Mr Capes sat bolt upright and stared at Thorndyke open-mouthed.

'How on earth did you guess that?' he exclaimed in an astonished tone. 'It's most extraordinary! But you are right. It was dated the thirteenth.'

'Then,' said Thorndyke, 'as we have fixed the time we will have a try at the place. What do you say if I suggest that the seaside resort was in the neighbourhood of Broadstairs?'

Mr Capes was positively thunderstruck. As he sat gazing at Thorndyke he looked like amazement personified.

'But,' he exclaimed, 'you can't be guessing! You know! You know that he was at Broadstairs. And yet, how could you? I haven't even hinted at who he is.'

'I have a certain man in my mind,' said Thorndyke, 'who may have disappeared from Broadstairs. Shall I suggest a few personal characteristics?'

Mr Capes nodded eagerly and Thorndyke continued:

'If I suggest, for instance, that he was an artist— a painter in oil'— Capes nodded again— 'that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments?'

'Yes,' said Capes. 'Unnecessarily so in my opinion, and I am an artist myself. What else?'

'That he worked with his palette in his right hand and held his brush with his left?'

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed Capes, half-rising from his chair; 'and what was he like?'

'By gum,' murmured Brodribb, 'we haven't stumped him after all.'

Evidently we had not, for he proceeded:

'As to his physical characteristics, I suggest that he was a shortish man— about five feet seven— rather stout, fair hair, slightly bald and wearing a rather large and ragged moustache.'

Mr Capes was astounded— and so was I, for that matter— and for some moments there was a silence, broken only by old Brodribb, who sat chuckling softly and rubbing his hands. At length Mr Capes said:

'You have described him exactly, but I needn't tell you that. What I do not understand at all is how you knew that I was referring to this particular man, seeing that I mentioned no name. By the way, sir, may I ask when you saw him last?'

'I have no reason to suppose,' replied Thorndyke, 'that I have ever seen him at all;' an answer that reduced Mr Capes to a state of stupefaction and brought our old friend Brodribb to the verge of apoplexy. 'This man,' Thorndyke continued, 'is a purely hypothetical individual whom I have described from certain traces left by him. I have reason to believe that he left Broadstairs on the fourteenth of August and I have certain opinions as to what became of him thereafter. But a few more details would be useful, and I shall continue my interrogation. Now this man sent his luggage on separately. That suggests a possible intention of breaking his journey to London. What do you say?'

'I don't know,' replied Capes, 'but I think it probable.'

'I suggest that he broke his journey for the purpose of holding an interview with some other person.'

'I cannot say,' answered Capes: 'but if he did break his journey it would probably be for that purpose.'

'And supposing that interview to have taken place, would it be likely to be an amicable interview?'

'I am afraid not. I suspect that my— er— acquaintance might have made certain proposals which would have been unacceptable, but which he might have been able to enforce. However, that is only surmise,' Capes added hastily. 'I really know nothing more than I have told you, excepting the missing man's name, and that I would rather not mention.'

'It is not material,' said Thorndyke, 'at least, not at present. If it should become essential, I will let you know.'

'M— yes,' said Mr Capes. 'But you were saying that you had certain opinions as to what has become of this person.'

'Yes,' Thorndyke replied; 'speculative opinions. But they will have to be verified. If they turn out to be correct— or incorrect either— I will let you know in the course of a few days. Has Mr Brodribb your address?'

'He has; but you had better have it, too.'

He produced his card, and, after an ineffectual effort to extract a statement from Thorndyke, took his departure.

THE THIRD ACT of this singular drama opened in the same setting as the first, for the following Sunday morning found my colleague and me following the path from Sandwich to the sea. But we were not alone this time. At our side marched Major Robertson, the eminent dog-trainer, and behind him trotted one of his superlatively educated fox-hounds.

We came out on the shore at the same point as on the former occasion, and, turning towards Shellness, walked along the smooth sand with a careful eye on the not very distinctive landmarks. At length Thorndyke halted.

'This is the place,' said he. 'I fixed it in my mind by that distant tree, which coincides with the chimney of that cottage on the marshes. The clothes lay in that hollow between the two big sand-hills.'

We advanced to the spot, but, as a hollow is useless as a landmark, Thorndyke ascended the nearest sand-hill and stuck his stick in the summit and tied his handkerchief to the handle.

'That,' said he, 'will serve as a centre which we can keep in sight, and if we describe a series of gradually widening concentric circles round it, we shall cover the whole ground completely.'

'How far do you propose to go?' asked the major.

'We must be guided by the appearance of the ground,' replied Thorndyke. 'But the circumstances suggest that if there is anything buried, it can't be very far from where the clothes were laid. And it is pretty certain to be in a hollow.'

The major nodded; and when he had attached a long leash to the dog's collar, we started, at first skirting the base of the sand-hill, and then, guided by our own footmarks in the loose sand, gradually increasing the distance from the high mound, above which Thorndyke's handkerchief fluttered in the light breeze. Thus we continued, walking slowly, keeping close to the previously made circle of footprints and watching the dog; who certainly did a vast amount of sniffing, but appeared to let his mind run unduly on the subject of rabbits.

In this way half an hour was consumed, and I was beginning to wonder whether we were going after all to draw a blank, when the dog's demeanour underwent a sudden change. At the moment we were crossing a range of high sand hills, covered with stiff, reedy grass and stunted gorse, and before us lay a deep hollow, naked of vegetation and presenting a bare, smooth surface of the characteristic greyish-yellow sand. On the side of the hill the dog checked, and,

with upraised muzzle, began to sniff the air with a curiously suspicious expression, clearly unconnected with the rabbit question. On this, the major unfastened the leash, and the dog, left to his own devices, put his nose to the ground and began rapidly to cast to and fro, zig-zagging down the side of the hill and growing every moment more excited. In the same sinuous manner he proceeded across the hollow until he reached a spot near the middle; and here he came to a sudden stop and began to scratch up the sand with furious eagerness.

'It's a find, sure enough!' exclaimed the major, nearly as excited as his pupil; and, as he spoke, he ran down the hill-side, followed by me and Thorndyke, who, as he reached the bottom, drew from his 'poacher's pocket' a large fern-trowel in a leather sheath. It was not a very efficient digging implement, but it threw up the loose sand faster than the scratchings of the dog.

It was easy ground to excavate. Working at the spot that the dog had located, Thorndyke had soon hollowed out a small cavity some eighteen inches deep. Into the bottom of this he thrust the pointed blade of the big trowel. Then he paused and looked round at the major and me, who were craning eagerly over the little pit.

'There is something there,' said he. 'Feel the handle of the trowel.'

I grasped the wooden handle, and, working it gently up and down, was aware of a definite but somewhat soft resistance. The major verified my observation and then Thorndyke resumed his digging, widening the pit and working with increased caution. Ten minutes' more careful excavation brought into view a recognizable shape— a shoulder and upper arm; and following the lines of this, further diggings disclosed the form of a head and shoulders plainly discernible though still shrouded in sand. Finally, with the point of the trowel and a borrowed handkerchief— mine— the adhering sand was cleared away; and then, from the bottom of the deep, funnel-shaped hole, there looked up at us, with a most weird and horrible effect, the discoloured face of a man.

In that face, the passing weeks had wrought inevitable changes, on which I need not dwell. But the features were easily recognizable, and I could see at once that the man corresponded completely with Thorndyke's description. The cheeks were full; the hair on the temples was of a pale, yellowish brown; a straggling, fair moustache covered the mouth; and, when the sand had been sufficiently cleared away, I could see a small, tonsure-like bald patch near the back of the crown. But I could see something more than this. On the left temple, just behind the eyebrow, was a ragged, shapeless wound such as might have been made by a hammer.

'That turns into certainty what we have already surmised,' said Thorndyke, gently pressing the scalp around the wound. 'It must have killed him instantly. The skull is smashed in like an egg-shell. And this is undoubtedly the weapon,'

he added, drawing out of the sand beside the body a big, hexagon-headed screw-bolt, 'very prudently buried with the body. And that is all that really concerns us. We can leave the police to finish the disinterment; but you notice, Anstey, that the corpse is nude with the exception of the vest and probably the pants. The shirt has disappeared. Which is exactly what we should have expected.'

Slowly, but with the feeling of something accomplished, we took our way back to the town, having collected Thorndyke's stick on the way. Presently, the major left us, to look up a friend at the club house on the links. As soon as we were alone, I put in a demand for an elucidation.

'I see the general trend of your investigations,' said I, 'but I can't imagine how they yielded so much detail; as to the personal appearance of this man, for instance.'

'The evidence in this case,' he replied, 'was analogous to circumstantial evidence. It depended on the cumulative effect of a number of facts, each separately inconclusive, but all pointing to the same conclusion. Shall I run over the data in their order and in accordance with their connections?'

I gave an emphatic affirmative, and he continued:

'We begin, naturally, with the first fact, which is, of course, the most interesting and important; the fact which arrests attention, which shows that something has to be explained and possibly suggests a line of inquiry. You remember that I measured the footprints in the sand for comparison with the other footprints. Then I had the dimensions of the feet of the presumed bather. But as soon as I looked at the shoes which purported to be those of that bather, I felt a conviction that his feet would never go into them.

'Now, that was a very striking fact— if it really was a fact— and it came on top of another fact hardly less striking. That bather had gone into the sea; and at a considerable distance he had unquestionably come out again. There could be no possible doubt. In foot-measurements and length of stride the two sets of tracks were identical; and there were no other tracks. That man had come ashore and he had remained ashore. But yet he had not put on his clothes. He couldn't have gone away naked; but, obviously he was not there. As a criminal lawyer, you must admit that there was prima facie evidence of something very abnormal and probably criminal.

'On our way to the dormy-house, I carried the stick in the same hand as my own and noted that it was very little shorter. Therefore it was a tall man's stick. Apparently, then, the stick did not belong to the shoes, but to the man who had made the footprints. Then, when we came to the dormy-house, another striking fact presented itself. You remember that Hallett commented on the quantity of sand that fell from the clothes on to the table. I am astonished that he did not notice the very peculiar character of that sand. It was perfectly unlike the sand

which would fall from his own clothes. The sand on the sand-hills is dune sand—wind-borne sand, or, as the legal term has it, aeolian sand; and it is perfectly characteristic. As it has been carried by the wind, it is necessarily fine. The grains are small; and as the action of the wind sorts them out, they are extremely uniform in size. Moreover, by being continually blown about and rubbed together, they become rounded by mutual attrition. And then dune sand is nearly pure sand, composed of grains of silica unmixed with other substances.

'Beach sand is quite different. Much of it is half-formed, freshly-broken-down silica and is often very coarse; and, as I pointed out at the time, it is mixed with all sorts of foreign substances derived from masses in the neighbourhood. This particular sand was loaded with black and white particles, of which the white were mostly chalk, and the black particles of coal. Now there is very little chalk in the Shellness sand, as there are no cliffs quite near, and chalk rapidly disappears from sand by reason of its softness; and there is no coal.'

'Where does the coal come from?' I asked.

'Principally from the Goodwins,' he replied. 'It is derived from the cargoes of colliers whose wrecks are embedded in those sands, and from the bunkers of wrecked steamers. This coal sinks down through the seventy odd feet of sand and at last works out at the bottom, where it drifts slowly across the floor of the sea in a north-westerly direction until some easterly gale throws it up on the Thanet shore between Ramsgate and Foreness Point. Most of it comes up at Dumpton and Broadstairs, where you may see the poor people, in the winter, gathering coal pebbles to feed their fires.

'This sand, then, almost certainly came from the Thanet coast; but the missing man, Roscoff, had been staying in Sandwich, playing golf on the sand-hills. This was another striking discrepancy, and it made me decide to examine the clothes exhaustively, garment by garment. I did so; and this is what I found.

'The jacket, trousers, socks and shoes were those of a shortish, rather stout man, as shown by measurements, and the cap was his, since it was made of the same cloth as the jacket and trousers.

'The waistcoat, shirt, underclothes and stick were those of a tall man.

'The garments, socks and shoes of the short man were charged with Thanet beach sand, and contained no dune sand, excepting the cap, which might have fallen off on the sand-hills.

'The waistcoat was saturated with dune sand and contained no beach sand, and a little dune sand was obtained from the shirt and undergarments. That is to say, that the short man's clothes contained beach sand only, while the tall man's clothes contained only dune sand.

'The short man's clothes were all unmarked; the tall man's clothes were either marked or conspicuously recognizable, as the waistcoat and also the stick.

'The garments of the short man which had been left were those that could not have been worn by a tall man without attracting instant attention and the shoes could not have been put on at all; whereas the garments of the short man which had disappeared— the waistcoat, shirt and underclothes— were those that could have been worn by a tall man without attracting attention. The obvious suggestion was that the tall man had gone off in the short man's shirt and waistcoat but otherwise in his own clothes.

'And now as to the personal characteristics of the short man. From the cap I obtained five hairs. They were all blonde, and two of them were of the peculiar, atrophic, "point of exclamation" type that grow at the margin of a bald area. Therefore he was a fair man and partially bald. On the inside of the jacket, clinging to the rough tweed, I found a single long, thin, fair moustache hair, which suggested a long, soft moustache. The edge of the left cuff was thickly marked with oil-paint— not a single smear, but an accumulation such as a painter picks up when he reaches with his brush hand across a loaded palette. The suggestion— not very conclusive— was that he was an oil-painter and left-handed. But there was strong confirmation. There was an artist's pencil— 3B— and a stump of vine charcoal such as an oil-painter might carry. The silver coins in his pocket were blackened with sulphide as they would be if a piece of artist's soft, vulcanized rubber has been in the pocket with them. And there was the pocket-knife. It contained a sharp steel pencil-blade, a charcoal file and an ivory palette-blade; and that palette-blade had been used by a left-handed man.'

'How did you arrive at that?' I asked.

'By the bevels worn at the edges,' he replied. 'An old palette-knife used by a right-handed man shows a bevel of wear on the under side of the left-hand edge and the upper side of the right-hand edge; in the case of a left-handed man the wear shows on the under side of the right-hand edge and the upper side of the left-hand edge. This being an ivory blade, showed the wear very distinctly and proved conclusively that the user was left-handed; and as an ivory palette-knife is used only by fastidiously careful painters for such pigments as the cadmiums, which might be discoloured by a steel blade, one was justified in assuming that he was somewhat fastidious as to his pigments.'

As I listened to Thorndyke's exposition I was profoundly impressed. His conclusions, which had sounded like mere speculative guesses, were, I now realized, based upon an analysis of the evidence as careful and as impartial as the summing up of a judge. And these conclusions he had drawn instantaneously from the appearances of things that had been before my eyes all the time and from which I had learned nothing.

'What do you suppose is the meaning of the affair?' I asked presently. 'What was the motive of the murder?'

'We can only guess,' he replied. 'But, interpreting Capes' hints, I should suspect that our artist friend was a blackmailer; that he had come over here to squeeze Roscoff— perhaps not for the first time— and that his victim lured him out on the sand-hills for a private talk and then took the only effective means of ridding himself of his persecutor. That is my view of the case; but, of course, it is only surmise.'

Surmise as it was, however, it turned out to be literally correct. At the inquest Capes had to tell all that he knew; which was uncommonly little, though no one was able to add to it. The murdered man, Joseph Bertrand, had fastened on Roscoff and made a regular income by blackmailing him. That much Capes knew; and he knew that the victim had been in prison and that that was the secret. But who Roscoff was and what was his real name— for Roscoff was apparently a *nom de guerre*— he had no idea. So he could not help the police. The murderer had got clear away and there was no hint as to where to look for him; and so far as I know, nothing has ever been heard of him since.

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14: Superstition

Mark Hellinger

The Argus (Melbourne) 20 Nov 1937

1903-1947

Mark Hellinger was a New York newspaperman for years, whose daily column was a short-short story; later he became a Hollywood movie producer of film noir such as "They Drive by Night" and "The Naked City".

BUTCH slapped the table vigorously. "I'm tellin ' you, Margie," he said, "that I ain't gonna touch the job if it's got a thirteen in it. And I'm tellin' it to you right to your kisser. No thirteens for Butch Muggins."

Margie nodded in complete agreement. "Listen, Butch," she returned earnestly, "you're my guy, and I'm screwy about you. You got a hunch on that thirteen stuff, and I'd be the last dame in the world to cross that hunch. So let's get down to business, 'cause we sure need the dough."

The man rubbed his chin. Margie was right about the dough angle. They needed money; needed it badly. But Butch Muggins was in too tough a spot to be taking many chances. And anything that involved number thirteen was absolute poison to him.

Strange about such things. Here was as tough a gentleman as ever cracked a safe. He had a prison record as long as the speech of a windy Congressman. Right now, he was wanted— oh, decidedly wanted!— by the police of several States. He'd battle a regiment at the drop of a gat. But mention the number thirteen to him, and he'd flee for his very life.

Silly superstition? Certainly it was. But silly superstitions are very handy things to have around. If it wasn't for them, half the world's short story writers would have starved to death long before this.

Butch made an effort to Justify his position. "I know you wouldn't steer me wrong, Margie. You're a good dame, and I like you." He waved a hand. "But, my gawd, I gotta be terrible careful now! "If the cops nail me again, I'll never get out. They ain't gonna get me if I can help it, and you know I ain't afraid of nothin' that walks on this earth." He paused. "The only think that worries me," he went on slowly, "is thirteen."

The girl leaned across the kitchen table. She spoke with quiet conviction.

"Butch," she said, "I'm swearin' to you on my life that there's no thirteen in this thing— and I know there's at least seven grand in the touch. Lefty Dugan gimme the layout, and we slip him two grand before the getaway. That leaves us five gees for ourselves. And I'm tellin' you, Butch, that the job is the biggest cinch in history."

"Maybe." grunted Butch.

"Go on. What's the dope?"

"Here it is," the girl continued swiftly. "The old guy — he's about seventy, Dugan says— lives on the fourth floor of a walk-up flat on West 73rd Street. He—"

"Wait a minute," cried Butch. "Seven and three make ten, and four more adds up to— yeah, that's okay so far. That makes fourteen."

"Sure." Maggie saw she was progressing nicely. "It's just like I told you, honey. Now look: This old guy goes to the bank the day before yesterday and takes out this seven thousand bucks in ready cash.

"He's gonna give it to his daughter for some kind of a payoff, and he don't think nobody knows nothin' about it.

"The dame's comin' down to get the dough on Tuesday mornin'. This is only Sunday night, so you can nail it tomorrow without no trouble at all.

"Dugan gets soused with one of the bank guys the other night, and he learns the whole story. The bank guy is tryin' to point out how foolish some people are in leavin' money around, and Dugan yesses him to death. Then Dugan tells it to me for you— and there we are."

Mr. Butch Muggins eyes were beginning to sparkle.

"I getcha, kid," he observed. "It sounds okay. What's the old guy's name?"

"Ben Green."'

"Ben Green," repeated Butch. He began to count on his fingers. "One, two, three for Ben. Four, five, six, seven, eight for Green. No thirteen there. What's the address of the house?"

"1465," replied Margie.

"1465," mused Butch. "One and four is five— and six is eleven— and five is sixteen. That's okay. No thirteen there. What's tomorrer's date?"

"The ninth."

"Well," said Butch, "then that's okay, too." He shrugged. "When I don't find no thirteens standin' in my way, baby, I'm a guy who's ready to go right into action. I'll get that dough tomorrer night — and then you'n me'll blow town pronto." He regarded her closely. "Don't think I'm nuts, baby," he added apologetically. "About that 13 thing, I mean. I just can't help myself."

The lady arose and seated herself in Butch's lap. "I understand, baby," she said. "Gimme a kiss an' forget about it."

Butch forgot about it.

EXACTLY 24 hours later, Butch Muggins was in the custody of the police. To say that he was surprised would be a gross understatement. He was completely amazed.

The first part of his plan had succeeded admirably. Nothing to it, really. He had gone to the house in question, entered without the slightest difficulty,

walked up to the proper flat, and found his elderly victim in bed. Most politely, he had requested the whereabouts of the seven thousand dollars. The elderly gentleman had handed it over. Then, also as politely as possible. Butch had hit him over the head with a piece of lead pipe he always carried with him in case of just such emergencies. And then, just as he was about to leave, the law had walked in. Patrolman Murphy, shield number 2562, had entered with his gun drawn. Butch had no chance to argue. And 15 minutes later, he was in a very choice cell.

He was talking to himself— and you are at liberty to listen in.

"I can't understand it," Butch Muggins muttered over and over. "Even the copper's shield don't add up to 13. No 13— and still I get pinched. I can't understand it."

IN FRONT of the 73rd Street flat, a youth was talking to a group of reporters.

"There was really nothing to it, fellers," he told the newspapermen. "I live on the third floor, and I saw that man enter the house. I didn't like his looks, so I told the cop on the corner about it. He did the rest."

"You're a pretty bright kid," said one of the reporters. "I'm gonna write a piece about you. How old are you?"

The boy threw out his chest. "Today's my birthday," he said proudly. "I'm thirteen."

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15: The Phantom Death

W. Clarke Russell
1844-1911
The Idler Oct 1893
Collected in: *The Phantom Death and Other Stories*, 1895

ON THE 24th of April, 1840, having finished the business that had carried me into the Brazils, I arrived at Rio de Janeiro, where I found a vessel lying nearly loaded, and sailing for the port of Bristol in four or five days. In those times, passenger traffic between Great Britain and the eastern coast of South America was almost entirely carried on in small ships, averaging from 200 to 500 tons. The funnel of the ocean mail steamer, with her gilded saloons and side wheels, which, to the great admiration of all beholders, slapped twelve knots an hour out of the composite fabric, had not yet hove into sight above the horizon of commerce, and folks were very well satisfied if they were no longer than three months in reaching the Brazilian coast out of the River Thames.

The little ship in which I took passage was a barque called the *Lord of the Isles*; her burthen was something under four hundred tons. She was a round-bowed waggon of a vanished type, with a square, sawed-off stern, painted ports, heavy over-hanging channels, and as loftily rigged, I was going to say, as a line-of-battle-ship, owing to her immense beam, which gave her the stability of a church. I applied to the agent and hired a cabin, and found myself, to my secret satisfaction, the only passenger in the ship. Yes, I was rejoiced to be the sole passenger; my passage out had been rendered memorably miserable by the society of as ill-conditioned, bad-tempered, sulky a lot of wretches as ever turned in of a night into bunks, and cursed the captain in their gizzards in a calm for not being able to whistle a wind up over the sea-line.

The name of the skipper of the *Lord of the Isles* was Joyce. He was unlike the average run of the men in that trade. Instead of being beef-faced and bow-legged, humid of eye and gay with grog-blossoms, he was tall, pale, spare; he spoke low and in a melancholy key; he never swore; he drank wine and water, and there was little or nothing in his language to suggest the sailor. His berth was right aft on the starboard side; mine was right aft also, next his. Three cabins on either hand ran forward from these two after-berths. Two of them were occupied by the first and second mates. Between was a roomy "state-cabin," as the term then was: a plain interior furnished with an oblong table and fixed chairs, lighted by day by a large skylight, by night by a couple of brass lamps.

We sailed away on a Monday morning, as well I recollect, out of the spacious and splendid scene of the harbour of Rio, and under full breasts of canvas, swelling to the height of a main-skysail big enough to serve as a mizzen

topgallant-sail for a thousand-ton ship of to-day, and with taut bowlines and yearning jibs, and a heel of hull that washed a two-foot wide streak of greenish copper through the wool-white swirl of froth that broke from the bows, the *Lord of the Isles* headed on a straight course for the deep solitudes of the Atlantic.

All went well with us for several days. Our ship's company consisted of twelve men, including a boatswain and carpenter. The forecastle hands appeared very hearty, likely fellows, despite their pier-head raiment of Scotch cap and broken small clothes, and open flannel shirt, and greasy sheath-knife belted to the hip. They worked with a will, they sang out cheerily at the ropes, they went in and out of the galley at meal-time without faces of loathing, and but one complaint came aft before our wonderful, mysterious troubles began: the ship's bread crawled, they said, and, being found truly very bad, good white flour was served out in lieu.

We had been eight days at sea, and in that time had made fairly good way; it drew down a quiet, soft, black night with the young moon gone soon after sunset, a trembling flash of stars over the mastheads, a murky dimness of heat and of stagnation all round about the sea-line, and a frequent glance of sea-fire over the side when a dip of the barque's round bends drove the water from her in a swelling cloud of ebony. I walked the quarter-deck with the captain, and our talk was of England and of the Brazils, and of his experiences as a mariner of thirty years' standing.

"What of the weather?" said I, as we came to a pause at the binnacle, whose bright disc of illuminated card touched into phantom outlines the hairy features of the Jack who grasped the wheel.

"There's a spell of quiet before us, I fear," he answered, in his melancholy, monotonous voice. "No doubt a day will come, Mr. West, when the unhappy sea-captain upon whose forehead the shipowner would be glad to brand the words 'Prompt Despatch' will be rendered by steam independent of that most capricious of all things— wind. The wind bloweth as it listeth— which is very well whilst it keeps all on blowing; for with our machinery of trusses, and parrels, and braces, we can snatch a sort of propulsion out of anything short of hurricane antagonism within six points of what we want to look up for. But of a dead night and of a dead day, with the wind up and down, and your ship showing her stern to the thirty-two points in a single watch, what's to be done with an owner's request of *look sharp*? Will you come below and have some grog?"

The second mate, a man named Bonner, was in charge of the deck. I followed the captain into the cabin, where he smoked a cigar; he drank a little wine and water, I drained a tumbler of cold brandy grog, then stepped above for an hour of fresh air, and afterwards to bed, six bells, eleven o'clock, striking as I turned in.

I slept soundly, awoke at seven o'clock, and shortly afterwards went on deck. The watch were at work washing down. The crystal brine flashed over the white plank to the swing of the bucket in the boatswain's powerful grasp, and the air was filled with the busy noise of scrubbing-brushes, and of the murmurs of some live-stock under the long-boat. The morning was a wide radiant scene of tropic sky and sea— afar, right astern on the light blue verge, trembled the mother-o'-pearl canvas of a ship; a small breeze was blowing off the beam; from under the round bows of the slightly-leaning barque came a pleasant, brook-like sound of running waters— a soft shaling as of foam over stones, sweet to the ear in that heat as the music of a fountain. Mr. Bonner, the second mate, was again in charge of the deck. When I passed through the companion hatch I saw him standing abreast of the skylight at the rail: the expression of his face was grave and full of concern, and he seemed to watch the movements of the men with an inattentive eye.

I bade him good morning; he made no reply for a little, but looked at me fixedly, and then said, "I'm afraid Captain Joyce is a dead man."

"What is wrong with him?" I exclaimed eagerly, and much startled.

"I don't know, sir. I wish there was a medical man on board. Perhaps you'd be able to tell what he's suffering from if you saw him."

I at once went below, and found the lad who waited upon us in the cabin preparing the table for breakfast. I asked him if the captain was alone. He answered that Mr. Stroud, the chief mate, was with him. On this I went to the door of Captain Joyce's cabin and lightly knocked. The mate looked out, and, seeing who I was, told me in a soft voice to enter.

Captain Joyce lay in his bunk dressed in a flannel shirt and a pair of white drill trousers. All his throat and a considerable portion of his chest were exposed, and his feet were naked. I looked at him scarcely crediting my sight: I did not know him as the man I had parted with but a few hours before. He was swelled from head to foot as though drowned: the swelling contorted his countenance out of all resemblance to his familiar face; the flesh of him that was visible was a pale blue, as if rubbed with a powder of the stuff called "blue" which the laundresses use in getting up their linen. His eyes were open, but the pupils were rolled out of sight, and the "whites," as they are called, were covered with red blotches.

I had no knowledge of medicine, and could not imagine what had come to the poor man. He was unconscious, and evidently fast sinking. I said to Mr. Stroud, "What is this?"

The mate answered, "I'm afraid he's poisoned himself accidentally. It looks to me like poison. Don't it seem so to you, sir? See how his fingers and toes are curled."

I ran my eye over the cabin and exclaimed, "Have you searched for any bottles containing poison?"

"I did so when he sent for me at four o'clock, and complained of feeling sick and ill. He was then changing colour, and his face was losing its proper looks. I asked him if he thought he had taken anything by mistake. He answered no, unless he had done so in his sleep. He awoke feeling very bad, and that was all he could tell me."

I touched the poor fellow's hand, and found it cold. His breathing was swift and thin. At moments a convulsion, like a wrenching shudder, passed through him.

"Is it," I asked, "some form of country sickness, do you think— some kind of illness that was lying latent in him when we sailed?"

"I never heard of any sort of sickness," he answered, "that made a man look like that— not cholera even. And what but poison would do its work so quickly? Depend upon it he's either been poisoned, or poisoned himself unawares."

"Poisoned!" I exclaimed. "Who's the man in this ship that's going to do such a thing?"

"It's no natural illness," he answered, looking at the livid, bloated face of the dying man; and he repeated with gloomy emphasis, "He's either been poisoned, or he's poisoned himself unawares."

I stood beside Mr. Stroud for about a quarter of an hour, watching the captain and speculating upon the cause of his mortal sickness; we talked in low voices, often pausing and starting, for the convulsions of the sufferer made us think that he had his mind and wished to sit up and speak; but the ghastly, horrid, vacant look of his face continued fixed by the stubborn burial of the pupils of his eyes; his lips moved only when his frame was convulsed. I put my finger upon his pulse and found the beat thread-like, terribly rapid, intermittent, and faint. Then, feeling sick and scared, I went on deck for some air.

The second mate asked me how the captain was and what I thought. I answered that he might be dead even now as I spoke; that I could not conceive the nature of the malady that was killing him, that had apparently fastened upon him in his sleep, and was threatening to kill him within the compass of four or five hours, but that Mr. Stroud believed he had been poisoned, or had poisoned himself accidentally.

"Poisoned!" echoed the second mate, and he sent a look in the direction of the ship's galley. "What's he eaten that we haven't partaken of? A regular case of poisoning, does the chief officer think it? Oh no— oh no— who's to do it? The captain's too well liked to allow of such a guess as that. If the food's been fouled by the cook in error, how's it that the others of us who ate at the cabin table aren't likewise seized?"

There was no more to be said about it then, but in less than half an hour's time the mate came up and told us the captain was gone.

"He never recovered his senses, never spoke except to talk in delirium," he said.

"You think he was poisoned, sir?" said the second mate.

"Not wilfully," answered Mr. Stroud, looking at me. "I never said that; nor is it a thing one wants to think of," he added, sending his gaze round the wide scene of flashing ocean.

He then abruptly quitted us and walked to the galley, where for some while he remained out of sight. When he returned he told the second mate with whom I had stood talking that he had spoken to the cook, and thoroughly overhauled the dressing utensils, and was satisfied that the galley had nothing to do with the murderous mischief which had befallen the skipper.

"But why be so cock-certain, Mr. Stroud," said I, "that the captain's dead of poisoning?"

"I *am* cock-certain," he answered shortly, and with some little passion. "Name me the illness that's going to kill a man in three or four hours, and make such a corpse of him as lies in the captain's cabin."

He called to the second mate, and they paced the deck together deep in talk. The men had come up from breakfast, and the boatswain had set them to the various jobs of the morning; but the news of the captain's death had gone forward; it was shocking by reason of its suddenness. Then, again, the death of the master of a ship lies cold and heavy upon the spirits of a company at sea; 'tis the head gone, the thinking part. The mate may make as good a captain, but he's not the man the crew signed articles under. The seamen of the *Lord of the Isles* wore grave faces as they went about their work; they spoke softly, and the boatswain delivered his orders in subdued notes. After a bit the second mate walked forward and addressed the boatswain and some of the men, but what he said I did not catch.

I breakfasted and returned on deck: it was then ten o'clock. I found the main-topsail to the mast and a number of seamen standing in the gangway, whilst the two mates hung together on the quarter-deck, talking, as though waiting. In a few minutes four seamen brought the body of the captain up through the companion hatch, and carried it to the gangway. The corpse was stitched up in a hammock and rested upon a plank, over which the English ensign was thrown. I thought this funeral very hurried, and dreaded to think that the poor man might be breathing and alive at the instant of his launch, for after all we had but the mate's assurance that the captain was dead; and what did Mr. Stroud know of death— that is, as it would be indicated by the body of a man who had died from some swift, subtle, nameless distemper, as Captain Joyce seemingly had?

When the funeral was over, the topsail swung, and the men returned to their work, I put the matter to the mate, who answered that the corpse had turned black, and that there could be no more question of his being dead than of his now being overboard.

The breeze freshened that morning. At noon it was blowing strong, with a dark, hard sky of compacted cloud, under which curls and shreds of yellow scud fled like a scattering of smoke, and the mates were unable to get an observation. Mr. Stroud seemed engrossed by the sudden responsibilities which had come upon him, and talked little. That afternoon he shifted into the captain's berth, being now, indeed, in command of the barque. It was convenient to him to live in that cabin, for the necessary nautical appliances for navigating the ship were there along with facilities for their use. Mr. Bonner told me that he and the mate had thoroughly examined the cabin, overhauled the captain's boxes, lockers, shelves and the like for anything of a poisonous nature, but had met with nothing whatever. It was indeed an amazing mystery, he said, and he was no longer of opinion with Mr. Stroud that poison, accidentally or otherwise taken, had destroyed the captain. Indeed, he now leaned to my view, that Captain Joyce had fallen a victim to some disease which had lain latent in him since leaving Rio, something deadly quick and horribly transforming, well known, maybe, to physicians of the Brazils, if, indeed, it were peculiar to that country.

