PAST MASTERS 237

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and more

PAST MASTERS 237

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

3 October 2025

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1: The Valley of Death

A Strange Story of the Hot Lakes

Margaret Cox Taylor ("Vandorian")

1864-1939

Armidale Chronicle (NSW) 23 Dec 1903

"WHO is she?"

A tall, handsome young woman. She was coming down the grand staircase of the Hinemoa Hotel, Rotorua. The soft frou-frou of her silk skirts offered a refined suggestion of rich apparel. It was insidious and pleasing as opposed to the loud, aggressive rustle which brazenly proclaims the over-dressed *parvenue*. She carried her head high.

Women who have been trained in the atmosphere of court life; women who are queens and empresses upon the stage; women who live by their wits and dress sumptuously on the results, have this erect carriage of body and proud pose of head.

"Who is she?"

"Miss Harwell-Martin."

The name suggests nothing.

"She is the most beautiful woman in the world— I am sure of it!"

"Youth is sure of most things, particularly its own immature judgment."

Major Stamford spoke carelessly. He took no interest in Miss Haswell-Martin.

"Shall we go in to dinner? I have been waiting for you since seven, Mortimer. And you caught no trout? Possibly you caught a cold. One does not like to waste a day."

It was a quarter past seven as the two men entered the long dining room, which was dotted with small tables.

"The beauty arrived this afternoon— so did the new *chef*— while you were not catching trout. She is said to be wealthy. Her diamonds are fine. She is travelling with a companion and maid. No, Mortimer, I can tell you nothing more about Miss Haswell-Martin. The new *chef* is a treasure; try his *entrée*."

The Hinomoa Hotel is one of the best and most comfortable in New Zealand. It catered for a wealthy class of tourists who came for health or pleasure to the Hot Lakes from all parts of Europe and Australasia. The scene in the big dining room was gay and interesting. To the man who looked on it was fascinating. And to-night the beauty and strange personality of the new arrival added a fresh charm.

Gerard Mortimer was young, ardent, and impressible, and there was something so haunting about the expression of Miss Martin's eyes that Major Stamford's chatter was practically unheard by him. There are many beautiful women in the world. To most men there comes a moment when there is only one who represents every type. But in this one woman there was more than

attraction— there was something vague and intangible that appealed to Dr. Mortimer's professional instincts. What was it? He had the acutely nervous temperament which responds quickly to every fresh impression. What was there in the expression of a handsome woman, quietly eating her dinner, that should attract the attention of the man who saw her for the first time?

Miss Martin wore a long trailing dress of soft black silk; it was cut square at the neck, and round the white throat was a glittering chain of superb diamonds. Her black hair was simply parted in the middle and taken back in shining waved bands, to be coiled low on the nape of her neck. The delicate oval of the face, with its fine straight nose, firmly-moulded lips and round chin, was coldly classic. But under the straight black eyebrows deep blue eyes shone with a mild radiance, that softened the expression of the coldly-perfect face.

Miss Martin appeared to speak in a low tone to her companion from time to time; otherwise she was very passive ill her manner, and glanced at the other occupants of the room with the candid innocence of a child who frankly questions the doings of its elders.

"Say, that lady's got some fine stones— she couldn't get 'em better in New York City."

"That's so, momma. Say, perhaps she's an Amurikan? I like the way she does her hair— slick and smooth. She's handsome enough to be a Southerner."

"She's English. I happened to hear that Miss Martin—" and Major Stamford lowered his voice in reply to the comments of the two Americans at his table "— came from England via America. Perhaps she picked up her good looks in the States. The diamonds, if I am a judge, are Brazilian of the first water. Thank you, Mortimer, I'm taking sherry."

"This is the man who says lie has no curiosity," said Gerard, waking up from his abstraction; "the bored traveller who takes no interest in anyone, but happens to know something about everything— quite as entertaining and more reliable than a society column."

"I'm completely ignorant of the domestic habits of geysers, anyhow. I came here for my rheumatism. I'm the only sensible man in Rotorua. Waiter, I want brown bread— yes, instead of running about to look at boiling water going to waste in mid-air, I take my dip three times a day. No, not boiled to rags yet, Mrs. Hawkins. I only simmer!"

Major Stamford babbled on with the frank egotism of a man who is so openly selfish that he amuses. He was wonderfully good natured— when it did hot interfere with his meals.

"The companion, as you are policing, Mortimer, is strictly neutral." I never saw anything more colorless in my life. A woman like that seems to go to my liver straight, away. Ah! I knew I had a touch of indigestion. Mortimer, tomorrow I will

ask you to change places with me at the table. The companion, sir, is spoiling my dinner."

An hour later Dr. Mortimer was sauntering in the beautiful sanatorium grounds. The gardens were brilliantly lit up, the band was playing, and tourists were strolling about. Many of them were in evening dress; many in wrappers, with towels across their arms, were taking a short cut to the baths; some half-caste Maoris were dancing on the lawn near the bandstand. The whole scene was strikingly cosmopolitan.

It was the height of the season. As groups of tourists sauntered past, Mortimer heard snatches of conversation in half a dozen European languages. Then he heard a low voice, speaking with a thick enunciation, in an unknown tongue. He turned sharply round. The electric light shone on the beautiful face of Miss Haswell-Martin. She was talking to her companion. As she recognised Mortimer she bowed slightly and passed on in silence.

The summer night was heavy with scent of roses, which grew profusely near the bandstand; the splashing fountains— toy geysers trained by the Government— bailed and bubbled in mimic fury; clouds of steam— pale silvery wraiths under the flashing electric lights— rose from the bathing houses. Dr. Mortimer's step crunched on the gravel path. For a moment he was half inclined to follow Miss Martin and her companion. Infatuated, impulsive, he hurried forward.

"Looking for you everywhere, Mortimer. You're a nice chap to chum up with a sick man and then leave him in the lurch. Came here to smoke a quiet cigar? So did I. Let's smoke two quiet cigars together."

"I thought of going towards the lake, Stamford. She can't be an English-woman! I heard her speak. It— it is a mystery!"

LATE THAT NIGHT Dr. Mortimer opened his bedroom door and stepped into the long corridor. Next to his room was a bathroom on one side, and on the other the great staircase. Large and luxurious, the Hinemoa Hotel was, like most buildings in the hot lake district, built of wood. Though the rooms were lined and panelled with expensive woods, and the corridor was wide and lofty, sound penetrated through the walls with much more distinctness than in a building of brick or stone. A large suite of rooms was opposite to Dr. Mortimer. From these rooms , came the strange noises which had roused him from his sleep. Was anyone else disturbed? Apparently not. From Major Stamford's room, beyond the bathroom, there came the steady snore of a heavy sleeper who lies on his back. Dr. Mortimer listened. There was no doubt of it. Someone was quarreling. It was only one voice that was raised— the strange voice that spoke in an unknown tongue. One other— or were there two?— replied in low tones. It was impossible to hear what they said. To stand and listen like a common eavesdropper! It was

impossible not to listen! Again that angry, indistinct voice was raised; then there was a strange laugh. It is no business of mine, yet what does it mean? I am a rash fool to interfere. A hundred thoughts seemed to cross and contradict each other. There was a dull thud, the falling of a heavy bony. Without an instant's hesitation Dr. Mortimer rushed across the corridor. He rapped at the first door.

"Who is there?"

"I am a doctor. There is— I fear that someone is ill. Can I help?"

There was silence. The light in the room within was put out; then the door opened.

"Who is there ? What do you want ?'

"My name is Mortimer. I am a medical man "

He hesitated. He saw the false position into which he had rushed. He read swift hatred and suspicion in the baleful eyes of Miss Martin's companion. She was a big woman. Standing at the half-open door, holding a freshly-lighted candle in her hand, she looked unusually tall in her long grey wrapper.

"There is no one ill, Dr. Mortimer. This suite of rooms is occupied by Miss Martin, her maid, and myself."

Miss Helmsley spoke in a harsh undertone. Naturally, she was angry at being knocked up in the dead of night by a man whose manner was strange and excited.

"The maid eats hearty suppers; she talks in her sleep. Do not wander about the hotel at night looking for patients. Your motives may be misunderstood! Good night, Dr. Mortimer."

The door closed. He heard the key turn sharply in the lock. Of course, he had made a fool of himself. And yet—

Dr. Mortimer went to his bedroom and switched on the electric light. He sat for a few minutes at the open window, looking out into the quiet night. He had come to Rotorua ostensibly for a brief holiday. Young, ambitious, and absorbed in his profession, his real business was to watch the effects of the different curative waters. Why had Miss Haswell-Martin come to Rotorua? 'Not for pleasure, Gerard felt sure of it.

There was a slight rattle of the door handle, and a piece of paper was pushed underneath. Before picking it up Mortimer opened the door, only in time to got a glimpse of some one disappearing down the corridor. The light was too dim to see distinctly, and he felt disinclined to leave his room again. He picked up the paper and read the scrawl hastily written in pencil:

Will Dr. Mortimer go to Tikitere on Friday afternoon?
The Maid Who Talks in her Sleep.

The extraordinary form of signature could have only one meaning. It proved that the writer was present at the brief interview between Miss Helmsley and the

man who had knocked at her door. It was Tuesday night— no, it was very early on Wednesday morning.

"To Tikitere? By heavens, I'd go to the north cape to solve this mystery!"

Miss Haswell-Martin made no acquaintances at the hotel. Since the evening of her arrival she had taken all her meals with Miss Helmsley in her private sitting room. During the day she walked, or went for long drives with her companion. The maid, a plain-featured middle-aged woman, generally accompanied her mistress. Miss Martin's beauty attracted much attention, but her silence and reserve baffled curiosity. Dr. Mortimer watched for a chance to break this silence, but in vain. Up to the Thursday afternoon he had to content himself with brief glimpses of the woman whose beauty fascinated him, and whose mysterious personality haunted him day and night. Then the chance came, as it appeared, by pure accident.

A large vehicle— a mixture of dogcart and buggy— with two horses was waiting in front of the-Hinemoa Hotel, v Miss Helmsley was standing, with her back to the hotel, giving directions in a low tone to the driver

"It is a wet day. No, thank you. I am quite well."

Gerard turned, quickly. Who was talking this nonsense in a curiously thick-voice? It was Miss' Martin. She was trying to put on a light grey dust cloak; one sleeve was turned inside out.

"Allow me, Miss Martin."

In an instant Gerard had put the sleeve right. In an instant Miss Helmsley was beside them.

"Dr. Mortimer, you have discovered our sad secret. Miss Martin is an idiot! I trust that you will respect our wish to shield her from public curiosity. There is a painful story connected with this case, but we hope everything from change of scene."

The serene blue eyes of Miss Martin looked with frank confidence into the face of Dr. Mortimer.

"The maid has strict orders never to leave her mistress for a moment. Like most old servants, she has a trick of disobeying orders."

The maid was now standing beside Miss Martin, and her face showed no symptom of emotion. Miss Helmsley's harsh reproval was ignored— no, not ignored. Miss Martin's eyes were dull and clouded with a midst of tears. She put her hand out, and Gerard held it for a moment. Idlers were gathering about the hotel verandah and staring at Miss Helmsley's beautiful charge.

"Good-bye for the present, Miss Martin. I see you are going for a drive. Command me at any time if I can be of the slightest, service."

Miss Helmsley was a singularly disagreeable woman. She took no further notice of Dr. Mortimer, but spoke in her harsh, abrupt way to Miss Martin, and roughly helped her to get into the vehicle. In a moment they were off, a cloud of fine white dust marking their exit.

"Hello, Mortimer, here you are. I went into your room to see if you'd gone out, and found this letter on your dressing-table. What a glorious afternoon it is! Suppose we go to Tikitere? I am anxious to see the 'Gates of Hades' on a fine day. Ah, Mrs. Hawkins; going for a walk? Now, Mortimer, what about the infernal regions?"

Gerard opened the envelope and glanced at the scrawl it contained:

"The Gates of Hell' at seven this evening."

It was an ominous name to choose for a trysting place, yet it meant nothing more than the narrow neck of land between two boiling lakes in the desolate valley of Tikitere. There had been some sudden change in Miss Martin's plans. Thursday, instead of Friday, was the day fixed for the drive to the local Inferno. And here was Major Stamford, by some strange coincidence, making up his mind to go to Tikitere too.

"There is a coach going directly. It can't be more than seven or eight miles' drive. It's only a few minutes past three. Come, Mortimer!"

"Supposing you go without me, Stamford. No; I'm not going for a hot dusty drive with a pack of gabbling tourists. "You'll be back in Rotorua for dinner. Well, good-bye for the present."

Major Stamford, "got up" in a semi-mountaineering costume, had infused a slight military mixture by wearing an Indian cork helmet. He whistled and hummed little tunes as he mounted the box-seat of the coach to Tikitere. Apparently he felt no disappointment at his friend's defection.

"What a jolly good chap he is— and what a thundering fool!" This was Mortimer's thought as, for the second time within half an hour, he saw people start for the infernal regions— as locally portrayed in the gloomy valley of mud lakes and solfataras.

Dr. Mortimer went upstairs to his room. He wanted a few minutes to think. But it annoyed him to notice his own carelessness. On his dressing table he must have left a small medical book open, and the wind was blowing the leaves about. This sort of thing was the worst possible taste. The chamber-maid had evidently been reading it, and had even turned down a page. Dr. Mortimer picked up his book. He felt some curiosity to see what portion of it had so deeply interested the chamber-maid.

"My God! Aphasia!"

He saw it all. The word illuminated his mind as a lightning-flash brightens the darkest storm-clouds. He had prided himself on his skill, in nerve and brain diseases, yet it remained for an ignorant woman— it must have been Miss Martin's maid— to teach him the A.B.C. of his business!

"Aphasia— paralysis of the muscles employed in speaking... It is an attack on that peculiar gift of man, articulate speech, the power by which he expresses his ideas and clothes them in words... The patient has plenty of words sometimes at his disposal, but not the right ones…. The face is intelligent."

Of course! Here was the key to the mystery of Miss Martin's strange silence and stranger language. Young and evidently rich, unusually handsome, and apparently in good health, the woman with whom Dr. Mortimer had become so madly infatuated was a helpless victim in the hands of a cruel and designing wretch like Miss Helmsley. Yet why did not the maid speak? At the 'Gates of Hell' I shall solve the problem to-night!

THE "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

Such was Tikitere. Death seemed to gape and yawn for its prey on every side. Black pools of boiling mud bubbled and hissed, sickly vapours hung over treacherous bogs where the earth quaked, and steaming sulphur made the summer night almost too heavy to breathe.

Dr. Mortimer had ridden from Rotorua and put his horse up at a Maori *whare* about a mile distant. Hiding behind some great blocks of sulphurous rock he had waited patiently since seven o'clock. It was now after half-past eight. Had he been fooled? Not a living creature besides himself appeared in sight.

"If you kick about much more you'll knock a hole in my helmet! Take it quietly, Mortimer. There'll be the devil to pay presently!"

"Stamford!"

"Ah! Keep quiet! They're coming! I thought you might want a little help in this. You're too hot-headed to play melodrama alone. Now you're filling my mouth with sulphur! Ugh!"

it was the same easy-going Stamford who was half buried under the crumbling sulphur. He was apparently no more excited than if he had just asked for another *entree* at the hotel dinner.

"Sulphur without the treacle. Ah! Here they come!"

In the fading light the figure of Miss Helmsley seemed exaggerated.

"She's the biggest woman I ever saw in my life— and the most unpleasant! She spoilt my dinner the first night I saw her. She's wiped it out to-night.

"Mortimer, don't be a fool— keep quiet!"

The little group on the other side of the boiling lakes came slowly forward; then they hesitated. Miss Helmsley said something to the maid, who then seated herself on a little knoll of rising ground.

"If that isn't murder, what is it? Stamford, let me go!"

"In a moment. Now!"

The grey dusk, the awful surroundings, the desolation of loneliness, and standing on the narrow neck of land a huge woman holding in her giant grasp,

another woman whose head was veiled, and whose figure was wrapped In a long grey dust-cloak! It was a horrible moment!

"My God! She is going to throw her into the boiling lake!"

The men rushed forward.

"Fiend! What are you doing?"

Stamford's helmet went bobbing off into a little crater of black mud. He seized Miss Helmsley's arm. Not a foot of firm ground stood between them all and a whirlpool of boiling water. The steaming poisonous gases rose in a dense cloud. Almost blinded, Dr. Mortimer put one arm around the limp figure in the grey cloak and staggered to the mainland.

" I am so frightened— you are not hurt— I am so frightened!"

It was Miss Martin speaking slowly, laboriously— like a little child trying-to use long words. Shock had restored her speech. She put out her hands towards the figure in the grey cloak— it was the maid. Violently hysterical, Miss Martin held her faithful servant in her arms and sobbed like a frightened child.

"Dr. Mortimer, I have to thank you for keeping the appointment I arranged." It was Miss Helmsley speaking. "Like yourself, I am a doctor— or was till I married an heiress. This lady is my wife!"

Earth and sky seemed to reel round as Mortimer stood spellbound, looking at the extraordinary being who had so completely tricked him.

"I noticed your admiration for my wife— pardon me, I excuse it. I have long been trying to plan the most startling scene by which it might be possible to effect the recovery of my wife's speech. Thanks partly to the dramatic appearance of yourself and Major Stamford, also here by appointment, my best hopes are realised."

"You're a damned ruffian!"

It was Major Stamford who managed to feebly express his feelings.

"My name is Haswell-Martin. They used to call me 'Mad Martin' an the old days at Guy's. But, gentlemen, I have succeeded in marrying a beauty and a heiress. I have also succeeded in an experiment which will be quoted in every medical journal in England."

Mrs. Haswell-Martin clung to her servant. Her face was blanched with terror as she looked at her husband's cruel face.

"Save me— from him !"

"Hearts are not always trumps," said Dr. Martin in a harsh undertone, but I'm not so mad as I seem— ha, ha! You are both in love with my wife? Hands off, gentlemen— no fighting in a lady's presence! You have both helped to save her— for me! Good evening, Dr. Mortimer!"

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2: The Tiger

Booth Tarkington

1869-1946

The Red Book Magazine, Sep 1921

Collected in: *The Fascinating Stranger*, 1923

THE two little girls, Daisy Mears and Elsie Threamer, were nine years old, and they lived next door to each other; but there the coincidence came to an end; and even if any further similarity between them had been perceptible, it could not have been mentioned openly without causing excitement in Elsie's family. Elsie belonged to that small class of exquisite children seen on canvas in the days when a painter would exhibit without shame a picture called "Ideal Head." She was one of those rare little fair creatures at whom grown people, murmuring tenderly, turn to stare; and her childhood was attended by the exclamations not only of strangers but of people who knew her well. "*Greuze*!" they said, or "A child Saint Cecilia!" or "That angelic sweetness!" But whatever form preliminary admiration might take, the concluding tribute was almost always the same: "And so unconscious, with it all!" When some unobservant and rambling-minded person did wander from the subject without mentioning Elsie's unconsciousness, she was apt to take a dislike to him.

People often wondered what that ineffable child with the shadowy downcast eyes was thinking about. They would "give anything," they declared, to know what she was thinking about. But nobody wondered what Daisy Mears was thinking about— on the contrary, people were frequently only too sure they knew what Daisy was thinking about.

From the days of her earliest infancy, Elsie, without making any effort, was a child continually noticed and acclaimed; whereas her next neighbour was but an inconspicuous bit of background, which may have been more trying for Daisy than any one realized. No doubt it also helped great aspirations to sprout within her, and was thus the very cause of the abrupt change in her character during their mutual tenth summer. For it was at this time that Daisy all at once began to be more talked about than Elsie had ever been. All over the neighbourhood and even beyond its borders, she was spoken of probably dozens of times as often as Elsie was— and with more feeling, more emphasis, more gesticulation, than Elsie had ever evoked.

Daisy had accidentally made the discovery that the means of becoming prominent are at hand for anybody, and that the process of using them is the simplest in the world; for of course all that a person desirous of prominence needs to do is to follow his unconventional impulses. In this easy way prodigious events can be produced at the cost of the most insignificant exertion, as is well

understood by people who have felt a temptation to step from the roof of a high building, or to speak out inappropriately in church. Daisy still behaved rather properly in church, but several times she made herself prominent in Sunday school; and she stepped off the roof of her father's garage, merely to become more prominent among a small circle of coloured people who stood in the alley begging her not to do it.

She spent the rest of that day in bed— for after all, while fame may so easily be obtained, it has its price, and the bill is inevitably sent in— but she was herself again the next morning, and at about ten o'clock announced to her mother that she had decided to "go shopping."

Mrs. Mears laughed, and, just to hear what Daisy would say, asked quizzically: " 'Go shopping?' What in the world do you mean, Daisy?"

"Well, I think it would be a nice thing for me to do, mamma," Daisy explained. "You an' grandma an' Aunt Clara, you always keep sayin', 'I believe I'll go shopping.' I want to, too."

"What would you do?"

"Why, I'd go shopping the way you do. I'd walk in a store an' say: 'Have you got any unb'eached muslin? Oh, I thought this'd be only six cents a yard! Haven't you got anything nicer?' Everything like that. I know, mamma. I know any amount o' things to say when I go shopping. Can't I go shopping, mamma?"

"Yes, of course," her mother said, smiling. "You can pretend our big walnut tree is a department store and shop all you want."

"Well—" Daisy began, and then realizing that the recommendation of the walnut tree was only a suggestion, and not a command, she said, "Well, thank you, mamma," and ran outdoors, swinging her brown straw hat by its elastic cord. The interview had taken place in the front hall, and Mrs. Hears watched the lively little figure for a moment as it was silhouetted against the ardent sunshine at the open doors; then she turned away, smiling, and for the rest of the morning her serene thought of Daisy was the picture of a ladylike child playing quietly near the walnut tree in the front yard.

Daisy skipped out to the gate, but upon the public sidewalk, just beyond, she moderated her speed and looked as important as she could, assuming at once the rôle she had selected in the little play she was making up as she went along. In part, too, her importance was meant to interest Elsie Threamer, who was standing in graceful idleness by the hedge that separated the Threamers' yard from the sidewalk.

"Where you goin', Daisy?" the angelic neighbour inquired.

Daisy paused and tried to increase a distortion of her face, which was her conception of a businesslike concentration upon "shopping." "What?" she inquired, affecting absent-mindedness.

"Where you goin'?"

"I haf to go shopping to-day, Elsie."

Elsie laughed. "No, you don't."

"I do, too. I go shopping almost all the time lately. I haf to."

"You don't, either," Elsie said. "You don't either haf to."

"I do, too, haf to!" Daisy retorted. "I'm almos' worn out, I haf to go shopping so much."

"Where?"

"Every single place," Daisy informed her impressively. "I haf to go shopping all the way down-town. I'll take you with me if you haf to go shopping, too. D'you want to?"

Elsie glanced uneasily over her shoulder, but no one was visible at any of the windows of her house. Obviously, she was interested in her neighbour's proposal, though she was a little timorous. "Well—" she said. "Of course I ought to go shopping, because the truth is I got more shopping to do than 'most anybody. I haf to go shopping so much I just have the backache all the time! I guess—"

"Come on," said Daisy. "I haf to go shopping in every single store down-town, and there's lots o' stores on the way we can go shopping in before we get there."

"All right," her friend agreed. "I guess I rilly better."