Well, three days passed, and nothing of any moment happened. The wind drew ahead and braced our yards fore and aft for us, and the tub of a barque went to leeward like an empty cask, shouldering the head seas into snowstorms off her heavy round bow, and furrowing a short scope of oil-smooth wake almost at right angles with her sternpost. Though Mr. Stroud had charge of the ship, he continued from this time to keep watch and watch with Mr. Bonner as in the captain's life, not choosing, I dare say, to entrust the charge of the deck to the boatswain. On the evening of this third day that I have come to, I was sitting in the cabin under the lamp writing down some memories of the past week in a diary, when the door of the captain's berth was opened, and my name was faintly called. I saw Mr. Stroud, and instantly went to him. His hands were clasped upon his brow, and he swayed violently as though in pain, with greater vehemence than the heave of the deck warranted; his eyes were starting, and, by the clear light of the brace of cabin lamps, I easily saw that his complexion was unusually dusky, and darkening even, so it seemed to me, as I looked.

I cried out, "What is the matter, Mr. Stroud?"

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, "I am in terrible pain— I am horribly ill— I am dying."

I grasped him by the arm and conducted him to his bunk, into which he got, groaning and holding his head, with an occasional strange short plunge of his

feet such as a swimmer makes when resting in the water on his back. I asked him if he was only just now seized. He answered that he was in a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by a burning sensation throughout his body. He lay quiet awhile, supposing it was a sudden heat of the blood; but the fire increased, and with it came torturing pains in the head, and attacks of convulsions; and even whilst he told me this the convulsive fits grew upon him, and he broke off to groan deeply as though in exquisite pain and distress of mind; then he'd set his teeth, and then presently scream out, "Oh, my God! I have been poisoned— I am dying!"

I was thunderstruck and terrified to the last degree. What was this dreadful thing— this phantom death that had come into the ship? Was it a contagious plague? But what distemper is there that, catching men in their sleep, swells and discolours them even as the gaze rests upon them, and dismisses their souls to God in the space of three or four hours?

I ran on deck, but waited until Mr. Bonner had finished bawling out some orders to the men before addressing him. The moon was young, but bright, and she sheared scythe-like through the pouring shadows, and the light of her made a marvellous brilliant whiteness of the foam as it burst in masses from the plunge of the barque's bows. When I gave the news to Mr. Bonner, he stared at me for some moments wildly and in silence, and then rushed below. I followed him as quick as he went, for I had often used the sea, and the giddiest dance of a deck-plank was all one with the solid earth to my accustomed feet. We entered the mate's berth, and Mr. Bonner lighted the bracket lamp and stood looking at his shipmate, and by the aid of the flame he had kindled, and the bright light flowing in through the open door, I beheld a tragic and wonderful change in Mr. Stroud, though scarce ten minutes had passed since I was with him. His face was bloated, the features distorted, his eyes rolled continuously, and frequent heavy twitching shudders convulsed his body. But the most frightful part was the dusky hue of his skin, that was of a darker blue than I had observed in the captain.

He still had his senses, and repeated to the second mate what he had related to me. But he presently grew incoherent, then fell delirious, in about an hour's time was speechless and lay racked with convulsions; of a horrid blue, the features shockingly convulsed, and the whites of the eyes alone showing as in the captain's case.

He had called me at about nine o'clock, and he was a dead man at two in the morning, or four bells in the middle watch. Both the second mate and I were constantly in and out with the poor fellow; but we could do no good, only marvel, and murmur our astonishment and speculations. We put the captain's steward, a young fellow, to watch him— this was an hour before his death— and at four bells the lad came out with a white face, and said to me, who sat at

the table, depressed and awed and overwhelmed by this second ghastly and indeterminable visitation, that the chief mate was dead, had ceased to breathe, and was quickly turning black.

Mr. Bonner came into the cabin with the boatswain, and they went into the dead man's berth and stayed there about a quarter of an hour. When they came out the boatswain looked at me hard. I recollect that that man's name was Matthews. I asked some questions, but they had nothing to tell, except that the body had turned black.

"What manner of disease can it be that kills in this fashion?" said I. "If it's the plague, we maybe all dead men in a week."

"It's no plague," said the boatswain, in a voice that trembled with its own volume of sound.

"What is it?" I cried.

"Poison!" he shouted, and he dropped his clenched fist with the weight of a cannon-ball upon the table.

I looked at the second mate, who exclaimed, "The boatswain swears to the signs. He's seen the like of that corpse in three English seamen who were poisoned up at Chusan."

"Do you want to make out that both men have committed suicide?" I exclaimed.

"I want to make out that both men have been poisoned!" shouted the boatswain, in his voice of thunder.

There was a significance in the insolence of the fellow that confounded and alarmed me, and the meaning was deepened by the second mate allowing his companion to address me in this roaring, affronting way without reproof. I hoped that the man had been drinking, and that the second mate was too stupid with horror to heed his behaviour to me, and without giving either of them another word I walked to my cabin and lay down.

I have no space here to describe the wild and terrifying fancies which ran in my head. For some while I heard the boatswain and the second mate conversing, but the cabin bulkhead was stout, the straining and washing noises all about the helm heavy and continuous, and I caught not a syllable of what they said. At what hour I fell asleep I cannot tell; when I awoke my cabin was full of the sunshine that streamed in through the stern window. I dressed, and took hold of the handle of the door, and found myself a prisoner. Not doubting I was locked up in error, I shook the door, and beat upon it, and called out loudly to be released. After a few minutes the door was opened, and the second mate stood in the threshold. He exclaimed—

"Mr. West, it's the wish of the men that you should be locked up. I'm no party to the job— but they're resolved. I'll tell you plainly what they think: they believe you've had a hand in the death of the captain and the chief mate— the

bo'sun's put that into their heads; I'm the only navigator left, and they're afraid you'll try your hand on me if you have your liberty. You'll be regularly fed and properly seen to; but it's the crew's will that you stop here."

With that, and without giving me time to utter a word, he closed and secured the door. I leaned against the bulkhead and sought to rally my wits, but I own that for a long while I was as one whose mind comes slowly to him after he has been knocked down insensible. I never for an instant supposed that the crew really believed me guilty of poisoning the captain and chief mate: I concluded that the men had mutinied, and arranged with Mr. Bonner to run away with the ship, and that I should remain locked up in my cabin until they had decided what to do with me.

By-and-by the door was opened, and the young steward put a tray containing some breakfast upon the cabin deck. He was but a mule of a boy, and I guessed that nothing but what might still further imperil me could come of my questioning him, so in silence I watched him put down the tray and depart. The meal thus sent to me was plentiful, and I drew some small heart out of the attention. Whilst I ate and drank, I heard sounds in the adjoining berth, and presently gathered that they were preparing the body of the chief mate for its last toss over the side. After a bit they went on deck with the corpse, and then all was still in the cabin. I knew by the light of the sun that the vessel was still heading on her course for England. It was a bright morning, with a wild windy sparkle in as much of the weather as I could see through the cabin window. The plunge of the ship's stern brought the water in a roar of milky froth all about the counter close under me, and the frequent jar of rudder and jump of wheel assured me that the barque was travelling fast through the seas.

What, in God's name, did the men mean by keeping me a prisoner? Did they think me a madman? Or that I, whose life together with theirs depended upon the safe navigation of the barque, would destroy those who alone could promise me security? And what had slain the two men? If poison, who had administered it? One man might have died by his own hand, but not both. And since both had perished from the same cause, self-murder was not to be thought of. What was it, then, that had killed them, visiting them in their sleep, and discolouring, bloating, convulsing, and destroying them in a few hours? Was it some deadly malady subtly lurking in the atmosphere of the after part of the vessel? If so, then I might be the next to be taken. Or was there some devilish murderer lying secretly hidden? Or was one of the crew the doer of these things? I seemed to smell disease and death, and yearned for the freedom of the deck, and for the sweetness of the wide, strong rush of wind.

The day passed. The second mate never visited me. The lad arrived with my meals, and when he came with my supper I asked him some questions, but obtained no more news than that the second mate had taken up his quarters in

the adjoining berth as acting captain, and that the boatswain was keeping watch and watch with him.

I got but little rest that night. It blew hard, and the pitching of the vessel was unusually heavy. Then, again, I was profoundly agitated and in deep distress of mind; for, supposing the men in earnest, it was not only horrible to be thought capable of murder, there was the prospect of my being charged and of having to clear my character. Or, supposing the men's suspicion or accusation a villainous pretext, how would they serve me? Would they send me adrift, or set me ashore to perish on some barren coast, or destroy me out of hand? You will remember that I am writing of an age when seafaring was not as it now is. The pirate and the slaver were still afloat doing a brisk business. There often went a desperate spirit in ships' forecastles, and the maritime records of the time abound with tragic narratives of revolt, seizure, cruelty of a ferocious sort.

Another day and another night went by, and I was still locked up in my cabin, and, saving the punctual arrival of the lad with my meals, no man visited me.

Some time about eight o'clock on the morning of the third day of my confinement, I was looking through the cabin window at the space of grey and foaming sea and sallow flying sky which came and went in the square of the aperture with the lift and fall of the barque's stern, when my cabin door was struck upon, and in a minute afterwards opened, and the boatswain appeared.

"Mr. West," said he, after looking at me for a moment in silence with a face whose expression was made up of concern and fear and embarrassment, "I've come on my own part, and on the part of the men, sir, to ask your pardon for our treatment of you. We was mistook. And our fears made us too willing to believe that you had a hand in it. We dunno what it is now, but as Jesus is my God, Mr. West, the second mate he lies dead of the same thing in the next cabin!"

I went past him too stupefied to speak, and in a blind way sat down at the cabin table and leaned my head against my hand. Presently I looked up, and on lifting my eyes I caught sight of two or three sailors staring down with white faces through the skylight.

"You tell me that the second mate's dead?" said I.

"Yes, sir, dead of poison, too, so help me God!" cried the boatswain.

"Who remains to navigate the ship?" I said.

"That's it, sir!" he exclaimed, "unless you can do it?"

"Not I. There's no man amongst you more ignorant. May I look at the body?"

He opened the door of the cabin in which the others had died, and there, in the bunk from which the bodies of Captain Joyce and Mr. Stroud had been removed, lay now the blackened corpse of the second mate. It was an awful sight and a passage of time horrible with the mystery which charged it. I felt no rage at the manner in which I had been used by that dead man there and the

hurricane-lunged seaman alongside of me and the fellows forward; I could think of nothing but the mystery of the three men's deaths, the lamentable plight we were all in through our wanting a navigator, with the chance, moreover, that it *was* the plague, and not poison mysteriously given, that had killed the captain and mates, so that all the rest of us, as I have said, might be dead men in another week.

I returned to the cabin, and the boatswain joined me, and we stood beside the table conversing, anxiously watched by several men who had stationed themselves at the skylight.

"What we've got to do," said I, "is to keep a bright look-out for ships, and borrow some one to steer us home from the first vessel that will lend us a navigator. We're bound to fall in with something soon. Meanwhile, you're a smart seaman yourself, Matthews, as well qualified as any one of them who have died to sail the ship, and there's surely some intelligent sailor amongst the crew who would relieve you in taking charge of the deck. I'll do all I can."

"The question is, where's the vessel now?" said the boatswain.

"Fetch me the log-book," said I, "and see if you can find the chart they've been using to prick the courses off on. We should be able to find out where the ship was at noon yesterday. I can't enter that cabin. The sight of the poor fellow makes me sick."

He went to the berth and passed through the door, and might have left me about five minutes, evidently hunting for the chart, when he suddenly rushed out, roaring in his thunderous voice, "I've discovered it! I've discovered it!" and fled like a madman up the companion steps. I was startled almost to the very stopping of my heart by this sudden furious wild behaviour in him: then wondering what he meant by shouting "he had discovered it!" I walked to the cabin door, and the very first thing my eye lighted upon was a small snake, leisurely coiling its way from the head to the feet of the corpse. Its middle was about the thickness of a rifle-barrel, and it then tapered to something like whipcord to its tail. It was about two feet long, snow white, and speckled with black and red spots.

This, then, was the phantom death! Yonder venomous reptile it was, then, that, creeping out of some secret hiding-place, and visiting the unhappy men one after another, had stung them in their sleep, in the darkness of the cabin, and vanished before they had struck a light and realized indeed that something desperate had come to them!

Whilst I stood looking at the snake, whose horror seemed to gain fresh accentuation from the very beauty of its snow-white speckled skin and diamond-bright eyes, the boatswain, armed with a long handspike, and followed by a number of the crew, came headlong to the cabin. He thrust the end of the

handspike under the belly of the creature, and hove it into the middle of the berth.

"Stand clear!" he roared, and with a blow or two smashed the reptile's head into a pulp. "Open that cabin window," said he. One of the men did so, and the boatswain with his boot scraped the mess of mashed snake on to the handspike and shook it overboard.

"I told you they was poisoned," he cried, breathing deep; "and, oh my God, Mr. West— and I humbly ask your pardon again for having suspected ye— do you know, sir, whilst I was a-talking to you just now I was actually thinking of taking up my quarters in this here cabin this very night."

Thus much: and now to end this singular experience in a sentence or two. Three days after the discovery of the snake we sighted and signalled a large English merchantman bound to London from the Rio de la Plata. Her chief officer came aboard, and we related our story. He asked to see the snake. We told him we had thrown it overboard. On my describing it, he informed me that he guessed it was the little poisonous reptile known in certain districts of South America as the Ibiboboko. He returned to his ship, and shortly afterwards the commander sent us his third officer, with instructions to keep in company as long as possible.

16: Dick Turpin

Anonymous

The Newgate Calender, 1824 Edition

A famous Highway Robber, who shot dead one of his own Comrades and was executed at York On 7th of April, 1739

THIS NOTORIOUS character was for a long time the dread of travellers on the Essex road, on account of the daring robberies which he daily committed; was also a noted house-breaker, and was for a considerable time remarkably successful in his desperate course, but was at length brought to an ignominious end, in consequence of circumstances which, in themselves, may appear trifling. He was apprehended in consequence of shooting a fowl, and his brother refusing to pay sixpence for the postage of his letter occasioned his conviction.

He was the son of a farmer at Thackstead in Essex; and, having received a common school education, was apprenticed to a butcher in Whitechapel; but was distinguished from his early youth for the impropriety of his behaviour, and the brutality of his manners. On the expiration of his apprenticeship, be married a young woman of East Ham, in Essex, named Palmer: but he had not been long married before he took to the practice of stealing his neighbours' cattle, which he used to kill and cut up for sale.

Having stolen two oxen belonging to Mr. Giles, of Plaistow, he drove them to his own house; but two of Giles's servants, suspecting who was the robber, went to Turpin's where they saw two beasts of such size as had been lost: but as the hides were stripped from them, it was impossible to say that they were the same: but learning that Turpin used to dispose of his hides at Waltham-Abbey, they went thither, and saw the hides of the individual beasts that had been stolen.

No doubt now remaining who was the robber, a warrant was procured for the apprehension of Turpin; but, learning that the peace-officers were in search of him, he made his escape from the back window of his house, at the very moment that the others were entering at the door.

Having retreated to a place of security, he found means to inform his wife where he was concealed; on which she furnished him with money, with which he travelled into the hundreds of Essex, where he joined a gang of smugglers, with whom he was for some time successful; till a set of the Custom house officers, by one successful stroke, deprived him of all his ill-acquired gains.

Thrown out of this kind of business, he connected himself with a gang of deer-stealers, the principal part of whose depredations were committed on Epping Forest, and the parks in its neighbourhood: but this business not

succeeding to the expectation of the robbers, they determined to commence house-breakers.

Their plan was to fix on houses that they presumed contained any valuable property; and, while one of them knocked at the door, the others were to rush in, and seize whatever they might deem worthy of their notice.

The first attack of this kind was at the house of Mr. Strype, an old man who kept a chandler's shop at Watford, whom they robbed of all the money in his possession, but did not offer him any personal abuse.

Turpin now acquainted his associates that there was an old woman at Loughton, who was in possession of seven or eight hundred pounds; whereupon they agreed to rob her; and when they came to the door, one of them knocked, and the rest forcing their way into the house, tied handkerchiefs over the eyes of the old woman and her maid.

This being done, Turpin demanded what money was in the house; and the owner hesitating to tell him, he threatened to set her on the fire if she did not make an immediate discovery. Still, however, she declined to give the desired information; on which the villains actually placed her on the fire, where she sat till the tormenting pains compelled her to discover her hidden treasure; so that the robbers possessed themselves of above £400 and decamped with the booty.

Some little time after this they agreed to rob the house of a farmer near Barking; and knocking at the door, the people declined to open it; on which they broke it open; and having bound the farmer, his wife, his son-in-law, and the servant maid, they robbed the house of above £700; which delighted Turpin so much that he exclaimed, "Aye, this will do if it would always be so!" and the robbers retired with their prize, which amounted to above £80 for each of them.

This desperate gang, now flushed with success, determined to attack the house of Mr. Mason, the keeper of Epping Forest; and the time was affixed when the plan was to be carried into execution; but Turpin having gone to London, to spend his share of the former booty, intoxicated himself to such a degree, that he totally forgot the appointment.

Nevertheless, the rest of the gang resolved, that the absence of their companion should not frustrate the proposed design; and having taken a solemn oath to break every article of furniture in Mason's house, they set out on their expedition.

Having gained admission, they beat and kicked the unhappy man with great severity. Finding an old man sitting by the fire-side they permitted him to remain uninjured; and Mr. Mason's daughter escaped their fury, by running out of the house, and taking shelter in a hog-sty.

After ransacking the lower part of the house, and doing much mischief, they went up stairs, where they broke every thing that fell in their way, and among the rest a china punchbowl, from which dropped one hundred and twenty

guineas, which they made prey of, and effected their escape. They now went to London, in search of Turpin, with whom they shared the booty, though he had not taken an active part in the execution of the villainy.

On the 11th of January, 1735, Turpin and five of his companions went to the house of Mr. Saunders, a rich farmer at Charlton in Kent, between seven and eight in the evening, and having knocked at the door, asked if Mr. Saunders was at home. Being answered in the affirmative, they rushed into the house, and found Mr. Saunders, with his wife and friends, playing at cards in the parlour. They told the company that they should remain uninjured, if they made no disturbance. Having made prize of a silver snuff-box which lay on the table a part of the gang stood guard over the rest of the company, while the others attended Mr. Saunders through the house, and breaking open his escritoires and closets, stole about £100 exclusive of plate.

During these transactions the servant maid ran up stairs, barring the door of her room, and called out, "Thieves!" with a view of alarming the neighbourhood; but the robbers broke open the door of her room, secured her, and then robbed the house of all the valuable property they had not before taken. Finding some minced-pies, and some bottles of wine, they sat down. to regale themselves; and meeting with a bottle of brandy, they compelled each of the company to drink a glass of it.

Mrs. Saunders fainting through terror, they administered some drops in water to her, and recovered her to the use of her senses. Having staid in the house a considerable time, they packed up their booty and departed, having first declared, that if any of the family gave the least alarm within two hours, or advertised the marks of the stolen plate, they would return and murder them at a future time.

The division of the plunder having taken place, they, on the 18th of the same month, went to the house of Mr. Sheldon, near Croydon, in Surrey, where they arrived about seven in the evening. Having got into the yard, they perceived a light in the stable, and going into it, found the coachman attending his horses. Having immediately bound him, they quitted the stable, and meeting Mr. Sheldon in the yard, they seized him, and compelling him to conduct them into the house, they stole eleven guineas, with the jewels, plate, and other things of value, to a large amount. Having committed this robbery, they returned Mr. Sheldon two guineas, and apologized for their conduct.

This being done, they hastened to the Black Horse, in the Broad-way, Westminster, where they concerted the robbery of Mr. Lawrence, of Edgware, near Stanmore, in Middlesex, for which place they set out on the 4th of February, and arrived at a public-house in that village, about five o'clock in the evening. From this place they went to Mr. Lawrence's house, where they arrived

about seven o'clock, just as he had discharged some people who had worked for him.

Having quitted their horses at the outer gate, one of the robbers going forwards, found a boy who had lust returned from folding his sheep; the rest of the gang following, a pistol was presented and instant destruction threatened if he made any noise. They then took off his garters, and tied his hands, and told him to direct them to the door, and when they knocked, to answer, and bid the servants open it, in which case they would not hurt him; but when the boy came to the door he was so terrified that he could not speak; on which one of the gang knocked, and a man servant, imagining it was one of the neighbours, opened the door, whereupon they all rushed in, armed with pistols.

Having seized Mr. Lawrence and his servant, they threw a cloth over their faces, and taking the boy into another room, demanded what fire-arms were in the house; to which he replied, only an old gun, which they broke in pieces. They then bound Mr. Lawrence and his man, and made them sit by the boy; and Turpin searching the old gentleman, took from him a guinea, a Portugal piece, and some silver; but not being satisfied with this booty, they forced him to conduct them up stairs, where they broke open a closet, and stole some money and plate: but that not being sufficient to satisfy them, they threatened to murder Mr. Lawrence, each of them destining him to a different death, as the savageness of his own nature prompted him. At length one of them took a kettle of water from the fire, and threw it over him; but it providentially happened not to be hot enough to scald him.

In the interim, the maidservant who was churning butter in the dairy, hearing a noise in the house, apprehended some mischief; on which she blew out her candle to screen herself; but being found in the course of their search, one of the miscreants compelled her to go up stairs, where he gratified his brutal passion by force. They then robbed the house of all the valuable effects they could find, locked the family in the parlour, threw the key in the garden, and took their ill-gotten plunder to London.

The particulars of this atrocious robbery being represented to the king, a proclamation was issued for the apprehension of the offenders, promising a pardon to any one of them who would impeach his accomplices; and a reward of 501. was offered, to be paid on conviction. This, however, had no effect; the robbers continued their depredations as before; and, flushed with the success they had met with, seemed to bid defiance to the laws.

On the 7th of February, six of them assembled at the White Bear Inn, in Drury-lane, where they agreed to rob the house of Mr. Francis, a farmer near Mary-le-bone. Arriving at the place, they found a servant in the cow-house, whom they bound fast, and threatened to murder, if he was not perfectly silent.

This being done, they led him into the stable, where finding another of the servants, they bound him in the same manner.

In the interim Mr. Francis happening to come home, they presented their pistols to his breast, and threatened instant destruction to him, if he made the least noise or opposition. Having bound the master in the stable with his servants, they rushed into the house, tied Mrs. Francis, her daughter, and the maidservant, and beat them in a most cruel manner. One of the thieves stood as a sentry while the rest rifled the house, in which they found a silver tankard, a medal of Charles the First, a gold watch, several gold rings, a considerable sum of money, and a variety of valuable linen and other effects, which they conveyed to London.

Hereupon a reward of £100 was offered for the apprehension of the offenders: in consequence of which two of them were taken into custody, tried, convicted on the evidence of an accomplice, and hanged in chains: and the whole gang being dispersed, Turpin went into the country to renew his depredations on the public.

On a journey towards Cambridge, he met a man genteelly dressed, and well mounted: and expecting a good booty, he presented a pistol to the supposed gentleman, and demanded his money. The party thus stopped happened to be one King, a famous highwayman, who knew Turpin; and when the latter threatened destruction if he did not deliver his money, King burst into a fit of laughter, and said, "What, dog eat dog? — Come, come, brother Turpin; if you don't know me, I know you, and shall be glad of your company."

These brethren in iniquity soon struck the bargain, and immediately entering on business, committed a number of robberies; till at length they were so well known, that no public-house would receive them as guests. Thus situated they fixed on a spot between the King's-Oak and the Loughton Road, on Epping Forest, where they made a cave, which was large enough to receive them and their horses.

This cave was inclosed within a sort of thicket of bushes and brambles, through which they could look and see passengers on the road, while themselves remained unobserved.

From this station they used to issue, and robbed such a number of persons, that at length the very pedlars who travelled the road, carried fire-arms for their defence: and, while they were in this retreat, Turpin's wife used to supply them with necessaries, and frequently remained in the cave during the night.

Having taken a ride as far as Bungay, in Suffolk, they observed two young women receive fourteen pounds for corn, on which Turpin resolved to rob them of the money. King objected, saying it was a pity to rob such pretty girls: but Turpin was obstinate, and obtained the booty.

Upon their return home on the following day, they stopped a Mr. Bradele, of London, who was riding in his chariot with his children. The gentleman, seeing only one robber, was pre paring to make resistance, when King called to Turpin to hold the horses. They took from the gentleman his watch, money, and an old mourning ring; but returned the latter, as he declared that its intrinsic value was trifling, yet he was very unwilling to part with it.

Finding that they readily parted with the ring, he asked them what he must give for the watch: on which King said to Turpin, "What say ye, Jack? — Here seems to be a good honest fellow; shall we let him have the watch?"— Turpin replied, "Do as you please;" on which King said to the gentleman, "You must pay six guineas for it: we never sell for more, though the watch should be worth six and thirty." The gentleman promised that the money should be left at the Dial, in Birchin-lane.

On the 4th of May, 1737, Turpin was guilty of murder, which arose from the following circumstance: A reward of 1001. having been offered for apprehending him, one Thomas Morris, a servant of Mr. Thompson, one of the keepers of Epping Forest, accompanied by a higgler, set out in order to apprehend him. Turpin seeing them approach near his dwelling, Mr. Thompson's man having a gun, he mistook them for poachers; on which he said, there were no hares near that thicket: "No, (said Morris) but I have found a Turpin;" and presenting his gun required him to surrender.

Hereupon Turpin spoke to him, as in a friendly manner, and gradually retreated at the same time, till having seized his own gun, he shot him dead on the spot, and the higgler ran off with the utmost precipitation.

This murder being represented to the Secretary of State, the following proclamation was issued by government, which we give a place to, from its describing the person of this notorious depredator.

"It having been represented to the King, that Richard Turpin did, on Wednesday, the 4th of May last, barbarously murder Thomas Morris, servant to Henry Thompson, one of the keepers of Epping Forest, and commit other notorious felonies and robberies, near London, his Majesty is pleased to promise his most gracious pardon to any of his accomplices, and a reward of £200 to any person or persons that shall discover him, so that he may be apprehended and convicted.

Turpin was born at Thackstead, in Essex, is about thirty, by trade a butcher, about five feet nine inches high, very much marked with the small-pox, his cheek-bones broad, his face thinner towards the bottom; his visage short, pretty upright, and broad about the shoulders."

Turpin, to avoid the proclamation, went further into the country in search of his old companion King: and in the mean time sent a letter to his wife, to meet him at a public-house at Hertford. The woman attended according to this direction; and her husband coming into the house soon after she arrived, a butcher, to whom he owed five pounds, happened to see him; on which he said, "Come, Dick, I know you have money now; and if you will pay me, it will be of great service."

Turpin told him that his wife was in the next room; that she had money, and that he should he paid immediately; but while the butcher was hinting to some of his acquaintance, that the person present was Turpin, and that they might take him into custody after he had received his debt, the highwayman made his escape through a window, and rode off with great expedition.

Turpin having found King, and a man named Potter, who had lately connected himself with them, they set off towards London, in the dusk of the evening; but when they came near the Green Man, on Epping Forest, they overtook a Mr. Major, who riding on a very fine horse, and Turpin's beast being jaded he obliged the rider to dismount, and exchange horses.

The robbers now pursued their journey towards London, and Mr. Major going to the Green Man, gave an account of the affair; on which it was conjectured that Turpin had been the robber, and that the horse which he exchanged must have been stolen.

It was on a Saturday evening that this robbery was committed; but Mr. Major being advised to print hand-bills immediately, notice was given to the landlord of the Green Man, that such a horse as Mr. Major had lost, had been left at the Red Lion, in Whitechapel. The landlord going thither, determined to wait till some person came for it; and, at about eleven at night, King's brother came to pay for the horse, and take him away: on which he was immediately seized, and conducted into the house.

Being asked what right he had to the horse, he said he had bought it; but the landlord examining a whip which he had in his hand, found a button at the end of the handle half broken off, and the name of Major on the remaining half. Hereupon he was given into the custody of a constable; but as it was not supposed that he was the actual robber, he was told, that he should have his liberty, if he would discover his employer.

Hereupon he said, that a stout man, in a white duffel coat, was waiting for the horse in Red Lion-street; on which the company going thither, saw King, who drew a pistol attempted to fire it, but it flashed in the pan; he then endeavoured to draw out another pistol, but he could not, as it got entangled in his pocket.

At this time Turpin was watching at a small distance and riding towards the spot, King cried out, "Shoot him, or we are taken;" on which Turpin fired, and

shot his companion, who called out, "Dick, you have killed me;" which the other hearing, rode off at full speed.

King lived a week after this affair, and gave information that Turpin might be found at a house near Hackney-marsh; and, on inquiry, it was discovered that Turpin had been there on the night that he rode off, lamenting that he had killed King, who was his most faithful associate.

For a considerable time did Turpin skulk about the forest, having been deprived of his retreat in the cave since he shot the servant of Mr. Thompson. On the examination of this cave there were found two shirts, two pairs of stockings, a piece of ham, and a part of a bottle of wine.

Some vain attempts were made to take this notorious offender into custody; and among the rest, the huntsman of a gentleman in the neighbourhood went in search of him with blood-hounds. Turpin perceiving them, and recollecting that King Charles II. evaded his pursuers under covert of the friendly branches of the oak, mounted one of those trees under which the hounds passed, to his inexpressible terror, so that he determined to make a retreat into Yorkshire.

Going first to Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire, he stole some horses, for which he was taken into custody, but he escaped from the constable as he was conducting him before a magistrate, and hastened to Welton, in Yorkshire, where he went by the name of John Palmer, and assumed the character of a gentleman.

He now frequently went into Lincolnshire, where he stole horses, which he brought into Yorkshire, and either sold or exchanged them.

He often accompanied the neighbouring gentlemen on their parties of hunting and shooting; and one evening, on a return from an expedition of the latter kind, he wantonly shot a cock belonging to his landlord. On this Mr. Hall, a neighbour, said, "You have done wrong in shooting your landlord's cock;" to which Turpin replied, that if he would stay while he loaded his gun, he would shoot him also.

Irritated by this insult, Mr. Hall informed the landlord of what had passed; and application being made to some magistrates, a warrant was granted for the apprehension of the offender, who being taken into custody, and carried before a bench of justices, then assembled at the quarter-sessions, at Beverley, they demanded security for his good behaviour, which he being unable, or unwilling to give, was committed to Bridewell.

On inquiry it appeared that he made frequent journeys into Lincolnshire, and on his return always abounded in money, and was likewise in possession of several horses; so that it was conjectured he was a horse-stealer and highwayman.

On this the magistrates went to him on the following day, and demanded who he was, where he lived, and what was his employment? He replied in

substance, "that about two years ago he had lived at Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire, and was by trade a butcher, but that having contracted several debts, for sheep that proved rotten, he was obliged to abscond, and come to live in Yorkshire."

The magistrates not being satisfied with this tale, commissioned the clerk of the peace to write into Lincolnshire, to make the necessary inquiries respecting the supposed John Palmer. The letter was carried by a special messenger, who brought an answer from the magistrate in the neighbourhood, importing that John Palmer was well known, though he had never carried on trade there: that he had been accused of sheep-stealing for which he had been in custody but had made his escape from the peace officers: and that there were several informations lodged against him for horse-stealing.

Hereupon the magistrates thought it prudent to remove him to York Castle, where he had not been more than a month, when two persons from Lincolnshire came and claimed a mare and foal, and likewise a horse, which he had stolen in that county.

After he had been about four month in prison, he wrote the following letter to his brother in Essex:

"Dear Brother,
York, Feb. 6, 1739.

"I am sorry to acquaint you, that I am now under confinement in York Castle, for horse-stealing. If I could procure an evidence from London to give me a character, that would go a great way towards my being acquitted. I had not been long in this county before my being apprehended, so that it would pass off the readier. For Heaven's sake dear brother, do not neglect me; you will know what I mean, when I say,

I am yours,
"JOHN PALMER."

This letter being returned, unopened, to the Post-Office in Essex, because the brother would not pay the postage of it, was accidentally seen by Mr. Smith, a school-master, who having taught Turpin to write, immediately knew his hand, on which he carried the letter to a magistrate, who broke it open; by which it was discovered that the supposed John Palmer was the real Richard Turpin.

Hereupon the magistrates of Essex dispatched Mr. Smith to York, who immediately selected him from all the other prisoners in the castle. This Mr. Smith, and another gentleman, afterwards proved his identity on his trial.

On the rumour that the noted Turpin was a prisoner in York Castle, persons flocked from all parts of the country to take a view of him, and debates ran very high whether he was the real person or not. Among others who visited him, was

a young fellow who pretended to know the famous Turpin, and having regarded him a considerable time with looks of great attention, he told the keeper he would bet him half a guinea that he was not Turpin; on which the prisoner, whispering the keeper, said, "Lay him the wager, and I'll go your halves."

When this notorious malefactor was brought to trial, he was convicted on two indictments, and received sentence of death.

After conviction he wrote to his father, imploring him to intercede with a gentleman and lady of rank to make interest that his sentence might be remitted; and that he might be transported. The father did what was in his power: but the notoriety of his character was such, that no persons would exert themselves in his favour.

This man lived in the most gay and thoughtless manner after conviction, regardless of all considerations of futurity, and affecting to make a jest of the dreadful fate that awaited him.

Not many days before his execution, he purchased a new fustian frock and a pair of pumps, in order to wear them at the time of his death: and, on the day before, he hired five poor men, at ten shillings each, to follow the cart as mourners: and he gave hatbands and gloves to several other persons: and he also left a ring, and some other articles, to a married woman in Lincolnshire, with whom he had been acquainted.

On the morning of his death he was put into a cart, and being followed by his mourners, as above-mentioned, he was drawn to the place of execution, in his way to which he bowed to the spectators with an air of the most astonishing indifference and intrepidity.

When he came to the fatal tree, he ascended the ladder; when his right leg trembling, he stamped it down with an air of assumed courage, as if he was ashamed of discovering any signs of fear, Having conversed with the executioner about half an hour, he threw himself off the ladder, and expired in a few minutes.

The spectators of the execution were affected at his fate, as he was distinguished by the comeliness of his appearance. The corpse was brought to the Blue Boar, in Castle-Gate, York, where it remained till the next morning, when it was interred in the church-yard of St. George's parish, with an inscription on the coffin, with the initials of his name, and his age. The grave was dug remarkably deep, but notwithstanding the people who acted as mourners took such measures as they thought would secure the body: it was carried off about three o'clock on the following morning; the populace, however, got intimation whither it was conveyed, and found it in a garden belonging to one of the surgeons of the city.

Having got possession of it they laid it on a board, and carried it through the streets in a kind of triumphal manner, they then filled the coffin with unslacked lime, and buried it in the grave where it had been before deposited.

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17: All on a Springtide Day

J. S. Fletcher
1863-1935

The Red Magazine, 15 Feb 1917
Collected in: *The Massingham Butterfly and Other Stories*, 1926

IN THE FAR-OFF DAYS when Henry VII was king of England, there lived in a remote Yorkshire village an ancient gentleman, whose sole worldly wealth was a humble dwelling, a croft of land and orchard garden, a chair or two whereon to sit, a bed whereon to lie, a table to eat at, a shelf of old books, and enough money to keep himself in comfort. Also, ever since he had come into that village— which was a little time after the great battle of Bosworth— he had kept, first at his knee and later at his elbow, a handsome lad who called him uncle and whom he taught to read in the old books, to ride a somewhat ancient steed which picked up a living in the croft, to bend a bow and to fish in the river which ran at the foot of the garden. At the time when this truly amazing chronicle begins, this lad, whose name was Nepotus (having after much thought been invented by the old gentleman himself and, in a way, signifying nephew), was a big fellow of twenty years and as handsome as a young larch tree. He had a truly beautiful face, curling chestnut hair and blue eyes; his figure was the goodliest ever glanced aside at by amorous maidens; he was full of good temper and, in spite of a large appetite, had so far found things go very easily with him. True, he and the good man, his uncle, lived very quiet lives and ate very plainly, but what with a bit of fishing and the care of the garden and the reading of the old books and the hearing of tales of other times the days passed not unpleasantly, nor, let us hope, without profit.

There came a day— it was in the height of a joyous spring— when the old man, who for several days previously had been much wrapped in thought, summoned the young man to his side and gave signs that he was about to pronounce a grave and weighty discourse to him.

"Nepotus," he said, "I am now near unto seventy years, and it is time I considered the end of my days. In plain words, my son, I am about to enter upon the eventide of life. But thou, Nepotus, art yet on life's very threshold. Thou art about to enter upon a scene which I must needs quit."

Nepotus made no reply to this preface; he waited respectfully for the next in order.

"Know thee," continued the old man, "that I propose to end my days in a cloister. I have already arranged with the good monks of Rievaulx to take me into their house. But as for you, Nepotus, you shall go forth and seek your fortune in the world."

This news was welcome to Nepotus. Truth to tell, he had for some time cherished a secret longing to go away from that place and see for himself what the world was like. He had gained some notion of it from the old man's tales and from books and from the gossip of neighbours. He had heard of cities and towns and kings and statesmen, of fair ladies and the making of money— all these matters he desired to know somewhat of and at close quarters. Therefore, not unpleased, he bowed his head.

"As your worship pleases," he said obediently. "Certes, you know what is best for me."

"I hope it may be for the best," said the old man with a sigh. "But life, as I have seen it, is an uncertain thing— 'tis a lottery. Howbeit, thou mayest draw a rich prize. There is an ancient Latin proverb, which tells us that every man is the master of his own fortune. You, Nepotus, shall at any rate have the chance of making yours. But first let me tell thee somewhat. Know, Nepotus, that thou art not my nephew."

"Sir!" said Nepotus. "You amaze me!"

"Neither my nephew, nor my son, nor my grandson, nor any kith or kin," affirmed the old gentleman, shaking his white beard. "In good sooth, I do not know who thou art. My own notion is that thou art the son of some very great man. Thou mayest be lord for aught I know to the contrary. Thy good looks, thy build, thy hands, thy feet— nay, 'tis very sure thou didst never come of common folk! Hadst a man of quality for thy father, and a gentlewoman for thy mother, or I am a veritable ignoramus— which, by'r Lady, I am not!"

This was strange news to Nepotus and he could do naught but stare. His guardian presently proceeded.

"I will now tell thee thy history," said he. "Know that I, a man of good birth myself, though poor, was once a man-at-arms. I have seen much service. I fought in the Wars of the Roses, neither once, nor twice, nor thrice, but many times I have slain many men— may the Lord give their souls rest! I fought at Towton— never mind on which side, it boots it not— and I fought at Bosworth Field. And it was as I came away from that great battle, having seen the King his Majesty assume the crown which had rolled from Richard's head, that I found thee!"

The old man here paused, and, bidding Nepotus to fill him a cup of sack from a certain flagon which stood on a convenient shelf in the corner, took a refreshing pull at its contents.

"This way it was," said he continuing. "As I rode northward after that great fight, it chanced that hunger and fatigue fell upon me. Wherefore, putting up my horse at a wayside cottage, I sought rest and refreshment. Howbeit, naught did I find in that place, but a man lying dead in the garden, a woman likewise dead in the porch— both slain, moreover, by chance arrow shots, and thee,

then a lusty infant of some three years, weeping with loud voice in the houseplace. And there being no human soul or habitation in sight, what could I do but carry thee away on my saddlebow? And here thou art! For I was a lone man, having neither wife nor child of my own, and I took to thee. Moreover, this way did I account for things— thou wert garmented as benefited some child of quality; those dead folk were of the people. Clearly, then, thou hadst been left in their charge by some man who had gone to the war, and who, I doubt not, never returned. And though I remained in that country many days, no tidings of any seeking for thee could I get— so we came hitherward and here we have remained. But now I must go one way— to my grave; and thou another— to seek thy fortune."

Nepotus, hearing all this, thought a good deal more than he had ever thought in his life— to tell the truth, he never had thought much of anything serious up to that moment. However, the lad was not without sense, and he made a good answer.

"Sir," said he, "I am greatly beholden to your worship for all that you have done for me and I trust that I shall never disgrace you. In what way, now, would you recommend me to begin this fortune seeking?"

"Well said for a practical lad!" quoth the old gentleman. "Here, then, is my counsel. To-morrow morning at sunrise we will set out— our ways will lie together as far as Rievaulx, where I will get me into the calm retreat of the cloister. Thou shalt continue thy journeyings to York, which is, as thou hast heard me tell, a great and wondrous city. There seek out some noble of high rank and ask him courteously to take thee into his service. At discretion tell him thy history. And that thou mayest not go into the world empty-handed, two things will I give thee— this staff and this purse— which purse contains all the portion I can bestow on thee, which is fifty good rose-nobles. Take them with my blessing, and remember to think twice before thou dost spend them!"

Next morning when the sun was shining his brightest, the cocks crowing their loudest and every bird in the valley piping his best, Nepotus and the old man went on their way. At the gate of the Abbey of Rievaulx they took an affectionate farewell of each other; then the old gentleman smote on the door and was presently admitted, and Nepotus, somewhat sad, but yet in high spirits, climbed the hill and went forward to take a look at the world.

ii

THE PLACE in which Nepotus had lived all his life was so remotely situated in a deep vale amongst the North York moors that he had seen very little of life until this moment, and he was all agape with amazement and wonder when, at the top of the hill above Rievaulx, he came into the little market town of

Helmsley. That, to be sure, was but a small place, but its great church, its mighty castle, the houses of its folk, and the shops, stalls and booths in its market square, seemed so grand to the poor youth that he had haste to pass through, only pausing to ask his way to York. He glanced back at the town when he got outside it, wondering what York might be if this country place was so considerable; it relieved him greatly to find that villages which he now encountered were little bigger than that in which he had been brought up. And by the time of high noontide, he had grown so used to seeing strange folk, and to walking through unfamiliar village streets, that at Sutton-in-the-Forest he turned into the tavern, and boldly demanded to eat and drink.

Now, Nepotus was but humbly clad, in garments such as the poorer sort of country folk wore in those days and, though all about him was neat and clean, he was not without patches on his knees and elbows. Wherefore a somewhat sour-faced landlord glanced at him suspiciously.

"Before we set meat and liquor on board for such as thou," said he, "we choose to see the colour of their money. Hast thou such a thing as a groat about thee?"

"A groat!" exclaimed Nepotus. "What is that, good master?"

For, indeed, he knew nothing about money, the old gentleman having kept the purse, and paid everything out.

"I know nought of groats! Give me to eat and drink and I will pay thee with a rose-noble."

The landlord pricked up his ears at that, and glanced at two or three men who sat drinking in a corner of the inn. They, in their turn, stared at the young stranger.

"A rose-noble?" quoth the landlord. "Where should such as thou get a rose-noble? Hast never a rose-noble about thee?"

"Will you give me bread and meat, and ale?" demanded Nepotus, who was not without spirit. "I will show you smartly enough whether I can pay you or not when you have served me."

"Give the lad what he wants," growled a big man who sat by. "He looks honest enough. Art on thy way from market doubtless," he went on, turning to Nepotus. "Hast been selling the pigs, likely."

"I have neither been selling pigs nor buying them," answered Nepotus. "What I would buy is meat and drink, for I am sharp set. And if I cannot buy here, I will go where I can."

Now there was that in Nepotus's speech and manner which showed that he was not of common breed, so the landlord, grumbling somewhat, set before him bread and beef and a measure of ale, after which, planting himself squarely before the table at which Nepotus sat, he demanded the reckoning. Thereupon,

Nepotus, fumbling in his purse, extracted one of his rose-fifty nobles and handed it over.

After which there was a great to-do. Gold money was rarely seen in the country in those days, and no man in the inn had set eyes on a rose-noble more than once or twice in his life. Thereupon, amidst a great chattering and babbling, during which Nepotus calmly ate and drank, the coin was passed from hand to hand, bitten by strong teeth, wondered at, gazed upon covetously. But the great amazement was, that a lad so meanly garmented should possess it, wherefore they all turned and stared at Nepotus.

"Hast come honestly by this?" demanded the big man. "Know that I am the constable of this parish, and have been so these thirty years. Yet never did I see a fellow of thy seeming condition offer a gold piece of money for his luncheon. Where got'st thou that piece, lad?"

"What is that to you?" retorted Nepotus, with his cheeks bulging with beef. "Mind your own affairs, master, and let me mind mine. There should be change of money due to me out of my gold piece, pay it over, master host, and leave me to eat and drink in peace."

There was some further talk amongst the other men, but one of them, a very old man, shook his head.

"A' had the law on his side," said he. "Hath tendered a's money, and must have his change. 'Tis the law that. Give him what is due to him, John Bentbridge."

However, John Bentbridge, the landlord, found much ado in finding change for a rose-noble, and it was with much grumbling that he finally placed before Nepotus, a heap of groats, pence, and half-pence. Now, a penny was nearly as large as a saucer in those days, and a half-penny was a formidable thing, and Nepotus stared hard at this seemingly vast accession of wealth.

"Hadst better give me a sack to carry all that in!" he said good-humouredly. "Faith, masters, I had not known there was so much money in the world."

This made the men stare at him all the more; and the landlord and the constable began to put their heads together. For this, indeed, was stranger than the affair of the rose-noble, that one of apparently low degree should be amazed at the sight of halfpence.

But Nepotus, being in good sooth sharp set by his tramp over hill and dale, paid no heed to these village wiseacres, he ate and drank heartily, and when he had finished, swung round his purse which he carried at his girdle so that he might place therein the money which John Bentbridge had given him in change. And thereby began the misfortunes which were first to lead him into the very slough of despond, and afterwards conduct him to such heights of bliss as surely no youth ever dreamed of.

The purse which the old gentleman had given to Nepotus was, like its donor, worn and ancient, and that with the weight of the forty-nine rose-nobles, and the added weight of the massive pence and halfpence, its meshes gave way.

No sooner had Nepotus arisen to his feet, eager to be off about his business, than it burst, and a cataract of coinage, gold, silver and copper, flew forth and rolled here and there amongst the legs of the tables and the feet of the company. And thereupon arose such a commotion as might arise did one fling but an apron full of choice dainties amongst a herd of swine.

There was an upsetting of benches and chairs, a going-down on hands and knees; there were shoutings and cursings as each man scrambled with his neighbour. For a penny-piece was a penny-piece in those days, and, as for a rose-noble, it was a gentleman's ransom. So each ale swigger strove to pocket something for himself, and above the din rose the protestations of Nepotus and the loud voice of the constable.

"Hark ye all," roared the man of authority. "Let every knave of ye deliver what he hath picked up! John, the landlord shut and bolt thy door! Let no man leave, let none enter. Board the money before me, every one of you, on pain of death and the King's displeasure. And, as for thee, young man— "

But Nepotus, very pale and red by turns, was energetically collecting his wealth, and laying heavy hands on those who seemed slow to hand it over.

"Give me my money!" he demanded fiercely. "I will brain the first caitiff that keeps him a penny of it! Hand it back, I say, you who have recovered it. Forty-nine gold coins there are! Talk not to me of cracks and holes in the floor, thou reprobate! I will crack thy skull, and make holes in thy body, thou thief, if thou— "

"Caitiff— thieves?" shouted the constable. "And what art thou, my young cockerel? Who ever heard of a fellow with clouts on knee and elbow going about with fifty rose-nobles in his pouch? Thief thyself, and shalt to the nearest magistrate."

"Ay, marry!" exclaimed the landlord, "those be good words, enow! Have him to Sir Toby. He'll lay him by the heels, I warrant me. Gold quotha! and enough to pay for my house and liquor!"

Nepotus grew still paler on hearing all this, and he made his first error. For he was young, and his blood was hot, and he had a masterful will. Wherefore, he raised his oaken staff, and made threats with it.

"So I am to be robbed, am I?" he shouted. "Not willingly, my masters! Hand me my money, ye rascals, or—"

"Hand him naught!" commanded the constable, who himself had gathered up as much of the money as he could lay fingers to. "Hear all men in the King's name— 'liver this money to me, to have and hold until we know how it was come by, and, as for thee, thou young ruffiner, shalt with me before Sir To—"

But at that Nepotus made his second error. For, seeing these rustics hand over his gold, his silver, his pence, to the constable, for whose office he had no respect, there being no constable in the hamlet he hailed from— he began to lay about him with his staff, crying out that he was robbed and undone.

The windows were broken, the pots and pans were smashed, the pewter was strewn about the floor, and the landlord's wife, coming in from baking to learn the cause of this commotion, was just in time to catch the mighty form of her husband, who fell into her arms, streaming with blood, the result of a violent blow which had been aimed at Nepotus, but fell on the landlord's nose. Amidst her shrieks, and the good man's groans, and a general chorus of loud vociferations, Nepotus was overcome and bound, and he had the sorrow of seeing his beloved money carefully collected by the constable.

And now Nepotus made his third and greatest error. He had been given much book-learning by the old gentleman and he had picked up more from the monks of Rievaulx, and now, having a vague idea that it might frighten his assailants, he set to and cursed the constable, the landlord and the company, in good, sound Latin, throwing in a few words of bad Greek to make his anathemas the more awe-inspiring.

But in this he took the wrong sow by the ears, as you shall learn at once. For the constable, first opening his mouth in amazement at hearing Greek and Latin pouring readily from the lips of a youth whose jerkin was patched, and whose hose was much mended, presently shook his head with the decisiveness of a wise man.

"Ha, ha!" quoth he triumphantly. "What have we here, my masters? Hebrew, Greek, and who knows what else! I see how it is— this is some renegade young monk that hath robbed his monastry! Ay, and doubtless murdered some poor rustic for the sake of his apparel. Out with him to the stocks! We will lay him by the heels at any rate, until we can put a halter around his neck."

That it came to pass that as the village bell tolled noontide poor Nepotus, sore buffeted, and wholly sick of this strange world, sat in the stock, to be mocked at, and wondered about, by the people who came running from all sides to see him.

iii

HERE, THEN, at the very outset of his ventures, was Nepotus, a prisoner and object of contumely a thing to be jeered at by every mischievous lad who could find a clod of earth to fling at him. Yet the good blood in him asserted itself. He sat up in the stocks, held his bare head high and flashed upon his tormentors a proud look that made some of them wonder at his insolence. In their opinion

Nepotus should have slunk and whimpered; instead he stared at them as if they were so much mud beneath his feet.

It was at this juncture that a cavalcade rode into the village. A mighty fine cavalcade it was, of men-at-arms, and serving men, all fine and gay, in brave liveries, and riding proud steeds. But glittering and grand as this cavalcade was, all its brilliance was eclipsed by the rare sight that rode at its head— a fair and lovely maiden of some twenty summers, who was so beautiful that she seemed to put out the light of the sun and to fill everything in that place with a radiance of her own. It matters not to say with close particulars what she was like, suffice it to tell that not one goddess in all Olympus, nor even Helen of Troy herself, could in any way compare to her in face or form.

And she was not only beautiful but proud and masterful, and imperious, and at the very sight of her every man-jack there bent his head, uncapped, to the ground; all the women made their deepest curtsies and all the children, awe-struck, put their thumbs in their mouths.

"What have we here?" demanded this beauty with one swift glance at Nepotus, who, under its searching sweetness, felt himself grow fiery red. "What is this rabblement and who is yonder good youth?"

And again she looked at Nepotus, and Nepotus looked at her. Now, as I have said, Nepotus was a very paragon of beauty, in a proper, manly way, and the young woman was equally fair in her province, and it was as if flint had struck on steel when their eyes met. Nepotus grew redder than ever, and the lady blushed, too, and she compressed her full nether lip with her pearly teeth and looked away, and her glance fell on the constable, who had straightened himself by that time. Therewith she let out a rapping oath.

"God's death, fellow!" she exclaimed terribly. "Why standest thou gaping there, like the fool thou lookest? Answer me! Who is this youth?"

The constable summoned all the effrontery that was in him and spoke up. A nice tale he told, too, with so many lies in it that Nepotus laughed aloud. And at the laugh the lady turned on him— but her eyes did not seek his quite so readily.

"And what sayest thou, good youth?" she asked. "Say, and fear not."

Nepotus saw no reason for fear and spoke out. And as he told his tale the maiden's eyes began to grow sombre and dark, and her red lips straightened themselves ominously, and, taking their cue from their mistress, all the men-at-arms began to shake their heads and the villagers began to tremble. As for the constable, his spine turned to butter.

"Ha!" she exclaimed, when Nepotus had made an end. "That is more like the truth!" She turned on the constable with a set face. "Set me this gentleman free on the instant!" she said.

Nepotus presently arose, shook himself, and made a deep reverence to his preserver. But for that time his preserver took no heed of him. She lifted a finger to the men-at-arms. Six of them leapt from their horses and gathered at her stirrup. She pointed at the constable.

"Hang me that fat man on yonder tree!" she commanded.

Thereat arose a fine babel of sound. The constable roared, his wife and children screamed, all the village women began to wail and the dogs, which had assembled on every side, began to bark at the tumult. But the men-at-arms, taking no heed to aught but their lady's commands, seized and bound the constable, and in a twinkling slipped a halter around his neck. This seemed greatly to the maiden's relish and she was watching everything with glad eye, when she felt a gentle touch on her arm, and, looking down, in amazement, saw Nepotus' beautiful face turned upward to her own.

"So please you," said Nepotus, "it were ill-done to punish so heavily for so slight an offence. Methinks this man did what seemed to him his office. I beseech your majesty— for you are surely a queen, being so gracious and beautiful— to let him go. I kiss your majesty's hand"— here he suited the action to the word— "in token of my gratitude. But also I beg the man's life. Natheless," he continued, with a shake of his curly head, "it will be but right that he should give me back my money."

At the touch of Nepotus' lips upon her fair hand the lady blushed as rosy as the morning and she looked down again in a fashion which no man had ever seen her use before. For one moment more they continued gazing at each other— then she turned to the men-at-arms.

"Let the fellow go!" she said. "But first— the money. And now," she continued when the constable had yielded up the rose-nobles, "give this gentleman a horse. And hark ye, varlets!" she exclaimed, turning to the villagers. "Let me hear of your treating strangers again in this fashion and I will hang every mother's son of you to your own door posts!"

During the next hour Nepotus knew not if he was dead or dreaming— if dead, in Paradise; if dreaming, in such dreams as rarely come to mortal. For he rode by his fair preserver's side, and he told her his tale, and the tale which the old gentleman had told him; and the lady said that she had known from the moment she set eyes on him that he was a man of high birth, and it should now be her endeavour to set him on the pinnacle to which he had rightful place. Thus discoursing she led him to her castle, a mighty fair one, overlooking all that country, and there she delivered him to lackeys who provided him with a scented bath and much brave raiment, and, his toilet being made, conducted him with deep obeisances into the presence of their mistress, who was about to sit down to meat.

And now a rare and most wonderful thing happened.

There stood at the side of the table whereat Nepotus and the lady were to dine an ancient serving-man. He was a personage of distinction and wore a silver chain about his neck, and was master of the other lackeys. And no sooner did Nepotus enter the hall than this man, after staring at him in amazement, threw up his hands and exclaimed so loudly that his mistress asked him what ailed him.

"Madam," said he, when he could fetch his breath— "your ladyship will forgive me for my seeming lack of manners when I tell you that in this gracious young gentleman I seem to behold the very presence of one whom I once served. Nay, verily this young lord, whose name I know not, must indeed be the son of my old master, Sir Hugo de Belchamp, for he is his very spit!"

You may be sure that the old greybeard, and the fair mistress of the castle, and the wondering Nepotus had much anxious discourse during that afternoon— the upshot of it being that they decided that Nepotus was certainly the son of Sir Hugo de Belchamp, a great knight, who was believed to have met his death at Bosworth Field. According to the serving-man, many and great estates were awaiting Nepotus, or Sir Hugo, as we must now call him, and it was arranged that he should travel with a brave retinue, to that part of the country where they lay, there to be received with open arms and the ringing of bells.

But this was not yet to be. For the maiden who had rescued Nepotus from the stocks had no mind to part with him. She was the Lady Algitha; her parents were dead and she herself was absolute mistress of all the land which she could see from her castle, and could hang every man about that land if she were so disposed. She was as impulsive as she was powerful, and as resolute as she was impulsive. And now that Nepotus was in her company he began to feel that if any man had asked him which was his head and which was his heel he would have found it hard to answer. All that afternoon and all that evening the Lady Algitha kept him near her; she conducted him over her castle and through her pleasance; they lingered in a garden full of roses and sweet scents, and it became increasingly difficult for him to keep his eyes off her, and for her to keep her eyes off him. Nevertheless, it was not until evening had closed in and they were alone with the moonlight that they ventured to take each other by the hand.

Nepotus, for the life of him, could never tell how it came to be that he found the beautiful maiden in his arms, pressing her warm lips to his. He had never kissed a maiden before, and he lost his heart, his head and his tongue. But the Lady Algitha's tongue was not easily lost.

"Oh, Nepotus," she murmured, twining her shapely arms about his neck. "How I love thee! How I dote on thee, Nepotus! I shall never call thee anything else— 'tis so sweet a name. I have dreamed of thee so long, Nepotus— for three

long years at least, and now thou art come. Nepotus, never will we two part again. Wilt thou wed me?"

Nepotus nearly swooned. But the Lady Algitha's eyes were upon him and her arms about him. He became delirious, yet he found his tongue.

"Oh, heavens!" he murmured. "Do I hear aright? Can such bliss be possible?"

The Lady Algitha drew her head back from his shoulder and looked at him.

"Possible!" quoth she. "Am I not lord, lady, master, mistress? There is no man to say me nay. Thou lovest me?"

Nepotus was about to swear by the moon and stars. Thinking better of it, he caught the maiden to his bosom and kissed her six times. Therewith she took him by the hand and gently led him back to the castle.

"Come, Nepotus," she murmured in her softest accents. "Come, we will lose no time, being young. My chaplain shall wed us on the instant."

Thus did Nepotus become happily provided for on the very threshold of his career. And if there be any who doubt the truth of this chronicle I say to them, as a veracious chronicler, that in those days to which the story relates, this sort of thing happened almost every day.

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18: Dot: A Reminiscence

George Hurdis Purves
1850-1889
Australasian (Melbourne) 16 March 1889

The author, whose best-known work was the novel "The Squatter King", died on 21 February 1889. This was his last story, completed on 16 February 1889.

"ESSCHEN! ESSCHEN! ESSCHEN!"

There was so need to bawl out the name of the station as far as I was concerned, or to tell me that there was a stoppage of 20 minutes, or to announce that all baggage would have to be removed to the Customs shed for examination. The train had no sooner left Roosendaal than I had begun to get ready for the coming detention and examination, and even before we stopped at Esschen all my packages— they did not amount to much— were deposited on the seat opposite me.

When the porter flung the door open I at once secured his services (I was riding first-class, which a Continental proverb declares is only need by Englishmen and princes, and therefore was looked on as "a good mark"), and handing him down my things, stretched myself a couple of times, and then leisurely followed him to the Customs shed.

The large baggage would be unloaded immediately, so we were informed at intervals by the head officer of the Customs, who likewise politely advised all those who had trunks to get their keys ready.

I stood back leaning against the wall and watched the crowd with no little amusement, especially those of my unfortunate countrymen who could not speak French. There was one family especially that almost monopolised my attention, so flurried, so impatient, and so little versed in the ways of travelling were they. They all had different ideas of what should be done; they all wanted possession of the keys, and they one and all bitterly regretted that Sam, who probably was a relation, was not there to get them out of their difficulty.

"To think of the money that's been spent on 'em, Jane," said the father, wiping his perspiring forehead with one hand, as he pointed to two schoolgirls and a lad of eighteen or so with the other, "and not one of 'em able to say what these infernal fellows want"

Seeing a countryman in a fix, I stepped forward, and in a few minutes put matters right. The whole family were so profuse in their acknowledgments that (having had my own packages marked) I made my way to the refreshment-room, through which all passengers had to pass to the train, to escape their thanks.

But as I turned away, my hat being still raised as I took leave of them, I came face to face with a lovely girl, who had evidently not only watched the scene, but watched it with no little enjoyment. There was a twinkle in her eye of the keenest appreciation, and though on meeting my glance her face became at once comparatively demure and grave, a smile hovered still about the corners of her mouth. I fancy that my eyes brightened as I saw the merriment in hers, but as I could not stare her out of countenance, I moved past her and gradually was bustled and bustled into the refreshment-room,

The face was such an unusually pretty one that as I placed my things on a seat I turned round towards the door by which I had entered, and by which I knew she, too, must come in, determined not to lose an opportunity of seeing her again. And very carefully I watched too, for she was of such diminutive size that I thought it quite possible that she might pass by in the crowd and that I might miss her.

I was not kept waiting long. Two minutes after I had entered I saw her deftly making her way amongst the Tough, pushing crowd, with her lips just sufficiently parted to show her bright, even teeth, and a slight colour of excitement in her cheeks. She was carrying a medium-sized bag and a parcel of umbrellas, parasols, etc., and was making her way with difficulty. I was just on the point of proffering my services, when to the amusement of the bystanders, no less than her own, she let all the baggage fall to the ground, and as a bright colour came into her pretty cheeks, and a look of uncontrollable merriment into her eyes, began to laugh as if the whole thing was an excellent joke.

Now I have said that I was on the point of proffering my services. I had, in fact, made a step or two towards her. Directly, then, that I saw her luggage fall from her hand, I made a dive for the things, and rescued them before any damage was done. The next moment she was beside me, and as she sat down with a sigh of exhaustion on a bench close by, she thanked me with no little warmness for the assistance I had rendered. Of course I made light of what I had done (taking the opportunity of having another good look at what was the very prettiest and most captivating little face I had ever seen in my life), and professed my willingness to do anything I could for her.

She gave me a smile of gratitude, and then laughed again even more heartily than before, but what she laughed at I did not then discover. Just then the doors leading to the platform were opened, and the guard of the train requested the passengers to take their places. The announcement had for the moment distracted my attention from the girl, and when I turned round again she had risen to her feet, and was preparing to tackle her bundles again, little as she had shown herself competent to carry them before.

But even before I noticed this I had caught eight of her face, and was rather amused to see that the look of gaiety had given way to a thoughtful and even

business-like expression. She was pursing her plump little lips, her brows were contracted, and indeed the whole of her face denoted that she was debating a knotty point.

"Can I do anything for you?" I asked again. "Please allow me to carry those bundles."

She hesitated for a moment, and then apparently made up her mind. She looked up into my face with a trustful pleading expression in her eyes, and then, coming quite close to me, said in the very lowest voice

"I've noticed your good nature, sir, twice since we left the train. Would it be too much to ask you," she here faltered, but looked at me more pleadingly than ever, "to do me a further favour?"

I protested my perfect willingness in a tone the genuineness of which was not open to doubt.

" Well then, it's just this," she said, still speaking love, but at a great rate. " I got in at Rotterdam, and, of course, as I was only a girl travellin' alone, a great big porter got hold o' me and shoved me into the first first-class carriage he came to. I'd only mounted the first step when I saw the company wouldn't suit, but the porter went gabbling on at me— and in Dutch, too, the wretch, which he most have known I did not understand— and just fair shoved me into the car. The door had hardly closed when the train started. There were five in the carriage already— you know them, the five you helped just now— an' what room they weren't occupyin' they'd stuck their traps on. I looked round—" she here turned her pretty head round, so that I caught a sight of her exquisite little profile— "but they never offered to move, or make a place for me. The father was deep in a newspaper, the mother was knittin' a family shawl, the boy was readin' a novel and suckin' an orange, and the two girls were eatin' peppermint at such a rate that I thought they meant breakin' the record."

The girl here burst into a merry laugh— not a loud one, but a crisp, joyous chortle that was pleasant to hear. The moment she had opened her lips I had known she was an American; and though, perhaps, her conversation may not read well, I can pledge my word that it was delightful to listen to. Her face was so alive with merriment that it alone would have held one spell-bound, as, indeed, it did me for the time being, had not the gruff voice of a porter peremptorily summoned the passengers to take their places.

"Well! you want to get away from these people?" I asked.

She nodded vigorously.

"And get into another carriage," I proceeded.

"Oh! that's just it," she intercepted with a grave face, as we made for the platform. "The porters say there isn't another seat anywhere.

Now it so happened that I had a *coupé* to myself. What could I do but offer it to her? I did so on as polite terms as I could.

"I shall easily find a place elsewhere," I added.

She caught hold of my arm.

"Ain't there room for both?" she asked in surprise.

I hesitated a moment

"Why, yes," I answered at length. "But you see I'm alone, and— and— perhaps— perhaps—"

"Then what do you want to go for!" she asked, opening her eyes to the widest extent. "I'd like you to stay," she added emphatically, "and— and," here she laughed right merrily, "you ain't goin' to run away from *me*."

There was no time to argue the question had I been anxious to do so, which, indeed, I was not.

With a smile, I gave in, and we got into the carriage. The door was closed, the train started, and I was left alone with my pretty little acquaintance. Just for the moment I felt the situation rather awkward, but my little friend, for all that she looked but a schoolgirl, soon set me at my ease.

" Now, what comes first?" she exclaimed with quite a grave air. "Oh! allotment of seats. Which side will you have?"

I said it was a matter of indifference.

" All right I" she said. "I'll take the seat with the back to the engine. You don't get any sparks there, an' have a chance of keepin' yourself clean. Now you understand, sir, that *that* is your side, an' *this* is mine. Now, the next thing," she said in a tone that implied that she had arranged the whole programme, and that this was especially a matter of grave moment, "is the introduction. I think," she said, alter some consideration, "that you had better introduce yourself first."