She came out to the sidewalk, and the two turned toward the city's central quarter of trade, walking quickly and talking with an accompaniment of many little gestures. "I rilly don't know how I do it all," said Elsie, assuming a care-worn air. "I got so much shopping to do an' everything, my fam'ly all say they wonder I don't break down an' haf to go to a sanitanarian or somep'm because I do so much."

"Oh, it's worse'n that with me, my dear!" said Daisy. "I declare I doe' know how I do live through it all! Every single day, it's like this: I haf to go shopping all day long, my dear!"

"Well, I haf to, too, my dear! I never get time to even sit down, my dear!"

Daisy shook her head ruefully. "Well, goodness knows the last time I sat down, my dear!" she said. "My fam'ly say I got to take some rest, but how can I, with all this terrable shopping to do?"

"Oh, my dear!" Elsie exclaimed. "Why, my dear, I haven't sat down since Christmus!"

Thus they enacted a little drama, improvising the dialogue, for of course every child is both playwright and actor, and spends most of his time acting in scenes of his own invention— which is one reason that going to school may be painful to him; lessons are not easily made into plays, though even the arithmetic writers do try to help a little, with their dramas of grocers and eggs, and farmers and bushels and quarts. A child is a player, and an actor is a player; and both "play" in almost the same sense— the essential difference being that the child's art is instinctive, so that he is not so conscious of just where reality begins and made-up drama ends. Daisy and Elsie were now representing and exaggerating their two mothers,

with a dash of aunt thrown in; they felt that they were the grown people they played they were; and the more they developed these "secondary personalities," the better they believed in them.

"An' with all my trouble an' everything," Daisy said, "I jus' never get a minute to myself. Even my shopping, it's all for the fam'ly."

"So's mine," Elsie said promptly. "Mine's every single bit for the fam'ly, an' I never, never get through."

"Well, look at me!" Daisy exclaimed, her hands fluttering in movements she believed to be illustrative of the rush she lived in. "My fam'ly keep me on the run from the minute I get up till after I go to bed. I declare I don't get time to say my prayers! To-day I thought I might get a little rest for once in my life. But no! I haf to go shopping!"

"So do I, my dear! I haf to look at— Well, what do you haf to look at when we go in the stores?"

"Me? I haf to look at everything! There isn't a thing left in our house. I haf to look at doilies, an' all kinds embrawdries, an' some aperns for the servants, an' taffeta, an' two vases for the liberry mantelpice, an' some new towerls, an' kitchen-stove-polish, an' underwear, an' oilcloth, an' lamp-shades, an' some orstrich feathers for my blue vevvut hat. An' then I got to get some—"

"Oh, my dear! I got more'n that I haf to look at," Elsie interrupted. And she, likewise, went into details; but as Daisy continued with her own, and they both talked at the same time, the effect was rather confused, though neither seemed to be at all disturbed on that account. Probably they were pleased to think they were thus all the more realistically adult.

It was while they were chattering in this way that Master Laurence Coy came wandering along a side-street that crossed their route, and, catching sight of them, considered the idea of joining them. He had a weakness for Elsie, and an antipathy for Daisy, the latter feeling sometimes not unmingled with the most virulent repulsion; but there was a fair balance struck; in order to be with Elsie, he could bear being with Daisy. Yet both were girls, and, regarded in that light alone, not the company he cared to be thought of as deliberately choosing. Nevertheless, he had found no boys at home that morning; he was at a loss what to do with himself, and bored. Under these almost compulsory circumstances, he felt justified in consenting to join the ladies; and, overtaking them at the crossing, he stopped and spoke to them.

"Hay, there," he said, taking care not to speak too graciously. "Where you two goin', talkin' so much?"

They paid not the slightest attention to him, but continued busily on their way.

"My dear Mrs. Smith!" Daisy exclaimed, speaking with increased loudness. "I jus' pozzatively never have a minute to my own affairs! If I doe' get a rest from my

housekeepin' pretty soon, I doe' know what on earth's goin' to become o' my nerves!"

"Oh, Mrs. Jones!" Elsie exclaimed. "It's the same way with me, my dear. I haf to have the doctor for my nerves, every morning at seven or eight o'clock. Why, my dear, I never—"

"Hay!" Laurence called. "I said: 'Where you goin', talkin' so much?' Di'n'chu hear me?"

But they were already at some distance from him and hurrying on as if they had seen and heard nothing whatever. Staring after them, he caught a dozen more "my dears" and exclamatory repetitions of "Mrs. Smith, you don't say so!" and "Why, Mis-suz Jones!" He called again, but the two little figures, heeding him less than they did the impalpable sunshine about them, hastened on down the street, their voices gabbling, their heads waggling importantly, their arms and hands incessantly lively in airy gesticulation.

Laurence was thus granted that boon so often defined by connoisseurs of twenty as priceless— a new experience. But he had no gratitude for it; what he felt was indignation. He lifted up his voice and bawled:

"Hay! Di'n'chu hear what I said? Haven't you got 'ny ears?"

Well he knew they had ears, and that these ears heard him; but on the spur of the moment he was unable to think of anything more scathing than this inquiry. The shoppers went on, impervious, ignoring him with all their previous airiness— with a slight accentuation of it, indeed— even when he bellowed at them a second time and a third. Stung, he was finally inspired to add: "Hay! Are you gone crazy?" But they were halfway to the next crossing.

A bitterness came upon Laurence. "What I care?" he muttered. "I'll show you what I care!" However, his action seemed to deny his words, for instead of setting about some other business to prove his indifference, he slowly followed the shoppers. He was driven by a necessity he felt to make them comprehend his displeasure with their injurious flouting of himself and of etiquette in general. "Got 'ny politeness?" he muttered, and replied morosely: "No, they haven't— they haven't got sense enough to know what politeness means! Well, I'll show 'em! They'll see before I get through with 'em! Oh, oh! Jus' wait a little: they'll be beggin' me quick enough to speak to 'em. 'Oh, Laur-runce, please!' they'll say. 'Please speak to us, Laur-runce. Won' chu please speak to us, Laurunce? We'd jus' give anything to have you speak to us, Laurunce! Won' chu, Laurunce, pull-lease?' Then I'll say: 'Yes, I'll speak to you, an' you better listen if you want to learn some sense!' Then I'll call 'em everything I can think of!"

It might have been supposed that he had some definite plan for bringing them thus to their knees in supplication, but he was only solacing himself by sketching a triumphant climax founded upon nothing. Meanwhile he continued morbidly to follow, keeping about fifty yards behind them.

"Poot!" he sneered. "Think they're wunnaful, don't they? You wait! They'll see!"

He came to a halt, staring. "Now what they doin'?"

Elsie and Daisy had gone into a small drug-store, where Daisy straightway approached the person in charge, an elderly man of weary appearance. "Do you keep taffeta?" she asked importantly. Since she and her friend were "playing" that they were shopping, of course they found it easily consistent to "play" that the druggist was a clerk in a department store; and no doubt, too, the puzzlement of the elderly man gave them a profound if secret enjoyment.

He moved toward his rather shabby soda-fountain, replying: "I got chocolate and strawb'ry and v'nilla. I don't keep no fancy syrups."

"Oh, my, no!" Daisy exclaimed pettishly. "I mean taffeta you wear."

"What?"

"I mean taffeta you wear."

" 'Wear'?" he said.

"I want to look at some taffeta," Daisy said impatiently. "Taffeta."

"Taffy?" the man said. "I don't keep no line of candies."

Daisy frowned, and shook her head. "I guess he's kind of deaf or somep'm," she said to Elsie; and then she shouted again at the elderly man: "Taffetah! It's somep'm you wear. You wear it on you!"

"What for?" he said. "I ain't deaf. You mean some brand of porous plaster? Mustard plaster?"

"Oh, my, no!" Daisy exclaimed, and turned to Elsie. "This is just the way it is. Whenever I go shopping, they're always out of everything I want!"

"Oh, it's exackly the same with me, my dear," Elsie returned. "It's too provoking! Rilly, the shops in this town—"

"Listen here," the proprietor interrupted, and he regarded these fastidious customers somewhat unfavourably. "You're wastin' my time on me. Say what it is you want or go somewheres else."

"Well, have you got some very nice blue-silk lamp-shades?" Daisy inquired, and she added: "With gold fringe an' tassels?"

"Lamp-shades!" he said, and he had the air of a person who begins to feel seriously annoyed. "Listen! Go on out o' here!"

But Daisy ignored his rudeness. "Have you got any very good unb'eached muslin?" she asked.

"You go on out o' here!" the man shouted. "You go on out o' here or I'll untie my dog."

"Well, I declare!" Elsie exclaimed as she moved toward the door. "I never was treated like this in all my days!"

"What kind of a dog is it?" Daisy asked, for she was interested.

"It's a biting dog," the drug-store man informed her; and she thought best to retire with Elsie. The two came out to the sidewalk and went on their way, giggling surreptitiously, and busier than ever with their chatter. After a moment the injured party in the background again followed them.

"They'll find out what's goin' to happen to 'em," he muttered, continuing his gloomy rhapsody. " 'Please speak to us, Laurunce,' they'll say. 'Oh, Laurunce, pull-lease!' An' then I'll jus' keep on laughin' at 'em an' callin' 'em everything the worst I ever heard, while they keep hollerin': 'Oh, Laur-runce, pull-lease!' "

A passer-by, a kind-faced woman of middle age, caught the murmur from his slightly moving lips, and halted inquiringly.

"What is it, little boy?" she asked.

"What?" he said.

"Were you speaking to me, little boy? Didn't you say 'Please'?"

"No, I didn't," he replied, colouring high; for he did not like to be called "little boy" by anybody, and he was particularly averse to this form of address on the lips of a total stranger. Moreover, no indignant person who is talking to himself cares to be asked what he is saying. "I never said a thing to you," he added crossly. "What's the matter of you, anyhow?"

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "What a bad, rude little boy! Shame on you!"

"I ain't a little boy, an' shame on your own self!" he retorted; but she had already gone upon her way, and he was again following the busy shoppers. As he went on his mouth was slightly in motion, though it was careful not to open, and his slender neck was imperceptibly distended by small explosions of sound, for he continued his dialogues, but omitted any enunciation that might attract the impertinence of strangers. "It's none o' your ole biznuss!" he said, addressing the middle-aged woman in this internal manner. "I'll show you who you're talkin' to! I guess when you get through with me you'll know somep'm! Shame on your own self!" Then his eyes grew large as they followed the peculiar behaviour of the two demoiselles before him. "My goodness!" he said.

Daisy was just preceding Elsie into a barber-shop.

"Do you keep taffeta or— or lamp-shades?" Daisy asked of the barber nearest the door.

This was a fat coloured man, a mulatto. He had a towel over the jowl and eyes of his helpless customer, and standing behind the chair, employed his thumbs and fingers in a slow and rhythmic manipulation of the man's forehead. Meanwhile he continued an unctuous monologue, paying no attention whatever to Daisy's inquiry. "I dess turn roun' an' walk away little bit," said the barber. " 'N'en I turn an' look 'er over up an' down from head to foot. 'Yes,' I say. 'You use you' mouth full freely,' I say, 'but dess kinely gim me leave fer to tell you, you ain't got nothin' to rouse up no int'est o' mine in you. I make mo' money,' I say, 'I make mo' money

in a day than whut Henry ever see in a full year, an' if you tryin' to climb out o' Henry's class an' into mine— ' "

"Listen!" Daisy said, raising her voice. "Do you keep taffeta or—"

"Whut you say?" the barber asked, looking coldly upon her and her companion.

"We're out shopping," Daisy explained. "We want to look at some—"

"Listen me," the barber interrupted. "Run out o' here. Run out."

Daisy moved nearer him. "What you doin' to that man's face?" she asked.

"Nem mine! Nem mine!" he said haughtily.

"What were you tellin' him?" Daisy inquired. "I mean all about Henry's class an' usin' her mouth so full freely. Who was?"

"Run out!" the barber shouted. "Run out!"

"Well, I declare!" Daisy exclaimed, as she and Elsie followed his suggestion and emerged from the shop. "It's just this same way whenever I go shopping! I never can find the things I want; they act almos' like they don't care whether they keep 'em or not."

"It's dreadful!" Elsie agreed, and, greatly enjoying the air of annoyance they were affecting, they proceeded on their way. No one would have believed them aware that they were being followed; and neither had spoken a word referring to Master Coy; but they must have understood each other perfectly in the matter, for presently Daisy's head turned ever so slightly, and she sent a backward glance out of the very tail of her eye. "He's still comin'!" she said in a whisper that was ecstatic with mirth. And Elsie, in the same suppressed but joyous fashion, said: "Course he is, the ole thing!" This was the only break in their manner of being the busiest shoppers in the world; and immediately after it they became more flauntingly shoppers than ever.

As for Laurence, his curiosity was now almost equal to his bitterness. The visit to the drug-store he could understand, but that to the barber-shop astounded him; and when he came to the shop he paused to flatten his nose upon the window. The fat mulatto barber nearest the window was still massaging the face of the recumbent customer and continuing his narrative; the other barbers were placidly grooming the occupants of their chairs, while two or three waiting patrons, lounging on a bench, read periodicals of a worn and flaccid appearance. Nothing gave any clue to the errand of Laurence's fair friends; on the contrary, everything that was revealed to his staring eyes made their visit seem all the more singular.

He went in, and addressed himself to the fat barber. "Listen," he said. "Listen. I want to ast you somep'm."

"Dess 'bout when she was fixin' to holler," the barber continued, to his patron, "I take an' slap my money ri' back in my pocket. 'You talk 'bout tryin' show me some class,' I say. 'Dess lem me— ' "

"Listen!" Laurence said, speaking louder. "I want to ast you somep'm."

" 'Dess lem me tell you, if you fixin' show me some class,' " the barber went on; " 'if you fixin' show me some class,' I say. 'Dess lem me tell you if— ' "

"Listen!" Laurence insisted. "I want to ast you somep'm."

For a moment the barber ceased to manipulate his customer and gave Laurence a look of disapproval. "Listen me, boy!" he said. "Nex' time you flatten you' face on nat window you don' haf to breave on nat glass, do you? Ain' you' folks taught you no better'n go roun' dirtyin' up nice clean window?"

"What I want to know," Laurence said: "— What were they doin' in here?"

"What were who doin' in here?"

"Those two little girls that were in here just now. What did they come here for?"

"My goo'nuss!" the barber exclaimed. "Man'd think barber got nothin' do but stan' here all day 'nanswer questions! Run out, boy!"

"But, listen!" Laurence urged him. "What were they—"

"Run out, boy!" the barber said, and his appearance became formidable. "Run out, boy!"

Laurence departed silently, though in his mind he added another outrage to the revenge he owed the world for the insults and mistreatments he was receiving that morning. "I'll show you!" he mumbled in his throat as he came out of the shop. "You'll wish you had some sense, when I get through with you, you ole barber, you!"

Then, as he looked before him, his curiosity again surpassed his sense of injury. The busy shoppers were just coming out of a harness-shop, which was making a bitter struggle to survive the automobile; and as they emerged from the place, they had for a moment the hasty air of ejected persons. But this was a detail that escaped Laurence's observation, for the gestures and chatter were instantly resumed, and the two hurried on as before.

"My gracious!" said Laurence, and when he came to the harness-shop he halted and looked in through the open door; but the expression of the bearded man behind a counter was so discouraging that he thought it best to make no inquiries.

The bearded man was as irritable as he looked. "Listen!" he called. "Don't block up that door, d'you hear me? Go on, get away from there and let some air in. Gosh!"

Laurence obeyed morosely. "Well, doggone it!" he said.

He had no idea that the pair preceding him might have been received as cavalierly, for their air of being people engaged in matters of importance had all the effect upon him they desired, and deceived him perfectly. Moreover, the mystery of what they had done in the barber-shop and in the harness-shop was actually dismaying; they were his colleagues in age and his inferiors in sex; and yet

all upon a sudden, this morning, they appeared to deal upon the adult plane and to have business with strange grown people. Laurence was unwilling to give them the slightest ground for a conceited supposition that he took any interest in them, or their doings, but he made up his mind that if they went into another shop, he would place himself in a position to observe what they did, even at the risk of their seeing him.

Four or five blocks away, the business part of the city began to be serious; buildings of ten or twelve stories, several of much more than that, were piled against the sky; but here, where walked the shoppers and their disturbed shadower, the street had fallen upon slovenly days. Farther out, in the quarter whence they had come, it led a life of domestic prosperity, but gradually, as it descended southward, its character altered dismally until just before it began to be respectable again, as a business street, it was not only shabby but had a covert air of underhand enterprise. And the shop windows had not been arranged with the idea of offering a view of the interiors.

Of course Elsie and Daisy did not concern themselves with the changed character of the street; one shop was as good as another for the purposes involved in the kind of shopping that engaged them this morning; and they were having too glorious a time to give much consideration to anything. Elsie had fallen under the spell of a daring leadership; she was as excited as Daisy, as intent as she upon preserving the illusion they maintained between them; and both of them were delightedly aware that they must be goading their frowning follower with a splendid series of mysteries.

"I declare!" Daisy said, affecting peevishness. "I forgot to look at orstrich feathers an' unb'eached muslin at both those two last places we went. Let's try in here."

By "in here" she referred to a begrimed and ignoble façade once painted dark green, but now the colour of street dust mixed with soot. Admission was to be obtained by double doors, with the word "Café" upon both of the panels. "Café" was also repeated upon a window, where a sign-painter of great inexperience had added the details: "Soft Drinks Candys Cigars & C." And upon three shelves in the window were displayed, as convincing proof of the mercantile innocence of the place, three or four corncob pipes, some fly-specked packets of tobacco, several packages of old popcorn and a small bottle of catsup.

Daisy tugged at the greasy brass knob projecting from one of the once green doors, and after some reluctance it yielded. "Come on," she said. The two then walked importantly into the place, and the door closed behind them.

Laurence immediately hurried forward; but what he beheld was discouraging. The glass of the double door was frankly opaque; and that of the window was so dirty and besooted, and so obstructed by the shelves of sparse merchandise, that he could see nothing whatever beyond the shelves.

"Well, dog-gone it!" he said.

DAISY AND ELSIE found themselves the only visible occupants of an interior unexampled in their previous experience. Along one side of the room, from wall to wall, there ran what they took to be a counter for the display of goods, though it had nothing upon it except a blackened little jar of matches and a short thick glass goblet, dimmed at the bottom with an ancient sediment. A brass rail extended along the base of the counter, and on the wall, behind, was a long mirror, once lustrous, no doubt, but now coated with a white substance that had begun to suffer from soot. Upon the wall opposite the mirror there were two old lithographs, one of a steamboat, the other of a horse and jockey; and there were some posters advertising cigarettes, but these decorations completed the invoice of all that was visible to the shoppers.

"Oh, dear!" Daisy said. "Wouldn't it be too provoking if they'd gone to lunch or somep'm!" And she tapped as loudly as she could upon the counter, calling: "Here! Somebody come an' wait on us! I want to look at some of your nicest unb'eached muslin an' some orstrich feathers."

There was a door at the other end of the room and it stood open, revealing a narrow and greasy passage, with decrepit walls that showed the laths, here and there, where areas of plaster had fallen. "I guess I better go call in that little hallway," said Daisy. "They don't seem to care how long they keep their customers waitin'!"

But as she approached the door, the sound of several muffled explosions came from the rear of the building and reached the shoppers through the funnel of the sinister passage.

"That's funny," said Daisy. "I guess somebody's shootin' off firecrackers back there."

"What for?" Elsie asked.

"I guess they think it must be the Fourth o' July," Daisy answered; and she called down the passageway: "Here! Come wait on us. We want to look at some unb'eached muslin an' orstrich feathers. Can't you hurry up?"

No one replied, but voices became audible, approaching;— voices in simultaneous outbursts, and manifesting such poignant emotion that although there were only two of them, a man's and a woman's, Daisy and Elsie at first supposed that seven or eight people were engaged in the controversy. For a moment they also supposed the language to be foreign, but discovered that some of the expressions used were familiar, though they had been accustomed to hear them under more decorous circumstances.

"They're makin' an awful fuss," Elsie said. "What are they talkin' about?"

"The way it sounds," said Daisy, "it sounds like they're talkin' about things in the Bible."

Then another explosion was heard, closer; it seemed to come from a region just beyond the passageway; and it was immediately followed by a clatter of lumber and an increase of eloquence in the vocal argument.

"You quit that!" the man's voice bellowed plaintively. "You don't know what you're doin'; you blame near croaked me that time! You quit that, Mabel!"

"I'm a-goin' to learn you!" the woman's voice announced. "You come out from under them boards, and I'll learn you whether I know what I'm doin' or not! Come out!"

"Please go on away and lea' me alone," the man implored. "I never done nothin' to you. I never seen a cent o' that money! Honest, George never give me a cent of it. Why'n't you go an ast him? He's right in yonder. Oh, my goodness, whyn't you ast him?"

"Come out from under them boards!"

The man's voice became the more passionate in its protesting. "Oh, my goodness! Mabel, can't you jest ast George? He ain't left the place; you know that! He can't show his face in daytime, and he's right there in the bar, and so's Limpy. Limpy'll tell you jest the same as what George will, if you'll only go and ast 'em. Why can't you go and ast 'em?"

"Yes!" the woman cried. "And while I'm in there astin' 'em, where'll you be? Over the alley fence and a mile away! You come out from under them boards and git croaked like you're a-goin' to!"

"Oh, my goodness!" the man wailed. "I wish I had somep'm on me to lam you with! Jest once! That's all I'd ast— jest one little short crack at you!"

"You come out from under them boards!"

"I won't! I'll lay here till—"

"We'll see!" the woman cried. "I'm a-goin' to dig you out. I'm a-goin' to take them boards off o' you and then I'm a-goin' to croak you. I am!"

Elsie moved toward the outer door. "They talk so— so funny!" she said with a little anxiety. "I doe' b'lieve it's about the Bible."

"I guess she's mad at somebody about somep'm," Daisy said, much amused; and stepping nearer the passageway, she called: "Here! We want to look at some unb'eached muslin an' orstrich feathers!"

But the room beyond the passage was now in turmoil: planks were clattering again, and both voices were uproarious. The man's became a squawk as another explosion took place; he added an incomplete Scriptural glossary in falsetto; and Elsie began to be nervous.

"That's awful big firecrackers they're usin'," she said. "I guess we ought to go home, Daisy."

"Oh, they're just kind of quarrellin' or somep'm," Daisy explained, not at all disturbed. "If you listen up our alley, you can hear coloured people talkin' like that lots o' times. They do this way, an' they settle down again, or else they're only in

fun. But I do wish these people'd come, because I just haf to finish my shopping!" And, as yet another explosion was heard, she exclaimed complacently: "My! That's a big one!"

Then, beyond the passage, there seemed to be a final upheaval of lumber; the discussion reached a climax of vociferation, and a powerful, bald-headed man, without a coat, plunged through the passage and into the room. His unscholarly brow and rotund jowls were beaded; his agonized eyes saw nothing; he ran to the bar, and vaulted over it, vanishing behind it half a second before the person looking for him appeared in the doorway.

She was a small, rather shabby woman, who held one hand concealed in the folds of her skirt, while with the other she hastily cleared her eyes of some loosened strands of her reddish hair.

"I got you, Chollie!" she said. "You're behind the bar, and I'm a-goin' to make a good job of it, and get George and Limpy, too. I'm goin' to get all three of you!"

With that she darted across the room and ran behind the bar; whereupon Daisy and Elsie were treated to a scene like a conjuror's trick. Until the bald-headed man's arrival, they had supposed themselves to be quite alone in the room, but as the little woman ran behind the counter, not only this fugitive popped up from it, but two other panic-stricken men besides— one with uneven whiskers all over his mottled face, the other a well-dressed person, elderly, but just now supremely agile. The three shot up simultaneously like three Jacks-in-the-box, and, scrambling over the counter, dropped flat on the floor in front of it, leaving the little woman behind.

"Crawl up to the end o' the bar, George," the bald-headed man said hoarsely. "When she comes out from behind it, jump and grab her wrist."

"Think I'm deef?" the little woman inquired raucously. "George's got a fat chance to grab my wrist!"

Then her eyes, somewhat inflamed, fell upon Daisy and Elsie. "Well, what— what— what—" she said.

Daisy stepped toward the counter, for she felt that she had indeed delayed her business long enough.

"We'd like to look at some nice unb'eached muslin," she said, "an' some of your very best orstrich feathers."

The subsequent commotions, as well as the preceding ones, were indistinctly audible to the mystified person who waited upon the sidewalk outside the place. Finding that his eyes revealed nothing of the interior, he had placed his ear against the window, and the muffled reports, mistaken for firecrackers by Daisy and Elsie, were similarly interpreted by Laurence; but he supposed Daisy and Elsie to have a direct connection with the sounds. A thought of the Fourth of July entered his mind, as it had Daisy's, but it solved nothing for him: the Fourth was long past; this was not the sort of store that promised firecrackers; and even if Daisy and Elsie

had taken firecrackers with them, how had it happened that they were allowed to explode them indoors? As for an "ottomatick" or a "revolaver," he knew that neither maiden would touch such a thing, for he had heard them express their aversion to the antics of Robert Eliot, on an occasion when Master Eliot had surreptitiously borrowed his father's "good ole six-shooter" to disport himself with in the Threamers' garage.

Nothing could have been more evident than that Daisy and Elsie had definite affairs to transact in this café; the air with which they entered it was a conclusive demonstration of that. But the firecrackers made guessing at the nature of those affairs even more hopeless than when the pair had visited the barber-shop and the harness-shop. Then, as a closer report sounded, Laurence jumped. "Giant firecracker!" he exclaimed huskily, and his eyes still widened; for now vague noises of tumult and altercation could be heard.

"Well, my go-o-od-nuss!" he said.

Two pedestrians halted near him.

"Say, listen," one of them said. "What's goin' on in there?"

"Golly!" the other exclaimed, adding: "I happen to know it's a blind tiger."

Laurence's jaw dropped, and he stared at the man incredulously. "Wha-wha'd you say?"

"Listen," the man returned. "How long's all this been goin' on in there?"

"Just since they went in there. It was just a little while ago. Wha'd you say about—"

But he was interrupted. Several other passers-by had paused, and they began to make interested inquiries of the first two.

"What's the trouble in there? What's going on here? What's all the shooting? What's—"

"There's something pretty queer goin' on," said the man who had spoken to Laurence; and he added: "It's a blind tiger."

"Yes, I know that," another said. "I was in there once, and I know from my own eyes it's a blind tiger."

Laurence began to be disconcerted.

" 'A blind tiger'?" he gasped. "A blind tiger?" What caused his emotion was not anxiety for the safety of his friends; the confident importance with which they had entered the place convinced him that if there actually was a blind tiger within, they were perfectly aware of the circumstance and knew what they were doing when they entered the animal's presence. His feeling about them was indefinite and hazy; yet it was certainly a feeling incredulous but awed, such as any one might have about people well known to him, who suddenly appear to be possessed of supernatural powers. "Honest, d'you b'lieve there's a blind tiger in there?" he asked of the man who had confirmed the strange information.

"Sure!"

"Honest, is one in there? Do you honest—"

But no one paid him any further attention. By this time a dozen or more people had gathered; others were arriving; and as the tumult behind the formerly green door increased, hurried discussion became general on the sidewalk. Several men said that somebody ought to go in and see what the matter was; others said that they themselves would be willing to go in, but they didn't like to do it without a warrant; and two or three declared that nobody ought to go in just at that time. One of these was emphatic, especially upon the duty men owe to themselves. "A man owes something to himself," he said. "A man owes it to himself not to git no forty-four in his gizzard by takin' and pushin' into a place where somebody's usin' a forty-four. A man owes it to himself to keep out o' trouble unless he's got some call to take and go bullin' into it; that's what he owes to himself!"

Another seemed to be depressed by the scandal involved. He was an unshaven person of a general appearance naïvely villainous, and, without a hat or coat, he had hurried across the street from an establishment not essentially unlike that under discussion— precisely like it, in fact, in declaring itself (though without the accent) to be a place where coffee in the French manner might be expected. "What worries me is," he said gloomily, and he repeated this over and over, "what worries me is, it gives the neighbourhood kind of a poor name. What worries me, it's gittin' the neighbourhood all talked about and everything, the way you wouldn't want it to, yourself."

Laurence took a fancy to this man, whose dejection had a quality of pathos that seemed to imply a sympathetic nature.

"Is there one— honestly?" Laurence asked him. "Cross your heart there is one?"

The gloomy man continued to address his lament to the one or two acquaintances who were listening to him. "It's just like this— what worries me is— "

But Laurence tugged at his soiled shirt-sleeve. "Is there honest one in there?"

"Is there one what in there?" the man asked with unexpected gruffness.

"A blind tiger!"

The gloomy man instantly became of a terrifying aspect. He roared:

"Git away f'm here!"

Then, as Laurence hastily retreated, the man shook his head, and added to his grown listeners: "Ain't that jest what I says? It gits everybody to talkin'— even a lot of awnry dressed-up little boys! It ain't right, and Chollie and Mabel ought to have some consideration. Other folks has got to live as well as them! Why, I tell you—"

He stopped, and with a woeful exclamation pointed to the street-corner south of them. "Look there! It's that blame sister-in-law o' George's. I reckon she must of run out through the alley. Now they have done it!"

His allusion was to a most blonde young woman, whose toilet, evidently of the hastiest, had called upon one or two garments for the street as an emergency supplement to others eloquent of the intimate boudoir. She came hurrying, her blue crocheted slippers scurrying in and out of variegated draperies; and all the while she talked incessantly, and with agitation, to a patrolman in uniform who hastened beside her. Naturally, they brought behind them an almost magically increasing throng of citizens, aliens and minors.

They hurried to the once green doors; the patrolman swung these open, and he and the blonde young woman went in. So did the crowd, thus headed and protected by the law's very symbol; and Laurence went with them. Carried along, jostled and stepped upon, he could see nothing; and inside the solidly filled room he found himself jammed against a woman who surged in front of him. She was a fat woman, and tall, with a great, bulbous, black cotton cloth back; and just behind Laurence there pressed a short and muscular man who never for an instant relaxed the most passionate efforts to see over the big woman. He stood on tiptoe, stretching himself and pushing hard down on Laurence's shoulders; and he constantly shoved forward, inclosing Laurence's head between himself and the big woman's waist, so that Laurence found breathing difficult and uncomfortable. The black cotton cloth, against which his nose was pushed out of shape, smelled as if it had been in the rain— at least that was the impression obtained by means of his left nostril, which remained partially unobstructed; and he did not like it.

In a somewhat dazed and hazy way he had expected to see Daisy and Elsie and a blind tiger, but naturally, under these circumstances, no such expectation could be realized. Nor did he hear anything said about either the tiger or the little girls; the room was a chaos of voices, though bits of shrill protestation, and gruffer interruptions from the central group, detached themselves.

"I never!" cried the shrillest voice. "I never even pointed it at any of 'em! So help me—"

"Now look here—" Laurence somehow got an idea that this was the policeman's voice. "Now look here—" it said loudly, over and over, but was never able to get any further; for the shrill woman and the plaintive but insistent voices of three men interrupted at that point, and persisted in interrupting as long as Laurence was in the room.

He could bear the black cotton back no longer, and, squirming, he made his elbow uncomfortable to the aggressive man who tortured him.

"Here!" this person said indignantly. "Take your elbow out o' my stomach and stand still. How d'you expect anybody to see what's going on with you making all this fuss? Be quiet!"

"I won't," said Laurence thickly. "You lea' me out o' here!"

"Well, for heaven's sakes!" the oppressive little man exclaimed. "Make some more trouble for people that want to see something! Go on and get out, then! Oh, Lordy!"

This last was a petulant wail as Laurence squirmed round him; then the pressure of the crowd filled the gap by throwing the little man against the fat woman's back. "Dam boy!" he raved, putting all his troubles under one head.

But Laurence heard him not; he was writhing his way to the wall; and, once he reached it, he struggled toward the open doors, using his shoulder as a wedge between spectators and the wall. Thus he won free of the press and presently got himself out to the sidewalk, panting. And then, looking about him, he glanced up the street.

At the next crossing to the north two busy little figures were walking rapidly homeward. They were gesturing importantly; their heads were waggling to confirm these gestures; and they were chattering incessantly.

"Well— dog-gone it!" Laurence whispered.

He followed them; but now his lips moved not at all, and there was no mumbling in his throat. He stared at them amazedly, in a great mental silence.

"WHAT WEARS me out the most," Daisy said, as they came into their own purlieus again, "it's this shopping, shopping, shopping, and they never have one single thing!"

"No, they don't," Elsie agreed. "Not a thing! It just wears me out!"

"F'instance," Daisy continued, "look at how they acted in that las' place when I wanted to see some orstrich feathers. Just said 'What!' about seven hundred times! An' then that ole pleeceman came in!"

For a moment Elsie dropped her rôle as a tired shopper, and giggled nervously. "I was scared!" she said.

But Daisy tossed her head. "It's no use goin' shopping in a store like that; they never have anything, and I'll never waste my time on 'em again. Crazy things!"

"They did act crazy," Elsie said thoughtfully, as they paused at her gate. "I guess we better not tell about it to our mothers, maybe."

"No," Daisy agreed; and then with an elaborate gesture of fatigue she said: "Well, my dear, I hope you're not as worn out as I am! My nerves are jus' comp'etely gone, my dear!"

"So're mine!" said Elsie; and then, after a quick glance to the south, she giggled. "There's that ole thing, still comin' along;— no, he's stopped, an' lookin' at us!" She went into the yard. "Well, my dear, I must go in an' lay down an' rest myself. We'll go shopping again just as soon as my nerves get better, my dear!"

She skipped into the house, and Daisy, humming to herself, walked to her own gate, went in, and sat in a wicker rocking-chair under the walnut tree. She rocked herself and sang a wordless song, but becoming aware of a presence that lingered

upon the sidewalk near the gate, she checked both her song and the motion of the chair and looked that way. Master Coy was staring over the gate at her; and she had never known that he had such large eyes.

He was full of formless questions, but he had no vocabulary; in truth, his whole being was one intensified interrogation.

"What you want?" Daisy called.

"I was there," he announced solemnly. "I was there, too. I was in that place where the pleeceman was."

"I doe' care," Daisy said, and began to sing and to rock the chair again. "I doe' care where you went," she said.

"I was there," said Laurence. "I saw that ole bline tiger. That's nothin'!"

Daisy had no idea of what he meant, but she remained undisturbed. "I doe' care," she sang. "I doe' care, I doe' care, I doe' care what you saw."

"Well, I did!" said Laurence, and he moved away, walking backward and staring at her.

She went on singing, "I doe' care," and rocking, and Laurence continued to walk backward and stare at her. He walked backward, still staring, all the way to the next corner. There, as it was necessary for him to turn toward his own home, he adopted a more customary and convenient manner of walking— but his eyes continued to be of unnatural dimensions.

3: The Grain in the Husk

Sumner Locke

1881-1917

Western Mail (Perth) 24 June 1911

"DON'T YOU TRAMP your feet in here any more to-day," said Mrs. Petty, irritably. "I dunno why you can't keep to your own part of the place. Ain't there enuff to do in the yard without your coming in here to make trouble and dirt for me?"

"I wanted to ask you—" began Mr. Petty at the door.

"Can't it wait till dinner time, then?" said the woman, "as long as you leave that door open I got no chance of getting the stove to burn at all, and then you'll be calling out that the dinner ain't done."

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Petty, shutting the door again.

The woman rushed to the stove and opened it ever so slightly.

"Just what I said, the stove ain't going to heat as much as usual. lt's a thankless lot I'm working for, even if it's only for himself alone." She shut the door of the oven and stood up.

"Suppose he's fooling over them inventions of his in the shed again," she said, looking through the window. "If he'd only get to the potato patch and start digging them up for pitting, it might be something to talk about. I dunno what men can see in a bit of tin and a couple of nails and all the sort of thing Petty gets together, whenever he thinks he is on a fortune for some new patent or rubbish he wants you to listen about."

She began to beat up some eggs and to look out a reoeipt book off the high shelf. "Funny thing," she said presently, "I never can remember whether it's ten or twelve eggs in angel cake. Not that I make it once in three years, but on this occasion—"

Here the door opened and Mr, Petty put a grinning face through the opening and showed his teeth in a smile worth something.

"Hannah," he said very gently, but his wife was not going to be interrupted in the search for the receipt.

"What is it now?" she said, with disgust all over her face as she looked up from the book. "Are you going to keep that draught up for long, because if so. I might as well be cooking in the fowlhouse for all the results I might get?"

The man shut the door and took off his hat.

"Yer mighty busy this morning," he said. "You don't usually do so much cooking. Yer been at it ever since you was up this morning."

Mrs. Petty flashed round on him.

"What I does, I does in my own kitchen and not to be interfered with," she said smartly. "I don't make words about your being in the shed foolin' over some idiot thing you never won't get out of your head if you was to stay at it till you hadn't a

head at all. You leave me to cook what I like, and you keep to thc yard. When I want your opinion on how long I cooks, I'll get you to time me by the clock."

The man got up off the chair he had sat upon during the talk.

"Oh, I don't want to say nothing— least I come in to—"

"To find out what you could about my cooking," snapped Mrs. Petty.

"No, I wanted to tell you I—"

"Oh, I ain't got time to listen now," said the woman. "There you have puttin' me back again and the cakes burnt as likely as not."

The man fled through the kitchen door and shut it after him hurriedly.

"My word," called the woman, "you beat a baby in the house for giving trouble. There's the door banged now, and the draught like a hurricane in the season." She went back to the table with a number of small cakes that were beautifully cooked to a golden brown. "He might as well be give a toy to play with for all the benefit the place gets at times. Now, those pertatoes is—"

Suddenly she stopped and looked at the cakes.

"What a finish they'd have if they was all white on the top," she said, "I uster do the icing business when I was a girl when—"

She ran to the cupboard to the right of the kitchen and brought out aome more sugar in a basin. To this she added the white of another egg, and then spent a minute or two at the fire, stirring.

"I'll have to hurry up, or the angel cake wout be ready in time," she said as she put the pot of icing on the floor by the sink to cool.

For another hour she worked and hurried about, and after that the table was covered with numerous good things in white caps, and crusts of candied peel. The biggest cake was on the meat dish, and every now and then she picked it up and weighed it, to be sure it wasn't heavy; not that she could have altered the fact at such an hour, but she was very anxious about that cake.

Presently she looked out of the door. "S'pose he's gone to the paddock to talk to old Hardy," she said with disappointment in her face. "Can't see what he wants to imploy a man like Hardy for, when he don't do as much work in the day as earns his dinner.'"

She went inside again, and put all the cakes in the cupboard.

"I'll get the cloth on ready, and a few flowers, she said, peering about in case her man might see her in the garden. "There ain't anything in the place but a few nasturtiums and a cabbage rose," she said, as she gathered the little amber flowers into a tight bunch in her hand. She went to the bed where she had seen a red rose blooming against a full evil wind the night before.

"It sure can't have blowed away,'" she said as she noticed that the rose was not there. "Now I s'pose that that Hardy has taken it home to his wife. It wasn't likely I was going to say last night that it was not to be picked, as I wanted it special for to-day."

She went into the house with the flowers, and without the rose. The place was filled with the sun now, and the day looked as fine as one the woman was thinking about, as she laid the table.

"Glad I thought of the tablecloth." she said. "It ain't been used since the time me mother give it me— p'raps it don't look no different, though"— she suddenly stared at the white linen cloth— "anyone could take that for the same as usual only a bit cleaner," she said, and then discovered something.

"There's the date marked on it by me mother when-" Here she relaid the cloth with the date to the end where the mau sal. "Likely as not he'll see that, and notice it ain't the same as everyday."

Ten minutes after, she had a spread before her fit for a coming of age celebration. She ran into the bedroom when she had nut the plates in tho oven to warm, and removed the chicken there to the top pf tin- stove. In the bedroom she hunted among the boxes of years and presently found a tortoiseshell comb and a white mus-lin dress.

" 'Fraid the moths have been here," she said, but shook out the dress and put it on. Then she looked out of the window.

"That, man's goin' to be late I expect," she said, "just like him to spoil things, and it's only once in a life time that it comes about."

She went to the mirror to do her hair, and she waited there a fraction longer than she intended.

"He ain't got an idea," she said to herself in the mirror. "lt might as well be usual Sunday dinner, with him foolin' in the shed over some messy patent that won't never come to anythin'."

When she had completed her dressing, she started for the kitchen. The table was ablaze with the effects of the coming spread. At one end stood the big cake that the woman had termed "angel cake" and round it was a frill of white paper almost hidiug the iced top. About the table were the other things. Jam tarts and baby cakes,, stewed peaches in bright red syrup, hailed the hour as something new in the little house of the mature couple.

Mes. Petty went to the door, but even as she did so she heard the man coming through the yard. He was whistling, and hurrying for the kitchen.

"Thought he was going to make it late," said Mrs. Petty "it'd be just like him to do that to-day of all days."

She started to run about the kitchen in the muslin dress. It was very long and got in the way once or twice, but she managed as a young girl might have who is in her grown up gown for the first time.

The man stopped at the door, and took a couple of deep breaths before he spoke. Clearly, to Mrs. Petty, he was excited.

He was holding something in his hand, and he kept looking from it to his wife. "lt's for you," he said simply, indicating the frame of wood and wheels by a couple

of shakes of his head ; "that's what I've I been at all the morning. You didn't know, did you— it's an annversiry— ours it is! twenty-five years—"

To Mrs. Petty it was clearly apparent that he had neither noticed the table nor her own decorations of hair and dress. She looked at thc thing he had in his hand, and I let her face broaden out. "Well of all the men I ever—" she began, but her man i thrust, the present forward. "It's a wool winder, you can use it any day. All you has to do is—"

Here he discovered something different in Mrs. Petty's appearance.

"You knew," he said, sobered to a straight face, "yer knew it was twenty-five-years since—"

Mrs. Petty put the wool winder on the dresser, and pushed him round.

"Yer seem to have lost yer eyes, and after all the trouble I had to keep you from spoiling the dinner by leaving the door—"

Mr. Petty stared at the table. "You knew all the time," he said again, "what it was to-day, and you gets up a real spree, what's they call a silver wedding."

Mrs. Petty bustled him in earnest; "get a move on then," she said, "it wouldn't be you not to let the chicken get cold on the table and the roast potatoes go anyhow I never seen the likes of you. It'll be three o'clock before you cuts the cake, if you don't get going with the other things right away."

When the man sat down he picked up the end of the table cloth.

"Why," he said, "if this ain't the identical cloth we had on at the wedding twenty five years ago.''

But Mrs. Petty had an eye to the chickens.

"For heavens' sake give over talkin' so much, and serve the thing," she said and Mr. Petty picked up the carving knife right away.

During this operation Mrs. Petty had time to notice two things. One was the wool winder that he had made for her though she never saw such a thing as wool except when the teams passed on the roads, and the other was the big red cabbage rose that he was wearing in his coat.

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4: A Tale of a Dry Plate

W. S. Gilbert

William Schwenk Gilbert, 1836-1911

Holly Leaves, Christmas 1885

I AM A JUNIOR PARTNER in a large mercantile house. Certain irregularities had occurred in our Colombo branch, and I was dispatched by the firm to investigate them, and to place matters on a more satisfactory footing. I need not go into details on this point, as they are irrelevant to my story.

I sailed by the *Kaiser-i-Hind* from Tilbury, accompanied by my valet. At the Liverpool Street terminus an elderly lady in widow's mourning asked me some questions as to the conveyance of luggage from the Tilbury station to the ship; she should have sent her luggage to the docks, but had omitted to do so. As I replied to her questions, I saw that she was accompanied by a very beautiful girl of eighteen. There is no need to beat about the bush— I fell in love with her, there and then. It is a commonplace way of putting it, but I don't know that I could make matters clearer by a more elaborate method of expression. As they and I travelled to Tilbury in the same compartment, we entered into conversation, as people will readily do who know that they are to travel many thousand miles together. I learnt that the lady was a Mrs. Selby, widow of a Colonel Selby, who had died about six months since. Broken in health, and weakened by long weeping, she had been advised to take a sea voyage, in the belief that change of scene and beneficent sea air would do much to restore her to health, if not to happiness. As I happened to have met Colonel Selby on two occasions— once in London and once in a country house— my acquaintance with his widow and daughter rapidly ripened into friendship. We sailed on a fine October afternoon, and by the time we were off the "Start" I had almost established myself on the footing of an old friend.

Pass over the voyage. It lasted five weeks, but it seemed like five days. I lived but in Clara's presence. I scarcely spoke to anyone on board except to Clara and her mother. People see more of each other, if they care to do so, in a few weeks' voyage than in a lifetime on shore, and before we reached Colombo I had declared my love to Clara, and she had accepted it. If there is unalloyed happiness on earth, it was given to us as we neared Ceylon.

Unalloyed, save by the thought that we were about to part for a time ; for Clara was to go on to Calcutta, where her late father's brother was quartered, Avhereas I was to remain in Ceylon for three months. We were to return to England at about the same date, and it was arranged that as soon as possible after our arrival we were to be married.

I have some little skill in photography, and I had brought with me a camera and some dry plates, intending to photograph any striking scenes that I might come across during my journey. By the aid of dry plates, photography, and especially travelling photography, is much simplified. The traveller can take a photograph, shut the plate in a light-tight box, and develop it twelve months afterwards if he pleases. There is no need to encumber oneself with chemicals; all the messy portion of the process can be done at home, in the seclusion of one's own dark room. I had not intended to take any photographs on the voyage, for dry plates are extraordinarily sensitive to the action of the faintest ray of light, and it was practically impossible to make my cabin dark enough to allow of my transferring plates from the dark box to the slides without absolutely spoiling them. But I happened to have left two plates in one of the slides, and before we reached our destination I devoted one of these to Clara and one to Mrs. Selby.

We parted tearfully, but not unhappily. We were to meet in three months' time, and our lives were then to be passed together. I believe we were too full of happiness in this prospect to grieve very much over our parting. As the Kaiser steamed away for Calcutta, I kept the happiness of our next meeting steadily before me, and it served to keep me in good spirits.

The time passed slowly; but it passed. I had received two letters from Clara, written from Calcutta, full of life, and hope, and joy at the prospect before us. She was going to spend a month at Allahabad, and a fortnight at Bombay, and she was then to return to Marseilles by a Messageries ship, the captain of which was an intimate friend of the uncle with whom she had been staying at Calcutta. By this arrangement she would arrive in England about a month before me.