I happened to have my card-case in my pocket, and taking out a card presented it to her with a bow.

SIR CHARLES-CROSSLEY-CROSSLEY,
"DIMÉ OAKS".

She looked at the card, then at me, then at the card again. Her face was quite grave, and she bit her lip.

"Are you a lord?" she asked, her pretty eyes opening their widest

"No, indeed!" I laughingly answered. " Only a baronet, but my—"

I have often wondered since whether oar acquaintance would have become as intimate as it did had I finished the above sentence. I do not wish to disguise anything, and will at once acknowledge that at the time I was a married man, My wife was entitled to the prefix "Lady" in her own right before I succeeded to the title, and it was this little fact I was on the point of divulging.

" But my—!" she repeated after me, still holding the card up, but looking at me with great interest

I laughed at her persistence, and then mumbled out something about a cousin of mine being a lord. But I am afraid that I blushed a little as I spoke, for I instinctively knew, even as the words left my mouth, that my sharp little friend knew perfectly well that I had kept something back from her.

She stopped just a moment, and then took another look at the card.

"A baronet ain't much, is it?' she asked, playing with the card. " 'Bout the same as a colonel or judge with us?"

I could not help laughing, but explained that there were baronets and baronets, and that there were plenty of families who bore no title at all who were of very old stock indeed, going back, indeed, much further than half the peerage.

As I entered on this explanation she fell back in her seat with a disappointed look.

"Oh! I *am* sorry you ain't a lord," she said with a sigh. "I've always been dyin' to meet one. Yes! just *dyin*'! An' what am I to call you?" she asked, "for I'd never be able to say all this without keepin' the card in my hand."

She looked so puzzled that, from a smile, I broke into a hearty laugh.

" Call me Sir Charles," I said. "*That* won't be a great tax on you. And now for *your* introduction."

" Do you think Geraldine a pretty name?" she asked with an anxious look in her eyes,

I vowed that it was my favourite name.

"Well, then, that ain't my name!" she said with the glee of a schoolgirl who has caught her master. "What do you think of Doretta?" she asked again.

I shook my head.

"Once bitten, twice shy," I said.

"Now this time you are wrong," she laughed, "for Doretta is my name; an' if you hadn't made that pretty speech over Geraldine, you could protest that Doretta was your favourite name. Well! my whole name is Doretta Vanloo, on' what do you think of it?"

I said it was a very pretty name.

"Now, if I tell you something more you'll promise you'll never make any use of it."

I protested against being asked to enter blindfold into any bargain. Bat she insisted, and in the end I gave way.

"Strike your heart!" she said.

The formula was new to me, but I obeyed. "The boys call me Dot," she said gravely.

"Because yon are so sm—" I began.

"No!" she interrupted, with a vicious little stamp. "Because it's short for Doretta."

After this we drifted for a time into a general conversation from which we were each enabled to pick up some information. We thus found that we were each bound for Brussels by that night's express; that her party was only to join her on Friday night (it was then Monday); that I expected my "friends" (thus, I admit, I was mean enough to designate my wife and two thumping boys) over on Saturday; and that neither of us knew a soul at Brussels. I had asked, and gained, her permission to look after her things at Antwerp, and there was some sort of arrangement that I should act as her chaperon m the train to Brussels.

"How long do we stop at Antwerp?" she suddenly asked.

"About an hour and an half," I answered, "and a great nuisance it is."

" Well, you may think so, but I don't," she exclaimed vehemently. "I've had nothing to eat since breakfast. It was then five o'clock, an' I tell you, sir, that have somethin' to eat I will, whatever it is an' wherever I get it."

Referring to *Baedecker*, I named several restaurants quite near the station, which were recommended, with the all-powerful asterisk.

"Suppose we try Bertrand?" I suggested.

"We!" she exclaimed, raising her eyebrows. "I thought it was me that was hungry."

I explained that I, too, bad not eaten since breakfast, and proposed that we should have our meal together. But to this she would not at first listen. She had no objection to travelling with me to Brussels, or to me looking after her luggage, &c, but to deliberately go out and eat a meal together was a very different affair.

"Is there a *buffet* at the station?" she asked.

I replied haphazard that there was not, and renewed my entreaties for her to join me. For a time she resolutely refused, but in the end she gave in a little, suggesting that we should walk on opposite sides of the street, and should have our meal at separate tables. And to this arrangement I was forced to

Arrived at Antwerp I gave our luggage in charge of a porter, and we started on our divided way. But after we had walked a few hundred yards the whole thing seemed to ridiculous that we both, as we looked from time to time at each other across the wide street, began laughing immoderately.

Suddenly the little lady stopped and beckoned to me with her parasol.

"Why," she said, laughingly, "this is just too ridiculous. I give in, but mind," she added firmly, "I'm to pay my share."

Seeing the little woman so independent, I had to agree to this, and we quickly made our way to Bertrand's. Just as we turned in at the door she plucked my sleeve, and, turning round I beheld the family from which I bad rescued her at Esschen.

"We're done for," she said. "The two peppermint girls spotted us."

"Whatted us?" I exclaimed, in surprise at such a phrase in the mouth of a young girl.

"They saw us," she corrected herself quickly, and then added with a pout, "You are partic'lar."

We sat down and ordered something to eat, and though it was "between meals," as the head waiter informed us, we were very well satisfied, thanks, 1 fancy, to a tip that I gave that indispensable functionary. I must say that my little friend did justice to the meal, though she managed to get through a deal of talking between the courses.

"Well, I feel real good now," she said as we left to catch the train, "an'll last till supper."

"Till supper!" I said. "Shall you be hungry again to-night f'

"Well, I guess I will," she answered, as if it was a matter of course.

On our way to the station I bought her some chocolate. As we stepped out of the shop we came face to face with the father of the family already mentioned. He paid no attention to me, but he cast a look of undisguised contempt at my companion. His intention was so unmistakable that I felt no little indignation, and but for the restraining hand of my little friend should undoubtedly have given him a piece of my mind.

"Don't mind that," she said, with a twinkle of enjoyment in her eyes; "I've had all the best of him."

"How so?" I asked.

"Did you see me drop that heavy bag o' mine at Esschen?"

"Yes."

"Well! I took care it was in a plumb-line with his toes."

"Oh ! it was our friend who swore then?" I laughed.

The little lady nodded and laughed.

"I shouldn't ha' liked to ha' missed the shot," she said. "He was complainin' o' corns the whole way."

I said something about her being a little savage, but I laughed all the same.

THERE WERE VERY FEW passengers for Brussels, and I had no difficulty in arranging for a carriage to ourselves. The train was some little distance from where our luggage had been left, so after seeing the little American into the carriage I went off with the porter to claim our luggage. When I came back I found her reading *Baedecker*— my *Baedecker*— which she immediately threw on to my seat

" Well! I'm real glad you've come," she exclaimed with a yawn. "I was gettin' tired o' bein' alone, and I've read that fellow," she pointed to the discarded guide book, "until I just know him by heart."

Just then a boy put his head in the carriage-window and asked us if we wanted any fruit or papers.

"Have you a Brussels paper?" she asked.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," he answered. "*L'Etoile Belge*, to-morrow's edition."

She pulled out a neat little purse and paid him.

"Well," she said, as she scanned the columns; "I guess this is 'bout the on'y thing that these foreigners beat us at. Ain't it mighty handy," she laughed, "to buy tomorrow's paper, if you only do get the news o' the day before yesterday?" *

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** All Belgian, and most French, papers issue three editions daily: "L' Edition du Matin," "L' Edition du Soir," and "L' Edition Demain." —GHP*

As she looked down the columns she repeated all the headings, making a running commentary, as she went, on what the several articles contained. I sat looking at her with an amused smile, and more decided than ever that she was the loveliest little thing that I had ever met. Perhaps her nose did not belong to any recognised style of beauty, but to my mind it was the only nose to suit her face. Perhaps her mouth was just a trifle large, but had it not been one might have missed the sight of the most perfect set of teeth that ever ate chocolate (which they were doing at that very moment). But these defects, it defects they were, would only have been noticed by an hypercritic; and if the mouth had pleaded its own cause, aye, and that of the nose, it would have gained a verdict from any jury— I mean a jury of men— in the world. As for her hair, her eyes, and complexion, they were perfect. No jury of British matrons could have condemned them. She had taken off her hat, and the wind just caught her hair and played with a hundred mutinous ripples that clustered about her temples. What hair it was! How profuse! How perfect in colour! And how naturally yet suitably coifed.

And her dress! It was simple enough, and yet I never saw a more charming or becoming *costume de voyage*. Everything, from her hat to the hem of her skirt, was red and blue— the brightest red, the deepest blue. I can't say in what proportion the colours were used; I can't say how it was made; and still less can I tell you what it was made of. But I can aver— and I am not considered a bad judge of such things— that the *tout ensemble* was perfect, and that bright as the contrast was, having once seen the effect, no one would have wished her otherwise dressed.

"Ah! here we are!" she cried. "Now we will see what's goin' on. No opera! There never is in summer. Two theatres open— the *Eden*, that's a new theatre with naughty plays, an' *I* can't go; an' the *Moliére*, which is just a bit too stiff an' starchy for me. The opera band four nights a week in the park. I know the

place!" she exclaimed with no little animation. "You sit under the trees, an' eat ices, or drink the *sherry-gobbler*, as they call it, or the *whythe- wine- gobbler*; or the *whishkey-cocktails*, an' listen to the music. Ah! Joseph Dupont is conductor, so the music is sure to be good. Do you like music?" she asked.

I assured her that I was passionately fond of it, and saw that the warmth of my assertion gave her no little pleasure

" Well, *I* just live for it!" she sighed. " What sort do you like?" she asked, eagerly.

"Oh, pretty well all sorts, so long as it's good music well played."

"Ah! but what composers, do yon like best?" she asked, anxiously.

I hesitated a moment, dreading to plump too irrevocably for any particular school, lest my ideas should not coincide with here. But Miss Dot (I had received permission from her at Antwerp to use that form of address) awaited my answer with each evident impatience that I made a bold plunge.

" I think I prefer Liszt, and Berlioz, and Schumann, and especially Wagner."

Her eyes had lit up afresh at each name, but when I named Wagner she actually leapt to her feet and danced for joy. Then as suddenly sitting down, she began to tell me the effect which the works of each composers produced on her.

"Ah," she cried, clasping her little hands together; "give me something that makes you feel— that makes you go hot an' cold almost the same time, that makes you so excited that you can't keep your seat, that makes your hair go out o' curl, an' that finishes you up in one round, as the boys say. An' that's what their music does. Do you know that *Hungarian Rhapsody*— I don't know its number, I think it's two or four— but it goes like this," and she began to sing the air.

I nodded an assent

"You know it begins *quite slowly*,' she proceeded, dwelling on the last two words to add effect to the description, "and the same strain is repeated over an' over again in a quaint, unearthly sort o' way, and then come the twiddles."

"Twiddles!" I exclaimed laughingly, but still catching her meaning.

"Yes, twiddles!" she answered sharply. "What do you call them? Well, they go on for a bit, and jest when you're beginnin' to think you're bein' fooled, an' are gettin' that impatient that you could run a pin into the fat gentleman before you, the whole orchestra breaks into a furious tune, that makes you jump clean out o' your seat, and— and—"

"Sit down again!" I venture to suggest

"Don't steal American jokes," she said sharply, and added seriously, "If you can joke at all about it you don't feel it as I do. You should see me when I hear it. I get that excited I can't keep my seat— special if it's a spring one— an' I bound

about just like quicksilver. I always tell whoever I go with to look after me, for I declare to goodness I'm not responsible for my actions."

I laughed heartily at her excitement, and said that I hoped that I might be fortunate enough to see her on an occasion of the sort

"Oh! but I'm worse, much worse, when they're playin' the overture to *Tannhauser*," she proceeded, with even increased animation. "Then I'm just dangerous. I never dare go except with folk I know real well. Directly the orchestra strikes the first note I'm off. Bang! bang! bang! goes my heart as if it wanted to join in, an' I put an extra spike into my hat lest my hair should raise it off. Before they've finished the first theme there I am clean mad. An' how shouldn't I be? Why, the mere lookin' at the orchestra's enough to do it. After they've kept their hair on for about two minutes they begin to get excited. Then you hear spirits moaning in the 'cellos and shrieking in the clarinets. Well, after they've been goin' it a bit like so many Will-of-the-wisps gone mad, the brass in the band can't stand it any longer. Then they begin, an' don't you know it too! That starts the fun. As the horns, cornets, and bassoons fill their cheeks till they look like so many young balloons, the violinists are caught by the fever, an' don't they just get it bad. Forty or fifty at once start to try and saw their violins in half with the bow, an' the violins just shriek back at 'em as if they was really doin' it. An' the more the horns bellow, the more the violins shriek, why the more the conductor hops about in his box as if he was dancin' a jig barefoot on a red-hot stove, an' lookin' sometimes at the brass, sometimes at the strings, as if to say, 'Come on, you ruffians! I'm ready for you.' Oh!" finished the little lady with a sigh out of all proportion to her diminutive size; " it's just too lovely!"

I had roared with laughter (the expression may be taken almost literally) as she gabbled off this animated description, and for a time I could hardly pull myself together to speak. At last I was sufficiently master of myself to put a question.

"And what becomes of you at the end of the performance?" I asked.

"Why, sir, I have been found sittin' on my neighbour's knee," she said simply.

Soon after this we drifted into a conversation about travelling, and I found that she had been in pretty well every important town of Europe. I could hardly believe my ears as she rattled off the names of the places she had been to. Up to that time I had considered myself a great traveller, but here was a girl half my age who could give me a good start and a certain beating. I looked at her in amazement, and rubbed my eyes. Had she been a woman of forty her information, her memory, and experiences would have been remarkable, but here a mere chit of a girl. Well, l had heard that the Americans were a go-ahead people, but I had never recognised the truth of the assertion so fully as I did then. I purposely and perhaps a little meanly put questions to her about out-of-the-way places that I happened to know well, but she always answered without

the slightest hesitation, and added further particulars which always proved her case. I had tried to puzzle her, and "as the boys would say," to adopt her expression, she had polished me off in one round. I just looked at her in amazement and sank back on the seat

"Well, I'll be—" and then I just stopped in time.

"You'll be what, sir?" she laughed. " You'll be what Sir Curiosity?"

"Why, where the— I mean how the— I mean when have you found time to visit all these places? Do you travel night and day."

"Just depends!" she said, "If it's hot I like the night cars; if it's cold the day ones."

"But- you- don't- mean- to- tell- me," I said, sitting up and emphasising each word, "that you travel about just as you are, alone and unprotected?"

"No, I don't mean to tell you," she said, drily. "Anyway, what do you want to know for?"

I shrugged my shoulders with an air of indifference, which I indeed did not feel.

"Oh! I just wanted to know, you know," I said, inadvertently making use of a favourite slang phrase of the day.

She laughed a pert little laugh, showing those pretty teeth to the best advantage, and tilted her high straw hat at what I may term an alarming angle over her brows. Then she looked at me from under the brim,

"Well! perhaps he *shall* know, you know," speaking, upon my honour, as if she were soothing a child. "Have you ever played *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*?" she asked quite seriously,

"No, indeed!" I exclaimed emphatically. "But I'm afraid that I'm a little old to start learning any new games."

"Oh, no. Not a bit!" she said, shaking her pretty little head quite gravely. "Any child could learn it Now just you listen, and don't you forget. You play it on your fingers. You ask the question three times, and after each time you say ' *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*,' and if the last *Do* comes oh the little finger or thumb you win. If it comes on one of the other three I win."

"Bat," I urged, "you have three fingers to my two."

" An' so I ought," she laughed, "see the size of yours?" and she held up her diminutive hands to emphasise the disparity. "Besides, it's only three to two, an' that's fair odds, so the boys say. Now, then, I'm off. 'Shall I tell him? *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*. Shall I tell him? *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*. Shall I tell him? *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*."

She held up her first finger. I had lost! I protested that she had cheated— for she had gabbled off the incantation at such a rate that it was impossible for me to say what finger the fatal *Do* had come on. She made me then do it myself, lending me one of her tiny hands on which to operate. The result was the same.

I then averred that she had purposely framed the sentence so that I should lose. But she protested, both then and afterwards, that I had had "a fair show."

Vilvorde was passed, and looking at my watch I saw that we had only a quarter of an hour, if that, before arriving at Brussels. I had made up my mind-in fact, I thought I could not do less— to offer to see Miss Dot to her hotel, and proposed the matter to her as a matter of course, asking her where she stayed.

"Well, I've been thinkin' if I ought to tell you," she said, meditatively; "but I'll tell you what we'll do—"

"No more *Diddle-dee, Diddle-dee, Do*?" I interrupted, hastily.

"No, no!" she laughed. "We'll each mark the name of the hotel we are going to stop at in our *Baedecker*, an' there we must stay, you understand, an' there's no altering it."

"All right!" I said.

"Strike your heart!" she exclaimed earnestly.

Again I complied with the strange request.

"The name of my hotel is already underlined," I said, handing her the book; "so just mark yours and compare them."

Oh! the antics the little monkey went through before she would perform her part of the bargain. She huddled up the book against her, and kept looking at me, pencil in mouth, over the back of it She turned her back to me, and suddenly looked round to see if I was looking over her shoulder. She went to the other end of the carriage and nestled right in the corner so that the possibility of detection amounted to nil. But none of these positions suited her. She was sure I could guess from the position of her fingers, and the probable position of the pencil on the page, which hotel she proposed marking. At last she insisted that I should turn my back. Even then the performance took some little time.

"Now, sir, you can turn round," she announced, as she caught up my book which was still lying on her seat; "but I'm to have first look."

Suiting the action to the word, her nimble fingers soon found the place in my book.

"You mean, horrid thing!" she cried, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders, and an indignant little pout, as she closed the book with a slam. "You knew where I was going, and you just—"

I interrupted with an assurance that a friend had marked it for me before I left England.

"Well, you will go somewhere else!" she pleaded.

I pointed out that that was impossible.

My people— I still adhered to that phrase— were going to join me at that very hotel.

"An' so are mine!" she said dolefully.

For a moment or two she was silent and downcast, but it was not her nature to remain either silent or sad for long, and in a minute or two she was herself again.

"Perhaps, after all, it's for the best," she said. "You can act as my protector, you know, an' keep troublesome people off. How old are you?"

I was so taken off my guard by the question that I actually answered it without protest

"Thirty-six!"

"Thirty-six!" she repeated. "Well, now, what will you be? I mean what is the best thing for you to be? You look too young for a father; besides that, you wouldn't like it— it would wound your vanity, and there are other objections. You'd have to call me Dot, and— and—" Then she suddenly broke off. "The same objection applies to a brother, and an uncle. I have it!" she cried. "You shall be my trustee, and I your ward. If that comes to the ears of our people, it can be easily smoothed over."

I said to myself that it might easily be smoothed over, as far as her people were concerned, but I drew a mental picture of my wife's face on receiving the news which was anything but reassuring.

"There's no necessity for them to know it at all," I suggested in a tone of assumed indifference, which I feel certain lacked the true ring, for I saw an amused smile light up my companion's face.

We had only a few minutes left before we reached Brussels, and during that time the little lady's behaviour was in marked contrast to her previous liveliness. She sat as quiet as a mouse (she was not unlike that frisky little creature, by the way), biting her lips, and with an air of reflection and gravity that was rarely met with there. Nor did this demeanour change when we arrived at our destination. We were going to the Hôtel de l'Europe, and there was an omnibus to take us and our effects. I helped her in, jumped in myself, and off we drove at a good pace. But still her face was quite grave. I did my best to arrive at a reason for this sudden change of manner, but for a time could not divine any satisfactory one. Suddenly, however, it struck me that, being a mere schoolgirl, she had now got frightened at the length to which her joke had been carried, and was apprehensive of the future. Under the circumstances, and perhaps more especially because I did not like to see such a cloud on her pretty brow, I made her what I considered a generous offer. I said that, after all, it would not inconvenience me to stop at another hotel till Friday night, and indeed, seeing the situation caused her annoyance, that I should prefer to do so. She absolutely refused.

"It's nice an' kind of you to think of it, Sir Charles," she answered gratefully, "but a bargain is a bargain. Besides," she added, "it won't make two cents difference."

Arrived at the hotel I took a room for my little friend— my ward she was henceforth to I be— and ordered her boxes to be taken there.

Soon afterwards I saw her tripping up the stairs after the chambermaid, having promised to meet her in the reading-room immediately "she was fixed up." Then, with a budget of letters in my hand, which I had found on my arrival, I went up to my room to have a wash and peruse my correspondence. Though I skipped a good deal of the letters— even of my wife's, who, to be candid, is a somewhat diffuse correspondent— it was some time before I got down to the reading-room. The next moment in came Miss Dot, looking brighter and more charming than ever; her hat was off, and her hair seemed to add a new charm to her beauty.

"Now, my ward," I said, sitting down near her. "I want you to enjoy yourself. I'm told there's a concert in the park. Would you like to go?"

I saw a bright light come into her eyee, and as suddenly go out

"Do you think we dare?" she asked,

I protested that no one was likely to see as, that everyone went, and that we would pass unnoticed in the crowd. At last she consented, and ran off for her hat and coat. Two minutes afterwards she arrived and announced herself as "ready." Surely there never was a woman who dressed to such perfection I Every new thing she wore seemed to suit her better than the last. Her hat and coat seemed to me the prettiest articles of the kind I had ever seen, and I told her so.

"I'm so glad," she said, giving me quite a grateful look. "I'd like to look nice when I'm going ta-ta with my trustee."

On which we both laughed.

Well! we went to the concert, which, I must acknowledge was not up to its usual standard of excellence, and which did not excite Miss Dot to the extent I expected. We ate ices, drank coffee, I— at Miss Dot's request— smoked a cigar or two, and we chatted merrily till the concert was over. I enjoyed the concert none the less— call me conceited fool if you will, but I wish to confess the truth— that I could not help seeing the great admiration that my little friend excited. As I caught eight of appreciative glances or overheard whispered phrases of admiration I felt what I may term a pleasant feeling of proprietorship in my little companion; and, in fact, I do not know that I did not tell her so.

"What about the supper?" I asked, as we left.

She laughed.

"Well! I could eat somethin' if it was handy."

That was enough. I got a cab and drove to the hotel, and having got the address of the best restaurant went there at once. What a supper we had ! What dear little dishes! What fruit and wine! But, above all, what merry jokes and conversation! I felt quite sorry to have to break up the feast, but a clock

which confronted me forced on me the impropriety of "keeping it up" any longer. I ordered a cab, and two minutes afterwards we were on our way home.

As we shook hands on going to bed Miss Dot thanked me warmly for the pleasant day she had spent.

"Do you know why I knew I could trust you, why I felt sure you were a gentleman?" she asked.

"No, indeed!" I laughed.

"Well!" she said quite gravely, "when I got in at Esschen I knew you had been smoking. Now all the way from there to Brussels I know you were dying to smoke."

"I was!" I admitted with a laugh.

"Yes! an' you never asked my permission. Then I knew you were a gentleman. If you could make a sacrifice like that— not even asking a permission I should readily have accorded— I knew you were a man to be trusted, an' I trusted you. Good-night, Sir Charles."

I watched the little fairy trip up the stairs, and then turning into the smoking-room took out my budget of letters, which I had only half read. But it was long before I could bring myself to read them. The events of the day had been of such a remarkable nature that they could thrust themselves on my mind. And it was the same when I went to bed. I could think of nothing but Miss Dot and the adventures of the day. I admitted that as a married man I had allowed myself to be flirted with (I protest the phrase is the right one) rather more than I should; that I had even encouraged her in her quips, and cranks, and wreathed smiles, and that I had most certainly not attempted to restrain her from first to last But, I urged in self-defence, what opportunity had I of shaping things otherwise? what else could I have done? and, finally, what harm had come of it? And it was with thoughts such as these that I at last fell asleep.

I awoke late next morning, and my *toilette* did not take as long as usual. I thought Miss Dot might be waiting for me, and I hurried down. There was no one in the *salle-à-manger*. There was no one in the reading-room. I sent up to her room. The waiter returned with a message from the chambermaid that Mademoiselle had left very early.

"You mean gone out," I suggested.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. The chambermaid had said Mademoiselle had *left*.

I rushed to the office. The news was true enough. Miss Dot had left for Paris by the early train. I stood for a minute looking at the man— astounded, speechless, incapable of action or thought. Then, turning on my heel, I gave vent to but one word, but it was a word of great strength.

I never saw Dot again— indeed, I never heard of her. I asked Americans without number— and I cultivated Americans for the express purpose— if they

could give me any information, but Miss Doretta Vanloo was utterly unknown. Finding my researches so fruitless, I have latterly ceased an active search, hoping to come across a trace of her accidentally. But I fancy somehow that Dot and I will never meet again. I even doubt at times whether we ever did meet.

What do you think?

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19: The Haunted Photograph

Ruth McEnery Stuart

1849-1917

Harper's Bazar June 1909

TO THE ORDINARY OBSERVER it was just a common photograph of a cheap summer hotel. It hung sumptuously framed in plush, over the Widow Morris's mantel, the one resplendent note in an otherwise modest home, in a characteristic Queen Anne village.

One had only to see the rapt face of its owner as she sat in her weeds before the picture, which she tearfully pronounced "a strikin' likeness," to sympathize with the townsfolk who looked askance at the bereaved woman, even while they bore with her delusion, feeling sure that her sudden sorrow had set her mind agog.

When she had received the picture through the mail, some months before the fire which consumed the hotel— a fire through which she had not passed, but out of which she had come a widow— she proudly passed it around among the friends waiting with her at the post-office, replying to their questions as they admired it:

"Oh, yes! That's where he works— if you can call it work. He's the head steward in it. All that row o' winders where you see the awnin's down, they're his— an' them that ain't down, they're his, too— that is to say, it's his jurisdiction.

"You see, he's got the whip hand over the cook an' the sto'eroom, an' that key don't go out o' his belt unless he knows who's gettin' what— an' he's firm. Morris always was. He's like the iron law of the Ephesians."

"What key?"

It was an old lady who held the picture at arm's length, the more closely to scan it, who asked the question. She asked it partly to know, as neither man nor key appeared in the photograph, and partly to parry the "historic allusion"— a disturbing sort of fire for which Mrs. Morris was rather noted and which made some of her most loyal townsfolk a bit shy of her.

"Oh, I ain't referrin' to the picture," she hastened to explain. "I mean the keys thet he always carries in his belt. The reg'lar joke there is to call him 'St. Peter,' an' he takes it in good part, for, he declares, if there *is* such a thing *as* a similitude to the kingdom o' Heaven *in* a hotel, why, it's in the providential supply department which, in a manner, hangs to his belt. He always humors a joke— 'specially on himself."

No one will ever know through what painful periods of unrequited longing the Widow Morris had sought solace in this, her only cherished "relic," after the "half hour of sky-works" which had made her, in her own vernacular, "a lonely,

conflagrated widow, with a heart full of ashes," before the glad moment when it was given her to discern in it an unsuspected and novel value. First had come, as a faint gleam of comfort, the reflection that although her dear lost one was not in evidence in the picture, he had really been inside the building when the photograph was taken, and so, of course, *he must be in there yet*!

At first she experienced a slight disappointment that her man was not visible, at door or window. But it was only a passing regret. It was really better to feel him surely and broadly within— at large in the great house, free to pass at will from one room to another. To have had him fixed, no matter how effectively, would have been a limitation. As it was, she pressed the picture to her bosom as she wondered if, perchance, he would not some day come out of his hiding to meet her.

It was a muffled pleasure and tremulously entertained at first, but the very whimsicality of it was an appeal to her sensitized imagination, and so, when finally the thing did really happen, it is small wonder that it came somewhat as a shock.

It appears that one day, feeling particularly lonely and forlorn, and having no other comfort, she was pressing her tear-stained face against the row of window-shutters in the room without awnings, this being her nearest approach to the alleged occupant's bosom, when she was suddenly startled by a peculiar swishing sound, as of wind-blown rain, whereupon she lifted her face to perceive that it was indeed raining, and then, glancing back at the photograph, she distinctly saw her husband rushing from one window to another, drawing down the sashes on the side of the house that would have been exposed to the real shower whose music was in her ears.

This was a great discovery, and, naturally enough, it set her weeping, for, she sobbed, it made her feel, for a minute, that she had lost her widowhood and that, after the shower, he'd be coming home.

It might well make any one cry to suddenly lose the pivot upon which his emotions are swung. At any rate, Mrs. Morris cried. She said that she cried all night, first because it seemed so spooky to see him whose remains she had so recently buried on faith, waiving recognition in the débris, dashing about now in so matter-of-fact a way.

And then she wept because, after all, he did not come.

This was the formal beginning of her sense of personal companionship in the picture— companionship, yes, of delight in it, for there is even delight in tears— in some situations in life. Especially is this true of one whose emotions are her only guides, as seems to have been the case with the Widow Morris.

After seeing him draw the window-sashes— and he had drawn them *down*, ignoring her presence— she sat for hours, waiting for the rain to stop. It seemed to have set in for a long spell, for when she finally fell asleep, "from sheer

disappointment, 'long towards morning," it was still raining, but when she awoke the sun shone and all the windows in the picture were up again.

This was a misleading experience, however, for she soon discovered that she could not count upon any line of conduct by the man in the hotel, as the fact that it had one time rained in the photograph at the same time that it rained outside was but a coincidence and she was soon surprised to perceive all quiet along the hotel piazza, not even an awning flapping, while the earth, on her plane, was torn by storms.

On one memorable occasion when her husband had appeared, flapping the window-panes from within with a towel, she had thought for one brief moment that he was beckoning to her, and that she might have to go to him, and she was beginning to experience terror, with shortness of breath and other premonitions of sudden passing, when she discovered that he was merely killing flies, and she flurriedly fanned herself with the asbestos mat which she had seized from the stove beside her, and staggered out to a seat under the mulberries, as she stammered:

"I do declare, Morris'll be the death of me yet. He's 'most as much care to me dead as he was alive— I made sure— made sure he'd come after me!"

Then, feeling her own fidelity challenged, she hastened to add:

"Not that I hadn't rather go to him than to take any trip in the world, but— but I never did fancy that hotel, and since I've got used to seein' him there so constant, I feel sure that's where we'd put up. My belief is, anyway, that if there's hereafters for some things, there's hereafters for all. From what I can gather, I reckon I'm a kind of a cross between a Swedenborgian and a Gates-ajar— that, of course, engrafted on to a Methodist. Now, that hotel, when it was consumed by fire, which to it was the same as mortal death, why, it either ascended into Heaven, in smoke, or it fell, in ashes— to the other place. If it died worthy, like as not it's undergoin' repairs now for a 'mansion,' jasper cupalos, an'— but, of course, such as that could be run up in a twinklin'.

"Still, from what I've heard, it's more likely gone *down* to its deserts. It would seem hard for a hotel with so many awned-off corridors an' palmed embrasures with teet-a-teet sofas, to live along without sin."

She stood on her step-ladder, wiping the face of the picture as she spoke, and as she began to back down she discovered the cat under her elbow, glaring at the picture.

"Yes, Kitty! Spit away!" she exclaimed. "Like as not you see even more than I do!"

And as she slipped the ladder back into the closet, she remarked— this to herself, strictly:

"If it hadn't 'a' been for poor puss, I'd 'a' had a heap more pleasure out o' this picture than what I have had— or will be likely to have again. The way she's taken on, I've almost come to hate it!"

A serpent had entered her poor little Eden— even the green-eyed monster constrictor, who, if given full swing, would not spare a bone of her meager comfort.

A neighbor who chanced to come in at the time, unobserved overheard the last remark, and Mrs. Morris, seeing that she was there, continued in an unchanged tone, while she gave her a chair:

"Of course, Mis' Withers, you can easy guess who I refer to. I mean that combly-featured wench that kep' the books an' answered the telephone at the hotel— when she found the time from her meddlin'. Somehow, I never thought about her bein' *burned in* with Morris till puss give her away. Puss never did like the girl when she was alive, an' the first time I see her scratch an' spit at the picture, just the way she used to do whenever *she* come in sight, why, it just struck me like a clap o' thunder out of a clear sky that puss knew who she was a-spittin' at— an' I switched around sudden— an' glanced up sudden— an'—

"Well, what I seen, I seen! There was that beautied-up typewriter settin' in the window-sill o' Morris's butler's pantry— an' if she didn't wink at me malicious, then I don't know malice when I see it. An' she used her fingers against her nose, too, most defiant and impolite. So I says to puss I says, 'Puss,' I says, 'there's *goin's on* in that hotel, sure as fate. Annabel Bender has got the better o' me, for once!' An', tell the truth, it did spoil the photograph for me for a while, for, of course, after that, if I didn't see him somewheres on the watch for his faithful spouse, I'd say to myself, 'He's inside there with that pink-featured hussy!'