At length, my sailing orders came, and on one of the happiest days of my life I set foot on board the good ship *Mirzapore*, which was to convey me to Port Said, on my way home, vid Brindisi. I had written to Mrs. Selby, begging her to bring Clara to meet me in Paris. Her doing so would but shorten our period of separation by some ten or twelve hours, but I knew that these hours were golden to her as well as to me, and I was selfish for both of us. After a stormy voyage, I reached Brindisi in due course ; I hurried to the Poste Restante, for I had asked her to reply to me there, but there was nothing for me. It was evident that my letter had not reached her; perhaps she had delayed a few days in Paris on her way home. She had a trousseau to prepare, and it is a strange article of faith among women that this can be done more effectually in Paris than elsewhere; consequently, nothing was more probable than that she was there at that moment; my letter would probably be forwarded to her, and if so, she would surely be at the station on the arrival of the train from Italy

As I rushed across Europe I had but one thought in my mind— would Clara be at the Paris terminus to meet me? The towns flew by me when I thought of her, and yet at times the intervals between them seemed interminable. Every

stoppage irritated me ; yet the two days were not tedious. I could always lose all count of time by allowing my mind to dwell upon the incidents of our voyage together, and especially on the crowning incident that was yet to come. But when the doubting question arose whether or not we should meet in Paris, the train seemed to dawdle as it never dawdled before. At length we reached the terminus. I eagerly scanned the few people on the platform as we entered the station, and my heart sank when I saw she was not there. Then I remembered that on French railways friends of passengers are not, as a rule, allowed on the platform, and my hopes rose again. They were soon dashed, for there was no Clara for me in the waiting-rooms or at the entrance.

A dim sense of calamity— unknown, and the more terrible for being unknown— took possession of me. I hurried across Paris to the "Nord," reached Calais in due course, crossed to Dover and made my way to London, which I reached late at night. The next day, at nine in the morning, I hurried to Mrs. Selby's house in Oxford Square. I rang the bell, and it was answered by a maid-servant in deep black. I asked for Mrs. Selby, but so inarticulately that the girl did not understand me. I pulled myself together, and repeated the question. The girl stammered awkwardly. Had I not heard? No! I had heard nothing; was anything wrong? The French ship in which Mrs. Selby and Clara had sailed from Bombay had been lost— as it was supposed— in a hurricane between Bombay and Aden, and all souls drowned.

I staggered as from a strong man's blow. I remember nothing until I found myself lying on the sofa in the dining-room, tended by an elderly gentleman, Mrs. Selby's brother and administrator. He, of course, did not know me ; still less did he know of my relation towards his dead niece. I told him all, and he treated me with the greatest kindness. He could give me no hope; the ship was then six weeks overdue, and the insurances on her had been duly paid.

Desolate and heart-broken I left him, and went to my mother's house in Devonshire. After three weeks of fever I began to recover strength, but the light of my life was extinct, and an undefinable sense of night was all that remained to me. As soon as I was strong enough to stand, I thought of the photographs I had taken at Singapore. They were all that was left to me of my dead love, and with a feeling of unspeakable awe, I proceeded to raise her presentment as it were from the grave. In the closely darkened room, illuminated only by the dim red light of my developing lamp, I prepared the necessary chemicals with a trembling and uncertain hand. I took the plate from the slide in which it had been enclosed for so many months, and as I looked upon its plain creamy surface, so soon to be sanctified by her image, I almost felt that I was engaged on some unhallowed deed of necromancy. Breathless with excitement, I poured the developer upon it, and as I awaited the result, I could hear my heart thumping against my chest. I had not long to wait. Slowly, but surely and distinctly, the features of my darling came

to me from the grave. Not-withstanding the inversion of its tones, it stood plainly before me— herself in every detail. As I watched the gradual perfection of the portrait, I cried like a child. At length the development was complete, and, shaking like a leaf, I took it from its bath to examine it more closely. As I did so the door of the room was suddenly opened, a flood of light was admitted, and the photograph was ruined beyond reparation.

With an inarticulate cry, I seized the intruder in my weakened grasp— it was my valet, who had accompanied me on my voyage out and home. I know not what I said to him, in my furious despair— the words, whatever they were, passed into forgetfulness as they were spoken.

"Sir, sir," said he, "I bring you great news. Miss Selby— Mrs. Selby. Their boat was picked up by a sailing ship. She encountered adverse winds, and only reached Plymouth yesterday— and— and— Miss Clara is here— and I have come to tell you so!"

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5: Madam Crowl's Ghost

Sheridan Le Fanu
1814-1873
All the Year Round, 31 Dec 1870
Collected in: *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories*, 1923

I'M AN OLD WOMAN NOW; and I was but thirteen my last birthday, the night I came to Applewale House. My aunt was the housekeeper there, and a sort o' one-horse carriage was down at Lexhoe to take me and my box up to Applewale.

I was a bit frightened by the time I got to Lexhoe, and when I saw the carriage and horse, I wished myself back again with my mother at Hazelden. I was crying when I got into the "shay"— that's what we used to call it— and old John Mulbery that drove it, and was a good-natured fellow, bought me a handful of apples at the Golden Lion, to cheer me up a bit; and he told me that there was a currant-cake, and tea, and pork-chops, waiting for me, all hot, in my aunt's room at the great house. It was a fine moonlight night and I eat the apples, lookin' out o' the shay winda.

It is a shame for gentlemen to frighten a poor foolish child like I was. I sometimes think it might be tricks. There was two on 'em on the tap o' the coach beside me. And they began to question me after nightfall, when the moon rose, where I was going to. Well, I told them it was to wait on Dame Arabella Crowl, of Applewale House, near by Lexhoe.

"Ho, then," says one of them, "you'll not be long there!"

And I looked at him as much as to say, "Why not?" for I had spoke out when I told them where I was goin', as if 'twas something clever I had to say.

"Because," says he— "and don't you for your life tell no one, only watch her and see— she's possessed by the devil, and more an half a ghost. Have you got a Bible?"

"Yes, sir," says I. For my mother put my little Bible in my box, and I knew it was there: and by the same token, though the print's too small for my ald eyes, I have it in my press to this hour.

As I looked up at him, saying "Yes, sir," I thought I saw him winkin' at his friend; but I could not be sure.

"Well," says he, "be sure you put it under your bolster every night, it will keep the ald girl's claws aff ye."

And I got such a fright when he said that, you wouldn't fancy! And I'd a liked to ask him a lot about the ald lady, but I was too shy, and he and his friend began talkin' together about their own consarns, and dowly enough I got down, as I told ye, at Lexhoe. My heart sank as I drove into the dark avenue. The trees stands very thick and big, as ald as the ald house almost, and four people, with their arms out and finger-tips touchin', barely girds round some of them.

Well, my neck was stretched out o' the winda, looking for the first view o' the great house; and, all at once we pulled up in front of it.

A great white-and-black house it is, wi' great black beams across and right up it, and gables lookin' out, as white as a sheet, to the moon, and the shadows o' the trees, two or three up and down upon the front, you could count the leaves on them, and all the little diamond-shaped winda-panes, glimmering on the great hall winda, and great shutters, in the old fashion, hinged on the wall outside, boulted across all the rest o' the windas in front, for there was but three or four servants, and the old lady in the house, and most o' t'rooms was locked up.

My heart was in my mouth when I sid the journey was over, and this, the great house afore me, and I sa near my aunt that I never sid till noo, and Dame Crowl, that I was come to wait upon, and was afeard on already.

My aunt kissed me in the hall, and brought me to her room. She was tall and thin, wi' a pale face and black eyes, and long thin hands wi' black mittins on. She was past fifty, and her word was short; but her word was law. I hev no complaints to make of her; but she was a hard woman, and I think she would hev bin kinder to me if I had bin her sister's child in place of her brother's. But all that's o' no consequence noo.

The squire— his name was Mr. Chevenix Crowl, he was Dame Crowl's grandson— came down there, by way of seeing that the old lady was well treated, about twice or thrice in the year. I sid him but twice all the time I was at Applewale House.

I can't say but she was well taken care of, notwithstanding, but that was because my aunt and Meg Wyvern, that was her maid, had a conscience, and did their duty by her.

Mrs. Wyvern— Meg Wyvern my aunt called her to herself, and Mrs. Wyvern to me— was a fat, jolly lass of fifty, a good height and a good breadth, always good-humoured, and walked slow. She had fine wages, but she was a bit stingy, and kept all her fine clothes under lock and key, and wore, mostly, a twilled chocolate cotton, wi' red, and yellow, and green sprigs and balls on it, and it lasted wonderful.

She never gave me nout, not the vally o' a brass thimble, all the time I was there; but she was good-humoured, and always laughin', and she talked no end o' proas over her tea; and, seeing me sa sackless and dowly, she roused me up wi' her laughin' and stories; and I think I liked her better than my aunt— children is so taken wi' a bit o' fun or a story— though my aunt was very good to me, but a hard woman about some things, and silent always.

My aunt took me into her bed-chamber, that I might rest myself a bit while she was settin' the tea in her room. But first she patted me on the shouther, and said I was a tall lass o' my years, and had spired up well, and asked me if I could do plain work and stitchin'; and she looked in my face, and said I was like my father,

her brother, that was dead and gone, and she hoped I was a better Christian, and wad na du a' that lids.

It was a hard sayin' the first time I set my foot in her room, I thought.

When I went into the next room, the housekeeper's room— very comfortable, yak (oak) all round— there was a fine fire blazin' away, wi' coal, and peat, and wood, all in a low together, and tea on the table, and hot cake, and smokin' meat; and there was Mrs. Wyvern, fat, jolly, and talkin' away, more in an hour than my aunt would in a year.

While I was still at my tea my aunt went up-stairs to see Madam Crowl.

"She's agone up to see that old Judith Squailes is awake," says Mrs. Wyvern. "Judith sits with Madam Crowl when me and Mrs. Shutters"— that was my aunt's name—" is away. She's a troublesome old lady. Ye'll hev to be sharp wi' her, or she'll be into the fire, or out o' t' winda. She goes on wires, she does, old though she be."

"How old, ma'am ?" says I.

"Ninety-three her last birthday, and that's eight months gone," says she; and she laughed. "And don't be askin' questions about her before your aunt— mind, I tell ye; just take her as you find her, and that's all."

"And what's to be my business about her, please ma'am ?" says I.

"About the old lady? Well," says she, "your aunt, Mrs. Shutters, will tell you that; but I suppose you'll hev to sit in the room with your work, and see she's at no mischief, and let her amuse herself with her things on the table, and get her her food or drink as she calls for it, and keep her out o' mischief, and ring the bell hard if she's troublesome."

"Is she deaf, ma'am?"

"No, nor blind," says she; "as sharp as a needle, but she's gone quite aupy, and can't remember nout rightly; and Jack the Giant Killer, or Goody Twoshoes will please her as well as the King's court, or the affairs of the nation."

"And what did the little girl go away for, ma'am, that went on Friday last? My aunt wrote to my mother she was to go."

"Yes; she's gone."

"What for?" says I again.

"She didn't answer Mrs. Shutters, I do suppose," says she. "I don't know. Don't be talkin'; your aunt can't abide a talkin' child."

"And please, ma'am, is the old lady well in health?" says I.

"It ain't no harm to ask that," says she. "She's torflin' a bit lately, but better this week past, and I dare say she'll last out her hundred years yet. Hish! Here's your aunt coming down the passage."

In comes my aunt, and begins talkin' to Mrs. Wyvern, and I, beginnin' to feel more comfortable and at home like, was walkin' about the room lookin' at this thing and at that. There was pretty old china things on the cupboard, and pictures

again the wall; and there was a door open in the wainscot, and I sees a queer old leathern jacket, wi' straps and buckles to it, and sleeves as long as the bed-post, hangin' up inside.

"What's that you're at, child?" says my aunt, sharp enough, turning about when I thought she least minded. "What's that in your hand?"

"This, ma'am?" says I, turning about with the leathern jacket. "I don't know what it is, ma'am."

Pale as she was, the red came up in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed wi' anger, and I think only she had half a dozen steps to take, between her and me, she'd a gov me a sizzup. But she did give me a shake by the shouther, and she plucked the thing out o' my hand, and says she, "While ever you stay here, don't ye meddle wi' nout that don't belong to ye," and she hung it up on the pin that was there, and shut the door wi' a bang and locked it fast.

Mrs. Wyvern was liftin' up her hands and laughin' all this time, quietly in her chair, rolling herself a bit in it, as she used when she was kinkin'.

The tears was in my eyes, and she winked at my aunt, and says she, dryin' her own eyes that was wet wi' the laughin', "Tut, the child meant no harm— come here to me, child. It's only a pair o' crutches for lame ducks, and ask us no questions mind, and we'll tell ye no lies; and come here and sit down, and drink a mug o' beer before ye go to your bed."

My room, mind ye, was up-stairs, next to the old lady's, and Mrs. Wyvern's bed was near hers in her room and I was to be ready at call, if need should be.

The old lady was in one of her tantrums that night and part of the day before. She used to take fits o' the sulks. Sometimes she would not let them dress her, and other times she would not let them take her clothes off. She was a great beauty, they said, in her day. But there was no one about Applewale that remembered her in her prime. And she was dreadful fond o' dress, and had thick silks, and stiff satins, and velvets, and laces, and all sorts, enough to set up seven shops at the least. All her dresses was old-fashioned and queer, but worth a fortune.

Well, I went to my bed. I lay for a while awake; for a' things was new to me; and I think the tea was in my nerves, too, for I wasn't used to it, except now and then on a holiday, or the like. And I heard Mrs. Wyvern talkin', and I listened with my hand to my ear; but I could not hear Mrs. Crowl, and I don't think she said a word.

There was great care took of her. The people at Applewale knew that when she died they would every one get the sack; and their situations was well paid and easy.

The doctor come twice a week to see the old lady, and you may be sure they all did as he bid them. One thing was the same every time; they were never to cross or frump her, any way, but to humour and please her in everything.

So she lay in her clothes all that night, and next day, not a word she said, and I was at my needlework all that day, in my own room, except when I went down to my dinner.

I would a liked to see the ald lady, and even to hear her speak. But she might as well a'bin in Lunnon a' the time for me.

When I had my dinner my aunt sent me out for a walk for an hour. I was glad when I came back, the trees was so big, and the place so dark and lonesome, and 'twas a cloudy day, and I cried a deal, thinkin' of home, while I was walkin' alone there. That evening, the candles bein' alight, I was sittin' in my room, and the door was open into Madam Crowl's chamber, where my aunt was. It was, then, for the first time I heard what I suppose was the ald lady talking.

It was a queer noise like, I couldn't well say which, a bird, or a beast, only it had a bleatin' sound in it, and was very small.

I pricked my ears to hear all I could. But I could not make out one word she said. And my aunt answered:

"The evil one can't hurt no one, ma'am, bout the Lord permits."

Then the same queer voice from the bed says something more that I couldn't make head nor tail on.

And my aunt med answer again: "Let them pull faces, ma'am, and say what they will; if the Lord be for us, who can be against us?"

I kept listenin' with my ear turned to the door, holdin' my breath, but not another word or sound came in from the room. In about twenty minutes, as I was sittin' by the table, lookin' at the pictures in the old Æsop's Fables, I was aware o' something moving at the door, and lookin' up I sid my aunt's face lookin' in at the door, and her hand raised.

"Hish!" says she, very soft, and comes over to me on tiptoe, and she says in a whisper: "Thank God, she's asleep at last, and don't ye make no noise till I come back, for I'm goin' down to take my cup o' tea, and I'll be back i' noo— me and Mrs. Wyvern, and she'll be sleepin' in the room, and you can run down when we come up, and Judith will gie ye yaur supper in my room."

And with that away she goes.

I kep' looking at the picture-book, as before, listenin' every noo and then, but there was no sound, not a breath, that I could hear; an' I began whisperin' to the pictures and talkin' to myself to keep my heart up, for I was growin' feared in that big room.

And at last up I got, and began walkin' about the room, lookin' at this and peepin' at that, to amuse my mind, ye'll understand. And at last what sud I do but peeps into Madame Crowl's bed-chamber.

A grand chamber it was, wi' a great four-poster, wi' flowered silk curtains as tall as the ceilin', and foldin' down on the floor, and drawn close all round. There was a lookin'-glass, the biggest I ever sid before, and the room was a blaze o' light.

I counted twenty-two wax-candles, all alight. Such was her fancy, and no one dared say her nay.

I listened at the door, and gaped and wondered all round. When I heard there was not a breath, and did not see so much as a stir in the curtains, I took heart, and I walked into the room on tiptoe, and looked round again. Then I takes a keek at myself in the big glass; and at last it came in my head, "Why couldn't I ha' a keek at the ald lady herself in the bed?"

Ye'd think me a fule if ye knew half how I longed to see Dame Crowl, and I thought to myself if I didn't peep now I might wait many a day before I got so gude a chance again.

Well, my dear, I came to the side o' the bed, the curtains bein' close, and my heart a'most failed me. But I took courage, and I slips my finger in between the thick curtains, and then my hand. So I waits a bit, but all was still as death. So, softly, softly I draws the curtain, and there, sure enough, I sid before me, stretched out like the painted lady on the tomb-stean in Lexhoe Church, the famous Dame Crowl, of Applewale House. There she was, dressed out. You never sid the like in they days. Satin and silk, and scarlet and green, and gold and pint lace; by Jen! 'twas a sight! A big powdered wig, half as high as herself, was a-top o' her head, and, wow!— was ever such wrinkles?— and her old baggy throat all powdered white, and her cheeks rouged, and mouse-skin eyebrows, that Mrs. Wyvern used to stick on, and there she lay grand and stark, wi' a pair o' clocked silk hose on, and heels to her shoon as tall as nine-pins. Lawk! But her nose was crooked and thin, and half the whites o' her eyes was open. She used to stand, dressed as she was, gigglin' and dribblin' before the lookin'-glass, wi' a fan in her hand, and a big nosegay in her bodice. Her wrinkled little hands was stretched down by her sides, and such long nails, all cut into points, I never sid in my days. Could it ever a bin the fashion for grit fowk to wear their finger-nails so?

Well, I think ye'd a bin frightened yourself if ye'd a sid such a sight. I couldn't let go the curtain, nor move an inch, not take my eyes off her; my very heart stood still. And in an instant she opens her eyes, and up she sits, and spins herself round, and down wi' her, wi' a clack on her two tall heels on the floor, facin' me, ogglin' in my face wi' her two great glassy eyes, and a wicked simper wi' her old wrinkled lips, and lang fause teeth.

Well, a corpse is a natural thing; but this was the dreadfullest sight I ever sid. She had her fingers straight out pointin' at me, and her back was crooked, round again wi' age. Says she:

"Ye little limb! what for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff!"

If I'd a thought an instant, I'd a turned about and run. But I couldn't take my eyes off her, and I backed from her as soon as I could; and she came clatterin' after, like a thing on wires, with her fingers pointing to my throat, and she makin' all the time a sound with her tongue like zizz-zizz-zizz.

I kept backin' and backin' as quick as I could, and her fingers was only a few inches away from my throat, and I felt I'd lose my wits if she touched me.

I went back this way, right into the corner, and I gev a yellock, ye'd think saul and body was partin', and that minute my aunt, from the door, calls out wi' a blare, and the ald lady turns round on her, and I turns about, and ran through my room, and down the back stairs, as hard as my legs could carry me.

I cried hearty, I can tell you, when I got down to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Wyvern laughed a deal when I told her what happened. But she changed her key when she heard the ald lady's words.

"Say them again," says she.

So I told her.

"Ye little limb! What for did ye say I killed the boy? I'll tickle ye till ye're stiff."

"And did ye say she killed a boy?" says she.

"Not I, ma'am," says I.

Judith was always up with me, after that, when the two elder women was away from her. I would a jumped out at winda, rather than stay alone in the same room wi' her.

It was about a week after, as well as I can remember, Mrs. Wyvern, one day when me and her was alone, told me a thing about Madam Crowl that I did not know before.

She being young, and a great beauty, full seventy years before, had married Squire Crowl of Applewale. But he was a widower, and had a son about nine year old.

There never was tale or tidings of this boy after one mornin'. No one could say where he went to. He was allowed too much liberty, and used to be off in the morning, one day, to the keeper's cottage, and breakfast wi' him, and away to the warren, and not home, mayhap, till evening, and another time down to the lake, and bathe there, and spend the day fishin' there, or paddlin' about in the boat. Well, no one could say what was gone wi' him; only this, that his hat was found by the lake, under a haathorn that grows thar to this day, and 'twas thought he was drowned bathin'. And the squire's son, by his second marriage, by this Madam Crowl that lived sa dreadful lang, came in for the estates. It was his son, the ald lady's grandson, Squire Chevenix Crowl, that owned the estates at the time I came to Applewale.

There was a deal o' talk lang before my aunt's time about it; and 'twas said the step-mother knew more than she was like to let out. And she managed her husband, the ald squire, wi' her whiteheft and flatteries. And as the boy was never seen more, in course of time the thing died out of fowks' minds.

I'm goin' to tell ye noo about what I sid wi' my own een.

I was not there six months, and it was winter time, when the ald lady took her last sickness.

The doctor was afeard she might a took a fit o' madness, as she did, fifteen years befoore, and was buckled up, many a time, in a strait-waistcoat, which was the very leathern jerkin' I sid in the closet, off my aunt's room.

Well, she didn't. She pined, and windered, and went off, torflin', torflin', quiet enough, till a day or two before her flittin', and then she took to rabblin', and sometimes skirlin' in the bed, ye'd think a robber had a knife to her throat, and she used to work out o' the bed, and not being strong enough, then, to walk or stand, she'd fall on the flure, wi' her ald wizened hands stretched before her face, and skirlin' still for mercy.

Ye may guess I didn't go into the room, and I used to be shiverin' in my bed wi' fear, at her skirlin' and scrafflin' on the flure, and blarin' out words that id make your skin turn blue.

My aunt, and Mrs. Wyvern, and Judith Squailes, and a woman from Lexhoe, was always about her. At last she took fits, and they wore her out.

T'sir (parson) was there, and prayed for her; but she was past praying with. I suppose it was right, but none could think there was much good in it, and sa at lang last she made her flittin', and a' was over, and old Dame Crowl was shrouded and coffined and Squire Chevenix was wrote for. But he was away in France, and the delay was sa lang, that t'sir and doctor both agreed it would not du to keep her langer out o' her place, and no one cared but just them two, and my aunt and the rest o' us, from Applewale, to go to the buryin'. So the old lady of Applewale was laid in the vault under Lexhoe Church; and we lived up at the great house till such time as the squire should come to tell his will about us, and pay off such as he chose to discharge.

I was put into another room, two doors away from what was Dame Crowl's chamber, after her death, and this thing happened the night before Squire Chevenix came to Applewale.

The room I was in now was a large square chamber, covered wi' yak pannels, but unfurnished except for my bed, which had no curtains to it, and a chair and a table, or so, that looked nothing at all in such a big room. And the big looking-glass, that the old lady used to keek into and admire herself from head to heel, now that there was na mair o' that wark, was put out of the way, and stood against the wall in my room, for there was shiftin' o' many things in her chambers ye may suppose, when she came to be coffined.