"You know, a man's a man, Mis' Withers— 'specially Morris, an' with his lawful wife cut off an' indefinitely divorced by a longevitied family— an' another burned in with him— well, his faithfulness is put to a trial by fire, as you might say. So, as I say, it spoiled the picture for me, for a while.

"An', to make matters worse, it wasn't any time before I recollected that Campbellite preacher thet was burned in with them, an' with that my imagination run riot, an' I'd think to myself, '*If* they're inclined, they cert'n'y have things handy!' Then I'd ketch myself an' say, 'Where's your faith in Scripture, Mary Marthy Matthews, named after two Bible women an' born daughter to an apostle? What's the use?' I'd say, an' so, first an' last, I'd get a sort o' alpha an' omega comfort out o' the passage about no givin' in marriage. Still, there'd be times, pray as I would, when them three would loom up, him an' her— *an'* the Campbellite preacher. I know his license to marry would run out *in time*, but for eternity, of course we don't know. Seem like everything would last

forever— an' then again, if I've got a widow's freedom, Morris must be classed as a widower, if he's anything.

"Then I'd get some relief in thinkin' about his[283] disposition. Good as he was, Morris was fickle-tasted, not in the long run, but day in an' day out, an' even if he'd be taken up with her he'd get a distaste the minute he reelized she'd be there interminable. That's Morris. Why, didn't he used to get nervous just seein' *me* around, an' me his own selected? An' didn't I use to make some excuse to send him over to Mame Maddern's ma's ma's— so's he'd be harmlessly diverted? She was full o' talk, and she was ninety-odd an' asthmatic, but he'd come home from them visits an' call me his child wife. I've had my happy moments!

"You know a man'll get tired of himself, even, if he's condemned to it too continual, and think of that blondinetted typewriter for a steady diet— to a man like Morris! Imagine her when her hair dye started to give out— green streaks in that pompadour! So, knowin' my man, I'd take courage an' I'd think, 'Seein' me cut off, he'll soon be wantin' me more than ever'— an' so he does. It's got so now that, glance up at that hotel any time I will, I can generally find him on the lookout, an' many's the time I've stole in an' put on a favoryte apron o' his with blue bows on it, when we'd be alone an' nobody to remark about me breakin' my mournin'. Dear me, how full o' b'oyancy he was— a regular boy at thirty-five, when he passed away!"

Was it any wonder that her friends exchanged glances while Mrs. Morris entertained them in so droll a way? Still, as time passed and she not only brightened in the light of her delusion, but proceeded to meet the conditions of her own life by opening a small shop in her home, and when she exhibited a wholesome sense of profit and loss, her neighbors were quite ready to accept her on terms of mental responsibility.

With occupation and a modest success, emotional disturbance was surely giving place to an even calm, when, one day, something happened.

Mrs. Morris sat behind her counter, sorting notions, puss asleep beside her, when she heard the swish of thin silk, with a breath of familiar perfume, and, looking up, whom did she see but the blond lady of her troubled dreams striding bodily up to the counter, smiling as she swished.

At the sight the good woman first rose to her feet, and then as suddenly dropped— flopped— breathless and white— backward— and had to be revived, so that for the space of some minutes things happened very fast— that is, if we may believe the flurried testimony of the blonde, who, in going over it, two hours later, had more than once to stop for breath.

"Well, say!" she panted. "Did you ever! *Such* a turn as took her! I hadn't no more 'n stepped in the door when she succumbed, green as the Ganges, into her own egg-basket— an' it full! An' she was on the eve o' floppin' back into the

prunin' scizzor points up, when I scrambled over the counter, breakin' my straight-front in two, which she's welcome to, poor thing! Then I loaned her my smellin'-salts, which she held her breath against until it got to be a case of smell or die, an' she smelt! Then it was a case of temporary spasms for a minute, the salts spillin' out over her face, but when the accident evaporated, an' she opened her eyes, rational, I thought to myself, 'Maybe she don't know she's keeled an' would be humiliated if she did,' so I acted callous, an' I says, offhand like, I says, pushin' her apron around behind her over its *vice versa*, so's to cover up the eggs, which I thought had better be broke to her gently, I says. 'I just called in, Mis' Morris, to borry your recipe for angel-cake— or maybe get you to bake one for us' (I knew she baked on orders). An' with that, what does she do but go over again, limp as wet starch, down an' through every egg in that basket, solid *an'* fluid!

"Well, by this time, a man who had seen her at her first worst an' run for a doctor, he come in with three, an' whilst they were bowin' to each other an' backin', I giv' 'er stimulus an' d'rectly she turned upon me one rememberable gaze, an' she says, 'Doctors,' says she, 'would you think they'd have the gall to try to get me to cook for 'em? They've ordered angel-ca— ' An' with that, over she toppled again, no pulse nor nothin', same as the dead!"

While the blonde talked she busied herself with her loosely falling locks, which she tried vainly to entrap.

"An' yet you say she ain't classed as crazy? I'd say it of her, sure! An' so old Morris is dead— burned in that old hotel! Well, well! Poor old fellow! Dear old place! What times I've had!"

She spoke through a mouthful of gilt hairpins and her voice was as an Æolian harp.

"An' he burned in it— an' she's a widow yet! Yes, I did hear there'd been a fire, but you never can tell. I thought the chimney might 'a' burned out— an' I was in the thick of bein' engaged to the night clerk at the Singin' Needles Hotel at Pineville at the time— an' there's no regular mail there. I thought the story might be exaggerated. Oh no, I didn't marry the night clerk. I'm a bride now, married to the head steward, same rank as poor old Morris— an' we're just *as* happy! I used to pleg Morris about *her* hair, but I'd have to let up on that now. Mine's as red again as hers. No, not my hair— *mine's* hair. It's as red as a flannen drawer, every bit an' grain!

"But, say," she added, presently, "when she gets better, just tell her never mind about that reci-pe. I copied it out of her reci-pe book whilst she was under the weather, an' dropped a dime in her cash-drawer. I recollect how old Morris used to look forward to her angel-cakes week-ends he'd be goin' home, an' you know there's nothin' like havin' ammunition, in marriage, even if you never need it. Mine's in that frame of mind now that transforms my gingerbread into angel-

cake, but the time may come when I'll have to beat my eggs to a fluff even for angel-cake, so's not to have it taste like gingerbread to him.

"Oh no, he's not with me this trip. I just run down for a lark to show my folks my ring an' things, an' let 'em see it's really so. He give me considerable jewelry. His First's taste run that way, an' they ain't no children.

"Yes, this amethyst is the weddin'-ring. I selected that on account of him bein' a widower. It's the nearest I'd come to wearin' second mournin' for a woman I can't exactly grieve after. The year not bein' up is why he stayed home this trip. He didn't like to be seen traversin' the same old haunts with Another till it *was* up. I wouldn't wait because, tell the truth, I was afraid. He ain't like a married man with me about money yet, an' it's liable to seize him any day. He might say that he couldn't afford the trip, or that we couldn't, which would amount to the same thing. I rather liked him bein' a little ticklish about goin' around with me for a while. It's one thing to do a thing an' another to be brazen about it— it—

"But if she don't get better"— the reversion was to the Widow Morris—"if she don't get her mind poor thing! there's a fine insane asylum just out of Pineville, an' I'd like the best in the world to look out for her. It would make an excuse for me to go in. They say they have high old times there. Some days they let the inmates do 'most any old thing that's harmless. They even give 'em unpoisonous paints an' let 'em paint each other up. One man insisted he was a barber-pole an' ringed himself accordingly, an' then another chased him[288] around for a stick of peppermint candy. Think of all that inside a close fence, an' a town so dull an' news-hungry— —

"Yes, they say Thursdays is paint days, an', of course, Fridays, they are scrub days. They pass around turpentine an' hide the matches. But, of course, Mis' Morris may get the better of it. 'Tain' every woman that can stand widowin', an' sometimes them that has got the least out of marriage will seem the most deprived to lose it— so they say."

The blonde was a person of words.

When Mrs. Morris had fully revived and, after a restoring "night's sleep" had got her bearings, and when she realized clearly that her supposed rival had actually shown up in the flesh, she visibly braced up. Her neighbors understood that it must have been a shock "to be suddenly confronted with any souvenir of the hotel fire"— so one had expressed it— and the incident soon passed out of the village mind.

It was not long after this incident that the widow confided to a friend that she was coming to depend upon Morris for advice in her business.

"Standing as he does, in that hotel door— between two worlds, as you might say— why, he sees both ways, and oftentimes he'll detect an event *on the way*

to happening, an' if it don't move too fast, why, I can hustle an' get the better of things." It was as if she had a private wire for advance information— and she declared herself happy.

Indeed, a certain ineffable light such as we sometimes see in the eyes of those newly in love came to shine from the face of the widow, who did not hesitate to affirm, looking into space as she said it:

"Takin' all things into consideration, I can truly say that I have never been so truly and ideely married as since my widowhood." And she smiled as she added:

"Marriage, the earthly way, is vicissitudinous, for everybody knows that anything is liable to happen to a man at large."

There had been a time when she lamented that her picture was not "life-sized" as it would seem so much more natural, but she immediately reflected that that hotel would never have gotten into her little house, and that, after all, the main thing was having "him" under her own roof.

As the months passed Mrs. Morris, albeit she seemed serene and of peaceful mind, grew very white and still. Fire is white in its ultimate intensity. The top, spinning its fastest, is said to "sleep"— and the dancing dervish is "still." So, misleading signs sometimes mark the danger-line.

"Under-eating and over-thinking" was what the doctor said while he felt her translucent wrist and prescribed nails in her drinking-water. If he secretly knew that kind nature was gently letting down the bars so that a waiting spirit might easily pass— well, he was a doctor, not a minister. His business was with the body, and he ordered repairs.

She was only thirty-seven and "well" when she passed painlessly out of life. It seemed to be simply a case of going.

There were several friends at her bedside the night she went, and to them she turned, feeling the time come:

"I just wanted to give out that the first thing I intend to do when I'm relieved is to call by there for Morris"— she lifted her weary eyes to the picture as she spoke—"for Morris— and I want it understood that it'll be a vacant house from the minute I depart. So, if there's any other woman that's calculatin' to have any carryin's-on from them windows— why, she'll be disappointed— she or they. The one obnoxious person I thought was in it *wasn't*. My imagination was tempted of Satan an' I was misled. So it must be sold for just what it is— just a photographer's photograph. If it's a picture with a past, why, everybody knows what that past is, and will respect it. I have tried to conquer myself enough to bequeath it to the young lady I suspicioned, but human nature is frail, an' I can't quite do it, although doubtless she would like it as a souvenir. Maybe she'd find it a little too souvenirish to suit my wifely taste, and yet— if a person is going to die—

"I suppose I might legate it to her, partly to recompense her for her discretion in leaving that hotel when she did— an' partly for undue suspicion—

"There's a few debts to be paid, but there's eggs an' things that'll pay them, an' there's no need to have the hen settin' in the window showcase any longer. It was a good advertisement, but I've often thought it might be embarrassin' to her." She was growing weaker, but she roused herself to amend:

"Better raffle the picture for a dollar a chance an' let the proceeds go to my funeral— an' I want to be buried in the hotel-fire general grave, commingled with him— an' what's left over after the debts are paid, I bequeath to *her*— to make amends— an' if she don't care to come for it, let every widow in town draw for it. But she'll come. 'Most any woman'll take any trip, if it's paid for— But look!" she raised her eyes excitedly toward the mantel, "Look! What's that he's wavin'? It looks— oh yes, it is— it's our wings— two pairs— mine a little smaller. I s'pose it'll be the same old story— I'll never be able to keep up— to keep up with him— an' I've been so hap— —

"Yes, Morris— I'm comin'—"

And she was gone— into a peaceful sleep from which she easily passed just before dawn.

When all was well over, the sitting women rose with one accord and went to the mantel, where one even lighted an extra candle more clearly to scan the mysterious picture.

Finally one said:

"You may think I'm queer, but it does look different to me already!"

"So it does," said another, taking the candle. "Like a house for rent. I declare, it gives me the cold shivers."

"I'll pay my dollar gladly, and take a chance for it," whispered a third, "but I wouldn't let such a thing as that enter my happy home—"

"Neither would I!"

"Nor me, neither. I've had trouble enough. My husband's first wife's portrait has brought me discord enough— an' it was a straight likeness. I don't want any more pictures to put in the hen-house loft."

So the feeling ran among the wives.

"Well," said she who was blowing out the candle, "I'll draw for it— an' take it if I win it, an' consider it a sort of inheritance. I never inherited anything but indigestion."

The last speaker was a maiden lady, and so was she who answered, chuckling:

"That's what I say! Anything for a change. There'd be some excitement in a picture where a man was liable to show up. It's more than I've got now. I do declare it's just scandalous the way we're gigglin', an' the poor soul hardly out o'

hearin'. She had a kind heart, Mis' Morris had, an' she made herself happy with a mighty slim chance—"

"Yes, she did— and I only wish there'd been a better man waitin' for her in that hotel."

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20: The Confidence King

Arthur B Reeve
1880-1936
In: *The Poisoned Pen and other stories*, 1912

Professor Craig Kennedy was an early "scientific" detective of the pulps.

"SHAKE HANDS with Mr. Burke of the secret service, Professor Kennedy."

It was our old friend First Deputy O'Connor who thus in his bluff way introduced a well-groomed and prosperous-looking man whom he brought up to our apartment one evening.

The formalities were quickly over. "Mr. Burke and I are old friends," explained O'Connor. "We try to work together when we can, and very often the city department can give the government service a lift, and then again it's the other way— as it was in the trunk-murder mystery. Show Professor Kennedy the 'queer,' Tom."

Burke drew a wallet out of his pocket, and from it slowly and deliberately selected a crisp, yellow-backed hundred-dollar bill. He laid it flat on the table before us. Diagonally across its face from the upper left-to the lower right-hand corner extended two parallel scorings in indelible ink.

Not being initiated into the secrets of the gentle art of "shoving the queer," otherwise known as passing counterfeit money, I suppose my questioning look betrayed me.

"A counterfeit, Walter," explained Kennedy. "That's what they do with bills when they wish to preserve them as records in the secret service and yet render them valueless."

Without a word Burke handed Kennedy a pocket magnifying-glass, and Kennedy carefully studied the bill. He was about to say something when Burke opened his capacious wallet again and laid down a Bank of England five-pound note which had been similarly treated.

Again Kennedy looked through the glass with growing amazement written on his face, but before he could say anything, Burke laid down an express money-order on the International Express Company.

"I say," exclaimed Kennedy, putting down the glass, "stop! How many more of these are there?"

Burke smiled. "That's all," he replied, "but it's not the worst."

"Not the worst? Good heavens, man, next you'll tell me that the government is counterfeiting its own notes! How much of this stuff do you suppose has been put into circulation?"

Burke chewed a pencil thoughtfully, jotted down some figures on a piece of paper, and thought some more. "Of course I can't say exactly, but from hints I

have received here and there I should think that a safe bet would be that some one has cashed in upward of half a million dollars already."

"Whew," whistled Kennedy, "that's going some. And I suppose it is all salted away in some portable form. What an inventory it must be— good bills, gold, diamonds, and jewellery. This is a stake worth playing for."

"Yes," broke in O'Connor, "but from my standpoint, professionally, I mean, the case is even worse than that. It's not the counterfeits that bother us. We understand that, all right. But," and he leaned forward earnestly and brought his fist down hard on the table with a resounding Irish oath, "the finger-print system, the infallible finger-print system, has gone to pieces. We've just imported this new 'portrait parle' fresh from Paris and London, invented by Bertillon and all that sort of thing— it has gone to pieces, too. It's a fine case, this is, with nothing left of either scientific or unscientific criminal-catching to rely on. There— what do you know about that?"

"You'll have to tell me the facts first," said Kennedy. "I can't diagnose your disease until I know the symptoms."

"It's like this," explained Burke, the detective in him showing now with no effort at concealment. "A man, an Englishman, apparently, went into a downtown banker's office about three months ago and asked to have some English bank-notes exchanged for American money. After he had gone away, the cashier began to get suspicious. He thought there was something phoney in the feel of the notes. Under the glass he noticed that the little curl on the 'e' of the 'Five' was missing. It's the protective mark. The water-mark was quite equal to that of the genuine— maybe better. Hold that note up to the light and see for yourself.

"Well, the next day, down to the Custom House, where my office is, a man came who runs a swell gambling-house uptown. He laid ten brand-new bills on my desk. An Englishman had been betting on the wheel. He didn't seem to care about winning, and he cashed in each time with a new one-hundred-dollar bill. Of course he didn't care about winning. He cared about the change— that was his winning. The bill on the table is one of the original ten, though since then scores have been put into circulation. I made up my mind that it was the same Englishman in both cases.

"Then within a week, in walked the manager of the Mozambique Hotel— he had been stung with the fake International Express money-order— same Englishman, too, I believe."

"And you have no trace of him?" asked Kennedy eagerly.

"We had him under arrest once— we thought. A general alarm was sent out, of course, to all the banks and banking-houses. But the man was too clever to turn up in that way again. In one gambling-joint which women frequent a good deal, a classy dame who might have been a duchess or a— well, she was a pretty

good loser and always paid with hundred-dollar bills. Now, you know women are *not* good losers. Besides, the hundred-dollar-bill story had got around among the gambling-houses. This joint thought it worth taking a chance, so they called me up on the 'phone, extracted a promise that I'd play fair and keep O'Connor from raiding them, but wouldn't I please come up and look over the dame of the yellow bills? Of course I made a jump at it. Sure enough, they were the same counterfeits. I could tell because the silk threads were drawn in with coloured ink. But instead of making an arrest I decided to trail the lady.

"Now, here comes the strange part of it. Let me see, this must have been over two months ago. I followed her out to a suburban town, Riverwood along the Hudson, and to a swell country house overlooking the river, private drive, stone gate, hedges, old trees, and all that sort of thing. A sporty-looking Englishman met her at the gate with one of those big imported touring-cars, and they took a spin.

"I waited a day or so, but nothing more happened, and I began to get anxious. Perhaps I was a bit hasty. Anyhow I watched my chance and made an arrest of both of them when they came to New York on a shopping expedition. You should have heard that Englishman swear. I didn't know such language was possible. But in his pocket we found twenty more of those hundred-dollar bills— that was all. Do you think he owned up? Not a bit of it. He swore he had picked the notes up in a pocketbook on the pier as he left the steamer. I laughed. But when he was arraigned in court he told the magistrate the same story and that he had advertised his find at the time. Sure enough, in the files of the papers we discovered in the lost-and-found column the ad., just as he claimed. We couldn't even prove that he had passed the bills. So the magistrate refused to hold them, and they were both released. But we had had them in our power long enough to take their finger-prints and get descriptions and measurements of them, particularly by this new *'portrait parle*' system. We felt we could send out a strange detective and have him pick them out of a crowd— you know the system, I presume?"

Kennedy nodded, and I made a mental note of finding out more about the "*portrait parle*" later.

Burke paused, and O'Connor prompted, "Tell them about Scotland Yard, Tom."

"Oh, yes," resumed Burke. "Of course I sent copies of the finger-prints to Scotland Yard. Within two weeks they replied that one set belonged to William Forbes, a noted counterfeiter, who, they understood, had sailed for South Africa but had never arrived there. They were glad to learn that he was in America, and advised me to look after him sharply. The woman was also a noted character— Harriet Wollstone, an adventuress."

"I suppose you have shadowed them ever since?" Kennedy asked.

"Yes, a few days after they were arrested the man had an accident with his car. It was said he was cranking the engine and that it kicked back and splintered the bone in his forearm. Anyhow, he went about with his hand and arm in a sling."

"And then?"

"They gave my man the slip that night in their fast touring-car. You know automobiles have about made shadowing impossible in these days. The house was closed up, and it was said by the neighbours that Williams and Mrs. Williams— as they called themselves— had gone to visit a specialist in Philadelphia. Still, as they had a year's lease on the house, I detailed a man to watch it more or less all the time. They went to Philadelphia all right; some of the bills turned up there. But we saw nothing of them.

"A short time ago, word came to me that the house was open again. It wasn't two hours later that the telephone rang like mad. A Fifth Avenue jeweller had just sold a rope of pearls to an Englishwoman who paid for it herself in crisp new one-hundred-dollar bills. The bank had returned them to him that very afternoon— counterfeits. I didn't lose any time making a second arrest up at the house of mystery at Riverwood. I had the county authorities hold them— and, now, O'Connor, tell the rest of it. You took the finger-prints up there."

O'Connor cleared his throat as if something stuck in it, in the telling. "The Riverwood authorities refused to hold them," he said with evident chagrin. "As soon as I heard of the arrest I started up myself with the finger-print records to help Burke. It was the same man, all right— I'll swear to that on a stack of Bibles. So will Burke. I'll never forget that snub nose— the concave nose, the nose being the first point of identification in the 'portrait parle.' And the ears, too— oh, it was the same man, all right. But when we produced the London finger-prints which tallied with the New York fingerprints which we had made— believe it or not, but it is a fact, the Riverwood finger-prints did not tally at all."

He laid the prints on the table. Kennedy examined them closely. His face clouded. It was quite evident that he was stumped, and he said so. "There are some points of agreement," he remarked, "but more points of difference. Any points of difference are usually considered fatal to the finger-print theory."

"We had to let the man go," concluded Burke. "We could have held the woman, but we let her go, too, because she was not the principal in the case. My men are shadowing the house now and have been ever since then. But the next day after the last arrest, a man from New York, who looked like a doctor, made a visit. The secret-service man on the job didn't dare leave the house to follow him, but as he never came again perhaps it doesn't matter. Since then the house has been closed."

The telephone rang. It was Burke's office calling him. As he talked we could gather that something tragic must have happened at Riverwood, and we could hardly wait until he had finished.

"There has been an accident up there," he remarked as he hung up the receiver rather petulantly. "They returned in the car this afternoon with a large package in the back of the tonneau. But they didn't stay long. After dark they started out again in the car. The accident was at the bad railroad crossing just above Riverwood. It *seems* Williams's car got stalled on the track just as the Buffalo express was due. No one saw it, but a man in a buggy around the bend in the road heard a woman scream. He hurried down. The train had smashed the car to bits. How the woman escaped was a miracle, but they found the man's body up the tracks, horribly mangled. It was Williams, they say. They identified him by the clothes and by letters in his pockets. But my man tells me he found a watch on him with 'W. F.' engraved on it. His hands and arms and head must have been right under the locomotive when it struck him, I judge."

"I guess that winds the case up, eh?" exclaimed O'Connor with evident chagrin. "Where's the woman?"

"They said she was in the little local hospital, but not much hurt. Just the shock and a few bruises."

O'Connor's question seemed to suggest an idea to Burke, and he reached for the telephone again. "Riverwood 297," he ordered; then to us as he waited he said: "We must hold the woman. Hello, 297? The hospital? This is Burke of the secret service. Will you tell my man, who must be somewhere about, that I would like to have him hold that woman who was in the auto smash until I can— what? Gone? The deuce!"

He hung up the receiver angrily. "She left with a man who called for her about half an hour ago," he said. "There must be a gang of them. Forbes is dead, but we must get the rest. Mr. Kennedy, I'm sorry to have bothered you, but I guess we can handle this alone, after all. It was the finger-prints that fooled us, but now that Forbes is out of the way it's just a straight case of detective work of the old style which won't interest you."

"On the contrary," answered Kennedy, "I'm just beginning to be interested. Does it occur to you that, after all, Forbes may not be dead?"

"Not dead?" echoed Burke and O'Connor together.

"Exactly; that's just what I said— not dead. Now stop and think a moment. Would the great Forbes be so foolish as to go about with a watch marked 'W. F.' if he knew, as he must have known, that you would communicate with London and by means of the prints find out all about him?"

"Yes," agreed Burke, "all we have to go by is his watch found on Williams. I suppose there is some possibility that Forbes may still be alive."

"Who is this third man who comes in and with whom Harriet Wollstone goes away so willingly?" put in O'Connor. "You said the house had been closed—absolutely closed?"

Burke nodded. "Been closed ever since the last arrest. There's a servant who goes in now and then, but the car hasn't been there before to-night, wherever it has been."

"I should like to watch that house myself for a while," mused Kennedy. "I suppose you have no objections to my doing so?"

"Of course not. Go ahead," said Burke. "I will go along with you if you wish, or my man can go with you."

"No," said Kennedy, "too many of us might spoil the broth. I'll watch alone to-night and will see you in the morning. You needn't even say anything to your man there about us."

"Walter, what's on for to-night?" he asked when they had gone. "How are you fixed for a little trip out to Riverwood?"

"To tell the truth, I had an engagement at the College Club with some of the fellows."

"Oh, cut it."

"That's what I intend to do," I replied.

It was a raw night, and we bundled ourselves up in old football sweaters under our overcoats. Half an hour later we were on our way up to Riverwood.

"By the way, Craig," I asked, "I didn't like to say anything before those fellows. They'd think I was a dub. But I don't mind asking you. What is this 'portrait parle' they talk about, anyway?"

"Why, it's a word-picture— a 'spoken picture,' to be literal. I took some lessons in it at Bertillon's school when I was in Paris. It's a method of scientific apprehension of criminals, a sort of necessary addition and completion to the methods of scientific identification of them after they are arrested. For instance, in trying to pick out a given criminal from his mere description you begin with the nose. Now, noses are all concave, straight, or convex. This Forbes had a nose that was concave, Burke says. Suppose you were sent out to find him. Of all the people you met, we'll say, roughly, two-thirds wouldn't interest you. You'd pass up all with straight or convex noses. Now the next point to observe is the ear. There are four general kinds of ears-triangular, square, oval, and round, besides a number of other differences which are clear enough after you study ears. This fellow is a pale man with square ears and a peculiar lobe to his ear. So you wouldn't give a second glance to, say, three-fourths of the square-eared people. So by a process of elimination of various features, the eyes, the mouth, the hair, wrinkles, and so forth, you would be able to pick your man out of a thousand—that is, if you were trained."

"And it works?" I asked rather doubtfully.

"Oh, yes. That's why I'm taking up this case. I believe science can really be used to detect crime, any crime, and in the present instance I've just pride enough to stick to this thing until— until they begin to cut ice on the Styx. Whew, but it will be cold out in the country to-night, Walter— speaking about ice."

It was quite late when we reached Riverwood, and Kennedy hurried along the dimly lighted streets, avoiding the main street lest some one might be watching or following us. He pushed on, following the directions Burke had given him. The house in question was a large, newly built affair of concrete, surrounded by trees and a hedge, directly overlooking the river. A bitter wind swept in from the west, but in the shadow of an evergreen tree and of the hedge Kennedy established our watch.

Of all fruitless errands this seemed to me to be the acme. The house was deserted; that was apparent, I thought, and I said so. Hardly had I said it when I heard the baying of a dog. It did not come from the house, however, and I concluded that it must have come from the next estate.

"It's in the garage," whispered Kennedy. "I can hardly think they would go away and leave a dog locked up in it. They would at least turn him loose."

Hour after hour we waited. Midnight passed, and still nothing happened. At last when the moon had disappeared under the clouds, Kennedy pulled me along. We had seen not a sign of life in the house, yet he observed all the caution he would have if it had been well guarded. Quickly we advanced over the open space to the house, approaching in the shadow as much as possible, on the side farthest from the river.

Tiptoeing over the porch, Kennedy tried a window. It was fastened. Without hesitation he pulled out some instruments. One of them was a rubber suction-cup, which he fastened to the window-pane. Then with a very fine diamond-cutter he proceeded to cut out a large section. It soon fell and was prevented from smashing on the floor by the string and the suction-cup. Kennedy put his hand in and unlatched the window, and we stepped in.

All was silent. Apparently the house was deserted.

Cautiously Kennedy pressed the button of his pocket storage-battery lamp and flashed it slowly about the room. It was a sort of library, handsomely furnished. At last the beam of light rested on a huge desk at the opposite end. It seemed to interest Kennedy, and we tiptoed over to it. One after another he opened the drawers. One was locked, and he saved that until the last.

Quietly as he could, he jimmied it open, muffling the jimmy in a felt cloth that was on a table. Most people do not realise the disruptive force that there is in a simple jimmy. I didn't until I saw the solid drawer with its heavy lock yield with just the trace of a noise. Kennedy waited an instant and listened. Nothing happened.

Inside the drawer was a most nondescript collection of useless articles. There were a number of pieces of fine sponge, some of them very thin and cut in a flat oval shape, smelling of lysol strongly; several bottles, a set of sharp little knives, some paraffin, bandages, antiseptic gauze, cotton— in fact, it looked like a first-aid kit. As soon as he saw it Kennedy seemed astonished but not at a loss to account for it.

"I thought he left that sort of thing to the doctors, but I guess he took a hand in it himself," he muttered, continuing to fumble with the knives in the drawer. It was no time to ask questions, and I did not. Kennedy rapidly stowed away the things in his pockets. One bottle he opened and held to his nose. I could distinguish immediately the volatile smell of ether. He closed it quickly, and it, too, went into his pocket with the remark, "Somebody must have known how to administer an anaesthetic— probably the Wollstone woman."

A suppressed exclamation from Kennedy caused me to look. The drawer had a false back. Safely tucked away in it reposed a tin box, one of those so-called strong-boxes which are so handy in that they save a burglar much time and trouble in hunting all over for the valuables he has come after. Kennedy drew it forth and laid it on the desk. It was locked.

Even that did not seem to satisfy Kennedy, who continued to scrutinise the walls and corners of the room as if looking for a safe or something of that sort.

"Let's look in the room across the hall," he whispered.

Suddenly a piercing scream of a woman rang out upstairs. "Help! Help! There's some one in the house! Billy, help!"

I felt an arm grasp me tightly, and for a moment a chill ran over me at being caught in the nefarious work of breaking and entering a dwelling-house at night. But it was only Kennedy, who had already tucked the precious little tin box under his arm.

With a leap he dragged me to the open window, cleared it, vaulted over the porch, and we were running for the clump of woods that adjoined the estate on one side. Lights flashed in all the windows of the house at once. There must have been some sort of electric-light system that could be lighted instantly as a "burglar-expeller." Anyhow, we had made good our escape.

As we lost ourselves in the woods I gave a last glance back and saw a lantern carried from the house to the garage. As the door was unlocked I could see, in the moonlight, a huge dog leap out and lick the hands and face of a man.

Quickly we now crashed through the frozen underbrush. Evidently Kennedy was making for the station by a direct route across country instead of the circuitous way by the road and town. Behind us we could hear a deep baying.

"By the Lord, Walter," cried Kennedy, for once in his life thoroughly alarmed, "it's a bloodhound, and our trail is fresh."

Closer it came. Press forward as we might, we could never expect to beat that dog.

"Oh, for a stream," groaned Kennedy, "but they are all frozen— even the river."

He stopped short, fumbled in his pocket, and drew out the bottle of ether.

"Raise your foot, Walter," he ordered.

I did so and he smeared first mine and then his with the ether. Then we doubled on our trail once or twice and ran again.

"The dog will never be able to pick up the ether as our trail," panted Kennedy; "that is, if he is any good and trained not to go off on wild-goose chases."

On we hurried from the woods to the now dark and silent town. It was indeed fortunate that the dog had been thrown off our scent, for the station was closed, and, indeed, if it had been open I am sure the station agent would have felt more like locking the door against two such tramps as we were, carrying a tin box and pursued by a dog, than opening it for us. The best we could do was to huddle into a corner until we succeeded in jumping a milk-train that luckily slowed down as it passed Riverwood station.

Neither of us could wait to open the tin box in our apartment, and instead of going uptown Kennedy decided it would be best to go to a hotel near the station. Somehow we succeeded in getting a room without exciting suspicion. Hardly had the bellboy's footsteps ceased echoing in the corridor than Kennedy was at work wrenching off the lid of the box with such leverage as the scanty furnishings of the room afforded.

At last it yielded, and we looked in curiously, expecting to find fabulous wealth in some form. A few hundred dollars and a rope of pearls lay in it. It was a good "haul," but where was the vast spoil the counterfeiters had accumulated? We had missed it. So far we were completely baffled.

"Perhaps we had better snatch a couple of hours' sleep," was all that Craig said, stifling his chagrin.

Over and over in my mind I was turning the problem of where they had hidden the spoil. I dozed off, still thinking about it and thinking that, even should they be captured, they might have stowed away perhaps a million dollars to which they could go back after their sentences were served.

It was still early for New York when Kennedy roused me by talking over the telephone in the room. In fact, I doubt if he had slept at all.

Burke was at the other end of the wire. His man had just reported that something had happened during the night at Riverwood, but he couldn't give a very clear account. Craig seemed to enjoy the joke immensely as he told his story to Burke.

The last words I heard were: "All right. Send a man up here to the station— one who knows all the descriptions of these people. I'm sure they will have to come into town to-day, and they will have to come by train, for their car is wrecked. Better watch at the uptown stations, also."

After a hasty breakfast we met Burke's man and took our places at the exit from the train platforms. Evidently Kennedy had figured out that the counterfeiters would have to come into town for some reason or other. The incoming passengers were passing us in a steady stream, for a new station was then being built, and there was only a temporary structure with one large exit.