The news had come that day that the squire was to be down next morning at Applewale; and not sorry was I, for I thought I was sure to be sent home again to my mother. And right glad was I, and I was thinkin' of a' at hame, and my sister, Janet, and the kitten and the pymag, and Trimmer the tike, and all the rest, and I got sa fidgetty, I couldn't sleep, and the clock struck twelve, and me wide awake, and the room as dark as pick. My back was turned to the door, and my eyes toward the wall opposite.

Well, it could na be a full quarter past twelve, when I sees a lightin' on the wall befoore me, as if something took fire behind, and the shadas o' the bed, and the chair, and my gown, that was hangin' from the wall, was dancin' up and down, on the ceilin' beams and the yak pannels; and I turns my head ower my shouther quick, thinkin' something must a gone a' fire.

And what sud I see, by Jen! but the likeness o' the ald beldame, bedizened out in her satins and velvets, on her dead body, simperin', wi' her eyes as wide as saucers, and her face like the fiend himself. 'Twas a red light that rose about her in a fuffin low, as if her dress round her feet was blazin'. She was drivin' on right for me, wi' her ald shrivelled hands crooked as if she was goin' to claw me. I could not stir, but she passed me straight by, wi' a blast o' cald air, and I sid her, at the wall, in the alcove as my aunt used to call it, which was a recess where the state bed used to stand in ald times, wi' a door open wide, and her hands gropin' in at somethin' was there. I never sid that door befoore. And she turned round to me, like a thing on a pivot, flyrin' (grinning), and all at once the room was dark, and I standin' at the far side o' the bed; I don't know how I got there, and I found my tongue at last, and if I did na blare a yellock, rennin' down the gallery and almost pulled Mrs. Wyvern's door, off t'hooks, and frightened her half out o' her wits.

Ye may guess I did na sleep that night; and wi' the first light, down wi' me to my aunt, as fast as my two legs cud carry me.

Well, my aunt did na frump or flite me, as I thought she would, but she held me by the hand, and looked hard in my face all the time. And she telt me not to be feared; and says she:

"Hed the appearance a key in its hand?"

"Yes," says I, bringin' it to mind, "a big key in a queer brass handle."

"Stop a bit," says she, lettin' go ma hand, and openin' the cupboard-door. "Was it like this?" says she, takin' one out in her fingers and showing it to me, with a dark look in my face.

"That was it," says I, quick enough.

"Are ye sure?" she says, turnin' it round.

"Sart," says I, and I felt like I was gain' to faint when I sid it.

"Well, that will do, child," says she, saftly thinkin', and she locked it up again.

"The squire himself will be here to-day, before twelve o'clock, and ye must tell him all about it," says she, thinkin', "and I suppose I'll be leavin' soon, and so the best thing for the present is, that ye should go home this afternoon, and I'll look out another place for you when I can."

Fain was I, ye may guess, at that word.

My aunt packed up my things for me, and the three pounds that was due to me, to bring home, and Squire Crowl himself came down to Applewale that day, a handsome man, about thirty years aid. It was the second time I sid him. But this was the first time he spoke to me.

My aunt talked wi' him in the housekeeper's room, and I don't know what they said. I was a bit feared on the squire, he bein' a great gentleman down in Lexhoe, and I darn't go near till I was called. And says he, smilin':

"What's a' this ye a sen, child? it mun be a dream, for ye know there's na sic a thing as a bo or a freet in a' the world. But whatever it was, ma little maid, sit ye down and tell us all about it from first to last."

Well, so soon as I med an end, he thought a bit, and says he to my aunt:

"I mind the place well. In old Sir Oliver's time lame Wyndel told me there was a door in that recess, to the left, where the lassie dreamed she saw my grandmother open it. He was past eighty when he telt me that, and I but a boy. It's twenty year sen. The plate and jewels used to be kept there, long ago, before the iron closet was made in the arras chamber, and he told me the key had a brass handle, and this ye say was found in the bottom o' the kist where she kept her old fans. Now, would not it be a queer thing if we found some spoons or diamonds forgot there? Ye mun come up wi' us, lassie, and point to the very spot."

Loth was I, and my heart in my mouth, and fast I held by my aunt's hand as I stept into that awsome room, and showed them both how she came and passed me by, and the spot where she stood, and where the door seemed to open.

There was an ald empty press against the wall then, and shoving it aside, sure enough there was the tracing of a door in the wainscot, and a keyhole stopped with wood, and planed across as smooth as the rest, and the joining of the door all stopped wi' putty the colour o' yak, and, but for the hinges that showed a bit when the press was shoved aside, ye would not consayt there was a door there at all.

"Ha!" says he, wi' a queer smile, "this looks like it."

It took some minutes wi' a small chisel and hammer to pick the bit o' wood out o' the keyhole. The key fitted, sure enough, and, wi' a strang twist and a lang skreeak, the boult went back and he pulled the door open.

There was another door inside, stranger than the first, but the lacks was gone, and it opened easy. Inside was a narrow floor and walls and vault o' brick; we could not see what was in it, for 'twas dark as pick.

When my aunt had lighted the candle the squire held it up and stept in.

My aunt stood on tiptoe tryin' to look over his shouther, and I did na see nout.

"Ha! ha!" says the squire, steppin' backward. "What's that? Gi'ma the poker—quick!" says he to my aunt. And as she went to the hearth I peeps beside his arm, and I sid squat down in the far corner a monkey or a flayin' on the chest, or else the maist shrivelled up, wizzened ald wife that ever was sen on yearth.

"By Jen!" says my aunt, as, puttin' the poker in his hand, she keeked by his shouther, and sid the ill-favoured thing, "hae a care sir, what ye're doin'. Back wi' ye, and shut to the door!"

But in place o' that he steps in saftly, wi' the poker pointed like a swoord, and he gies it a poke, and down it a' tumbles together, head and a', in a heap o' bayans and dust, little meyar an' a hatful.

'Twas the bayans o' a child; a' the rest went to dust at a touch. They said nout for a while, but he turns round the skull as it lay on the floor.

Young as I was I consayted I knew well enough what they was thinkin' on.

"A dead cat!" says he, pushin' back and blowin' out the can'le, and shuttin' to the door. "We'll come back, you and me, Mrs. Shutters, and look on the shelves by-and-bye. I've other matters first to speak to ye about; and this little girl's goin' hame, ye say. She has her wages, and I mun mak' her a present," says he, pattin' my shoulder wi' his hand.

And he did gimma a goud pound, and I went aff to Lexhoe about an hour after, and sa hame by the stagecoach, and fain was I to be at hame again; and I never saa ald Dame Crowl o' Applewale, God be thanked, either in appearance or in dream, at-efter. But when I was grown to be a woman my aunt spent a day and night wi' me at Littleham, and she telt me there was na doubt it was the poor little boy that was missing sa lang sen that was shut up to die thar in the dark by that wicked beldame, whar his skirls, or his prayers, or his thumpin' cud na be heard, and his hat was left by the water's edge, whoever did it, to mak' belief he was drowned. The clothes, at the first touch, a' ran into a snuff o' dust in the cell whar the bayans was found. But there was a handful o' jet buttons, and a knife with a green handle, together wi' a couple o' pennies the poor little fella had in his pocket, I suppose, when he was decoyed in thar, and sid his last o' the light. And there was, amang the squire's papers, a copy o' the notice that was prented after he was lost, when the old squire thought he might 'a run away, or bin took by gipsies, and it said he had a green-hefted knife wi' him, and that his buttons were o' cut jet. Sa that is a' I hev to say consarnin' ald Dame Crowl, o' Applewale House.

6: Across The Gulf

Henry S. Whitehead
1882-1932
Weird Tales, May 1926.

FOR THE FIRST YEAR, or thereabouts, after his Scotch mother's death the successful lawyer Alan Carrington was conscious, among his other feelings, of a kind of vague dread that she might appear as a character in one of his dreams, as, she had often assured him, her mother had come to her. Being the man he was, he resented this feeling as an incongruity. Yet, there was a certain background for the feeling of dread. It had been one of his practical mother's convictions that such an appearance of her long-dead mother always preceded a disaster in the family.

Such aversions as he might possess against the maternal side of his ancestry were all included in his dislike for belief in this kind of thing. When he agreed that "the Scotch are a dour race," he always had reference, at least mentally, to this superstitious strain, associated with that race from time immemorial, concrete to his experience because of this belief of his mother's, against which he had always fought.

He carried out dutifully, and with a high degree of professional skill, all her various expressed desires, and continued, after her death, to live in their large, comfortable house. Perhaps because his mother never did appear in such dreams as he happened to remember, his dread became less and less poignant. At the end of two years or so, occupied with the thronging interests of a public man in the full power of his early maturity, it had almost ceased to be so much as a memory.

In the spring of his forty-fourth year, Carrington, who had long worked at high pressure and virtually without vacations, was apprized by certain mental and physical indications which his physician interpreted vigorously, that he must take at least the whole summer off and devote himself to recuperation. Rest, said the doctor, for his overworked mind and under-exercised body, was imperatively indicated.

Carrington was able to set his nearly innumerable interests and affairs in order in something like three weeks by means of highly concentrated efforts to that end. Then, exceedingly nervous, and not a little debilitated physically from this extra strain upon his depleted resources, he had to meet the problem of where he was to go and what he was to do. He was, of course, too deeply set in the rut of his routines to find such a decision easy. Fortunately, this problem was solved for him by a letter which he received unexpectedly from one of his cousins on his mother's side, the Reverend Fergus MacDonald, a gentleman with whom he had had only slight contacts.

Dr. MacDonald was a middle-aged, retired clergyman, whom an imminent decline had removed eight or ten years before from a brilliant, if underpaid, career in his own profession. After a few years sojourn in the Adirondacks he had emerged cured, and with an already growing reputation as a writer of that somewhat inelastic literary product emphasized by certain American magazines which seem to embalm a spinsterish austerity of the literary form under the label of distinction.

Dr. MacDonald had retained a developed pastoral instinct which he could no longer satisfy in the management of a parish. He was, besides, too little robust to risk assuming, at least for some time to come, the wearing burden of teaching. He compromised the matter by establishing a summer camp for boys in his still-desirable Adirondacks. Being devoid of experience in business matters he associated with himself a certain Thomas Starkey, a young man whom the ravages of the White Plague had snatched away from a sales-managership and driven into the quasi-exile of Saranac, where Dr. MacDonald had met him.

This association proved highly successful for the half-dozen years that it had lasted. Then Starkey, after a brave battle for his health, had succumbed, just at a period when his trained business intelligence would have been most helpful to the affairs of the camp.

Dazed at this blow, Dr. MacDonald had desisted from his labors after literary distinction long enough to write to his cousin Carrington, beseeching his legal and financial counsel. When Carrington had read the last of his cousin's finished periods, he decided at once, and dispatched a telegram announcing his immediate setting out for the camp, his intention to remain through the summer, and the promise to assume full charge of the business management. He started for the Adirondacks the next afternoon.

His presence brought immediate order out of confusion. Dr. MacDonald, on the evening of the second day of his cousin's administration of affairs, got down on his knees and returned thanks to his Maker for the undeserved beneficence which had sent this financial angel of light into the midst of his affairs, in this, his hour of dire need! Thereafter the reverend doctor immersed himself more and more deeply in his wonted task of producing the solid literature dear to the hearts of his editors.

But if Carrington's coming had improved matters at the camp, the balance of indebtedness was far from being one-sided. For the first week or so the reaction from his accustomed way of life had caused him to feel, if anything, even staler and more nerve-racked than before. But that first unpleasantness past, the invigorating air of the balsam-laden pine woods began to show its restorative effects rapidly. He found that he was sleeping like the dead. He could not get enough sleep, it appeared. His appetite increased, and he found that he was putting on needed weight. The business management of a boys' camp, absurdly

simple after the complex matters of Big Business with which he had long been occupied, was only a spice to this new existence among the deep shadows and sunny spaces of the Adirondack country. At the end of a month of this, he confidently declared himself a new man. By the first of August, instead of the nervous wreck who had arrived, sharp-visaged and cadaverous, two months before, Carrington presented the appearance of a robust, hard-muscled athlete of thirty, twenty-two pounds heavier and "without a nerve in his body."

ON THE EVENING of the fourth day of August, healthily weary after a long day's hike, Carrington retired soon after 9 o'clock, and fell immediately into a deep and restful sleep. Toward morning he dreamed of his mother for the first time since her death more than six years before. His dream took the form that he was lying here, in his own bed, awake,— a not altogether uncommon form of dream,— and that he was very chilly in the region of the left shoulder. As is well-known to those skilled in the scientific phenomena of the dream-state, now a very prominent portion of the material used in psychological study, this kind of sensation in a dream virtually always is the result of an actual physical condition, and is reproduced in the dream because of that actual background as a stimulus. Carrington's cold shoulder was toward the left-hand, or outside of the bed, which stood against the wall of his large, airy room.

In his dream he thought that he reached out his hand to replace the bed clothes, and as he did so his hand was softly, though firmly, taken, and his mother's well-remembered voice said: "Lie still, laddie; I'll tuck you in." Then he thought his mother replaced the loosened covers and tucked them in about his shoulder with her competent touch. He wanted to thank her, and as he could not see her because of the position in which he was lying, he endeavored to open his eyes and turn over, being in that state commonly thought of as between sleep and waking. With some considerable effort he succeeded in forcing open his reluctant eyes; but turning over was a much more difficult matter, it appeared. He had to fight against an overpowering inclination to sink back comfortably into the deep sleep, from which, in his dream, he had awakened to find his shoulder disagreeably uncomfortable. The warmth of the replaced covers was an additional inducement to sleep.

At last, with a determined wrench he overcame his desire to go to sleep again and rolled over to his left side by dint of a strong effort of his will, smiling gratefully and about to express his thanks. But at the instant of accomplishing this victory of the will, he actually awakened, in precisely the position recorded in his mind in the dream-state.

Where he had expected to meet his mother's eyes, he saw nothing, but there remained with him a persistent impression that he had felt the withdrawal of her hand from where, on his shoulder, it had rested caressingly. The grateful warmth

of the bedclothes in that cool morning remained, however, and he observed that they were well tucked in about that shoulder.

His dream had clearly been of the type which George Du Maurier speaks of in *Peter Ibbetson*. He had "dreamed true," and it required several minutes before he could rid himself of the impression that his mother, moved by some strange whimsicality, had stepped out of his sight, perhaps hidden herself behind the bed! He was actually about to look back of the bed before the utter absurdity of the idea became fully apparent to him. The back of the bed stood close against the wall of the room. His mother had been dead more than six years.

He jumped out of bed at the sound of reveille, blown by the camp bugler, and this abrupt action dissipated his impressions. Their memory remained, however, very clear-cut in his mind for the next two days. The impression of his mother's nearness in the course of that vivid dream had recalled her to his mind with the greatest clarity. With this revived impression of her, too, there marched, almost of necessity he supposed, in his mind the old idea which he had dreaded,— the idea that she would come to him to warn him of some impending danger.

Curiously enough, as he analyzed his sensations, he found that there remained none of the old resentment connected with this speculation, such as had characterized it during the period immediately after his mothers death. His maturity, the preoccupations of an exceptionally full and active life, and the tenderness which marked all his memories of his mother had served to remove from his mind all traces of that idea. The possibility of a "warning" in his dream of his dear mother only caused him to smile during those days after the dream during which the revived impression of his mother slowly faded thin, but it was the indulgent, slightly melancholy smile of a revived nostalgia, a gentle, faint sense of "homesickness" for her, such as might affect any middle-aged man recently reminded of a beloved mother in some rather intense fashion.

On the evening of the second day after his dream he was walking toward the camp garage with some visitors, a man and woman, parents of one of the boys at the camp, intending to drive with them to the village to guide them in some minor purchases. Just beside the well-worn trail through the great pine trees, half-way up the hill to the garage, the woman noticed a clump of large, brownish mushrooms, and enquired if they were of an edible variety. Carrington picked one and examined it. To his limited knowledge it seemed to have several of the marks of an edible mushroom. While they were standing beside the place where the mushrooms grew, one of the younger boys passed them.

"Crocker," called Mr. Carrington.

"Yes, Mr. Carrington," replied young Crocker, pausing.

"Crocker, your cabin is the one farthest south, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you going there just now?"

"Yes, Mr. Carrington; can I do anything for you?"

"Well, if it isn't too much trouble, you might take this mushroom over to Professor Benjamin's— you know where his camp is, just the other side of the wire fence beyond your cabin,— and ask him to let us know whether or not this is an edible mushroom. I'm not quite sure myself."

"Certainly," replied the boy, pleased to be allowed "out of bounds" even to the extent of the few rods separating the camp property from that of the gentleman named by Carrington, a university teacher regarded locally as a great expert on mushrooms, fungi, and suchlike things.

Carrington called after the disappearing boy.

"Oh, Crocker!"

"Yes, Mr. Carrington?"

"Throw it away if Dr. Benjamin says it's no good; but if he says it's all right, bring it back, please, and leave it on the mantel-shelf in the big living room. Do you mind?"

"All right, sir," shouted Crocker over his shoulder, and trotted on.

Returning from the village an hour later, Carrington found the mushroom on the mantel-shelf in the living room.

He placed it in a large paper bag, left it in the kitchen in a safe place, and, the next morning before breakfast, walked up the trail toward the garage and filled his paper bag with mushrooms.

He liked mushrooms, and so, doubtless, did the people who had noticed these. He decided he would prepare the mushrooms himself. There would be just about enough for three generous portions. Mushrooms were not commonly eaten as a breakfast dish, but— this was camp!

Exchanging a pleasant "good morning" with the young colored man who served as assistant cook, and who was engaged in getting breakfast ready, and smilingly declining his offer to prepare the mushrooms, he peeled them, warmed a generous lump of fresh, country butter in a large frying pan, and began cooking them.

A delightfully appetizing odor arising from the pan provoked respectful banter from the young cook, amused at the camp-director's efforts along the lines of his own profession, and the two chatted while Carrington turned his mushrooms over and over in the butter with a long fork. When they were done exactly to a turn, and duly peppered and salted, Carrington left them in the pan, which he took off the stove, and set about the preparation of three canapés of fried toast. He was going to serve his mushrooms in style, as the grinning young cook slyly remarked. He grinned back, and divided the mushrooms into three equal portions, each on its canapé, which he asked the under-cook to keep hot in the oven during the brief interval until mess call should bring everybody at camp in to breakfast.

Then with his long fork he speared several small pieces of mushroom which had got broken in the pan. After blowing these cool on the fork, Carrington, grinning like a boy, put them into his mouth and began to eat them.

"Good, suh?" enquired the assistant cook.

"Delicious," mumbled Carrington, enthusiastically, his mouth full of the succulent bits. After he had swallowed his mouthful, he remarked:

"But I must have left a bit of the hide on one of 'em. There's a little trace of bitter."

"Look out for 'em, suh," enjoined the under-cook, suddenly grave. "They're plumb wicked when they ain't jus' right, suh."

"These are all right," returned Carrington, reassuringly. "I had Professor Benjamin look them over."

He sauntered out on the veranda, waiting for the bugle call. From many directions the boys and a few visitors were straggling in toward the mess hall after a morning dip in the lake and cabin inspection. From their room in the guest house the people with whom he had been the evening before came across the broad veranda toward him. He was just turning toward them with a smile of pleasant greeting when the very hand of death fell on him.

Without warning, a sudden terrible griping, accompanied by a deadly coldness, and this immediately followed by a pungent, burning heat, ran through his body. Great beads of sweat sprang out on his forehead. His knees began to give under him. Everything, all this pleasant world about him, of brilliant morning sunshine and deep, sharply-defined shadow, turned greenish and dim. His senses started to slip away from him in the numbness which closed down like a relentless hand, crushing out his consciousness.

With an effort which seemed to wrench his soul and tear him with unimagined pain, he gathered all his waning forces, and, sustained only by a mighty effort of his powerful will, he staggered through the open doorway of the mess hall into the kitchen. He nearly collapsed as he leaned against the nearest table, articulating between fast-paralyzing lips:

"Water,— and mustard! Quick. The mushrooms!"

The head-cook, that moment arrived in the kitchen, happened to be quick-minded. The under-cook, too, had had, of course, some preparation for this possibility.

One of the men seized a bowl just used for beating eggs and with shaking hands poured it half-full of warm water from a heating kettle on the stove. Into this the other emptied nearly half a tin of dry mustard which he stirred about frantically with his floury hand. This, his eyes rolling with terror, he held to Carrington's lips, and Carrington, concentrating afresh all his remaining faculties, forced the nauseous fluid through his blue lips, and swallowed, painfully, great saving gulps of the powerful emetic.

Again and yet again the two negroes renewed the dose.

One of the counselors, on dining room duty, coming into the kitchen sensed something terribly amiss, and ran to support Carrington.

TEN MINUTES LATER, vastly nauseated, trembling with weakness, but safe, Carrington, leaning heavily on the young counselor, walked up and down behind the mess hall. His first words, after he could speak coherently, were to order the assistant cook to burn the contents of the three hot plates in the oven....

He had eaten a large mouthful of one of the most deadly varieties of poisonous mushroom, one containing the swiftly-acting vegetable alkaloids which spell certain death. His few moments' respite, as he reasoned the matter out afterward, had been undoubtedly due to his having cooked the mushrooms in butter, of which he had been lavish. This, thoroughly soaked up by the mushrooms, had, for a brief period, resisted digestion.

Very gradually, as he walked up and down, taking in deep breaths of the sweet, pine-scented air, his strength returned to him. After he had thoroughly walked off the faintness which had followed the violent treatment to which he had subjected himself, he went up to his room, and, still terribly shaken by his experience and narrow escape from death, went to bed to rest.

Crocker, it appeared, had duly carried out his instructions. Dr. Benjamin had looked at the specimen and told the boy that there were several varieties of this mushroom, not easily to be distinguished from one another, of which some were wholesome, and one contained a deadly alkaloid. Being otherwise occupied at the time, he would have to defer his opinion until he had had an opportunity for a more thorough examination. He had handed back the mushroom submitted to him and the lad had given it to a counselor, who had put it on the mantel-shelf intending to report to Mr. Carrington the following morning.

Weak still, and very drowsy, Carrington lay on his bed and silently thanked the Powers above for having preserved his life.

Abruptly he thought of his mother. The warning!

At once it was as though she stood in the room beside his bed; as though their long, close companionship had not been interrupted by death.

A wave of affectionate gratitude suffused him. Under its influence he rose, wearily, and sank to his knees beside the bed, his head on his arms, in the very spot where his mother had seemed to stand in his dream.

Tears welled into his eyes, and fell, unnoticed, as he communed silently with her who had brought him into the world, whose watchful love and care not even death could interrupt or vitiate.

Silently, fervently, he spoke across the gulf to his mother....

He choked with silent sobs as understanding of her invincible love came to him and overwhelmed him. Then, to the accompaniment of a tremulous calmness

which seemed to fall upon him abruptly, he had the sense of her, standing close beside him, as she had stood in his dream. He dared not raise his eyes, because now he knew that he was awake. It seemed to him as though she spoke, though there came to him no sensation of anything that could be compared to sound.

"Ye must be getting back into your bed, laddie."

And keeping his eyes tightly shut, lest he disturb this visitation, he awkwardly fumbled his way back into bed. He settled himself on his back, and an overpowering drowsiness, perhaps begotten of his recent shock and its attendant bodily weakness, ran through him like a benediction and a refreshing wind.