"Here is where the 'portrait parle' ought to come in, if ever," commented Kennedy as he watched eagerly.

And yet neither man nor woman passed us who fitted the description. Train after train emptied its human freight, yet the pale man with the concave nose and the peculiar ear, accompanied perhaps by a lady, did not pass us.

At last the incoming stream began to dwindle down. It was long past the time when the counterfeiters should have arrived if they had started on any reasonable train.

"Perhaps they have gone up to Montreal, instead," I ventured.

Kennedy shook his head. "No," he answered. "I have an idea that I was mistaken about the money being kept at Riverwood. It would have been too risky. I thought it out on the way back this morning. They probably kept it in a safe deposit vault here. I had figured that they would come down and get it and leave New York after last night's events. We have failed— they have got by us. Neither the 'portrait parle' nor the ordinary photography nor any other system will suffice alone against the arch-criminal back of this, I'm afraid. Walter, I am sore and disgusted. What I should have done was to accept Burke's offer— surround the house with a posse if necessary, last night, and catch the counterfeiters by sheer force. I was too confident. I thought I could do it with finesse, and I have failed. I'd give anything to know what safe deposit vault they kept the fake money in."

I said nothing as we strolled away, leaving Burke's man still to watch, hoping against hope. Kennedy walked disconsolately through the station, and I followed. In a secluded part of the waiting-room he sat down, his face drawn up in a scowl such as I had never seen. Plainly he was disgusted with himself— with only himself. This was no bungling of Burke or any one else. Again the counterfeiters had escaped from the hand of the law.

As he moved his fingers restlessly in the pockets of his coat, he absently pulled out the little pieces of sponge and the ether bottle. He regarded them without much interest.

"I know what they were for," he said, diving back into his pocket for the other things and bringing out the sharp little knives in their case. I said nothing,

for Kennedy was in a deep study. At last he put the things back into his pocket. As he did so his hand encountered something which he drew forth with a puzzled air. It was the piece of paraffin.

"Now, what do you suppose that was for?" he asked, half to himself. "I had forgotten that. What was the use of a piece of paraffin? Phew, smell the antiseptic worked into it."

"I don't know," I replied, rather testily. "If you would tell me what the other things were for I might enlighten you, but—"

"By George, Walter, what a chump I am!" cried Kennedy, leaping to his feet, all energy again. "Why did I forget that lump of paraffin? Why, of course— I think I can guess what they have been doing— of course. Why, man alive, he walked right past us, and we never knew it. Boy, boy," he shouted to a newsboy who passed, "what's the latest sporting edition you have?"

Eagerly he almost tore a paper open and scanned the sporting pages. "Racing at Lexington begins to-morrow," he read. "Yes, I'll bet that's it. We don't have to know the safe deposit vault, after all. It would be too late, anyhow. Quick, let us look up the train to Lexington."

As we hurried over to the information booth, I gasped, in a whirl: "Now, look here, Kennedy, what's all this lightning calculation? What possible connection is there between a lump of paraffin and one of the few places in the country where they still race horses?"

"None," he replied, not stopping an instant. "None. The paraffin suggested to me the possible way in which our man managed to elude us under our very eyes. That set my mind at work again. Like a flash it occurred to me: Where would they be most likely to go next to work off some of the bills? The banks are on, the jewellery-houses are on, the gambling-joints are on. Why, to the racetracks, of course. That's it. Counterfeiters all use the bookmakers, only since racing has been killed in New York they have had to resort to other means here. If New York has suddenly become too hot, what more natural than to leave it? Here, let me see— there's a train that gets there early to-morrow, the best train, too. Say, is No. 144 made up yet?" he inquired at the desk.

"No. 144 will be ready in fifteen minutes. Track 8."

Kennedy thanked the man, turned abruptly, and started for the still closed gate at Track 8.

"Beg pardon— why, hulloa— it's Burke," he exclaimed as we ran plump into a man staring vacantly about.

It was not the gentleman farmer of the night before, nor yet the supposed college graduate. This man was a Western rancher; his broad-brimmed hat, long moustache, frock coat, and flowing tie proclaimed it. Yet there was something indefinably familiar about him, too. It was Burke in another disguise.

"Pretty good work, Kennedy," nodded Burke, shifting his tobacco from one side of his jaws to the other. "Now, tell me how your man escaped you this morning, when you can recognise me instantly in this rig."

"You haven't altered your features," explained Kennedy simply. "Our pale-faced, snub-nosed peculiar-eared friend has. What do you think of the possibility of his going to the Lexington track, now that he finds it too dangerous to remain in New York?"

Burke looked at Kennedy rather sharply. "Say, do you add telepathy to your other accomplishments?"

"No," laughed Craig, "but I'm glad to see that two of us working independently have arrived at the same conclusion. Come, let us saunter over to Track 8— I guess the train is made up."

The gate was just opened, and the crowd filed through. No one who seemed to satisfy either Burke or Kennedy appeared. The train-announcer made his last call. Just then a taxicab pulled up at the street-end of the platform, not far from Track 8. A man jumped out and assisted a heavily veiled lady, paid the driver, picked up the grips, and turned toward us.

We waited expectantly. As he turned I saw a dark-skinned, hook-nosed man, and I exclaimed disgustedly to Burke: "Well, if they are going to Lexington they can't make this train. Those are the last people who have a chance."

Kennedy, however, continued to regard the couple steadily. The man saw that he was being watched and faced us defiantly, "Such impertinence!" Then to his wife, "Come, my dear, we'll just make it."

"I'm afraid I'll have to trouble you to show us what's in that grip," said Kennedy, calmly laying his hand on the man's arm.

"Well, now, did you ever hear of such blasted impudence? Get out of my way, sir, this instant, or I'll have you arrested."

"Come, come, Kennedy," interrupted Burke. "Surely you are getting in wrong here. This can't be the man."

Craig shook his head decidedly. "You can make the arrest or not, Burke, as you choose. If not, I am through. If so— I'll take all the responsibility."

Reluctantly Burke yielded. The man protested; the woman cried; a crowd collected.

The train-gate shut with a bang. As it did so the man's demeanour changed instantly. "There," he shouted angrily, "you have made us miss our train. I'll have you in jail for this. Come on now to the nearest magistrate's court. I'll have my rights as an American citizen. You have carried your little joke too far. Knight is my name— John Knight, of Omaha, pork-packer. Come on now. I'll see that somebody suffers for this if I have to stay in New York a year. It's an outrage— an outrage."

Burke was now apparently alarmed— more at the possibility of the humorous publicity that would follow such a mistake by the secret service than at anything else. However, Kennedy did not weaken, and on general principles I stuck to Kennedy.

"Now," said the man surlily while he placed "Mrs. Knight" in as easy a chair as he could find in the judge's chambers, "what is the occasion of all this row? Tell the judge what a bad man from Bloody Gulch I am."

O'Connor had arrived, having broken all speed laws and perhaps some records on the way up from headquarters. Kennedy laid the Scotland Yard finger-prints on the table. Beside them he placed those taken by O'Connor and Burke in New York.

"Here," he began, "we have the finger-prints of a man who was one of the most noted counterfeiters in Great Britain. Beside them are those of a man who succeeded in passing counterfeits of several kinds recently in New York. Some weeks later this third set of prints was taken from a man who was believed to be the same person."

The magistrate was examining the three sets of prints. As he came to the third, he raised his head as if about to make a remark, when Kennedy quickly interrupted.

"One moment, sir. You were about to say that finger-prints never change, never show such variations as these. That is true. There are fingerprints of people taken fifty years ago that are exactly the same as their finger-prints of to-day. They don't change— they are permanent. The fingerprints of mummies can be deciphered even after thousands of years. But," he added slowly, "you can change fingers."

The idea was so startling that I could scarcely realise what he meant at first. I had read of the wonderful work of the surgeons of the Rockefeller Institute in transplanting tissues and even whole organs, in grafting skin and in keeping muscles artificially alive for days under proper conditions. Could it be that a man had deliberately amputated his fingers and grafted on new ones? Was the stake sufficient for such a game? Surely there must be some scars left after such grafting. I picked up the various sets of prints. It was true that the third set was not very clear, but there certainly were no scars there.

"Though there is no natural changeability of finger-prints," pursued Kennedy, "such changes can be induced, as Dr. Paul Prager of Vienna has shown, by acids and other reagents, by grafting and by injuries. Now, is there any method by which lost finger-tips can be restored? I know of one case where the end of a finger was taken off and only one-sixteenth inch of the nail was left. The doctor incised the edges of the granulating surface and then led the granulations on by what is known in the medical profession as the 'sponge graft.' He grew a new finger-tip.

"The sponge graft consists in using portions of a fine Turkish surgical sponge, such I have here. I found these pieces in a desk at Riverwood. The patient is anaesthetised. An incision is made from side to side in the stump of the finger and flaps of skin are sliced off and turned up for the new end of the finger to develop in— a sort of shell of living skin. Inside this, the sponge is placed, not a large piece, but a very thin piece sliced off and cut to the shape of the finger-stump. It is perfectly sterilised in water and washed in green soap after all the stony particles are removed by hydrochloric acid. Then the finger is bound up and kept moist with normal salt solution.

"The result is that the end of the finger, instead of healing over, grows into the fine meshes of the pieces of sponge, by capillary attraction. Of course even this would heal in a few days, but the doctor does not let it heal. In three days he pulls the sponge off gently. The end of the finger has grown up just a fraction of an inch. Then a new thin layer of sponge is added. Day after day this process is repeated, each time the finger growing a little more. A new nail develops if any of the matrix is left, and I suppose a clever surgeon by grafting up pieces of epidermis could produce on such a stump very passable finger-prints."

No one of us said anything, but Kennedy seemed to realise the thought in our minds and proceeded to elaborate the method.

"It is known as the 'education sponge method,' and was first described by Dr. D. J. Hamilton, of Edinburgh, in 1881. It has frequently been used in America since then. The sponge really acts in a mechanical manner to support the new finger-tissue that is developed. The meshes are filled in by growing tissue, and as it grows the tissue absorbs part of the sponge, which is itself an animal tissue and acts like catgut. Part of it is also thrown off. In fact, the sponge imitates what happens naturally in the porous network of a regular blood-clot. It educates the tissue to grow, stimulates it— new blood-vessels and nerves as well as flesh.

"In another case I know of, almost the whole of the first joint of a finger was crushed off, and the doctor was asked to amputate the stump of bone that protruded. Instead, he decided to educate the tissue to grow out to cover it and appear like a normal finger. In these cases the doctors succeeded admirably in giving the patients entire new finger-tips, without scars, and, except for the initial injury and operation, with comparatively little inconvenience except that absolute rest of the hands was required.

"That is what happened, gentlemen," concluded Kennedy. "That is why Mr. Forbes, alias Williams, made a trip to Philadelphia to be treated— for crushed finger-tips, not for the kick of an automobile engine. He may have paid the doctors in counterfeits. In reality this man was playing a game in which there was indeed a heavy stake at issue. He was a counterfeiter sought by two governments with the net closing about him. What are the tips of a few fingers

compared with life, liberty, wealth, and a beautiful woman? The first two sets of prints are different from the third because they are made by different finger-tips— on the same man. The very core of the prints was changed. But the finger-print system is vindicated by the very ingenuity of the man who so cleverly has contrived to beat it."

"Very interesting— to one who is interested," remarked the stranger, "but what has that to do with detaining my wife and myself, making us miss our train, and insulting us?"

"Just this," replied Craig. "If you will kindly oblige us by laying your fingers on this inking-pad and then lightly on this sheet of paper, I think I can show you an answer."

Knight demurred, and his wife grew hysterical at the idea, but there was nothing, to do but comply. Kennedy glanced at the fourth set of prints, then at the third set taken a week ago, and smiled. No one said a word. Knight or Williams, which was it? He nonchalantly lit a cigarette.

"So you say I am this Williams, the counterfeiter?" he asked superciliously.

"I do," reiterated Kennedy. "You are also Forbes."

"I don't suppose Scotland Yard has neglected to furnish you with photographs and a description of this Forbes?"

Burke reluctantly pulled out a Bertillon card from his pocket and laid it on the table. It bore the front face and profile of the famous counterfeiter, as well as his measurements.

The man picked it up as if indeed it was a curious thing. His coolness nearly convinced me. Surely he should have hesitated in actually demanding this last piece of evidence. I had heard, however, that the Bertillon system of measurements often depended on the personal equation of the measurer as well as on the measured. Was he relying on that, or on his difference in features?

I looked over Kennedy's shoulder at the card on the table. There was the concave nose of the "*portrait parle*" of Forbes, as it had first been described to us. Without looking further I involuntarily glanced at the man, although I had no need to do so. I knew that his nose was the exact opposite of that of Forbes.

"Ingenious at argument as you are," he remarked quietly, "you will hardly deny that Knight, of Omaha, is the exact opposite of Forbes, of London. My nose is almost Jewish— my complexion is dark as an Arab's. Still, I suppose I am the sallow, snub-nosed Forbes described here, inasmuch as I have stolen Forbes's fingers and lost them again by a most preposterous method."

"The colour of the face is easily altered," said Kennedy. "A little picric acid will do that. The ingenious rogue Sarcey in Paris eluded the police very successfully until Dr. Charcot exposed him and showed how he changed the arch

of his eyebrows and the wrinkles of his face. Much is possible to-day that would make Frankenstein and Dr. Moreau look clumsy and antiquated."

A sharp feminine voice interrupted. It was the woman, who had kept silent up to this time. "But I have read in one of the papers this morning that a Mr. Williams was found dead in an automobile accident up the Hudson yesterday. I remember reading it, because I am afraid of accidents myself."

All eyes were now fixed on Kennedy. "That body," he answered quickly, "was a body purchased by you at a medical school, brought in your car to Riverwood, dressed in Williams's clothes with a watch that would show he was Forbes, placed on the track in front of the auto, while you two watched the Buffalo express run it down, and screamed. It was a clever scheme that you concocted, but these facts do not agree."

He laid the measurements of the corpse obtained by Burke and those from the London police card side by side. Only in the roughest way did they approximate each other.

"Your honour, I appeal to your sense of justice," cried our prisoner impatiently. "Hasn't this farce been allowed to go far enough? Is there any reason why this fake detective should make fools out of us all and keep my wife longer in this court? I'm not disposed to let the matter drop. I wish to enter a charge against him of false arrest and malicious prosecution. I shall turn the whole thing over to my attorney this afternoon. The deuce with the races— I'll have justice."

The man had by this time raised himself to a high pitch of apparently righteous wrath. He advanced menacingly toward Kennedy, who stood with his shoulders thrown back, and his hands deep in his pockets, and a half amused look on his face.

"As for you, Mr. Detective," added the man, "for eleven cents I'd lick you to within an inch of your life. *'Portrait parle*,' indeed! It's a fine scientific system that has to deny its own main principles in order to vindicate itself. Bah! Take that, you scoundrel!"

Harriet Wollstone threw her arms about him, but he broke away. His fist shot out straight. Kennedy was too quick for him, however. I had seen Craig do it dozens of times with the best boxers in the "gym." He simply jerked his head to one side, and the blow passed just a fraction of an inch from his jaw, but passed it as cleanly as if it had been a yard away.

The man lost his balance, and as he fell forward and caught himself, Kennedy calmly and deliberately slapped him on the nose.

It was an intensely serious instant, yet I actually laughed. The man's nose was quite out of joint, even from such a slight blow. It was twisted over on his face in the most ludicrous position imaginable.

"The next time you try that, Forbes," remarked Kennedy, as he pulled the piece of paraffin from his pocket and laid it on the table with the other exhibits, "don't forget that a concave nose built out to hook-nose convexity by injections of paraffin, such as the beauty-doctors everywhere advertise, is a poor thing for a White Hope."

Both Burke and O'Connor had seized Forbes, but Kennedy had turned his attention to the larger of Forbes's grips, which the Wollstone woman vociferously claimed as her own. Quickly he wrenched it open.

As he turned it up on the table my eyes fairly bulged at the sight. Forbes' suit-case might have been that of a travelling salesman for the Kimberley, the Klondike, and the Bureau of Engraving, all in one. Craig dumped the wealth out on the table— stacks of genuine bills, gold coins of two realms, diamonds, pearls, everything portable and tangible all heaped up and topped off with piles of counterfeits awaiting the magic touch of this Midas to turn them into real gold.

"Forbes, you have failed in your get-away," said Craig triumphantly. "Gentlemen, you have here a master counterfeiter, surely— a master counterfeiter of features and fingers as well as of currency."

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21: The Strangeness of Joab Lashmere

Edgar Wallace
1875-1932
Lloyd's Story Magazine Sep 1922
Collected in: *The Woman From the East*, 1934

IT IS A TRADITION amongst such humorists as are left to us (and was assuredly a faith with those who have left behind them the jest called "Life"), that the landlady of a select boarding-house should have seen better days. It is equally a tradition that the landlady should be blessed with a pretty daughter, possessed of a voice or the power of producing music of a superior brand and quality.

Jack Stackford used to sit in the drawing-room of Mrs. Lashmere's boarding-house and wonder what Fate ordered matters so. He had lived in other select boardinghouses and had found that these adjuncts of lodgerdom were inevitable. And the favourite boarder falls in love with the beautiful daughter, and they go to live in somebody else's boarding-house.

That was the tradition. It irritated Captain Stackford to think that he had so faithfully realized a part of the story.

Mary Lashmere's voice was both sweet and trained. And Mrs. Lashmere never spoke of her misfortunes or referred pathetically to her rich relations. The furniture, scratched as it was, faded as were the tapestries and leather of chairs and couches, was of the most expensive character. It was not the kind of furniture which one could or would buy nowadays, but in its time it must have cost a small fortune.

"No, I'm not singing to-night, Captain Stackford. I'm rather tired and worried."

Jack murmured his regrets.

He had come in late; it was the serving maid's night out and Mary had brought him his dinner, so that they were alone in the big ugly dining-room.

"Is Mrs. Lashmere worse?"

She shook her head. Mrs. Lashmere was a chronic invalid; and she saw few a guests from time to time in her room, but she took no active part in running the house. That fell to Mary, and it is creditable to her that nobody knew how she hated it. Women are better able to hide their dislikes than men.

"And how are the clients coming in?" she asked, and he pulled a wry face.

"There are too many detective agencies in London already," he said.

"What made you hit upon that way of losing money?" She was interested, and stood at the other side of the table, resting her hands on the edge. He hated to see her stand when he was sitting. She had a peculiar pleasure in knowing that he hated it. He was the one man with whom confidences had been possible.

"Oh... well," he hesitated. "I was in the Intelligence during the War... divisional and corps intelligence, and I have a sort of flair for that kind of work if it comes."

"If it comes," she repeated, deep in thought. "Let us pretend it is coming I think I will be your first client," her lips twitched, but she was savagely serious. "I commission you to shadow Uncle Joab and discover what has happened to his head. I think his head went years ago."

"Joab?" he repeated amused, and then sat bolt upright. "Joab Lashmere, not *the* Lashmere?"

"I am glad you are impressed," she said calmly. "At least he serves a purpose. Joab Lashmere is my uncle, dear father's brother. He is the rich relation which all self-respecting keepers of boarding-houses maintain for their glory. And he is worth oh, I don't know how many millions," she added.

If he was not impressed, he was at least astounded.

"Of course I know all about him he's a national figure. People say that he is mad."

She lifted a warning finger and she was very serious now.

"Please don't say that or, if you say it, don't say it so that he can learn of it."

He thought that she was protesting against his applying the taint of madness to anybody of her blood. But here he was mistaken.

Her father, the late Charles Lashmere, once went to court to ask for a ruling as to the sanity of his brother Joab. In his application he was supported by Porter Jackson, a banker of note, and a certain Frank B. Teddington, a broker.

The case created considerable attention in the 'eighties, for all the parties were men of great wealth, the two Lashmeres having inherited several millions from their father. The grounds for the action were Joab's queer secretiveness; his practice of sleeping through the day behind locked doors and working all night. To this end the hours of his office staff were from eleven p.m. to eight a.m. In the daytime the sole occupants of the office were an aged manager who carried out the scrawled instructions of his chief, and a few clerks.

Another practice which was put forward in proof of the deponent's madness was his avoidance of his kind. His servants, even his valet, never saw him come or go. His houses, which he built himself (he never lived in any other kind), had a private stairway for his own use.

There were other eccentricities quoted, but the long and short of the story is that Joab won his action without coming into court a providential attack of scarlet fever (a sceptical doctor, commissioned by Charles to see him, came away infected and all but died) saving him this appearance especially after two doctors, the family physician and a famous alienist, had given their evidence.

Whether Charles and his associates were actuated by the purest of motives is open to question. The administration of his brother's millions would have

been a happy circumstance for Charles, who had been hard hit in the Baltic. But he lost, and, to prove his sanity, Joab ruined first his brother, then Frank B. Teddington (he shot himself in a seaside hotel), and last, Porter Jackson, whose bankruptcy was followed by a police prosecution and a seven years' sentence.

Later, in the 'nineties, a discharged valet had made certain affidavits before a master in lunacy or some such official. Dennis, the valet, was a nasty fellow and a vindictive fellow. Incidentally he had forged Joab's name to three cheques, counting first upon his excellent penmanship to avoid detection; secondly, upon his sure knowledge that Joab would never go into court to prosecute him if the forgeries were discovered as of course they were. In the latter respect, he was right. Joab persecuted his servant for exactly one year. And the very evidence of persecution was invisible. You could not trace the hand of Joab farther than the refusal of gentlemen to employ the thieving ex-servant. There Joab was within the law and his rights. Even Dennis accepted the justice of his former master's action. But Dennis knew who was behind the pin-prick prosecutions that followed. These drove him to the streets and to people who whispered of a golden road to affluence. It was not exactly golden, but it had that appearance.

He passed nineteen counterfeit coins, supplied by his new friends, and was arrested when he was passing the twentieth. Twenty was his fatal quantity just those number of years of servitude did the judge award him. He was carried from the dock howling insensate maledictions at the head of the real prosecutor, and the man who sat in his new castle in Trondjem read the account of the trial and sentence with insane glee. Joab liked Norway, especially in the winter, when it was never quite light.

The skeleton of the story Mary told. She knew nothing of Dennis.

"The old devil!" said Jack. "Of course he's mad."

"Is he just wait."

She was gone from the room a very little time and came back with a letter in her hand. The paper was thick and the edges were gilded. In the top left-hand corner was a coloured crest.

Storm Castle,
Trondjem,
March 12.

We have received your letter telling us of your mother's illness and requesting that we should, being in the position as we are to do so, make provision for your mother and relieve her from the anxiety of her low lodging-house

"That is his description," the girl interrupted her reading to explain. She went on:

In reply we have to state...

"He says 'we'; is he married?" asked Jack.

"To himself 'we' is his royal way. It was one of the peculiarities which came out in the action poor daddy brought," she said and continued:

...beg to state that we thank you for the reminder of your continued existence. We are journeying to London next week and shall rectify our omission to prepare a will. For the brood of Charles, not a cent, not a groat, not a crumb from a green-moulded loaf.

"You can almost hear him shrieking that," she said with a little smile.

"I haven't told mother. She does not even know that I have written."

"A curious man, and obviously mad," said Jack thoughtfully. "What is he like in appearance I mean?" She shook her head.

"I have never seen him, neither has mother. The only person I know who has talked to him face to face is Doctor Bennett— mother's doctor, you know. He was one of the physicians who testified to Uncle Joab's sanity. I wonder—"

She bit her lips in thought.

"Doctor Bennett is coming to see mother. I should like you to have a talk with him about Uncle Joab? Perhaps I haven't given a very fair account of him, and his view will help you to strike a balance."

"Will he mind talking?"

"No, dear no," said the girl, shaking her head. "Uncle Joab is a favourite topic of his. I think he is secretly proud that his evidence was accepted in the courts."

Dr. Bennett proved to be a rosy-faced, white-haired man, whose professional manner was tempered by a boisterous good-humour.

"Mad? Bless you, no!" he said. "If furtiveness and money-grabbing and an abnormal conceit are to be accepted as evidences of insanity, you'd have to build insane asylums at the corner of every block! He is a mean fellow. By the way, I received a paltry fee for the services I rendered him in court and he never consulted me again. But Joab isn't really a bad fellow at heart. I am convinced of that. One of these days you will see a tremendous change in his attitude, not only to life, but to his relations. Mark my words!"

Three days later a small steamer came staggering through the North Sea. It was pitch dark and a heavy rain was falling when it made fast alongside the quay at Hull. The captain clumped across the bridge in his heavy sea-boots and looked down upon the pier.

"There he goes," he said, pointing to a dark figure that moved furtively down the gangway on to the wharf. "Any other man who ordered a special boat to bring him across from Bergen would have come up to the skipper and at least said: 'How d'ye do?' Not that I expected it."

He shook the moisture from his oilskins and followed the first mate into the chart-house.

"I suppose he'll have a special train to London?"

"He used to have, ten, twenty years ago," said the other. "Didn't you see his car waiting for him by the side of the quay? Lord, if I had his millions!"

"I don't suppose he's any happier than you or me," said the first mate. "A man who wants to travel alone and who mustn't be looked at lord, what a life!"

"I wish I had it for about forty-eight hours," said the skipper grimly, and proceeded to the writing-up of his log.

The man who left the ship paused only to say a word to a chilled Customs official.

"I have no baggage," he said shortly, and dropped his suitcase at the other's feet. "If you want to examine that you can."

"No, Mr. Lashmere," said the official, "if you have nothing to declare "

"If I had anything to declare, I should have declared it," snarled Joab Lashmere, and walked toward the waiting limousine.

He was muffled in a long fur-lined coat, the collar of which was turned up so that only the tip of his nose was visible.

"Don't get out," he growled at the chauffeur. That individual, with some experience of his master, had no intention of getting out. A door slammed and the car moved noiselessly through the silent streets of Hull, and into the country. Only once did the microphone at the driver's ear bellow a request.

"Faster, faster! Remember, I must be at Saint Albans before daybreak or you lose your job!"

"Yes, sir," muttered the chauffeur, and accelerated.

The man in the car curled himself into a corner and fell asleep. The night was a wild one. A south-westerly gale was blowing, driving the stinging rain into the driver's face. The glass screen was blurred, and for all purposes of observation opaque. Yet the chauffeur dare not stop the car to put up the screen. He craned sideways from his seat, watching the road which the big headlamps revealed. Villages came out of the darkness, showed for a moment and vanished as the car sped southward. They flew through the streets of a cathedral city at such a speed that an indignant town policeman had no time to take the number of the car, and so came on the Great North Road and to Rodley Bridge. Rodley Bridge was under repair, and a red lamp boldly labelled "storm-proof" had been attached overnight to a barrier which blocked one half of the road. The cord on which the lamp was attached was a trifle long, and early in the night the swaying lamp had smashed against an iron tressle...

When dawn broke, a farm labourer on his way to work came round the bend of the lane which gave him a view of the bridge.

What he saw quickened his footsteps. The wreckage of a car smashed and twisted almost beyond recognition half hung over the ruined parapet, and beneath he saw a pair of gaitered legs. They were very still. And then he saw an elderly, careworn man with a thin, lined face sitting on a milestone, his fur-lined overcoat drawn round his shrunken figure, the hand upon which his head rested was heavily bandaged.

He looked up as the man approached.

"Get some people to move this car," he said. "I am afraid my chauffeur is dead. Is there a telephone near?"

"Not nearer than Jawney," said the rustic. "Are you hurt, sir?"

"Not much," growled the other. His face was deadly white and his hands were shaking.

"It happened about two hours ago," he said, and said no more.

At that moment there came upon the scene the first of the men who were engaged in repairing the bridge. It took half an hour to get the car lifted off, and they found the chauffeur was killed and was beyond recognition.

"My name is Lashmere," explained the man in the long coat to a police constable. "I don't know how the accident happened. There ought to have been a red light on this bridge."

"There was, last night, sir," said one of the workmen, and examined the lamp.

Being a discreet employee he said nothing more.

They got the injured man into Jawney in the farmer's cart, a hired car was secured and, against all traditions, he arrived at his unlovely house at St. Albans in broad daylight. Nevertheless he went up his private stairway to his room, telephoned his orders to his household, and was not seen again for the rest of the day. Whatever desire for obscurity he had, he could not escape publicity now.

Mary Lashmere read the account of the accident.

"Uncle Joab will be furious," she said. "He will not worry much about the chauffeur, poor soul, but being dragged to an inquest will be a hateful experience for him."

Yet it appeared at the inquest that Joab Lashmere conducted himself without any of his characteristic outbursts of irritation, and even received the commendation of the coroner for the attempt he had made to rescue his chauffeur.

Old Dr. Bennett called on her mother on the morning the account of the inquest was published.

"I tell you, Joab has got a lot in him," he insisted. "He has pluck at any rate."

"It is surprising if it is true," said the girl sceptically.

At first she had been sorry that she had written again to her uncle, for she had not minced her words.

Jack was away on his first job, an enquiry in the Midlands, and lie returned the day after the inquest to confirm much that had been said of Joab Lashmere's heroic attempt to save the chauffeur.

"I read an account of the accident, and as I was within five or six miles of Rodley Bridge I went over to look at the damage. The car was still there when I arrived, and it was in a ghastly mess, exactly like one of those cars one saw in France that had been hit by a Naval shell. The old man can't be as bad as you think, Mary," he said, for they had reached the "Mary" and "Jack" stage in their friendship. "I had a talk with the foreman. There were about fifty men there repairing the bridge, and he told me that Mr. Lashmere must have broken open the big tool chest probably searching for a crowbar, though the only tool that was missing from the box was a spade."

"A spade?" she repeated in surprise. "Perhaps he tried to dig him out?"

"That, I think, is possible, but the ground was so torn up near where the accident occurred that it was impossible to discover what he tried. Probably he lost his head, and certainly the foreman lost his spade. He gave this fact almost the importance of the accident."

It was at this moment that the maid came into Mary's little sanctum, which was half office and half rest-room.

"A letter?" said the girl. "A bill I suppose."

She stared at the big square envelope in her hand. "From Uncle Joab," she said, and pulled a little grimace, "and it is certain to be unpleasant."

"Get it over," said Jack with a smile, as she hesitated. She tore open the flap and pulled out the contents, and a slip of paper fell to the floor. She stooped and, picking it up, gasped.

"A cheque for one thousand pounds!" she gasped in wonder.

They looked at each other, and then she unfolded the letter.

Joab Lashmere wrote all his own letters on a portable typewriter, and they began without any polite prefix.

Perhaps what you say is right (the letter ran). *We have thought this matter over and we have decided to allow you £1000 per annum on condition that you do not come to see us or molest us in any way.*

She was silent.

"A queer devil," said Jack. "You'll take the money, of course."

"If there were only myself concerned I should send it back to him," she said, "but I must consider mother." She read the letter again.

"Doctor Bennett said a change would come over him."

"Perhaps it has come," suggested Jack, and then, quickly, "Will this mean you give up the boarding-house?"

She nodded, and put out her hand with a smile.

"It will not mean I shall not see you, Jack," she said quietly.

Nearly an hour passed before the maid knocked at the door again with a prosaic question about potatoes, and the hair of Mary Lashmere appeared, to the critical and knowledgeable eye of the girl, to be considerably ruffled.

One man received the news of Jaob Lashmere's munificence with an elation which he did not attempt to conceal.

"What did I tell you?" said Dr. Bennett triumphantly, his rosy face shining. "There's a lot in old Joab! I tell you the devil isn't as black as he is painted. Mark my words!" he wagged his finger solemnly "when Joab goes to heaven he'll leave you a cool million." And Mary laughed, for she was happy, but her happiness had nothing to do either with the possible acquirement of wealth or Uncle Joab's translation to a heavenly sphere.

The doctor spent the evening with them. They were a select party in Mary's room. Mrs. Lashmere, a grey, faded woman, was wheeled in her chair to partake in the festivities. A week ago such a party would not have been possible. The indignation of the other boarders at such favour shown to a guest would have been overwhelming, but now Mary could afford to ignore the acidulated maiden sisters who occupied the two best rooms in the house and never ceased to hint that they paid for the advantage, and she could smile at the sneers of the motherly matron and her flaxen-haired daughter, could even endure the scowls and the sulks of the young motor engineer (with socialistic views) who had three times invited her to go with him to a theatre and had three times been refused.

Dr. Bennett, despite his many years or because of them, was the gayest of that party. He left them with a mysterious suggestion of some great project he had in his mind, left them full of good spirits and bubbling humour, and was found the next night by a platelayer dead on the embankment of the Great Northern Railway.

On the afternoon following the discovery, Jack Stackford came into the girl's little room and closed the door behind him.

"I am afraid it is a case of murder, Mary," he said gently.

She stared at him.

"Murder? Impossible! The dear old doctor hadn't an enemy in the world."

He shook his head.

"There's no doubt about it. I've just come from the doctor who examined him. He was struck down from behind and savagely battered to death. I've been making enquiries at his flat. The servants say that he paid his afternoon calls and came home to tea. He told his housekeeper that he was going out as he had an

appointment, and from that time he was not seen again until he was found on the railway."