As he drifted down over the threshold of consciousness into the deep and prolonged sleep of physical exhaustion which completely restored him, his last remembrance was of the lingering caress of his mother's firm hand resting on his shoulder.

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7: The Man Who Could Vanish

A. Hyatt Verrill

1871-1954

Amazing Stories, Jan 1927

Prologue

ON the third day of last August the public was astounded by a story which appeared in every newspaper in the country. Extra editions of even the most staid and conservative papers appeared on the streets shortly after noon and, in screaming headlines, announced:

HARTWELL BUILDING DISAPPEARS.
TWENTY STORY STRUCTURE VANISHES IN BROAD DAYLIGHT AND REAPPEARS.
MARVELOUS AND INEXPLICABLE ILLUSION WITNESSED BY CROWDS. BELIEVED TO BE A DEMONSTRATION BY SOME MASTER HYPNOTIST SEEKING PUBLICITY.

It is not necessary to quote the stories that occupied entire pages of the press, for while all agreed in the main essentials, no two were the same and all contained glaring errors and discrepancies. Moreover, the events must still be fresh in the minds of my readers. Suffice to say that each and every account stated that the new Hartwell Building, in process of construction on Nineteenth Street, had suddenly vanished from sight during the noon hour; that hundreds of citizens had packed the thoroughfare; that the police and fire departments had been called out, and that, for a space of Several minutes, only a vacant lot and an immense excavation had been visible where the building had stood. Then, while the crowd looked on, the structure had reappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had vanished.

The story was so utterly incredible that, at first, many persons thought it merely a canard or some advertising or publicity scheme. But as, during the following days, the press was filled with accounts of the phenomenon as related by eyewitnesses, and as the police and fire department officials confirmed the reports, and there could be no question regarding the authenticity of the story, innumerable theories and explanations were suggested, and so for days the crowds thronged the streets near the Hartwell Building and stood, gazing expectantly, in the hopes that it might repeat ita mysterious behavior.

The concensus of opinion was that the astounding occurrence had been brought about by some hypnotist or fakir who, as the East Indian magicians are supposed to do, had hypnotised the onlookers, and that the disappearance of the building had been wholly an illusion. "No doubt," said the *Times*, "the public will soon be informed that Signor So-and-So, the world's greatest hypnotist and

illusionist, will appear at a certain theatre, with a further announcement of the fact that the Signor deluded hundreds of persons, and by his mesmeric powers, caused them to believe that a twenty-story building could vanish into thin air."

But as time went on and no one came forward to claim the doubtful honor of being able to accomplish such a feat, by hypnotism or otherwise, the mystery deepened, and every conceivable theory— both natural and supernatural, was advanced to explain the wholly unaccountable phenomenon.

Up to the present time the truth has never been known, and only two men in the world are aware of the actual facts and the real solution of the mystery. One of these is Doctor Lemuel Unsinn, Professor of Physics at Stanforth University, and my lifetime friend and college chum; the other is myself. As the time has now passed when any harm can come from giving the true story to the world, and as the explanation is even more incredible and remarkable than any of the imaginary solutions put forth, we have agreed that the public should bo made acquainted with the facts. Indeed, the authentic story would have been published some months ago had it not been essential to make certain arrangements to safeguard the secret, and whose making required much more time than had been anticipated.

In order to make clear just how the astounding occurrence took place, and to enable my readers to thoroughly understand my true if incredible story, it will be necessary to begin at the beginning and to recount every detail of the events which led to the final results. To many readers much of this matter will, no doubt, prove rather dry, and, if I were writing fiction, I would omit all those portions of the tale which deal with the scientific side and the preliminaries. But both Dr. Unsinn and myself feel that to omit such matters would be a great mistake, and that as the story is of as much interest and importance to the scientific world as to the layman, nothing should be left untold. Moreover, we feel that unless such matters were included my story would be considered a purely fictitious. And at any rate the reader is at liberty to skip such portions of my narrative as the appreciative reader may find to be lacking in real and genuine interest.

1: Doctor Unsinn Propounds Some Theories

IT really began when I was visiting my old friend and college chum, Dr. Lemuel Unsinn, soon after his return from an international conference of scientists.

He had been telling me of the various new discoveries which had been announced by his fellows, and mentioned certain phenomena of light rays which, hitherto unseen, had now been brought within the scope of human vision. Although I could not, aa a layman, see the importance of the discovery, my friend was most enthusiastic about the matter, and, among other statements, declared that it might yet be possible to render objects invisible.

I laughed. "That is utterly impossible," I declared.

"Nothing within the realms of Science is impossible," he retorted.

"Perhaps not," I admitted, "but there are many things which are so highly improbable that to all intents and purposes they are beyond possibility or reason."

"Utter nonsense!" he ejaculated. "Ignorance, lack of imagination, pig-headed conservatism. Every advance made by Science has been declared improbable or impossible, or both, until its feasibility has been proven. Railways, steamships, the telegraph and telephone, radio, airplanes— all have been laughed at and declared impossibilities until they became actualities. Science," he went on, assuming his lecture-room manner, and looking at me over the rims of his glasses, "Science does not acknowledge the existence of the words impossible and improbable. What seems a mere dream today may become an every-day affair tomorrow. The scientist—"

"Oh, all right," I laughed. "Cut out the lecture. Granting that nothing is beyond Science, as represented by my old friend, Lemuel Unsinn, how do you propose going about it?"

"I presume you refer to the matter of rendering visible objects invisible," he smiled, leaning back in his chair and placing the tips of his fingers together.

I nodded.

"Hmm, I hardly care to divulge all my ideas, even to such an old friend as yourself," he chuckled. "But I am willing to suggest lines along which such investigations might be conducted. You state that it is preposterous to consider making visible, solid matter invisible. Is it any more preposterous than to- make inaudible sounds audible, invisible things visible, or audible sounds inaudible?"

I shook my head. "No, I'd say one's as impossible as the other."

Lemuel grinned. "Which shows your monumental ignorance," he exclaimed. "My dear boy," he continued, "those feats are all accomplished facts and are so familiar to you that you do not realize they exist. The inaudible waves transmitted by radio are rendered audible in the receiving set; the audible waves which enter the microphone of the transmitting station are sent inaudibly through the ether; and heat, which is invisible under certain conditions is plainly visible under other conditions which occur every day."

"Yes," I granted rather grudgingly, "I'll admit the matter of sounds, but I'd like to know when and how heat can be seen. That ia, unless you refer to the wavy effect seen above a pavement or sand on a hot day."

"No, there you have air, usually invisible, rendered visible by its motion," replied my friend. "But you have undoubtedly seen red-hot or white-hot metal. And there you have heat made visible. Heat, sound, light and probably scent also, are all caused by vibratory waves. Waves varying in length from the shortest X-rays and Gamma rays to the longest recorded waves; waves varying from less than a billionth part of a meter to over onehundred-and-fifty thousand meters in

length. Unfortunately, however, the human system is not designed or attuned to register or recognize more than an infinitely small proportion of these vibratory waves. Our eyes can only record those which range between violet and red, but our nerves and ears can detect others which are invisible. For example, there are the heat waves which are too long for us to see. But if, by heating an object, we decrease the length of the waves until they come within the limits of our vision we see the heat waves as red. And by still further heating the object the hotter waves appear to us as violet, white or yellow; white being, as you know, merely a mixture or combination of the various light waves. In other words, my dear boy, our eyes, our nerves, our ears, and in all probability our noses as well, are much like radio receiving sets. We can 'tune in' waves of light, sound, heat and scent within certain limits, and, like radio receiving sets, we often fail to 'tune out' interferences. Many sounds are far too high or too low for the human ear to detect, just as many light waves are too short or too long for us to see."

"All extremely interesting and educational," I said, "But what bearing does all this have on the matter under discussion— the rendering of various objects— any object I believe you said— invisible?"

"Let me reply by asking you a question," smiled my friend. "Why are objects— human beings, houses, trees, anything we see— visible? Merely because they reflect light," he continued without waiting for my answer. "Very well, then. We see an object because it reflects light; we see colors on that object because it has properties which cause it to absorb certain light rays and to reflect others— if red to us, it absorbs the violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow and orange rays. If it appears white it reflects all the rays. If black, it absorbs them. In other words we do not actually see the object at all. We merely see the light waves reflected from the object. And if means can be found to cause the object to absorb the light rays—"

"You'd have a black object instead of a colored one," I laughed.

"Exactly," agreed my friend quite unperturbed. "Provided the absorption was imperfect," he added. "But," he continued, "if the means were such as to cause perfect absorption, in other words to allow the light waves to pass through the object, then it would become invisible, just as clear glass is invisible, even though glass reflects certain waves of light which cannot be detected by the human eye."

I chuckled. The idea of transforming opaque objects to transparent objects seemed highly amusing. "Go to it," I laughed, "Why not begin with the ladies? Their clothes are pretty nearly transparent now."

"If you're trying to be facetious there's no use in my attempting to explain my ideas and theories," commented Dr. Unsinn in an injured tone.

"I wasn't laughing at your theories," I assured him. "And I'm really interested, even if I don't see what you're getting at."

"If your sense of logic and your knowledge of science were as highly developed as your sense of humor, and your knowledge of women's garments, you might more readily grasp what I am 'getting at' as you put it," he said dryly. "However," he continued, "I had no intention of conveying the idea that I believed visible objects could be rendered invisible by such means. But if, by altering the frequency or lengths of light waves reflected from an object, we could render such waves too short or too long for the human eye to register, then the object would become wholly invisible."

By this time I was really interested. My friend's arguments were, I knew, sound. If the frequency of one form of vibratory wave could be altered; if an oscillating wave could be changed to a direct wave or vice versa, if the inaudible radio waves could be made audible by the simplest of instruments, was there any scientific reason why light waves ordinarily visible might not be made invisible?

"And the man who succeeds in accomplishing such a feat will control the world," declared Dr. Unsinn interrupting nay thoughts. "Imagine it! Think for a moment what it would mean I He could command anything, everything. He could amass millions, billions if he wished. He could control the destinies of nations! No treaties, no plots, no business deals could be secret. He could go anywhere, unknown, unsuspected, unseen. Why," he exclaimed, as he sprang from his chair and began excitedly pacing the room. "Think what it would mean to a nation! Armies, battleships, invisible! And—"

"Think what it would mean to the crooks," I broke in. "Better not delve too far, Old Man. You might succeed and your secret might leak out. Well, I must be going. Good iuck to you in your experiments. And"— with a laugh, "Let's hope that the next time I see you I shan't see you at all."

2: An Amazing Demonstration

A FEW days after the foregoing conversation with my old friend, Doctor Unsinn, important business unexpectedly called me to South America.

Although his words often occurred to me on the long journey south, yet I gave them little serious consideration, for I knew that Lemuel, like so many scientific men, was prone to theorize and to argue most plausibly and convincingly in support of some theory, even if he had no real faith in it. And, amid new scenes and new friends, and with matters of much -more pressing importance to occupy my attention, all thoughts of Dr. Unsinn's weird ideas were completely driven from my mind.

Not until several months later, when I was homeward hound, did I again think of our last conversation. I had, to be sure, dropped him a postcard now and then, but I had received no reply and did not expect any. Lemuel was never one to write, and he considered it a waste of time to carry on a purposeless

correspondence with anyone, although he would fill page after page with facts, figures and theories in letters to other scientists. Now, however, as I recalled our conversation, I found myself wondering if he had actually attempted to carry his theory to a test. Of course the idea was ridiculously bizarre and unattainable and yet, I felt sure that Dr. Unsinn had actually been in earnest and really believed that it was scientifically possible to produce invisibility in solid matter.

And the more I mentally reviewed his words and analyzed his statements, the more I felt that he might be right, at least theoretically. After all, wa3 such a feat any more remarkable than the fact that the ship's wireless operator was talking and listening to people thousands of miles distant and separated from our ship by countless leagues of sea and land? And yet the idea of any material object being invisible seemed so far-fetched and supernatural that I could not bring myself to 'believe that Lemuel would ever attempt to experiment along such lines. Nevertheless, I had thought so much on the subject that, at the first opportunity after my arrival, and reaching my apartment, I called Dr. Unsinn, by phone and, after the usual greetings, asked how he was succeeding in his black art. Perhaps he felt slightly piqued at my tone or my words, but instantly there was a change in his voice and he replied, rather shortly, that it was evident that I had not improved in my attitude towards science, but that, as an old chum and friend, he would be glad to have me call whenever I found it convenient.

Just why my curiosity had been aroused I cannot say, hut curious I was nevertheless and within the hour I was at Lemuel's door. His Filipino servant Miguel, answered the bell and greeted me with a welcoming grin on his usually emotionless face.

"The Señor Doctor is in the laboratory," he announced as I entered. "He say you will please to await him in the library. He will arrive in one little moment."

I was somewhat surprised for, as a rule, I was welcome to enter Lemuel's holy of holies whenever I called, and never before had I been asked to await his pleasure like a perfect stranger. But no doubt I thought, he was busy on some delicate experiment and did not wish to be interrupted. Entering the library I turned to a table littered with magazines and scientific reports and rather idly glanced through them. A sound, like the creaking of a footstep on a loose board caused me to turn, but the door was open, the hallway was in plain view and no one was in sight. Once more I resumed my perusal of the periodicals and was becoming a bit interested in an article I ran across, when I wag startled by a low chuckle. Instantly I wheeled about, surprised that I had not heard my friend's approach, only to find the room empty. Then, as I stood, rather foolishly gaping I fear, and puzzled to understand how my ears had deceived me, I fairly jumped. Out of the obviously empty room came Dr. Unsinn's unmistakable voice.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," it said, "You're looking exceedingly well after your trip."

For an instant a strange creepy sensation swept over me. Then I realized that this must be one of my friend's practical jokes. No doubt he had installed some sort of telephone or loud speaker arrangement in the apartment and was testing it out on me.

As nearly as I could judge, the words had come from the farther corner of the room where there was a large, deeply-upholstered chair. Taking a step nearer, I peered into the corner, trying to discover the hidden instrument. And as I gazed at the chair I rubbed my eyes. and wondered if I were taking leave of my senses.

Slightly above the back of the chair and suspended in mid-air were a pair of spectacles. On the left side and a short distance below was a round metal disc and also seemingly floating in the atmosphere, were a number of buttons, a gold watch and chain, two small ornamental silver buckles, some cuff links and a large signet ring. Just below these and suspended a few inches above the chair seat were several silver coins, while just above the floor four rows of small metal rings hung without any support whatsoever.

Even while I gazed, dumbfounded, utterly at a loss to account for this strange hallucination, that ghostly chuckle again issued from the corner, and Lsaw the various objects sway, the coins shift their position and the ring move towards the spectacles which seemed to follow it, as though drawn by a magnet, as it again descended to its former position. Then, once again, the uncanny voice spoke.

"My dear boy, your expression is most remarkable," it said. "You really should see yourself. But it is most gratifying to me for it proves my test is a success. If I remember correctly, you remarked, when I last saw you, that you hoped the next time you saw me you would not: see me at all. Well, your wish is granted, you are gazing— or rather I might say, gaping, at me without seeing me. But I do not wonder you are amazed and also incredulous— don't deny it, I can see you think this some hoax. However—"

I had been gazing, gaping; jaw dropped, mouth open, eyes fairly popping, as the voice spoke, and fascinated, I saw the watch, the discs and the money slowly rise upward and come towards me. The next instant I fairly shrieked and leaped back. An unseen ghostly hand had gripped my shoulder! A hearty peal of laughter rang through the apartment as, shaken, almost terror stricken, I shrank back against the old-fashioned mantel,

"Yes, my experiment is a complete success," announced the disembodied voice, "but there is no need to carry the test further. You see my 'black art' as you call it has worked, and the impossible has been made possible. But I feel you will be more at ease if I am visible. No doubt it will take time to accustom yourself to the phenomenon."

Hardly had the last word been issued when the watch, the discs and the coins vanished, and Dr. Unsinn stood before me, as solid, as substantial and as natural as ever.

I collapsed. It was almost as great a shock to my nerves to see my friend materialize from the air as it had been to hear his voice, to feel his grip when he had been invisible, yes, invisible, for no longer could I doubt that the scientist had succeeded in making the impossible possible.

"I think I have answered your query of this morning," exclaimed Dr. Unsinn triumphantly, as he seated himself in his favorite chair. "I felt quite sure of ray.suecess even before you arrived," he continued, "I could not be sure, however, for, strangely enough— and quite surprising and as yet somewhat inexplicable to me, I can see myself in a mirror even when invisible to others. But I tried it to a slight extent on Miguel, although I dared not put the fellow to a thorough test— too superstitious and excitable you know. Might have died of fright or have bolted, if I had spoken, or if he had noticed anything such as my watch or buttons. Ah, you noticed such objects did you not?"

By this time I had regained a bit of my composure and enough breath to speak. "I'll say I did," I replied. "But why allow such objects to remain visible?"

"Hmm, that is my great difficulty," replied Lemuel regretfully. "It is obvious that the same treatment will not serve for all objects. I have learned how to render any organic substance invisible, but, as yet, I have not discovered how to accomplish the result with inorganic matter. My body, my clothing, my shoes, yes, even objects of wood are, by my method, easily rendered invisible, but metals— my watch, my suspender buttons, the coins in my pocket and the eyelets for my shoe strings resist, so far, all my efforts."

"But how," I interrupted, "do you do it?"

Dr. Unsinn smiled knowingly. "That is a secret I do not care to divulge," he replied. "But," he went on, "in a general way it is along the lines I suggested during our last conversation on the subject,-— by altering the frequency of light waves so that they become invisible to the human eye. As you, my friend, are deplorably ignorant of higher physics, I may perhaps better explain the process by comparing it with certain phenomena of radio with which you may be more or less familiar. Do you know the meaning of the term 'heterodyne?' "

I nodded.

"Good," continued Lemuel. "Then I can state that by my process I send out certain vibratory waves from my apparatus, and these, striking the light rays, reflect them baek with a frequency which renders them invisible. In other words, the light rays which would, normally, strike a solid object, and, being reflected therefrom, would cause that object to become visible, are prevented from striking that object by my method, but strike an armor of an envelope of outgoing vibratory waves. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," I lied blithely, not in the least understanding the scientific side of the explanation, but deeply interested nevertheless. "But," I asked, "I don't

understand why some objects remain visible while others vanish, and I didn't notice any apparatus for bringing on your astounding invisibility."

"I do not myself fully understand why organic objects should respond to my treatment and inorganic objects should resist it," admitted my friend. "But it is probably due to the fact that inorganic materials do not throw off my vibratory waves at the same frequency as organic materials. But I will solve the problem; I must solve it! As for your other query, the appliance which I employ is very compact and becomes invisible together with myself. At first the apparatus was cumbersome and clumsy, but I have now perfected it and have it so readily and perfectly under control that it is even more simple than tuning-in on a small radio receiving set. Indeed, the results may he brought about slowly and gradually, as I will demonstrate."

As Dr. Unsinn stood before me a strange, incredibly weird change came over him. A thin haze seemed to envelop his body, and as I stared fascinated, the haze seemed slowly to clear away and to my indescribable amazement I saw the curtained doorway leading into the room whose portiere and parts of whose frame appeared through my friend's body and head. If ever there was a ghost Lemuel was one. And then, as if snuffed out, Lemuel completely vanished and only his spectacles, the fraternity button on his lapel, his watch and chain, his cuff-links, his belt and arm-garter buckles, his ring, watch and chain and the other metaliic objects of his apparel remained to assure my reeling senses that Dr. Unsinn still stood before me.

I cannot begin to describe the sensation of thus seeing my companion vanish before my eyes, but it was nothing compared to the creepy, uncanny nerve-racking sensation which followed, as Lemuel's characteristic chuckle issued from the transparent air and he again spoke.

"For Heaven's sake I" I cried, "Don't do that. I'll have a nervous collapse if that disembodied voice of yours keeps on."

The voice laughed, but the next instant my friend was before me as substantial as ever.

"You'll get accustomed to the sensation," he declared, "but—"

"Never," I broke in. "No normal person could ever get accustomed to seeing a man vanish before his eyes or to hearing a voice talking from thin air."

"Hmm, I had rather expected something of this sort," admitted Lemuel. "No doubt it is a bit unnerving but you must accustom yourself to the phenomenon. Now, if you will follow my directions and, using a duplicate instrument, will render yourself invisible—"

"I will not!" I declared. "I have no desire to try the experiment. But even if I did I fail to see how that would render your disappearance any less uncanny."

"It is my belief," replied Dr. Unsinn, "that if you were treated by my waves I would still be visible to you and you to me. I am, as I informed you, quite visible to

myself when I look in a mirror. This I assume is due to some effect which my apparatus exercises upon the optic nerves, thus enabling the eye to register the light-waves even when their frequency is accelerated. I am most anxious to test the matter and you will confer a great favor by acceding to my wishes."

"Not a bit of it," I declared. "You can monkey with such things all you wish, but I'm perfectly satisfied to remain visible."

Lemuel shook his head sadly. "You're a conservative imbecile," he informed me. "I had counted on your accompanying me, as I go about, in order to note the effect upon the public, and it would be most desirable that you should also be invisible."

"Look here," I said. "I know you can vanish; I know it's all a perfectly natural feat, but it's too devilishly creepy and uncanny for my nerves. And if you're going to keep on being snuffed out and talking from an invisible mouth I'll leave you to your own devices and not come near your place."

Dr. Unsinn grinned. "You forget that you couidn't prevent me from coming to see you." he reminded me. "I could enter your apartment unseen and unsuspected. I might be seated on one of your chairs or lying on a couch in the same room with you and you'd never suspect it."

"If I didn't see your confounded watch and other metaliic articles," I assented. "But with all your darned scientific ardor I know you're not one to butt-in where you're not wanted— even for the sake of an experiment."

"But all joking aside," said my friend, "I am sorry that your nerves should be upset by my demonstration. However, there is, I think, a means of overcoming all your objections and yet helping me with my most valuable and interesting experiments. I have, in fact, devised a little instrument which will enable you to see me even when I am invisible to others."

Rising, he opened a cabinet, and turning, handed me a small rectangular box slightly larger than a cigarette case. To one end of the box a fine braidec cord was attached with the other end terminating in a pair of metal-rimmed, slightly tinted, eyeglasses.

"If you will place the detector case in your pocket and adjust the glasses on your nose, we will try an interesting test," announced Dr. Unsinn.

"Look here," I said. "Is this some darned trick to make me invisible?"

"I assure you it is not," he declared. "But if I am not vastly mistaken it will prevent me from becoming invisible to you."

Somewhat hesitatingly, and without the least faith in the apparently simple device, I slipped the case in my breast pocket and placed the glasses on my nose. As far as I could see all objects remained the same as before, though everything, including Lemuel's face, took on a peculiar pinkish tint, due, I supposed, to the color of the glasses.

"I presume you have no difficulty in seeing the various objects about the room, including myself," said my friend.

"Not a bit," I assured him.

"Then, if you will kindly press the lever on the case we will proceed."

Examining the case, I noticed a small lever or arm which fitted snuggly into a small groove on one edge of the affair. "Lift the lever and move it forward — toward the cord, as far as it will go," said my friend.

A slight click followed by an almost inaudible whistling sound issued from the case as I obeyed his instructions. But, as far as I could see, these were no other results. Lemuel still sat in his chair, his legs crossed, his elbows on the chair-arms, the tips of his fingers together, and his mild blue eyes looking over the tops of his glasses.

"The confounded contraption's a dud," I exclaimed, "everything's just the same."

"Precisely," my friend agreed. "But just remove the glasses from your eyes for a moment."

As I complied with his request I uttered a cry of utter amazement. Dr. Unsinn was absolutely invisible!

"Now replace the glasses," said his disembodied voice.

Hardly knowing what to expect, absolutely dumbfounded, I again placed the glasses before my eyes and there sat my friend as before. I could not believe it. I could not believe that this "now you see him and now you don't" effect was produced by the glasses. No, I felt sure, it was a trick on Lemuel's part. He must manage to vanish and to reappear coincidently with my donning or removing the lenses. But he assured me— quite heatedly and convincingly— that he had remained in the invisible state throughout fine experiment, and, moreover, he was so evidently highly elated at the success of his invention that at last I was forced to believe that the magic glasses actually rendered the inviBible visible. But my brain was now in a complete chaos. My friend's power to render himself invisible, the fact that certain objects remained visible, the effect of the glasses rendering him visible to me while still invisible to ordinary eyes, were all unquestionable facts; but they were so weird, uncanny and downright supernatural, that I felt as if in a confused, preposterous dream, and I half expected to wake up at any moment.

"It's splendid," exclaimed Lemuel, interrupting my chaotic thoughts. "Even if I cannot overcome your absurd and unreasonable objections to becoming invisible it now matters little."

"Look here!" I ejaculated. "Just what are you planning to do? Are you going out to amass the millions you spoke of, to control the world? I'll admit there's no reason why you should not succeed— possessing your secret, nothing is impossible of attainment, but if you plan taking me along you're mistaken. I'm not

invisible and I don't intend to be, and I can easily foresee where I'd be the goat for any confounded ghostly acts you perpetrated."

Dr. Unsinn laughed heartily. "My dear boy!" he cried, controlling his merriment. "You appear to forget that I am a scientist and a respected member of the community with a reputation to uphold. I have not the least desire nor intention to overstep the bounds of honesty, law, or proper behavior, even if invisible. If I were so minded I could, as you know, help myself to the world's treasures, could control the destinies of nations, could in fact place myself beyond the power of man or the law. But my sole idea is to use my discovery for the benefit of mankind, to perfect it and give it to the world, as so many great discoveries have been given. We men of science are never materialists—"

"You're an idiot!" I exclaimed. "Benefit of mankind ! Give it to the world ! Why, if you gave your discovery to the world— if you gave the secret to anyone— it would be a curse to mankind; you'd be destroying law and order and the world!"

"Hmm, perhaps there is something in that," admitted Lemuel regretfully. "But at any rate, I must discover how to treat inorganic substances before any very extensive experiments can be conducted. It would hardly do for a crowd to see a watch and buttons wandering about without visible attachment or reason."

"You might leave your watch behind, and use bone or fibre buttons," I suggested.

"But, my dear man," objected my friend, "unless I can render all substances invisible I shall feel that my efforts have been in vain."

"And I sincerely hope you fail," I informed him. "I don't see what good it will do for the rest of the world, and if it leaks out, Heaven help us."

"Just what thousands of conservative hide-bound persons have said of every great discovery of the past," exclaimed Lemuel, as I rose to take my leave.

3: Dr. Unsinn Perfects His Invention

AS I walked towards my apartment, my mind was, of course, filled with thoughts of my friend's amazing discovery. And, among other matters, it came to me, as a rather curious and amusing fact, that Dr. Unsinn, who had dwelt so enthusiastically upon the material possibilities of invisibility, when he first discussed the matter, was now far more interested in proving his scientific theories than in profiting by his discovery. It was typical of the man, and is, I believe, of most scientists. But a more disturbing thought was that my friend was deplorably absent-minded— a common trait of scientists also, especially when preoccupied with some experiment, and, being so inherently honest and frank himself, he was too prone to assume that his fellow-beings were the same. In this lay, so I feared, a very grave danger. I remembered occasions in the past when, suddenly sidetracked by some new lead, he had completely forgotten formulae or

calculations which had enabled him to succeed in some experiment, and had never been able to duplicate the results. Might he not, in endeavoring to perfect some feature of his own discovery, forget some important detail and find himself unable to restore himself to visible form? It waa in fact this chance that had caused me to refuse to test his device upon myself. I could see where it might be moat entertaining and advantageous to become invisible temporarily, but I had no deBire to remain in that condition indefinitely, and any failure of Lemuel's device, any miscalculation, any accident or any sudden illness on his part might leave me forever incapable of resuming my visible form. The risk to be sure might be small, but it was far too great for me to take. And finally, there was the chance that Dr. Unsinn might, in his ardor and enthusiasm, divulge his secret. Unquestion-ably he would wish to announce his discovery to his fellow scientists; if he did so some one would make the fact public and then, as I had said to Lemuel, Heaven help mankind. My head swam and I fairly trembled at thought of what would occur should my friend's secret fall into the hands of unprincipled men. Law, society, governments would be powerless. Possessing the power to become invisible, crooks could defy the world. They could loot banks, state treasuries, mints and all other sources of hoarded millions, unseen, unhampered and leaving no traces of their identity. Murder, robbery, rapine, any and all crimes could be committed without fear of detection or punishment. Even if caught unawares and thrown into prison an invisible man could walk out without being seen. No walls could hold him, no court try him, no punishment be dealt him. And even if the secret were known to all, it would make little difference, unless, as Lemuel had seemed to think, a person invisible himself could see others when under the effect of the apparatus. The next instant I laughed out so loudly that passers-by turned and stared at me. What a fool I had been I How ridiculous my worry over any such possibility! I had forgotten about the marvelous glasses! My friend's secret might become public property and yet be harmless, even in the hands of the most desperate criminals. Just as there is an antidote for every poison, so Lemuel's magic glasses would safeguard the world from any evil that might result from his discovery. Moreover, there was always the chance that he would be unable to discover a means of rendering inorganic matter invisible, and if so, his invention would be of little value either to honest or dishonest men. At thought of the weird situations that might result, I chuckled. I could imagine a gunman, himself invisible, holding up some citizen, and I could visualize the amazed expression of the victim as he saw a revolver suspended in mid-air and pointing at him, and heard a disembodied voice ordering him to throw up his hands. And it was amusing to picture motor cars, apparently empty, threading their way through traffic and stopping and starting at the signals of a visible whistle blown by an invisible traffic officer. Yes, one's imagination could run riot and nothing imagined could equal the reality if my friend's, invention came into general use. And, no

doubt, I had greatly overestimated the dangers and the undesirable features of the discovery. In all probability the invention, once it became known, would create little more excitement or wonder than had followed the invention of the telephone, the radio or any other epochal thing. People would take it aa a matter of course and no greater harm would come of it than had resulted from the discovery of the steam engine, electricity, or any other revolutionary invention, all of which had been looked upon as inimical to the world and to mankind when they had been first announced.

At any rate, I could not afford to worry over Lemuel's affairs even if his marvelous achievement continually occupied my thoughts.

For several days I heard nothing from Dr. Unsinn, and I was far too busy with my own work to visit him. No doubt he was deep in his experiments and I felt sure he would notify me when he had perfected anything new. And in this I was not mistaken. Answering my telephone, I was greeted by' Lemuel's voice.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I've conquered inorganic matter. Everything is perfected! Can you come over at once?"

As on my previous visit, Miguel admitted me, and, as before, he requested me to wait for my friend in the library. But this time I was prepared and had no intention of being either frightened or amazed at anything Dr. Unsinn might spring on me. At least, I thought I was; but I had underestimated my friend's abilities and the astounding possibilities of his perfected discovery.

Standing before the old-fashioned fireplace, and listening intently for the slightest sound which might betray the approach of an invisible being, I peered about the room half expecting to see Lemuel materialize or to hear his bodiless voice speaking to me.

As I did so a thin fog or mist seemed to cloud my vision. I can best describe the sensation as similar to a "blind headache" from which I had at times suffered. I could distinguish every object in the library, but everything appeared to he slightly out of focus. I rubbed my eyes and stared again. In the wall opposite where I stood a luminous spot appeared; other bright spots seemed to take form on the ceiling and the floor and on the other walls Without doubt, I thought, I was in for a terrific headache, for such bright, luminous spots always appeared before my eyes when such an attack was coming on. And then a strange, a marvelous, an absolutely astounding and terrifying change took place. Floor, ceiling, walls ; every object within the room melted away.. It was exactly the effect that I had seen when a film or a lantern-slide is melted by the heat of the projection machine. One instant I was standing before the fireplace in Dr. Unsinn's library; the next instant I was in the centre of a blank, standing in a void. To the right, where a wall and two windows had been, was the broad, tree-shaded street with its electric lights and shadowy houses on the further side. Above me was space; below me intense, fathomless blackness. And yet, my feet rested on solid matter and as, too

amazed and terrified even to cry out, I felt gropingly with my outstretched hands, my fingers touched the mantel and a nearby table with magazines that rustled at my touch. And then, instantly, I knew what had occurred. Incredible, utterly unbelievable as it seemed, I knew that Lemuel by his uncanny, his almost supernatural invention had amused himself and had demonstrated his powers by rendering the entire apartment invisible!

My fright gave way to absolute wonder. It was impossible but true, and feeling confident that I was right, I rather hesitatingly took a step forward. Never shall I forget the sensation. Surrounded by nothingness, as far as my vision went, suspended in mid-air, yet I was walking as securely, as firmly and on as solid a floor as ever. Reassured, I turned towards the street that stretched before me and far beneath me. As if in a dream I walked for-ward with arms extended, and, the next moment, banged with uncomfortable force against a solid wall. And at my involuntary expletive, Lemuel's hearty laughter came from behind me, and I staggered back as an invisible hand slapped my shoulders.

"It works!" exclaimed the voice. "It's the most wonderful discovery ever made by man!"

"And the moat damnable way to wreck a man's nerves," I blurted out, as my hands came into contact with an invisible chair and I dropped weakly into it.

"Sorry I had to frighten you a bit," said my friend's voice. "But I wanted to test the matter thoroughly."

"If you want to keep my friendship, you'll turn off your confounded machine and get things back to normal," I replied testily.

"Oh, all right," agreed Lemuel, "but look here, old man, can't you wait a minute? I—"

"I'm looking here, there and everywhere," I exclaimed. "And there's nothing to see and I've had enough of this."

"Dash it all, then I was wrong after all," cried Dr. Unsinn. "I felt sure that while subject to the treatment one person could see another, and that while invisible a person could see objects invisible to others. Well, after all, it doesn't matter so much,"

"You get things back to visibility again before you start lecturing," I commanded. "It's worse than a nightmare,"

Before I had finished speaking I found myself once more amid the familiar surroundings of my friend's library with Lemuel seated, grinning triumphantly, in his favorite chair.

"You didn't give me enough time to test my theories thoroughly," he complained. "I wished to try the glasses again."

"You tested it enough to suit me and more," I said. "I'll take the glasses on your say-so. In fact, from now on, I'll believe anything you say in regard to your discovery or invention or black magic or whatever it is. If you say you can make

the entire universe invisible I'll not argue with you. But let me tell you it's lucky you didn't live a century or so ago. You'd be burned for a witch before

"You forget that it would be a difficult undertaking to burn an invisible being," he reminded me. "And just think how scared those witch-baiters would have been, if their stake and fire had suddenly vanished from before their eyes."

"And I'll wager that a lot of people will wish you had been executed before you made your devilish discovery," I told him.

"Not a bit of it!" he declared. "The world will welcome it and will acclaim me the greatest inventor and greatest benefactor of the human race."

"See here," I cried, all my old fears again possessing me, "Won't you listen to reason and common sense? You're so carried away with your success that you haven't stopped to think what it would mean, if you. let the world know of your invention. No, don't interrupt me, I've worried over this ever since I was here last, and I'm going to have it out with you here and now. I'll admit you've succeeded better than I expected or hoped, for if you had failed to make inorganic substances invisible your invention might not have been so dangerous. As it is, the possibilities for destroying life, property, society and mankind are too tremendous to even think of. Can't you see what it would mean if crooks got hold of it? Can't you see what it would mean if it fell into the hands of Bolshevists, or revolutionists or governments? Why man, you'd upset the world, destroy civilization, wreak unspeakable woe and misery and terror."

"Piffle!" ejaculated Lemuel, "if everything and everybody was invisible the status of the world would remain unchanged. How could a criminal attack an invisible victim? Instead of facilitating crime it would deter crime. Instead of bringing on wars and destruction it would prevent such things. How could an army fight an invisible foe? How could a navy attack invisible ships ? And invisible police and officers of law and order could apprehend criminals much more readily. Besides, you forget about my glasses. If the public or any part of the public possessed these, nothing would be invisible to the wearers."

"Idiotic reasoning," I declared. "Suppose someone stole or learned your secret? Suppose the agent of a hostile nation got hold of it? Or suppose some gang of criminals secured the invention by fair means or foul? Is it likely that they would let the world know of the glasses which counteract the process? No, every moment that you possess the apparatus for working your devilish trick, you're threatening your fellow men and civilization with annihilation. If you wish to benefit the world, destroy every calculation, every bit"' of apparatus, every trace of what you've done and never divulge a word of it."

"You're an old scare-head," said Lemuel, though I could see that my words had had their effect. "And," he continued, "I have no intention of following your advice. There is not the slightest danger of my discovery being found out unless you or I divulge it. I shall not— for the present at least, and I know you will not.

Moreover, even if it were known, no one could work it. The procedure is known only to myself."

"Anything one man has done another can repeat," I reminded him.

"Possibly," he admitted, "but to proceed with my statement. I am free to grant that eertain things you have said are not without foundation. I had, in the beginning, expected to make my invention public, for of course it is impossible to patent it. Anyone could pirate the patent, and, availing himself of his knowledge could render himself invisible and thus beyond reach of the law. But I may decide not to give my discovery to the world at large. It all depends upon future experiments and tests. And, if you really feel as you say in regard to it, you'll help me to carry out my tests. If, in my judgment and in yours, these experiments prove the invention actually a peril to society then, I assure you, it will never be revealed to the public. But, if, on the other hand, you, as well as myself, are convinced that the discovery will be beneficial rather than inimical, I shall let the world know the secret."

"Hmm, well I suppose that's fair enough," I assented. "But before I agree I want to know what these experiments are which you have in mind."

"Certainly," said Lemuel. "I intend to go about while invisible, accompanied by you equipped with the glasses, and from personal observation determine just what will or might happen, and whether the power to become invisible would be beneficial or otherwise."

"I don't see anything to object to in that," I assured him, "and I'll agree to help you, provided you agree not to do anything which might result in my being held responsible. Remember, I will be visible and you. will not, and I'd hardly care to stand up in a police court and claim that an invisible companion was responsible for certain acts of which I was accused. No, Lemuel, I have no desire to end my days in an insane asylum."

"But, my dear boy," chuckled my friend, "that would be a splendid test, and of course I could always materialize at the last moment. Just imagine the effect on a policeman or a magistrate!"

"Yes, just imagine it," I replied drily. "And unless you're willing to agree to my terms you can imagine your experiments without ray aid."

"Yon take me far too seriously," exclaimed Lemuel. "I have no intention of overstepping the bounds of the law, and I shall certainly so conduct my experiments that no blame can be attached to you. But," he added regretfully, "it would be much better if you also would submit to the effect of my device."

"Well, I won't and that's an end to that," I declared positively. "And," I continued, "there's another matter. You'll have to promise me that you will not try the experiment of making things invisible by wholesale, — no vanishing of rooms, buildings or other structures while occupied. A terrible panic might and most certainly would result. And this includes trolley cars, railway trains, moving

vehicles and similar things. A panic is the easiest thing in the world to start and the hardest to stop."

"I promise," assented my friend, "but I shall most assuredly try my invention on unoccupied structures and other objects."

"I don't care what you try it on provided you do not endanger life or property," I told him.

"Then we'll start our experiment tomorrow," exclaimed Lemuel. "We'll start from your apartment. If convenient to you I'll call at ten tomorrow morn-

4: Dr. Unsinn's Experiment

I DO not know exactly what object Dr. Unsinn had in view, or what he hoped to accomplish by his "experiment." Certainly he had demonstrated his discovery and had proved it successful by his tests on myself. Possibly he felt that human sight might vary, that some persons might find him invisible while to others he was visible, or again, he may have wished merely to gratify his own vanity, and enjoy the sensation of moving unseen among his fellows. He could not, in fact, clearly explain to me what he expected or why he was so insistent upon having me accompany him, when, as we had agreed, we set out from ray apartment. But in view of the events which followed I feel sure that it was fate or predestination that led him to undertake his experiment.

Wearing the marvelous glasses, in order that I might not lose sight of my companion, who had rendered himself invisible, I hailed an approaching trolley car. But habit is a strong and persistent thing, and the human mind is greatly governed by the impressions it receives through the eyes, and, at the very outset of our venture I learned this to my chagrin. Boarding the car with Lemuel at my heels, I handed the conductor a dime and he returned a nickel in change. I was on the point of handing it back, and the word "two" was on the tip of my tongue when a nudge from Lemuel's elbow brought me to my senses. As niy friend was plainly visible to me I had completely forgotten that he was invisible to the conductor, and I mentally '.vowed to watch my step more closely in the future. There were few passengers in the car and my companion seated himself in one corner while I took the seat beside him. And presently habit once again came to the fore and came near to getting me into a most embarrassing situation. Quite forgetting, momentarily, that my friend was invisible, I spoke to him, and he, quite in his ordinary manner, replied. In fact we were carrying on quite an animated conversation when I was suddenly brought to a realization of what we were doing by the behavior of the other passengers. Everyone was gazing at me. Some curiously, others half pityingly, ag if thinking me either mad or intoxicated, while still others were grinning and thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of a man carrying on a conversation with himself. Even the conductor had entered the car and was

staring at me, a strangely puzzled expression on his face, as if undecided whether I was a dangerous lunatic or a common drunk. Fortunately, my presence of mind came to my rescue, and, flushing, but forcing a smile, I turned to an intelligent appearing gentleman near me. "I must apologize for my absent-mindedness," I stammered. "I was merely practising a bit of ventriloquism for my act, and inadvertently spoke aloud."

This lame explanation appeared to satisfy everyone. The passengers resumed their former occupations of staring vacantly out of the windows, reading their papers, or gazing absently at the advertising placards within the car, while the conductor, evidently relieved, betook himself again to the rear platform.

By now, however, the experiment was getting on my nerves. I had feared that my friend's absentmindedness might lead him into trouble and yet, by my own thoughtless actions, I had twice within a few moments barely escaped getting into deep water. And the fact that I could not speak my mind to my invisible companion, and that I had pledged myself to see the experiment through, only added to my irritation. As, inwardly fuming, I resolved to keep my mind constantly alert to avoid further embarrassment, the car came to a stop and a stout, pompous and overdressed middle-aged woman entered. As the car started with a jerk she lurched forward, and, before I realized her intention, she plumped herself into the apparently vacant seat beside me. A grunt from my invisible friend, and a terrific abriek from the stout female instantly followed, and, as if bounced from a spring, she sprang up, her eyes blazing, her face white with indignation and fairly shouting a torrent of abuse as she shook her beringed fist in my face,

"Brute! Disreputable old rake!" she screamed, "I'll have you jailed! I'll have you imprisoned!"

Instantly the car was in an uproar. Passengers crowded forward; necks were craned; everyone talked at once, and the conductor pushed his burly figure between the irate female and myself.

"Hey, what's the game?" he demanded. "What did this guy do to yer, lady?"

"He obtruded himself beneath me— the unspeakable fiend!" she shrieked. "He endeavored to embrace me and pinched me."

"I did nothing of the sort," I declared, fairly shouting to make myself heard. "I—"

"Tell it to the judge," interrupted the conductor, stepping towards me.

Fortunately for me the gentleman to whom I had offered my ventriloquistie explanation, now intervened in my behalf.

"The lady is mistaken," he declared, rising and restraining the conductor. "I was observing her and this gentleman closely. She seated herself in the vacant seat and this gentleman did not move. Possibly—"

"Yeah, the old guy's right," chimed in a greasy mechanic opposite. "He never done nothin'. The dame's nutty. What guy'd want her to squat in his lap?"

Instantly the woman's wrath was turned on this new victim, but before violence could be done the conductor intervened. "Hey, quit this roughhouse stuff," he ordered. "If youse want to fight take it outside. Guess you're in wrong, lady. Sit down, or get off and call a cop."

Still glaring, and voicing her opinions of everyone, and especially of me, she again descended ponderously to Lemuel's seat.

An involuntary exclamation escaped my lips, but it was uncalled for. During the excitement, Dr. Unsinn had risen and had slipped unseen to the rear platform where he was beckoning to me wildly.

Only too glad to escape, I rose and joined him and, as the car came to a halt, we stepped off.

"Confound the woman!" he exclaimed the moment we were alone. "She very nearly fractured my thighs. You would have gotten us into a nice fix if she had. How could a doctor set an invisible bone? And the apparatus in my pocket might have been ruined so that I could not have regained my visible form. You'll have to be more careful in future. Why didn't you stop her or warn me?"

For an instant I waa too amazed at his outburst to speak. So he, too, was blaming me for all the trouble. This was too much.

"Look here!" I cried, "I've had enough of this. You're as well able to take care of yourself while invisible as when visible. If you're going to depend on me to keep you out of trouble I'll quit and you can go ahead with your damnable experiment alone. And you talk about getting into trouble! You're safe and I'm the goat every time. Think it's fun for me to be called names and threatened with arrest? I'd look nice trying to explain matters to the police or the judge, wouldn't I?"

Lemuel chuckled. "Come, come," he exclaimed, placing his hand on my arm. "I didn't mean to have you take it that way, Old Man. But we'll both have to be a trifle more circumspect in future. And, really, it was most amusing. Now I propose taking a taxi hereafter. I am convinced that trolley cars are not suitable conveyances for me in conducting my tests. But the test was most conclusive after all."

By now the humor of the incident had outweighed the more serious side of the affair in my mind, and I laughed heartily with Lemuel as we waited on the corner for an empty taxi to approach.

Within the vehicle we could converse freely, for the noise of the motor and the surrounding traffic prevented the driver from hearing our voices.

Lemuel, elated at the success of his experiments, was now becoming reckless and suggested that it would be most interesting and amusing to render the taxi and ourselves invisible. But I sternly forbade it. "You're an idiot." I declared, "we could be maimed or killed even if we were invisible. Don't you realize we'd be in a wreck within ten seconds? If you make any more such crazy suggestions I'll see that you're placed in a lunatic asylum."

"Easier said than done," he reminded me, "but, all joking aside, I must try the effect on something more than myself. Ah, I have it! Stop the cab, will you?"

As he had been speaking we had passed a huge office building in course of erection, and, as I paid the taxi driver, Lemuel was gazing appraisingly at the towering structure of steel and stone.

"A splendid opportunity!" he cried enthusiastically. "Possibly my pocket apparatus may not have sufficient power but—"

"Confound you!" I cried. "Didn't you promise me you wouldn't try your invention on any structure?"

"I did not," he declared decisively. "I merely agreed not to render invisible any structure containing human occupants. This building is vacant. A strike is in progress and the place is deserted."