"But how did he get there?"

"That is the mystery which the police are trying to fathom. The first impression was that he had been thrown out of a train, but the platelayers were working on the line up till midnight, when they left off for an hour for supper. And between midnight and one o'clock, when he was discovered, no train had passed along that particular set of rails. My theory is that he was killed somewhere on the road running parallel with the railway embankment, which can be reached through a gate. In fact, the railway carriage murder theory has been dissipated by the discovery of the doctor's little two-seater a hundred yards from the scene of the murder."

Jack spent the whole of that night fitting theory to fact. He was weary, with a throbbing head, and he was preparing for bed when the great inspiration came to him, an explanation flashed upon him. In a moment he was awake. The missing spade!

It was a fantastic theory, one which would be rejected by ninety-nine police officials out of a hundred.

By ten o'clock he was awaiting impatiently in the room of the inspector who was investigating the Bennett murder, and no sooner had that official arrived than, without preamble, Jack Stackford put his theory into words. And in Inspector Ridley he met the hundredth man.

"It is feasible. Of course, there are lots of holes in your hypothesis. But it is worth trying."

He got on to Jawney by telephone and put through an enquiry.

"We'll have to wait whilst the constable gets to Rodley Bridge, and it will probably be an hour before we get any answer. If your theory is correct but it is farfetched, you will admit that, Mr. Stackford."

"We shall see," said Jack grimly. In fifty minutes the reply came through from Jawney.

"Yes, sir, the spade has been found. It was brought up by a boy who was fishing at the bottom of the stream about fifty yards away from the scene of the accident."

The inspector whistled.

"I'll be in your neighbourhood very shortly," he said, and hung up the receiver. "We'll have a look at Rodley Bridge," he said.

It was two and a half hours' run by car, but they stopped at Jawney to snatch a hasty lunch and consult the local authorities.

Early in the afternoon they came to the bridge, the repairs to which were nearly completed. The foreman was waiting for them and recognized Jack.

"The spade was found just about there." He pointed up the stream. "And that's the curious thing. It might have fallen over the bridge and been washed downstream, but how it got upstream is a mystery to me."

"We'll try to solve it," said the inspector; "and now will you show me exactly where the spade was found? and, by the way, I want you to lend me a couple of men. They had better bring their spades."

The little river which the bridge crossed was bordered by meadowlands, with here and there a plantation that broke the flatness of the view.

"This is the spot," said the foreman, and pointed. Jack looked round. A dozen yards away was a small copse, and after a careful scrutiny of the meadow: "If I'm not mistaken those trees are our objective," he said.

The river made a bend round the copse and in so doing created a tiny peninsula which, for some reason, was relatively well-wooded.

They pushed their way through a tangle of undergrowth and came to a clear space.

Jack pointed to a heap of twigs.

"That looks as though a bush has been uprooted and laid there," he said.

The men with the shovels cleared away the brushwood and revealed a slight depression of earth.

"We'll try here," said Jack quietly.

In silence the men went about their work, but they had not far to dig.

MR. JOAB LASHMERE had certainly undergone a considerable change, and the first to recognize the effect of the motor-car accident were his servants. He ceased to hide himself, was waited on at table by a serving-maid, with whom he condescended to exchange pleasantries.

He went abroad in daylight too, strolled round his estate and was amiable to his gate-keepers, to whom hitherto Joab Lashmere had been almost a mythical personage, a voice in the dark that barked orders, that dismissed men without hesitation or pity, and evicted their wives from their homes on his estate the instant their husbands' services were dispensed with. On one night, unbelievable though it seemed, he drank too much wine and was assisted to his bed by the butler, who never before had seen him, drunk or sober. Two days after Dr. Bennett's body was discovered, Joab Lashmere sat in his curiously bare library and stared absentmindedly at the cheque-book before him. From a drawer he took a box of cigars, pried it open and made his choice.

Then he extracted a letter from his pocket-book and read it.

Dear Lashmere,

I want to see you particularly. I haven't seen you for nearly thirty years. I know you will receive an old friend. I am driving out to meet you and shall arrive (punctuality is a vice of mine) at about six o'clock to-night.

Yours faithfully,
Walter Bennett.

There was no reason why he should have kept that letter, but there was at the back of his mind a thought that it might possibly be useful.

He lit a match and, putting it to the corner of the note, walked with it to the fireplace and watched it consume. Then he lit the cigar and resumed his seat in his chair. The butler came in.

"Captain Stackford wishes to see you."

"Eh?" He looked up, snarling. "Captain Stackford? I don't want to see Captain Stackford. Damn you, don't you know that I never receive...?"

But here, to the consternation of the servant, the door was opened and two men came in.

Jack Stackford he did not know, but the man behind him he recognized immediately and dropped his hand to his pocket. Before he could pull the automatic the inspector had flung himself upon him and the two went to the ground together.

"All right, Ridley, it's a cop. What do you want me for?"

"I want you for the wilful murder of Doctor Walter Bennett on the night of the sixteenth," said Inspector Ridley. "Your name is Dennis, formerly in the employment of Mr. Joab Lashmere, and you are an ex-convict."

"You know a lot for a copper," sneered the prisoner.

His statement, for some reason, was not published till long after he had walked the stone-paved corridor to the scaffold. This was probably due to the fact that the English law does not admit a plea of guilty in a murder case, or, if it does, admits it under protest.

Jack and the rich Mrs. Stackford, nee Lashmere (for Mary was the old man's heir-at-law), were honeymooning at Como when the newspapers containing the confession reached them. Jack read it with interest, though the story had been told at the trial.

My name is Ferdinand Dennis, and I was for some time in the employ of Mr. Joab Lashmere, from which service I was dismissed for forgery. I could always imitate the old man's writing, and I was certain that he would never prosecute me because he hated going into court. Though he did not charge me with any offence, he worked against me, and, I subsequently discovered, employed a chap named Hould to get me into a counterfeit coining charge on which I was sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude.

When I was in prison I determined to get even with Joab Lashmere. Owing to breaches of the prison rules I served the full term of my imprisonment, and I was released a week before Mr. Lashmere came from Norway. I had made up my mind when I was in prison that I would

kill him, and the first step I took was to discover his whereabouts. I learnt from a paragraph in the newspapers that he was expected in England, and I went to Hull. I knew his habits of travelling by night, and I had very little difficulty in finding that a specially chartered boat was bringing him across.

My plan was to conceal myself on the special train which I knew he would order, because that was his practice. Since I had been in prison, however, motor-cars had come into general use and I discovered that his car was waiting for him. It seemed as though all my plans had come undone, but after thinking the matter over I hit upon the following scheme. I saw the car. It was garaged at Parkers in the High Street, and behind was a luggage carrier. I had a talk with the chauffeur, who told me that Mr. Lashmere never carried luggage and the carrier was usually fastened up.

I managed to loosen the carrier, which was broad and would make a comfortable seat. On the night Mr. Lashmere arrived, I fastened it temporarily so that the chauffeur would not detect anything wrong. I knew it was impossible to get on to the carrier in the docks because the policeman on the gate would see me, but approaching the docks are a number of narrow streets through which the car would have to pass very slowly, and it was in one of these that I determined to board it.

It was raining heavily, and I had no exact plan as to what I intended doing after the car reached St. Albans. I think my scheme was to follow him up the private stairway which I knew he used, because it was at St. Albans that I was in service. The plan worked out as I had made it, except that I had some difficulty in pulling the carrier down and struggling on board for the car was moving at a faster rate than I had anticipated. But I managed to scramble on board and fasten myself up, and although a policeman saw me in the outskirts of Hull he could not draw the driver's attention to my presence.

It was a most uncomfortable ride, for the car went at a terrible pace. It was raining heavily, a high wind was blowing and I was nearly frozen, I remember nothing of the accident. I must have been dozing. The first thing I remember was striking water. I had been tossed over the parapet of the bridge into the river, and I was for a moment stunned. My hands were bleeding when I reached the bank and I was wet through from head to foot. I cursed Lashmere, believing that the accident had happened to myself and not to the car, but when I got up on to the bridge the first thing I discovered lying in the roadway was the old man. He was quite dead. I did not see him, I stumbled over him. One of the oil lamps on the car was still burning, and I took it from its socket and made an examination. I saw there was no hope of getting the driver out, he must have been killed immediately, and I sat down and considered what I should do. I knew Lashmere and his habits of avoiding company, and I guessed there wouldn't be half a dozen people in the country who would recognize him.

I took the body in my arms and carried it along the river bank, stripped it of its clothing and put them on myself. Then it occurred to me that if I left him there he would be discovered in the morning and enquiries would be made.

I went back to the bridge, which was under repair, and I looked for the tool-box which I knew would be there. It took me some time to break it open, and I had to search the tool-chest of the motor-car before I found a hammer strong enough to wrench off the bolt and staple. Taking out a shovel I went back to where I had left Mr. Lashmere's body, dug a hole and buried him, together with my old clothes. The ground was earthy and muddy, and I did not think that I should be detected, but to make sure I cut down two bushes and laid them over the place where the body was buried, and after throwing the spade into the river, went back to the road to wait until somebody came along.

In all probability I should never have been detected, only Dr. Bennett, who knew Mr. Lashmere, came out to see me. I was in a funk, because I knew the moment he saw me he would know that I was not Mr. Lashmere. I waited for him on the road outside the grounds and stopped his car, telling him that I wanted to talk to him away from the house. I thought that by this means, as it was dark, he would not suspect me. I asked him to drive me a little way along the road and we would talk. His manner, however, was short and suspicious.

By and by he said, "Why do you call yourself Lashmere? You are not Mr. Lashmere." And then suddenly he struck a match.

I was not prepared for this, and I had no time to cover my face.

"You're Dennis!" he said. "Dennis, the man who was discharged for forgery."

I knew I was up against it. Before he could utter another word I had struck him with the life preserver which I had brought with me, which I thought might come in handy, though I hoped it wouldn't...

After he was dead I put his body on the embankment, took the car a long way down the road and walked back to the house. Nobody saw me come or go, for I used the secret staircase...

It was easy to deceive the servants, who had never seen Mr. Lashmere, and I could write the old man's signature perfectly. Every cheque I sent was honoured...

Jack folded up the paper and sighed. A reasonably good detective had been lost to the world when he married Mary Lashmere and took over the direction of Joab's multifarious interests.

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22: The Purple Death

William Le Queux
1864-1927
Hutchinson's Magazine Dec 1925
Collected in: *The Crimes Club*, 1927

AROUND the big round table in the upper room of the Café de l'Univers the Crimes Club was holding its usual monthly meeting. All of the ten members, each of a different profession and each expert in his own walk of life, were present.

The *café noir* and liqueurs had been set, and the door locked, for no one was allowed at their secret deliberations, and no new member was admitted until death created a vacancy. The secretary, the stout Madame Léontine van Hecke, suddenly addressed her companions in French, saying:

"Gentlemen, M. Dubosq wishes to consult you. I ask your attention, if you please."

Lucien Dubosq, smart in his dinner-jacket and wearing the coveted red rosette of the Legion of Honour in his lapel, rose, and after apologising for troubling the club, explained a problem which the English and French detective service had both failed to solve.

He said that in the interests of justice a very strange and mysterious affair was being hushed up by both Scotland Yard and the French police, a mystery upon which no light could be thrown, therefore he would briefly place the facts before the members for discussion, decision, and action.

On September 22nd, at four o'clock in the afternoon, two well-dressed men, one dark, half-bald and clean-shaven, about fifty-five years of age, and the other, a younger man in his early thirties, with fair, well-brushed hair and of a somewhat effeminate type, strolled along the beach road leading from the cinema to the fish market in the old town of Hastings, where the brown-sailed fishing smacks were lying ready to go out. There were still many London trippers about, and at a beach stall the two men bought some bananas, and, throwing themselves upon the shingle, ate them and smoked cigarettes. They conversed in low tones, evidently holding a consultation, the younger man differing from his companion.

Presently the younger man, having grown calm, drew his wallet from his pocket and, taking out something, handed it to his friend, who examined it. Then the other clapped his knee in satisfaction and returned it to his friend, who carefully replaced it in his pocket-book. Both laughed heartily, then rose, and walking back to the town, entered the Bodega, where a young, fair-haired girl of twenty-two awaited them, and they had a drink together. The girl was

extremely well-dressed and had shingled hair. She wore a dark kid glove on her left hand, which apparently had some deformity.

All this was witnessed by Henry Hayes, an employee of the Hastings Corporation, whose duty was surveillance upon the beach fronting the old town, with its broken sea-wall and fishing harbour. He had noticed the rather unusual movements of the two well-dressed men, for such men did not usually eat bananas upon the beach. For that reason he noted their clothes. The elder man wore in his dark knotted cravat a beautiful cornflower-blue sapphire pin which had attracted Hayes as being very pretty.

When the men had entered the Bodega just as it had opened for its evening trade, Hayes relaxed his surveillance, for he had little to do, the trippers being orderly at that end of the town, which was the reverse to that stretch of beach between the Queen's Hotel and Hastings Pier.

That was the last seen of the two visitors to Hastings alive.

Thirty-four hours later, at three o'clock in the morning, the cross-Channel mail steamer, *Isle of Thanet*, when half-way between Dover and Calais, sounded her siren against a big sailing boat not showing the regulation lights. There was half a gale blowing, and the sails being set, she came straight across the bows of the *Isle of Thanet*, much to the anger of Captain Evans, who sounded his siren again and was compelled to alter his course sharply, avoiding a collision only by a few yards.

In the darkness he saw that it was a fishing smack, but there was no light nor any sign of life aboard. He drew up at risk of trouble at Calais Maritime over his delay, and so manoeuvred his steamer as to follow the derelict.

Coming up alongside of her, he took up his megaphone and shouted to her skipper, first in French, then in Spanish, English, and Italian. But the fishing smack, tossing upon the heaving waters, made no sign.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted. "Where the devil are you going?" But again there was no response.

Realising that such a vessel adrift in the Channel without lights was a great danger to shipping, he at once sent off a boat's crew to board her, and stood by awaiting his men's report. The boat's crew had a difficult time in getting aboard in such a sea, but they managed to scramble up while Captain Evans turned on his searchlight to watch.

Most of the passengers were below because of the heavy gale blowing. Presently the second officer, named Richard Hardwick, who had gone with the party, came up and, waving his arms just as a heavy sea struck the smack, yelled to the Captain:

"There's something wrong here, sir! We'll sail her into Calais and see you there."

"What's wrong?" inquired Evans deeply through his megaphone.

"We can't tell yet, sir," was his officer's reply. Then Captain Evans waved farewell and continued on his course, knowing that he would delay the Paris mail by half an hour or even more.

Meanwhile Hardwick, the officer of the *Isle of Thanet*, had ordered the lights to be relit, the sails altered, and a course set for Calais, he having the flashing harbour light to steer by.

"Funny, ain't it, sir!" remarked Williams, the man at the helm, obeying Hardwick's orders as they followed in the wake of the brilliantly-lit cross-Channel steamer. "Can you make it out?"

"No, I can't, Williams," was the officer's reply. "Keep her a point more westward." And then as the steersman altered the smack's course, another big sea struck her and she rose proudly from the trough. The night was not over-dark, but the moon was obscured by swift drifting clouds as it so often is in the Channel. Ever and anon, the stormy clouds parted and the moon shone in a long silver streak upon the wind-swept waters.

"The fellow for'ard looks like a gentleman," Williams remarked, just as another of his fellow-sailors passed along, a ghostly figure in the half light. "'E's been done in, no doubt. I wonder 'ow?"

"Who knows? There will be an inquiry into the derelict when we get into Calais," replied Hardwick. "The man's dead and we can't bring him to life. The only thing is to leave everything as it was— as I have given strict orders— and let the police solve the mystery of to-night's affair. It's beyond me, I admit, and— well— it gets on one's nerves. It is all so uncanny— three of them!"

"Yes, sir, I agree. But where is the crew? They've disappeared. They'll know something of 'em in Hastings, no doubt."

"Of course they will. But, as you say— where is the crew? Three dead men aboard— and nobody else!"

The fishing boat marked "CH. 38" upon her sails, which had sailed the Channel for fifteen years, and was well known to every fisherman between the North Foreland and Portland Bill, rose and fell, labouring heavily in the gale, the angry seas breaking over her every now and then, while the mail boat quickly out-distanced her in making for Calais harbour.

Two or three times the *Isle of Thanet* signalled dot-and-dash lights to the derelict, giving orders as to what Hardwick should do when entering the port.

Meanwhile Hardwick, who had spent his life on the Channel ferry, had all he could do to keep the brown-sailed old boat upon her course. The trawl was up— recently up, for fish, seaweed, and débris from it lay scattered about the swimming deck. But who had hauled it? Certainly not the three men now aboard. The fishing crew had apparently suddenly disappeared, leaving the vessel to drift without lights, a serious menace to shipping. Indeed, as showing the strict watch kept upon the Channel waters, two tramp steamers, which had

passed it an hour before, had reported it to the wireless station at Niton, in the Isle of Wight, as a dangerous derelict. This notice to mariners had, in turn, been transmitted to the Admiralty, who, a quarter of an hour later, had sent out a C.Q. message— which is the code-signal asking everyone to listen as all ships were warned of their danger.

Through the stormy waters the battered old fishing smack laboured on for a further two hours, until at last, they were under the green and red lights which marked the entrance to Calais harbour, and a dexterous turn of the wheel from Williams brought her into calm water where, after much manoeuvring, the boat was at last brought into the fishing port and tied up to the quay.

At once two French police agents, in hooded cloaks, boarded her, the Prefect of Police having already been notified by Captain Evans on the arrival of the *Isle of Thanet*. Evans and a plain-clothes policeman accompanied them.

"Well, Hardwick, what's wrong here?" asked the Captain in his sharp, brusque way.

"I can't tell, sir. But you can see for yourself," was his officer's reply.

Examination of the dirty, dismal little vessel showed an amazing state of things.

In the bows lay the body of a fair-haired young man in a cheap tweed suit. He lay curled up, his features distorted, his eyes bulging, and his countenance a curious bright purple; while down below in the small cabin lit by a single swinging oil lamp there were the remains of a rough supper upon the table, and dregs of red wine in enamelled cups. Lying on the floor were two other men, dead from no apparent cause. None of the trio were seafaring men, but the faces of all three were horribly distorted, their hands open instead of being clenched, and their faces bright purple. Yet there was no trace of the crew of four or five which such a vessel would carry.

In the cabin were signs of a violent quarrel. Some broken plates lay upon the floor, but they might have been swept off the table by the pitching of the boat when the trawl was down.

The police began a thorough search of the dead men's clothing, finding absolutely nothing to serve as a clue. But their investigations proved that the young man who was found in the bows of the boat was not a man at all, but a girl of about twenty-two or three with fair, close-cropped hair!

The curious discovery was at once reported by telephone to the Chief of Police of Calais, who, with his chief inspector, a well-known detective named Dufour, arrived on board. The bodies of all three were searched. The elder man, who was half-bald, wore in his cravat a cornflower sapphire pin set with four diamonds, and had in his pocket the return half of a first-class ticket from London Bridge to Hastings. The inside pocket of his jacket had been torn almost

out, and his face had been bruised on the left jaw either through somebody striking him with their fist, or, perhaps, in falling.

The girl attired as a man seemed a lady. Upon her arm was a solid gold slave-bangle worth at least fifty pounds, while around her neck, beneath her man's shirt, she wore a thin gold chain from which was suspended a circle of emerald-green stone which was afterwards identified as chrysoprase. In her trousers pocket was a twenty-franc gold piece, evidently a souvenir. But upon her was no mark of violence except a slight discoloration of the thumbnail on the right hand. The glove, on being removed from the left hand, showed it to be withered and looking almost like the hand of a skeleton, the thin skin upon the bones being white as marble.

The third man appeared to be aged about thirty. He wore sea-boots like his two companions, but upon his dead countenance was a look of inexpressible horror, as though he had faced some terrible shock at the moment of his death. His clothes were well-made, and upon him was found two pounds in Treasury notes and fifty francs in French bank notes. The palm of his open right hand was cut and had bled.

Beyond that all was mystery. Where was the crew of the fishing boat "CH. 38"?

The French police at once became active and telephoned a brief report of the discovery to Scotland Yard, and they, in turn, telephoned to the Hastings police asking them to at once make inquiry as to the owner of the "CH. 38," and what had become of the missing crew.

Soon a strange state of affairs became revealed. The boat belonged to a fishing company which had its headquarters at Grimsby and owned boats sailing from Brixham, Yarmouth, and elsewhere. The skipper's name was Ben Benham, a man recently from Grimsby, as were the three hands. The original crew of the vessel had been transferred to Grimsby, Benham and his men taking their place. They had only been out on four previous trips, but what had happened to them that night was a complete mystery.

The Hastings police, assisted by two expert officers from Scotland Yard, made every inquiry, but all fruitless. The Calais police had done the same, and inquiries had been made at all the ports of the Pas-de-Calais, but without avail.

Thus the problem put before the club by Monsieur Dubosq was an extremely complex one. Who were the two men and the girl dressed as a man? Why were they on board the fishing boat? Where were the crew? What was the motive of their journey? What had occurred during the fatal voyage? were some of the problems.

"Have photographs of the dead persons been taken?" asked Maurice Jacquinot.

"Yes. I have the photographs here," replied the Chef de la Sûreté. And he handed round three unmounted photographs which had been taken of the dead persons in the position in which they were found.

Each member gazed at them in turn as they were passed round the table. But the member most interested was the elderly, white-bearded Dr. Henri Plaud. He examined and re-examined them very minutely through his large round spectacles, and pursing his lips slightly, passed them to the podgy Baron d'Antenac, who sat at his right hand.

A discussion followed lasting over two hours, in which Gustave Delcros, Gordon Latimer, and the pretty dark-haired Parisienne, Fernande Buysse, took part. The latter, who had been so successful in the case of "The Golden Grasshopper," was eager and enthusiastic. She suggested that the members of the club should unite at once and make independent inquiries.

This course was adopted, and it was decided that the direction of the investigation should be left in the hands of the white-bearded Doctor Plaud, while Gordon Latimer, spruce and active, being English, should go to Hastings at once, accompanied by Mademoiselle Fernande and the young journalist Maurice Jacquinot.

The judicial inquiry held by the French authorities at Calais revealed nothing, so it was decided that the affair should be kept out of the newspapers in order not to alarm anyone who held secret knowledge of what had happened. The bodies of the unknown victims were duly buried, and the case left in the hands of the Crimes Club.

On the 20th December, Gordon Latimer and Fernande Buysse, who, with others, had been pursuing active inquiries in Hastings, Folkestone, Calais, London, Paris, and elsewhere for nearly three months, were sitting together in a low-pitched, underground room where dancing and drinking were being indulged in, a den in Greek Street, Soho, which was one of the most disreputable spots in London's underworld. Gordon had gone there alone and had stood drinks to two or three girls of the usual type which haunt such places. Then he had pretended to "pick up" Fernande, the smart young French girl with whom he was now seated, and who had in the past few weeks become a nightly habituée there.

They were drinking Russian tea, and as she raised her glass, she whispered in French:

"That's the girl— in the cinnamon frock, with reddish hair!"

The girl she indicated was about twenty-five, rather refined, delicate-looking and well-dressed. By her free manner, her painted lips, and her careless laughter it was plain that she was one of similar type to the other girls who frequented the place, some of them of the worst character. The fair-haired young man she was dancing with at the moment was known as "Jimmy the Painter," and was,

indeed, one of the several cat burglars who, from time to time, arouse great alarm among London householders.

Latimer looked at the girl, and asked:

"Are you quite sure?"

"I'm never sure of anything," laughed the chic French girl. "Only from what she's let out, I feel sure she knows something about the stuff. Shall I ask her across to sit with us?"

"No. I'll come here alone to-morrow night," he said, and they sat drinking their tea, smoking cigarettes, and afterwards danced together.

Molly was the name by which the girl whom Fernande had pointed out was known. Such girls have no surnames. They change them too often when the police are following them. She laughed across to Fernande with whom she had become acquainted, and then glanced inquisitively at her companion, as though summing him up, perhaps, as a pigeon to be plucked— which was exactly what Latimer desired.

By their combined efforts, the five members of the Crimes Club had, in a way, been successful. They had discovered Henry Hayes, the employee of the Hastings Corporation, who had identified the photographs of the two men and the girl found upon the fishing boat as the pair whom he had seen eating bananas on the beach and afterwards meeting the girl in the Bodega. That was all. How they came to be on board the boat, or how or for what reason the girl had been transformed into a man, was an absolute enigma.

Old Dr. Plaud, as director of the investigations, had, by his unerring instinct, transferred his sphere of inquiry to London, and there Latimer and Fernande, with the astute journalist, Jacquinot, and M. Delcros had gone to work in a careful, methodical and scientific manner, always keeping in mind that whenever a great crime is committed, there is always a woman in the case.

But what was the crime? What had happened in mid-Channel on that fateful September night? The foreigner can always learn more in London's cosmopolitan underworld than the Englishman, as every London detective will tell you. The cosmopolitan criminal looks upon every Englishman as a "nark," or policeman's "nose" or informer. Hence the foreign detective in London always has an easier task if he knows the haunts of crooks and becomes a habitué.

This is what Plaud had pointed out, and his suggestion had been at once adopted.

Indeed, the sprightly Fernande and her dancing had become quite a feature of that den known to the West End criminal as "Old Jacob's." To that cellar, or series of cellars, with their boarded, white-painted walls, with crude Futuristic designs upon them, many visitors to London were enticed to spend a "merry evening," and left there minus their wallet, or doped and taken to some den even more foul. The police knew "Old Jacob's" well, and Jacob himself, once a

solicitor but now a wily old criminal who had spent some years in Dartmoor for appropriating his clients' money, always took ample precautions, and when raided, the place was found to belong to somebody else who was duly fined, and "Old Jacob" next day removed to another underground den.

At "The Yard" it was always declared that at "Jacob's" there congregated the most dangerous crowd of criminals in London.

All efforts of Plaud and his companions had failed to establish the identity of the two strangers who had arrived on that September evening in Hastings, who had met the girl and given her a glass of wine, and who later had been discovered dead upon the derelict in mid-Channel.

The Crimes Club had held three meetings in Paris at which progress had been reported and the matter had been discussed, but it seemed after three months that the whole organisation of experts was up against a blank wall. On the other hand, it was argued that the crew of four men of the fishing boat could not have all disappeared— unless they had been drowned, which was not likely. Besides, the ship's lights had been deliberately extinguished, which gave colour to the theory that the three had been murdered and the boat abandoned. In addition, one of the small boats was missing, though it had not been sighted. It might have escaped to either the French or English coast in the darkness.

The clue which the shrewd young French lady journalist was following— the public being in ignorance of the highly sensational discovery— was only a slender one. In the course of the long investigations in which Jacquinot had been most active, it was found that a person, somewhat resembling the man who wore the sapphire in his cravat, was known in the dregs of the London underworld as an expert thief named Orlando Martin, who had a dozen or so *aliases*. He had never been in trouble apparently, neither had his companion, for the finger-prints of the dead hands taken by the Calais police did not correspond with any of the hundreds of thousands of records filed at Scotland Yard.

In such circumstances, with failure after failure to record, and with Dr. Plaud openly pessimistic as regards finding any solution to the mystery, Gordon Latimer, dressed in a dinner-jacket, lounged into "Jacob's" on the following night, and was soon in conversation with the neat-ankled girl, Molly. They sat together, drank coffee and cointreau, and watched the dancing, he pretending to live in Cornwall, and up from Truro on a holiday. He told her that he was a motor dealer, and having unexpectedly sold half a dozen cars he had determined to take a holiday in London.

The girl soon saw that he was an easy victim to her charms. Indeed, he promised to meet her and take her out to lunch next day, which he did. For the following three days he was mostly in her company and constantly spending

money upon her, but at night they always danced at "Old Jacob's," where twice they met Fernande alone, and she joined them.

One evening, in consequence of a telegram he had received from Paris regarding yet another discovery, Gordon resolved to make a bold endeavour to learn something, for if what Fernande suspected were true, then Molly might be able to supply the key to the enigma.

They left "Jacob's" at three o'clock in the morning, and he had offered to see her in a taxi as far as her flat at Baron's Court, out by West Kensington.

While in the taxi he suddenly took her hand, and said:

"Molly, you are dense. Haven't you recognised me?"

"Recognised you?" she cried, starting suddenly. "What do you mean?"

"You take me for a mug. You don't recognise Bert Davies— Sugar's friend!"

"Bert Davies!" gasped the girl. "Are you really Bert— his best pal?"

"I am. I came out of the Scrubbs a month ago and went over to Paris to find Maisie. But I can't find Sugar anywhere. Where is he? I know he was deeply in love with you. He told me so lots of times. I hope he isn't doing time?"

The shrewd girl, whose wits were sharpened by the criminal life she led, was silent for a few moments. Teddy Candy, known in the London underworld by the sobriquet of "Sugar," and with whom she was in love, had often spoken of his intimate friend, an expert blackmailer named Bertie Davies who was in prison owing to a little slip he had made.

"You aren't a nark, are you?" asked the girl cautiously.

"Certainly not. Maisie knows me. So does Dick Dale. Sugar used to wear a blue sapphire tie-pin that he pinched from a young Italian prince one night, didn't he?"

"Dick is doing time— shot at a copper in Kingsland and got it in the neck from the Recorder."

"I'm sorry. Dickie's one of the best. Recollect the Humber Street affair— a nasty business— but Dickie helped Teddy, didn't he?"

"Yes. It was a narrow shave for all of us. I don't like guns. But we got nearly two thousand apiece."

"But what about Sugar? Where can I find him?" asked her good-looking companion.

"I don't know— and that's a fact," she replied, with a regretful air. "I haven't seen him or heard of him since September."

"Perhaps he's doing time?"

"Oh, no. He's disappeared."

"How?"

"I don't know," the girl replied. "He and Tony Donald had a big thing on hand— a bit of bank business, he told me. One day in September he left me

after lunching at the Trocadero, and I haven't seen him since. Tony's missing, too!"

"Was Sugar ever about with a big, thick-set man with a beard, a rough, rather deep-voiced, unkempt fellow, who looked like a sailor?"

"The man who came up from Hastings, you mean— eh? Sugar told me he was one of us, and they were doing business together."

"Is that all he told you?" asked Latimer.

"What are you so inquisitive for, young man?" asked the girl pertly. "What business is it of yours— eh? I took you for a mug, but you certainly aren't one," she laughed. The cab had stopped outside her door, and seeing this, she said: "Come in and have a drink before you go back."

Latimer, delighted with the information he had obtained, accepted the girl's invitation and ascended to the third floor, to a little three-roomed flat cosily furnished, where he sat down and took the whisky and soda she poured out for him.

Ten minutes later she went below and paid the taxi driver, telling him that her friend was remaining, but the actual fact was that Gordon Latimer was at that moment lying senseless upon the floor heavily drugged.

"You're a nark, you damned swine!" she cried on returning, kicking his inanimate body savagely. "And you'll be sorry for your inquisitiveness. You are no friend of Sugar's or of Ben Benham's either!"

She went to the telephone and rang up somebody named Joe, urging him to come at once.

Half an hour later an ill-dressed, ill-conditioned man of forty with a sinister, criminal face arrived, and to him she told the story.

The man knit his heavy brows and was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"If he really knows something about Sugar he might possibly help us. Don't do anything rash. It may be better for us if he is alive, than if he died. We'll let him recover and loosen his tongue," added the ex-convict. "There's certain to be somebody with him, and he may have been watched here. So there's no time to lose. Give him the stuff that brings them round," he urged.

She passed into an adjoining room, and returned with a small phial bottle from which she poured about twenty drops into water, and held it to his lips. Unconsciously he drank it, and ten minutes later he was again fully conscious, and amazed at finding himself face to face with the stranger.

"Well, sonny?" asked the sinister man who had served many years of penal servitude, "what's all this you know about Sugar? If you can tell me where he is you'll get out of this alive. But if you don't, well; you'll be found dead by the police to-morrow," he said fiercely, drawing a revolver and holding it close to his brow. "Now, let's talk business. What do you know about Sugar?"

Gordon Latimer, realising that he was in a tight corner, decided that the best course was to tell the truth.

"I only know that he is dead."

"Dead!" cried the girl hysterically. "How do you know that?"

"Before I answer I want to ask a question. Is Ben Benham alive?"

"Certainly," was Molly's reply.

"Then I may tell you that Sugar is dead, and here is his photograph taken by the French police," said Latimer boldly, taking the three pictures from his pocket-book.

On sight of the first the girl Molly shrieked, and almost fainted.

"Yes, it is Sugar— poor, dear Sugar! Dead, and he loved me! Do forgive me— forgive us— and tell us all that you know. What happened to Sugar and to Tony Donald?"

"They are both dead— and this girl too— dressed as a man." And he showed them the other pictures.

"Gwen!" gasped Molly. "It's Gwen! She's dead also! Tell us what happened. Where were they found?"

Both stood open-mouthed and aghast.

"How did your little French friend find out what she did?" asked the old criminal, whose name was Joe Hawker, an expert forger.

"If I tell you I shall expect you to tell me all that you know regarding the affair," said the young radio inventor.

"That's agreed," replied Molly. "We have a lot to tell you— more curious than you can possibly imagine. How did she suspect that I knew anything?"

For a few seconds the young radio expert reflected, then he decided that straightforwardness was best.

"The fact is, Miss Molly," he said, "Professor Plaud, the French medico-legist, on seeing the photographs, at once suspected, from the position and appearance of the bodies, the fact of the palms being outstretched and the purple colour of the countenances, that death was due to an almost unknown, but very subtle and deadly narcotic poison called enconine. From only one person in London, whose name is known to the Professor, can the poison be obtained in secret, and a very high price is charged for it. That fact led us to search the underworld of London thoroughly for persons who had purchased it. There were six of them known to us, but our inquiries were narrowed down to yourself. You bought the poison for your friend Candy, and you kept some for yourself. It was that which you gave me in my drink just now. You can't deny it!"

The girl stood aghast at the allegation, unable to utter a word.

"I do not seek to harm you," he at once assured her. "I only want to solve the mystery. We have ascertained the truth up to a certain point— that you obtained the drug which cost Candy, Donald, and the girl Gwen, their lives."

"But what happened to them?" the girl asked breathlessly. "They wouldn't all commit suicide."

"Before I tell you I want to know the nature of the bank business in which Candy and Donald were 'interested.'"

"Well— you, no doubt, saw in the papers last August how the strong-room of Carron's, the big private bank in the City, had been blown open after the night watchman had been gassed, and how nearly a quarter of a million had been carried away in a blue motor-car."

"Yes, I remember," Latimer answered.

"Well, Sugar and Tony did the trick, while Gwen gassed the watchman. They hid the money in a house down by the sea at Pevensey Bay, but one day they were all three missing as well as old Ben Benham, and we've had no word of any of them till now you've shown us that they're dead."

"What actually occurred becomes quite plain," Latimer replied. "Candy and your other two friends no doubt feared the police and were anxious to get the loot in secret across the Channel, where the securities could be disposed of. They arranged with the skipper Benham, whom they had found to be a clever smuggler, to take them and their treasure over to France on that night. They went on board after dark and steered a course presumably to fish as usual, when Benham, who had evidently stolen the drug from Candy without his knowledge, offered all three a drink, which they took with fatal results. He then seized the money and securities, paid the crew well for their silence, lowered a boat, and having extinguished the vessel's lights, they rowed forward to the French coast, where he and the crew, whom he had sworn to silence and to remain in France, separated. Three hours later the vessel was sighted by the cross-Channel steamer, and the bodies discovered in the position in which you see them."

"Then Benham killed them!" cried the girl hysterically. "We'll kill him!"

"There is no necessity," was Latimer's reply.

"This afternoon I received a telegram from the Paris police to the effect that a man much resembling the skipper Benham, though he had shaved off his grey beard and moustache, was discovered at a small hotel in Rouen. When the police went to arrest him, however, he shot himself. In the room nearly seventeen thousands pounds in cash and nearly the whole of the securities were found."

23: Thrawn Janet

Robert Louis Stevenson
1850-1894
The Cornhill Magazine Oct 1881
Collected in: *The Merry Men and other tales*, 1887

THE REVEREND MURDOCH Soulis was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonitions, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eye pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the Holy Communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on 1st Peter, v. and 8th, 'The devil as a roaring lion,' on the Sunday after every seventeenth of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually oracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with the Shaw overhanging it on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hilltops rising towards the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr. Soulis's ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the high road and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its back was towards the kirk-town of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two stories high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden, but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instancy of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring schoolboys ventured, with beating hearts, to 'follow my leader' across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of inquiry

among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr. Soulis's ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only, one of the older folk would warm into courage over his third tumbler, and recount the cause of the minister's strange looks and solitary life.

FIFTY YEARS SYNE, when Mr. Soulis cam first into Ba'weary, he was still a young man— a callant, the folk said— fu' o' book learnin' and grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi' nae leevin' experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi' his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days o' the moderates— weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid— they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair and better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxter and a speerit o' prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt, onyway, but that Mr. Soulis had been ower lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him— mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them, for they were a' like to have smoored in the Deil's Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service for sae mony, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk of a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forbye, which was scant decent— writin', nae less; and first, they were feared he wad read his sermons; and syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no fittin' for ane of his years an' sma' experience.

Onyway it behoved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep the manse for him an' see to his bit denners; and he was recommended to an auld limmer— Janet M'Clour, they ca'd her— and sae far left to himsel' as to be ower persuaded. There was mony advised him to the contrar, for Janet was mair than suspeckit by the best folk in Ba'weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she hadnae come forrit[4] for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin' to hersel' up on Key's Loan in the gloamin', whilk was an unco time an' place for a God-fearin' woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel' that had first tauld the minister o' Janet; and in thae days he wad have gane a far gate to pleesure the laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the deil, it was a'

superstition by his way of it; an' when they cast up the Bible to him an' the witch of Endor, he wad threep it doun their thrapples that thir days were a' gane by, and the deil was mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M'Clour was to be servant at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi' her an' him thegether; and some o' the guidwives had nae better to dae than get round her door cheeks and chairge her wi' a' that was ken't again her, frae the sodger's bairn to John Tamson's twa kye. She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gate, an' she let them gang theirs, wi', neither Fair-guid-een nor Fair-guid-day; but when she buckled to, she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an' there wasnae an auld story in Ba'weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldnae say ae thing but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up and claught haud of her, and clawed the coats aff her back, and pu'd her doun the clachan to the water o' Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soum or droun. The carline skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin' Shaw, and she focht like ten; there was mony a guidwife bure the mark of her neist day an' mony a lang day after; and just in the hettest o' the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new minister.

'Women,' said he (and he had a grand voice), 'I charge you in the Lord's name to let her go.'

Janet ran to him— she was fair wud wi' terror— an' clang to him, an' prayed him, for Christ's sake, save her frae the cummers; an' they, for their pairt, tauld him a' that was ken't, and maybe mair.

'Woman,' says he to Janet, 'is this true?'

'As the Lord sees me,' says she, 'as the Lord made me, no a word o't. Forbye the bairn,' says she, 'I've been a decent woman a' my days.'

'Will you,' says Mr. Soulis, 'in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister, renounce the devil and his works?'

Weel, it wad appear that when he askit that, she gave a girn that fairly frichtit them that saw her, an' they could hear her teeth play dirl thegether in her chafts; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an' Janet lifted up her hand and renounced the deil before them a'.

'And now,' says Mr. Soulis to the guidwives, 'home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness.'

And he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up the clachan to her ain door like a leddy of the land; an' her scrieghin' and laughin' as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam' there was sic a fear fell upon a' Ba'weary that the bairns hid theirsels, and even the men folk stood and keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin' doun the clachan— her or her likeness, nane could tell— wi' her neck

thrawn, and her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, and a girn on her face like an unstreakit corp. By an' by they got used wi' it, and even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldnae speak like a Christian woman, but slavered and played click wi' her teeth like a pair o' shears; and frae that day forth the name o' God cam never on her lips. Whiles she wad try to say it, but it michtnae be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never gied that Thing the name o' Janet M'Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o't, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haud nor to bind; he preached about naething but the folk's cruelty that had gi'en her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpt the bairns that meddled her; and he had her up to the manse that same nicht, and dwalled there a' his lane wi' her under the Hangin' Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by: and the idler sort commenced to think mair lichtly o' that black business. The minister was weel thocht o'; he was aye late at the writing, folk wad see his can'le doon by the Dule water after twal' at e'en; and he seemed pleased wi' himsel' and upsitten as at first, though a' body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet she cam an' she gaed; if she didnae speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she meddled naebody; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an' nane wad hae mistrysted wi' her for Ba'weary glebe.

About the end o' July there cam' a spell o' weather, the like o't never was in that country side; it was lown an' het an' heartless; the herds couldnae win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower weariet to play; an' yet it was gousty too, wi' claps o' het wund that rumm'led in the glens, and bits o' shouers that slockened naething. We aye thocht it but to thun'er on the morn; but the morn cam, an' the morn's morning, and it was aye the same uncanny weather, sair on folks and bestial. Of a' that were the waur, nane suffered like Mr. Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he tauld his elders; an' when he wasnae writin' at his weary book, he wad be stravaguin' ower a' the countryside like a man possessed, when a' body else was blythe to keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin' Shaw, in the bield o' the Black Hill, there's a bit enclosed grund wi' an iron yett; and it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyaird o' Ba'weary, and consecrated by the Papists before the blessed licht shone upon the kingdom. It was a great howff o' Mr. Soulis's, onyway; there he would sit an' consider his sermons; and indeed it's a bieldy bit. Weel, as he cam ower the wast end o' the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an syne fower, an' syne seeven corbie craws fleein' round an' round abune the auld kirkyaird. They flew laigh and heavy, an' squawked to ither as they gaed; and it was clear to Mr. Soulis that something had put them frae their ordinar. He wasnae easy fleyed, an' gaed straucht up to the wa's; an' what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance of a man, sittin' in the inside upon a grave. He was of a great

stature, an' black as hell, and his e'en were singular to see. Mr. Soulis had heard tell o' black men, mony's the time; but there was something unco about this black man that daunted him. Het as he was, he took a kind o' cauld grue in the marrow o' his banes; but up he spak for a' that; an' says he: 'My friend, are you a stranger in this place?' The black man answered never a word; he got upon his feet, an' begude to hirsle to the wa' on the far side; but he aye lookit at the minister; an' the minister stood an' lookit back; till a' in a meenute the black man was ower the wa' an' rinnin' for the bield o' the trees. Mr. Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was sair forjaskit wi' his walk an' the het, unhalesome weather; and rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glisk o' the black man amang the birks, till he won doun to the foot o' the hill-side, an' there he saw him ance mair, gaun, hap, step, an' lowp, ower Dule water to the manse.

Mr. Soulis wasnae weel pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak' sae free wi' Ba'weary manse; an' he ran the harder, an', wet shoon, ower the burn, an' up the walk; but the deil a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road, but there was naebody there; he gaed a' ower the gairden, but na, nae black man. At the hinder end, and a bit feared as was but natural, he lifted the hasp and into the manse; and there was Janet M'Clour before his een, wi' her thrawn craig, and nane sae pleased to see him. And he aye minded sinsyne, when first he set his een upon her, he had the same cauld and deidly grue.

'Janet,' says he, 'have you seen a black man?'

'A black man?' quo' she. 'Save us a'! Ye're no wise, minister. There's nae black man in a Ba'weary.'

But she didnae speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a powney wi' the bit in its moo.

'Weel,' says he, 'Janet, if there was nae black man, I have spoken with the Accuser of the Brethren.'

And he sat down like ane wi' a fever, an' his teeth chittered in his heid.

'Hoots,' says she, 'think shame to yoursel', minister;' an' gied him a drap brandy that she keept aye by her.

Syne Mr. Soulis gaed into his study amang a' his books. It's a lang, laigh, mirk chalmer, perishin' cauld in winter, an' no very dry even in the tap o' the simmer, for the manse stands near the burn. Sae doun he sat, and thocht of a' that had come an' gane since he was in Ba'weary, an' his hame, an' the days when he was a bairn an' ran daffin' on the braes; and that black man aye ran in his heid like the ower-come of a sang. Aye the mair he thocht, the mair he thocht o' the black man. He tried the prayer, an' the words wouldnae come to him; an' he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he could nae mak' nae mair o' that. There was whiles he thocht the black man was at his oxter, an' the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there was other whiles, when he cam to himsel' like a christened bairn and minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an' stood glowrin' at Dule water. The trees are unco thick, an' the water lies deep an' black under the manse; an' there was Janct washin' the cla'es wi' her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister, an' he, for his pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin' at. Syne she turned round, an' shawed her face; Mr. Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an' it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay- cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin' in the cla'es, croonin' to hersel'; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o' woman that could tell the words o' her sang; an' whiles she lookit side-lang doun, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; and that was Heeven's advertisement. But Mr. Soulis just blamed himsel', he said, to think sae ill of a puir, auld afflicted wife that hadnae a freend forbye himsel'; an' he put up a bit prayer for him and her, an' drank a little caller water— for his heart rose again the meat— an' gaed up to his naked bed in the gloaming.

That was a nicht that has never been forgotten in Ba'weary, the nicht o' the seeventeenth of August, seventeen hun'er' an twal'. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed doun amang unco-lookin' clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no a star, no a breath o' wund; ye couldnae see your han' afore your face, and even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds and lay pechin' for their breath. Wi' a' that he had upon his mind, it was gey and unlikely Mr. Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an' he tummled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, and whiles he waukened; whiles he heard the time o' nicht, and whiles a tyke yowlin' up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thocht he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an' whiles he saw spunkies in the room. He behoved, he judged, to be sick; an' sick he was— little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bed-side, and fell thinkin' ance mair o' the black man an' Janet. He couldnae weel tell how— maybe it was the cauld to his feet— but it cam' in upon him wi' a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an' that either or baith o' them were bogles. And just at that moment, in Janet's room, which was neist to his, there cam' a stramp o' feet as if men were wars'lin', an' then a loud bang; an' then a wund gaed reishling round the fower quarters of the house; an' then a' was aince mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr. Soulis was feared for neither man nor deevil. He got his tinder-box, an' lit a can'le, an' made three steps o't ower to Janet's door. It was on the hasp, an' he pushed it open, an' keeked bauldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister's ain, an' plenished wi' grand, auld, solid gear, for he had naething else.

There was a fower-posted bed wi' auld tapestry; and a braw cabinet of aik, that was fu' o' the minister's divinity books, an' put there to be out o' the gate; an' a wheen duds o' Janet's lying here and there about the floor. But nae Janet could Mr. Soulis see; nor ony sign of a contention. In he gaed (an' there's few that wad ha'e followed him) an' lookit a' round, an' listened. But there was naethin' to be heard, neither inside the manse nor in a' Ba'weary parish, an' naethin' to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin' round the can'le. An' then a' at aince, the minister's heart played dunt an' stood stock-still; an' a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o' his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man's een! For there was Janat hangin' frae a nail beside the auld aik cabinet: her heid aye lay on her shoother, her een were steeked, the tongue projekit frae her mouth, and her heels were twa feet clear abune the floor.

'God forgive us all!' thocht Mr. Soulis; 'poor Janet's dead.'

He cam' a step nearer to the corp; an' then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For by what cantrip it wad ill-beseem a man to judge, she was hingin' frae a single nail an' by a single wursted thread for darnin' hose.

It's an awfu' thing to be your lane at nicht wi' siccan prodigies o' darkness; but Mr. Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an' gaed his ways oot o' that room, and lockit the door ahint him; and step by step, doon the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doon the can'le on the table at the stairfoot. He couldnae pray, he couldnae think, he was dreepin' wi' caul' swat, an' naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin' o' his ain heart. He micht maybe have stood there an hour, or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a' o' a sudden, he heard a laigh, uncanny steer upstairs; a foot gaed to an' fro in the cha'mer whaur the corp was hingin'; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an' syne there was a step upon the landin', an' it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin' ower the rail and doun upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can'le again (for he couldnae want the licht), and as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o' the manse an' to the far end o' the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o' the can'le, when he set it on the grund, brunt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule water seepin' and sabbin' doon the glen, an' yon unhaly footstep that cam' ploddin doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot over weel, for it was Janet's; and at ilka step that cam' a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commanded his soul to Him that made an' keepit him; 'and O Lord,' said he, 'give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil.'

By this time the foot was comin' through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt alang the wa', as if the fearsome thing was feelin' for its way. The saughs tossed an' maned thegether, a lang sigh cam' ower the hills, the flame o' the can'le was blawn aboot; an' there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi' her grogram goun an' her black mutch, wi' the heid aye upon the shouther,

an' the girn still upon the face o't— leevin', ye wad hae said— deid, as Mr. Soulis weel kenned— upon the threshold o' the manse.

It's a strange thing that the saul of man should be that thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an' his heart didnae break.

She didnae stand there lang; she began to move again an' cam' slowly towards Mr. Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A' the life o' his body, a' the strength o' his speerit, were glowerin' frae his een. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an' made a sign wi' the left hand. There cam' a clap o' wund, like a cat's fuff; oot gaed the can'le, the saughs skrieghed like folk; an' Mr. Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o't.

'Witch, beldame, devil!' he cried, 'I charge you, by the power of God, begone— if you be dead, to the grave— if you be damned, to hell.'

An' at that moment the Lord's ain hand out o' the Heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, desecrated corp o' the witch-wife, sae lang keepit frae the grave and hirsled round by deils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk and fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirling peal, the rairing rain upon the back o' that; and Mr. Soulis lowped through the garden hedge, and ran, wi' skelloch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin', John Christie saw the Black Man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin' six; before eicht, he gaed by the change- house at Knockdow; an' no lang after, Sandy M'Lellan saw him gaun linkin' doun the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There's little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet's body; but he was awa' at last; and sinsyne the deil has never fashed us in Ba'weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin' in his bed; and frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.

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24: Rutherford The Twice-Born

Edwin L. Arnold
1857-1935
The Idler May 1892
Collected in: *The Story of Ulla*, 1895

AT THE TWENTIETH outset of this story, when I have made up my mind many times to tell it, and have as often shrunk back from the paper and pen unwilling, I still hesitate and doubt, weighing with the wretched sensitiveness of my nature your certain ridicule against the hunger of confession that is within me. Yet I must speak, and I will! Here on the twentieth venturing I feel the crowded incidents of that one marvellous evening of my life well up strongly before me; the giddy, fantastic thrall of the strangest hour that ever a mortal man lived through possesses me again; my cold pen slips eagerly forward to the betrayal, and this is the narrative of my shame and my penance, just as it came unasked upon me out of the invisible past.

I was the younger son of an ancient family boasting an untarnished reputation, and one of the best rent-rolls in the northern country. When I was very young I gloried in the splendid sweep of territory that spread out in purple vistas round Wanleigh Court, weaving golden fancies of the sweet share I would play in the rule of my mimic kingdom, and when I was a little older I quickly learned with a sigh that I had no more part in that fertile realm than the meanest peasant on it. Briefly, I was the younger son of three, and before I was come to manhood, I had had a fiery word or two with those above me, and taken the younger son's portion, and went out into the world, and ate husks with the social swine, and, too proud to ask and too poor to beg, kept that sensitive, self-searching soul my ancestors had bequeathed me, and my frail, fine body together on the scanty wages of two unable hands. Lord ! how I suffered during those years, how nicely I measured each black abyss of humiliation, and probed each raw wound that my sensitive nature took in the rough and tumble of that grim, ugly strife for bare maintenance— and then— even now I cannot write it without a lump of genuine sorrow in my throat— my father died, and Wanleigh passed to my elder brother in the summer, and before the next spring it had gone again from that brother's dead hands into those of Guy who came between us, and here, in a trice Guy's horse had tripped and tumbled at a fence and Guy was gone in turn!— and I, ragged John Rutherford, who had feasted for years on poor men's leavings, and kennelled with his peers in leaky attics, was Lord of Lutterworth, and Worsborough, of Warkworth and Torsonce, of Thenford House and Sudley Park, with a new world of delights opening at my feet.

It was as sweet a flying sip from the full cup of pleasure as ever a man tasted, and my starving body and my hungry soul, I remember, burst into new young life with the bare conception of it. And that brief glimpse of delight lasted one day. Before I had scarcely ventured from my lair or shaken off those cruel rags which weighed like lead on my proud spirit, some rolls were handed to me as eldest now and heir, the most secret archives of our race, and therefrom I learned in a few numb minutes what had been to me before only a vague, whispered hearsay— that we held our splendid holdings by fraud, and that many generations back, but well within the discovery of research and the possibility of restitution, should a Rutherford arise so minded, was a foul deed of treachery and usurpation whereby the lawful line had been ousted from their right and ours substituted. That was all!

For six long black hours I— ragged, hungry John Rutherford— lay white and silent and speechless in my garret, my head on my arm on the table, that dreadful thing crushed in my unfeeling fingers, my corporal body inert and lifeless, while the good and the bad within me fought desperate and long for the mastery— and then, when the sodden dusk of a December evening had fallen across my cheerless window, the fight was finished and won, and I rose to my feet pale and faint and grateful. I went out and ordered that search which I felt would condemn me for ever to my kennel and the blank drudgery of living from which my soul revolted, then, I remember, I came back in the dark and took down my crust and my pitcher, and could not eat or drink, but sat like that all the night, cold and alone, fighting again all the incidents of the fight, and so fell asleep at last in my chair in the twilight strangely, incredibly contented.

And now begins the strangest part of the story! The search begun at my orders prospered so well that soon the long sequence of the wrong had been followed down until at last it seemed there was only a step or two needed to snatch the splendid pageantry of Lutterworth and Worsborough, Warkworth and gay Torsonce, from me for all time. I bore those endless days of torture in dull resignation, and then, on the very morrow of the final discovery, a fierce yearning took possession of me to see the old house once more, a fierce hunger which overlapped even the physical hunger in which I lived, an insatiable longing to touch even though it were but the humblest thing that friendly hands had touched, to hide my heavy loneliness even for a moment in the kind mother shadows of my home; and so I went.

It was a wet, rough evening, when I turned off the high-road I had been trudging, and picking my way in the stillness of the dark along broad avenues and through lonely fir plantations, every turn and bend of which were redolent to me of bygone memories, presently found myself amongst the tangled, neglected lawns and effaced flower-beds of Wanleigh Hall itself. And as I stood there in the sullen drip of the trees while the white moon shone between the

chinks of the storm upon the desolate face of that splendid sorrow in front, and the black feet of the clouds trod in gloomy procession across the sodden, unkempt lawns, the measure of the price of my victory, the depth of my loneliness was forced upon me, and I wrung my hands and hid my face and prayed, to the night-time, prayed to the great unforgiving,inscrutable powers— prayed as I had never prayed before in shame or in sickness, cursing in my blindness and folly that black debt, and him who had bequeathed me to pay it— and leant me against a tree and wept like the weak fool that I was— wept, but did not waver.

Presently the gust was over, and walking out into the light I hardened my heart and approached the house, from whose many windows only one small streak of brightness shone into the dark air, from where an old servitor and her husband lodged. The hall had been left in charge of these, and it was they who gave me admittance and had prepared in some measure for my coming. I will not say what a flood of memories rushed upon me as I stood again in the old wainscotted hall, or later on ascended the broad staircase and passed down a long ranked avenue of my ancestors' portraits to my bedroom; those crowding recollections of dead days were infinitely painful, my senses were all on the alert for laughing voices the memory of which filled every echo in these gloomy corridors with ghostly meaning, and my heart hungered for some sign of life or love to break the speechless loneliness of the desolate place. I washed and dressed in moody abstraction, and then made my way down to the great banquet-room, where a solitary stately supper was laid for me in grim parody of my condition.

There I supped under the wide vaulted roof at the table that had sat a hundred, the pale shine of my two tall candles making a bright island of my supper napkin and my plate and tankard in the ocean of the gloom around— touching the white tips of the antlers my kinsmen had brought home from long-forgotten hunts, and gilding with their faint yellow beams buckler and breastplate of that ranked armour they had worn in long-forgotten fights. On the one hand— far down the hall— the lonely fire burnt away back in the great cavernous grate- place, singing low, sad songs, it seemed, to itself as the grey smoke twined in wreaths up the wide chimney; and on the other hand the long, uncurtained sequence of the mullioned windows and the wet raven night outside— the plaintive rustle of the dead unseen summer things that for ever drew their withered strands to and fro against the streaked diamond panes, and the sad sob of the evening wind wandering like a restless spirit on the broken terrace outside, lifting with the invisible hem of its sable skirt the rustling dead leaves, and gently trying in turn with wet soft fingers each casement catch and latchet! Not a being in that full-haunted house, not a sound broke the dead

stillness; my head dropped upon my hand, and I grieved with a stony, emotionless grief like the grief of the stones around me.

Then— all on a sudden— some one was coming, and upon my empty ear fell the sound of fine small footsteps in the dim corridors at the distant end of the hall! Those steps were like the dripping of water in the silence of a cavern, and somehow every awakening fibre in me thrilled instinctively to the measured approach of my invisible visitor. I held my breath and gripped the carved lions on my chair and stared, and then very gently, inch by inch, and foot by foot, the heavy tapestries down beyond the bottom of the long table were parted, and from between them came an immaterial something, a smoothly stepping shadow that dropped the draperies behind it and came meditatively forward into the radiance of the low-burning fire; and there in the glow stood a black-velvet clad Elizabethan gentleman, as like to myself somehow and yet not quite alike, as one bird is to another of kindred feather! For some minutes that strange figure stood there gazing into the blaze, while I strove to steady my beating heart and wondering fancies, and then it looked up! My whole nature was fascinated by that glance; I felt a secret unknown association between my essence and that thin essence in front of me, which was like the eager attraction of the two parted elements of one common whole in a chemist's crucible; I did not fear or tremble; but a quick, strong, expressionless apprehension of my visitor— of every turn and motion of him, of every touch and play the fire-light made on his soft velvet garments, the hilt of his silver rapier, or the lines of his strong passionful features enthralled me. And when he spoke my heart was in my throat. "John Rutherford!" he said in a low cadenced way— and I thought even the wind outside and the raindrops had stopped to listen to him, " I have come tonight to explain, to help you to explain, some things which you find inexplicable. You have been wondering, and fuming, and fretting; cursing the unknown origin of your sorrow, and even blaming with bitter rashness the stable equity of chance! Your grief in this is my grief, and both might end," he said with a gentle courtierly inflexion suiting him strangely, " if you will but lend yourself to me. Now!" he said, gliding gently up until I felt the thrill of the cold smooth presence that hung about him; "now!— think— remember! back son of a hundred fathers— back into the dim— back up the long path you have come— think! remember, I conjure you!" and he laid a light thin hand upon my wrist, and at the touch of it every fibre in ine began fiercely pulsing, my breath came thick and short, my head grew light and giddy, and all the real about became dissolved into a vague immaterial shadow; I, me, the hard, material, passion-aching me and the solid life around was wiped out, and down I went out of my own control, down the plane of the immaterial, into a fantastic world remembering at that magic touch all, everything I had done; step by step, backwards into the past my wondering wide-eyed consciousness receded,

watching that immortal ego which was myself shrink from manhood down to babiness, and then materialise again into another life in another age, and heave and push and struggle, and shout and laugh and cry, and ever acting as though that life it lived upon the minute were the only one, the while it floundered slowly through ambiguous sloughs, towards the pale deathless glimmer of that distant godly Hope which was its life and being— back reeled my consciousness, back by deathbeds and altars and cradles, and cradles and deathbeds and altars;— at one minute of that compressed understanding I saw myself loathsome for base design and deed, and then the rhythm of that ceaseless struggle for the better which my ego waged, mended as the baseness mended— at one minute my staggering, startled consciousness saw itself grey and lean and wrinkled stretched in courtly obsequies upon a bed of silk and minever— and then as a soldier hot and young, waving a broken hilt in the thick red tangles of charging squadrons— at one minute of those lives that flashed in endless sequence before their liver, that liver sunk in shameful hopelessness scarcely lived, and then anon, at a hair's-breadth interval, it rose to heroic heights. I could not stand the stress of that wild vision, and presently ceased remembering, all on a sudden, the material materialised again, and with a gasp I was myself; the opaque curtain of corporeal living clouded my mind, leaving only a vague consciousness behind that I had forgotten something I had lately remembered!

"Back again, sweet kinsman," cried the shadow, standing right in front of me, " back again, sweet comrade, back into the black sea of the forgotten, for that great pearl of fact you have not found," and he touched me once more upon the wrist.

I struggled, I would not go, I gasped; and in a minute I had gone again and was spinning down the long dim vistas of the by and done-with, until I came at last, by episode of love and fear and hate and redeeming sadness, to where two half-brothers jointly owned our land. This was the kernel of it all. The elder of those two close comrades was learned and gentle, serene in his confidence of the brother whose loyal friendship made half the sweetness of the wide dominion that they shared. Another breathing space, and I saw mad envy growing in the younger till it ripened into malice and savagery, and pictured against the dark background of my fancy in his every pose and gesture; and lastly, in one minute of shame and sorrow incredible I saw him decoy the other to a pleasant tryst and stab him most foully in the back, stab him twice and thrice, till he lay bloody and dead in the screen of the woods, and all for the sake of a few more acres; then sneaking home, traitor no less than coward, I saw him by lies and forgery brand with infamy the true wife and children of that brother, and as he rose, wicked and flushed and triumphant on their ruin, undivided

master of Wanleigh and Worsborough, of Torsonce and Lutterworth, I saw his face— and it was my own.

With a scream and a start I awoke, all the terror and shame and confusion of that dread discovery working in my features; I threw myself out upon the table in an agony of contrition, and locking my clasped hands above my head, shut out for a minute the long, dim length of the hall, half seen in the golden gloom of the candles and the deathless eyes of that grey inquisitor who stood watching the tempest of emotions that racked my soul. So it was I, was it? I who had done that black, foul deed in another life, and sown the miserable seed of which the harvesting also was mine; it was myself then, on whose head I had heaped an hundred thousand curses; it was I, gentle John Rutherford, that was the best butcher of them all. In my wild incoherent grief and astonishment I lay moaning like that for a minute, thinkings over in my living mind each step of the motley pageantry which had carried me back into the past and given me that strange knowledge, that one chance insight, into what seemed the great methods of the inscrutable powers. I forgot the grey shadow by me until in a minute he touched me again and said, more gently this time, "The wrong was great, and great has had to be the repentance, but the methods of the law which governs your life and mine, there where you are, and here where I am, are as just, and as generous, as they are unalterable. You have offended and made restitution, good! this single circle of the hundred thousand which compose your life is completed, now see how nicely the ways of 'chance' (forsooth!) fit to the needs of justice— think again, kinsman."

But I dared not. I staggered back, back from the glamour of that shrouding presence about him— back from those inflexible grey eyes standing out keen and bright as two pale planets in the dusky soliditude of my hall; I wrung my hands in my stress like a woman, and wailed as the fear and the doubt and the wonder played like hot metal in my veins. In a frenzy of terror, with the courage of a rat in a corner, I remember swearing I would not remember again, and for answer, in a thought, he had touched me with that smooth, cold, velvet touch and I was away, nerveless, dreaming anew, right back into that age where my earlier self had done the baseness, and thence, this time descending through the years, I followed on the heels of the outlawed ones I wronged. I saw those dear, flitting phantoms stream across the stage of my comprehension, dropping as they went from their gentle condition down into lesser ranks, son succeeding to father, and brother to brother, a long line of yeomanry living in forgetfulness on the outskirts of the land that was theirs but for my treachery; marrying and working and dying, writing their names in churches and chapels and Bibles, until so many of them had slipped by that presently all knowledge of the wrong that had been suffered and the right unrestored was gone from amongst them! But could *I* overlook it? Step by step, and life by life I saw the right in the cottage

come down step by step and life by life with the wrong in the hall; I saw that right inviolate, slip from name to name and hand to hand; twice it was nearly extinguished, and then, when I somehow knew in my sleep I had followed it down all but to the actual present day, all the right and heirship of our wide acres and many halls was concentrated by true descent and existed only in one fair, unwotting, yeoman girl. I saw her bud in the swift, bright sequence ot my involuntary recollection from a tender cottage maid into a comely woman with averted face, I saw one in dress of better kind ride down and woo her by cottage door and hazel copse, and win— and lead her to the altar— and all my straining soul and aching heart and stretching nerves were breaking to look upon their faces, for here were they who had bred him who was to-day true Lord of Lutterworth and Worsborough— he to whom I must give place, and light and life, the embodied heir of that deathless wrong I had done. I half dragged the white linen from the table and the clattering plates and cups in the bitterness of my expectation, I half rose from my chair with starting, straining eyes still body-senseless as I was, and waited for those two to turn. And turn they did in a minute, and with a stagger and a start and a cry out of the lowermost depths of my soul, I tottered out of my vision into the material world again, and tossed my arms aloft, and laughed and wept, and reeled, and then fell fainting right across the floor, right at the feet of the grave, calm, gently smiling shadow who was watching me, for I had seen them— all in one blinding, dazzling moment of swift comprehension I had perceived that in myself was the focus of wrong and of right, in me was both the debt and the credit— for those two were my father and mother!

There is nothing more to say. I was ill after that, and when I was well a bulky blue letter was handed to me saying those who had undertaken my search had, to their marvel, come to conclusions the same as my own, but it need hardly be added by methods much more prosaic. And Wanleigh and Worsborough, and Torsonce and Lutterworth have a new master, a humble open-handed master who goes about thinking he sees better men than himself in every wastrel that he meets, and purpose in the purposeless, and justice in injustice, and the clear heart of eternal equity beating inviolate, imperturbable, and perpetual under all the noisy pulses of casual life.

End