"Well, you promised not to do anything which would cause a panic or trouble," I persisted.

"And I intend to keep my promise," he replied. "I shall defer my experiment until the noon hour when the streets will be practically deserted, and there can be no panic. And I fail to see how it can cause any trouble."

All arguments whieh I could offer were in vain, and, I must confess, I was rather fascinated by my friend's suggestion. To cause a towering steel and stone structure to vanish would, indeed, be a feat— if it could be done, and I was rather anxious to find what the effect on the public would be. But as it was still nearly two hours before noon we resumed our way, with Lemuel seeking new opportunities to test his discovery on the public.

The sidewalks were thronged with shoppers, and presently, as we pushed our way through the crowd, a terrified shriek pierced the hum and noises of the busy street, as my companion, either accidently or thoughtlessly, bumped into a passing woman. As she collapsed in a faint I sprang forward; but Dr. "Unainn was before me. Completely forgetting that he was invisible, he stooped down, raised the victim's head and then, lifting her in his arms, started for a nearby drug store. Instantly pandemonium broke loose. Screams, shouts, frightened cries rose from the crowd which had quickly gathered, and awed, unable to believe their eyes, men, women and children shoved, crowded, and fought to make way for the woman's form floating in air through their midst. For a moment my heart seemed to cease beating; All my fears appeared about to be justified. In an instant there would be a panic with crushed and trampled bodies and all the attendant horrors. But for once the impending catastrophe was stayed by the very panic and terror of the crowd. So intent were the people on the incredible Bight which had terrified them that they stood as if turned to stone, petrified with amazement and fear.

And then a still more incredible thing happened. The woman's body suddenly vanished! Lemuel had bethought himself, and, undoubtedly confused at the condition's he had created, had tried to improve matters by rendering his victim

invisible. And the seemingly supernatural occurrences had been witnessed by myself as well as by the crowd, for, in the meI6e the glasses had been wrenched from my nose and were hanging, dangling, useless and temporarily forgotten from my breast pocket. And as the woman's form vanished a strange sound, half sigh, half groan, arose from the gaping multitude. Before hundreds of eyes the impossible had taken place. A woman had fainted, without reason or cause she had risen and had floated through the air and had utterly vanished in the midst of the crowd. For an instant they remained spellbound, awed into absolute silence. And in that instant Lemuel had entered the drug store with his burden and had deposited her gently but hurriedly upon a chair, where, as instantaneously as she had vanished, she again resumed her customary form. As every occupant of the shop had rushed to the doors and windows to see what was taking place on the street, nobody noticed the sudden reappearance of the woman. To me it was all nearly as surprising as to the public, but I had sense enough left to hastily don my glasses, as Lemuel slipped past the white-clad employees of the store, and, taking care not to collide with another bystander, rejoined me.

We had no desire to linger and see the results of the affair, and hurried from the crowd and turned into a nearby cross street. I could scarcely berate my friend for what had occurred, for it had been an unavoidable accident, but I did not hesitate to use it as an example of the dire results which might follow if he kept on with his experiment or made his secret public.

Lemuel was, however, far more excited and disturbed than I, and without even attempting to reply he rushed into a subway entrance. Without stopping to think he hurried to the change booth and thrust a quarter under the wicket. Without glancing up, the occupant shoved back five nickels, and my friend gathered them up. But as the coins slid from the wooden shelf and vanished without apparent reason, and with no human hand grasping them, the man peered from his cage. An expression of mortal terror swept across his stolid features, and, with an inarticulate, choking cry, he reeled backward from his stool. But Lemuel did not stop. The events of the past few minutes had completely upset him, and the scientific mind when upset often becomes panicky. For the moment he had, no doubt, completely forgotten that he was invisible, and, rushing forward, he boarded the train with me at his heels. Fortunately it was a dull hour for the subway my friend was not forced to jostle or push his way, which most assuredly would have reresulted in further troubles— less than half a dozen passengers were within the car which we entered. Lemuel sat silent, evidently composing his thoughts, and fumbling in one of his pockets. The next moment a terrified shout reechoed through the car; a woman fainted; the guard appeared at the door; there was the hissing of released air, and the train came to a jolting, lurching stop. I had a premonition of what had occurred, and, snatching off the pink glasses, I found my worst fears more than fulfilled. The car and its occupants had

completely disappeared! With eyes fairly popping from their sockets, mouth agape, and shaking as if with ague, the guard stood on the platform of the next car, staring, utterly aghast, at the void that stretched between him and the car ahead. Reason and instinct told him it was impossible, but his senses told him that a car had completely vanished while speeding at fifty miles an hour, and had taken its passengers along with it. So thoroughly frightened and flabbergasted was the guard that even Lemuel's voice, issuing from space, failed to attract his attention.

"Confound the thing!" exclaimed my companion, "I must have pressed the wrong button, or it may have been shifted when I carried that fainting woman. Likely as not it wag injured when that miserable creature seated herself in my lap. Now—"

"My God, man! Can't you do something?" I cried, visions of the car and its oceupants remaining forever invisible flashing through my mind.

Then, as instantaneously and unexpectedly as it had vanished, the car was once more in the train. It had all occurred in a few seconds, and the bewildered passengers stared about, rubbing their eyes as if awakening from a dream, while the guard, blinking and muttering, jerked the signal cord and the train again rumbled on.

Fortunately for all concerned, Dr. Unsinn had managed to get his devilish machine to function properly, and no harm had came of the incident, but I had had about enough of it all, and I feared that, at any moment, the apparatus might fail entirely or might do the wrong thing. At the next stop I left the train, forcing my friend along with me, and, dragging him into an obscure corner of he station platform where there was no chance of being overheard, I expressed my view of his experiment, in no gentle terms.

"You can't expect a delicate device to withstand two hundred and fifty pounds of feminine flesh and bone, can you?" he demanded. "I'm not surprised that it was temporarily disarranged. But it's entirely right now. If you don't believe it I'll demonstrate it right here."

"Don't you dare!" I exclaimed. "You'll resume your normal form, as a demonstration, and we'll go to lunch. Then back to my apartments and no more of this experiment. You've caused enough trouble for one day and I'll have a nervous breakdown if this sort of thing continues."

"I'll agree on one condition," replied Lemuel with more readiness than I had expected. "I'm determined to try my experiment on that unfinished building. After that I'll cease my experiment for today."

In vain I argued. Lemuel could be as obstinate as a mule at times, and, at last, realizing that he was bound to carry out his desires and that if I left him he might bring about dire results when alone, I assented to his condition.

So, with Dr. Unsinn once more his usual self, we found a quiet restaurant where I was accustomed to dining. The waiter, having taken our order, handed me

a copy of the latest edition of a paper, and, half fearfully, I glanced through it, expecting to find an account of one or more of the strange occurrences for which we had been responsible. But nothing had appeared, and I decided that, in all probability, the witnesses had not cared to report an experience which would expose them to ridicule and a suspicion of insanity.

Lemuel was in high spirits. To be sure, he had made one or two mistakes, but, in each case, as he took care to point out to me, his errors had, as he put it, added to the value of his experiment and of his observations. And he could not resist crowing over me a bit when he called my attention to the fact that neither panic nor disasters had resulted.

"It is exactly as I foresaw," he declared. "The entirely new and unknown does not terrorize human beings. Wonder and amazement temporarily paralyze the muscles, and, as you should know, two opposed impressions cannot occupy the mind at the same time. Hence fear cannot have a place where wonder is predominant."

"No, my friend, your fears of my discovery creating a panic or causing terror and shock are absolutely unfounded."

"You forget about the woman who fainted, and the man in the subway," I reminded him.

"Utterly beside the question," he snorted. "In the case of the woman it was bodily contact which frightened her, and, in the other case, the fact that the money vanished. In neither case was it due to fright at my invisibility."

"It's hopeless to argue with you," I said. "Indirectly, your invisibility was at the bottom of it, and Heaven alone knows what a panic might have resulted if that car had remained invisible long enough for the passengers of the other cars to have investigated the cause of the train stopping."

"I can and shall prove I am right," he declared. "Come, we'll have a try at that building and I'll wager no one will be terrified."

"For Heaven's sake, don't vanish here!" I cried, as I saw Lemuel reach towards an inner pocket. "Wait until we are alone. I'd suggest a telephone booth as the most convenient and safest spot."

A few momenta later my friend entered a booth, and almost instantly emerged, visible only to myself. Hailing a taxi, we were soon in the vicinity of the partly completed Hartwell Building. It was the lunch hour and very few persons were on the street. Opposite the building a chauffeur dozed in his taxi, two fruit vendors argued in vociferous Italian on the corner, and a few pedestrians who had dined early were wandering about gazing into shop windows. Entering the main doorway of the building we found ourselves in the spacious rotunda with its litter of discarded building materials and abandoned scaffoldings.

"Ah, here we are!" exclaimed Lemuel gleefully. "Now, if my pocket apparatus can produce results on this edifice I shall feel that nothing is too great, to be rendered invisible. Entire armies, navies, cities, yes—"

"Then I hope it doesn't work," I interrupted.

But my hopes were in vain. As Lemuel had been speaking, he had adjusted his instrument and scarcely had my last word been uttered, when the twenty stories of concrete, steel and stone dissolved about us, leaving us, invisible to others, standing in air above the yawning abyss of the foundation excavation.

For a brief instant, no one within sight appeared to notice that the structure had vanished. Then the dozing chauffeur jerked upright, his jaw sagged, and with a wild yell he sat transfixed, pointing dramatically at the empty lot where the building had stood. At his cry everyone on the street turned. Shouts and exclamations drew occupants of stores and restaurants on the, run. With screeching horns taxis came tearing into the street, and in almost no time Nineteenth Street wa3 filled with a gaping, gesticulating, excited crowd.

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Lemuel triumphantly. "No one is frightened. All—" His words were cut short by the clanging of a bell as a patrol wagon came dashing around a corner, while from the opposite direction, the screaming siren of a fire truck added to the uproar.

"Quick!" I cried, "Someone's called the police and turned in a fire alarm. In a minute they'll be here. They'll find us and there'll be the devil to pay!"

Lemuel roared with glee. "You forget we're' invisible" he reminded me. "And it will be highly amusing to witness the reactions of the police and firemen when they find solid walls where obviously there are none. And imagine the results when those who succeed in entering vanish instantly."

"Turn off the damnable machine instantly," I commanded him, "this has gone far enough."

The police and firemen were advancing towards us, hesitatingly but determined, although what they expected to accomplish or why they imagined their services were required, is still a mystery to me. As I have said before, habit is one of the strongest of influences. Dr. Unsinn, being a great respector of law, and seeing the poliee approaching, succumbed to force of habit and almost involuntarily stopped his mechanism. Instantly the huge building once more towered above the street, and with a hoarse ciy of warning and alarm, the crowd broke and fled, seeking refuge in doorways and stores as if fearing the structure might crash thundering into the street. Even the police sprang back, but the firemen, to their credit be it said, stood their ground, and, thinking something was expected of them, turned half a dozen streams of water on the building. In the excitement Lemuel and I slipped unseen from a rear entrance and hurried from sight around a corner.

Despite all my experiences with my friend's discovery I was shaken and upset by this latest demonstration of his power, and even Lemuel was, I could see, in a highly excitable frame of mind. His device had exceeded even his most sanguine expectations and his experiment had, from his point of view, been a huge successSeveral times he started to speak, but each time I checked him, for the sidewalks were thronged with pedestrians and I had no desire to have attention turned towards us after our latest achievement.

We were now in a shopping district, and as we walked along, picking our way with care in order that Lemuel might not jostle some passer-by, I noticed a rough-looking, heavily-built fellow loitering near the edge of the sidewalk and furtively glancing at each woman who passed him. Suddenly he darted forward, snatched a handbag from a stylishly-dressed girl, and dashed up the street. Screaming that she had been robbed, the girl started after him. Cries of "Stop thief!" resounded from every side, and a score of persons turned and gave chase. Lemuel and I had been nearest to the fellow, and with one accord we were after him, quite forgetting that one of us was invisible. Dashing around a corner, the rascal entered an almost deserted side street with us at his heels and the howling mob half a block in the rear. In my youth I had been something of a runner, and Lemuel had, it flashed over me, won the coveted "S" of our university as a sprinter. Rapidly we gained upon the fellow, and, as he turned to duck into an alleyway, Lemuel grasped him by the coat with a command to halt.

Instantly, and without stopping, the fellow half turned and dealt a vicious, back-handed blow with his doubled fist. It caught Lemuel full in the face, and with a gasping cry he staggered back into my arms with a two inch gash laying bare the cheek bone and blood gushing from the wound. But even at that moment, while supporting my injured comrade, my attention was focussed upon the ruffian who had struck him down. Feeling the impact of his fist upon a fellow-being's flesh, he had wheeled, and, the next moment, stood rooted to the spot. Instead of a form stretched on the pavement or a battered man staggering back, not a living soul was near with the exception of myself. The fellow's eyes grew wide, his mouth opened, and the next moment he uttered a terrified scream, and dropping the hand-bag fell to his knees, covering his eyes with his hands, babbling incoherently, and shaking with mortal fear. Upon the flagging before me was a blotch of blood, and, from nowhere, drops of blood were slowly adding to the crimson pool. Lemuel might be invisible but the blood from his wound was not. To the cowering, superstitious wretch, the blood, slowly dripping from an unseen victim, must have been a most awful and terrifying sight.

The oncoming mob now was nearly upon us, and, a dozen fears swept through my confused brain. What if the blood stains on the pavement attracted attention and an explanation were demanded? What would happen to my invisible companion, as the mob, dashing onward, bore him down and trampled him under

foot? And what if the cowering wretch before us blurted out the truth? But I need not have worried. So intent were the man-chasers upon their quarry that they gave no heed even to me, and in a moment, the red blotch was completely obliterated by scores of feet, as the crowd surrounded us and seized the thief who offered no resistance. And almost by a miracle Dr. Unsinn escaped the fate I had feared. I sprang behind him as the mob reached us and thus partially shielded him, but despite this, the shouting, panting, perspiring crowd jostled and bumped him, tearing his coat half from his shoulders, knocking his spectacles into the street where they were instantly ground to bits underfoot, tearing his collar awry, knocking off his hat and, as I knew from his half-stifled grunts, exclamations and ejaculations, giving him many a painful jab and bump with elbows and shoulders. But in that hub-bub, the cries of any one man were inaudible, and as everyone jostled and pushed his neighbor no one noticed that an invisible but solid human form was in their midst. Luckily the mob surged forward around the thief and left a fairly clear space through which I halfdragged, half-pushed my battered, bruised and dishevelled comrade.

Attracted by the commotion, half a dozen taxis had drawn up to the curb, their drivers craning their necks and peering into the milling crowd about the captive, and giving no heed to anything else. Quickly opening the door of the nearest, 1 bundled Lemuel inside, and, at last succeeding in gaining the chauifeur's attention, I ordered him to drive off. He turned with a half-uttered oath and refused to move, but noticing my own rumpled appearance, and realizing I had been in the thick of the trouble, his tone changed and he asked what it was all about. In a few words I explained that it was merely a purse-snatcher, and that I had been knocked over in the melee. For an instant he gazed suspiciously at me, for my hands were a bit smeared with Lemuel's blood, and for a brief instant I trembled for fear he would drive us to the nearest police station. But he had lost interest in the crowd and excitement, and as I suggestively showed him a ten dollar bill, he grinned knowingly, threw in the gears and with loudly honking horn headed uptown as I had directed.

Hastily bandaging Lemuel's face with my handkerchief to prevent any further complications arising over blood dripping on the taxi seat or floor, and half-supporting him, for he was still dazed and groggy and without his glasses was almost as blind as a bat, I fanned him with my hat.

Presently he showed signs of recovering, took several deep breaths of relief and ruefully felt of his various bumps, contusions and bruises. Then, with a groan, he remarked: "Whew, that fellow packed an awful punch!"

"Yes" I agreed, "and obviously the fact that you are invisible does not prevent you from getting hurt."

"Nor from suffering," mumbled my companion, "I'm positive my jaw is fractured."

"Don't try to talk," I said. "I'd take you to a hospital or a doctor's office, but you'd have to be visible and you're in no fit shape to materialize in public. You look like a butchery."

By the time we reached my apartments Lemuel was near a collapse and was, I knew, suffering intensely. But he was still game, and with but little assistance walked up the steps and into my rooms where he instantly dropped upon a conch.

"Now, if you're able to, and the confounded thing isn't out of order, get back to your normal state," I commanded him. "I'll have my doctor here in a moment, but you've got to be visible first."

I was greatly worried for fear that Lemuel might faint or lose consciousness before he could restore himself to visibility, and I was so perturbed and excited that it never occurred to me that, even if he remained invisible, I could give the glasses to the physician and thus enable him to attend to my friend's injuries. However, to my relief, Lemuel fumbled with his mechanism, and presently was once more visible to unaided human eyes. And not an instant too soon. He had exhausted his last strength in operating the device which dropped to the floor as consciousness left him.

Fortunately, my doctor lived less than a block distant, and, still more fortunately, he was in his offiee. Within five minutes he was bending over Dr. TJnsinn, and, being as all doctors should be, a most discreet man, he forbore to make embarrassing inquiries as to the manner in which Lemuel had received the wounds.

To my intense relief he assured me that there was no fracture and no injuries more serious than the one deep gash and severe contusions.

Lemuel regained consciousness as the doctor was bandaging the wound, but he made no attempt to speak, and, for that matter, his face was too swollen and painful to permit him to utter an intelligible word for the next twenty-four hours.

In the meantime we eagerly bought and read the papers which were filled with accounts of the Hartwell Building mystery, and I could see by Lemuel's expression, even through his bandages, that he was immensely pleased at the attention his feat had attracted. There were also items regarding our, or rather Lemuel's, other exploits. A score of persons had reported the incident of the fainting woman; the man in the subway station had related his experience, but not a word appeared in print regarding the sudden vanishing of the car. No doubt the guard hesitated to mention or report the matter fearing that his superiors might, quite reasonably, feel that a guard subject to such hallucinations was unfit for his position. And, in all probability, the passengers who had been present and who, the chances were, had spoken to the guard after our departure, were convinced that they had been subjected to some optical illusion.

And of course there was no reference to the thiefchase or Lemuel's injuries, for the thief alone had seen anything out of the ordinary.

And of course no one had suspected our connection with all the phenomena, for which I was extremely thankful, although it did not please Lemuel, who declared, somewhat peevishly that he had received no credit for his astounding discovery.

"Credit!" I exclaimed, "If the police knew you were at the bottom of these things you'd very probably be in jail by now."

"And," I continued, "I hope this last experience of yours has convinced you that I was right and that your discovery is a menace. If you take my advice you'll destroy every one of your formulae and every confounded contraption that has to do with the invention."

A wry grin twisted Dr. Unsinn's plastered and bandaged face. "No," he declared, "I shall destroy nothing. But I must admit that I have found my discovery is not so beneficial to the individual or the public at large as I had hoped. It is, I fear, too vast in its possibilities to be given to the world as I had planned. But I still am positive that it is a most important discovery and, if properly employed, will be of incalculable benefit to the world. No, instead of destroying it as you suggest, I shall present it to our government on the understanding that it shall remain a secret until needed to avert some national calamity."

I breathed a sigh of deep relief. "In that case," I replied, "your invention is as good as destroyed."

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8: The Lady in Green

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

Sunday Times, (W. Aust) 7 April 1929

MR. ALONZO MacTAVISH, seated in the resplendent lounge of the Hotel Splendide, screwed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his left eye, adjusted an immaculately cut evening waistcoat and gazed about him with that charming expression which had won him so many friends, and which had driven half the police forces of Europe into a state of desperation.

Things were very quiet, ruminated Alonzo. Three months before he had been instrumental in the removal of certain important documents from the safe of the Moravian Embassy in Paris. These documents he had, with great wisdom, sold to the Rostovian Ambassador on the other side of the street. Two months after this exploit. Mr. MacTavish, with the same urbane smile, had quietly and skilfully removed the same documents from the Rostovian safe, and sold them back again to the Moravian Ambassador, who was glad to get them without asking any questions— at any price.

Mr. MacTavish had then considered that the air of England might be more agreeable to his health for a while and had taken the first boat just in time to miss the visit of three very quiet gentlemen who called at his apartment to inform him that his absence from France would be appreciated.

Since then nothing had turned up, and inaction bored Alonzo. Also, he realised that it was up to him to give his friends, the police, one more chance to get him. They had failed dismally up to date, although they knew very well that the fertile brain of MacTavish was behind a dozen or more mysterious "jobs" which had taken place in Europe during the last two years.

Alonzo selected a cigarette from a thin case with care, and was just about to light it, when his eyes fell upon a girl seated on the opposite side of the lounge. She wore a green gown— a wonderful Paris creation Alonzo guessed, and it suited her to perfection. For a moment, as she raised her head, it seemed to him that as her eyes met his, a tiny smile illuminated them for a moment. Then, she rose, suddenly and, still smiling walked towards the entrance.

So the smile had not been for him. A soft whistle escaped Alonzo's lips as he observed the tall, well-groomed man whom the girl in green was greeting so effusively— Caesar D'Alvarez, international crook and Jewel thief, an arch enemy of Alonzo, who had spoiled his game on more than one occasion. What was D'Alvarez doing here?

Alonzo, very unobtrusively, rose from his seat, and made his way to another seat in the shadow of the pillar. He waited until D'Alvarez had registered at the reception office; then, when he and the girl had disappeared in the direction of

the lift, he wandered casually over and examined the register. He read "Count Caesar D'Esterro, Rome."

After which Alonzo made his way back to his seat, and lighting the delayed cigarette gave himself up to quiet thought.

So Caesar D'Alvarez had become "Count Caesar D'Esterro!" Alonzo wondered exactly what the game was The girl was a stranger to him— he had never encountered her on any of his international adventures, and her beauty appealed to him. He hoped with a half sigh, that she was not intended to be the pawn in some low down game of D'Alvarez.

He picked up the illustrated weekly which lay on the lounge table before him and idly ran his fingers through the pages, his mind still busy with D'Alvarez. Suddenly he sat bolt upright and gazed at the page before him on which appeared a portrait of the girl in green, the girl, who a few minutes before had greeted D'Alvarez so warmly. Underneath the picture were the words:"Miss Aline Carnford of Philadelphia, whose marriage with Count Caesar D'Esterro is announced to be taking place shortly."

An Involuntary exclamation escaped him. What was the D'Alvarez game? Was he planning to marry an heiress, despite the fact that he already possessed about four other "wives" in different parts of the world! Alonzo, keen for immediate action, threw down the magazine and made rapidly for his room.

Ten minutes later, overcoated, and with his immaculate silk hat at its usual angle, Alonso strolled out of the Splendide and walked rapidly across Piccadilly Circus. In Leicester Square .he procured a taxi and ordered the man to drive to Grant's Court, Limehouse, and half an hour later Alonzo alighted from the cab in one of the most disreputable quarters of London's underworld. He walked rapidly through Grant's Court and turned into a narrow alley that led in the direction of the river. After a few minutes be stopped beneath the shadow of a tumbledown warehouse and whistled the first few bars of "Annie Laurie." Immediately a small and dirty window In the wall, just above him, opened, and a tousled grey head was thrust out.

"Oo's there?" a hoarse voice demanded.

"It's all right, Inky— its MacTavish," replied Alonzo. "I want a word with you."

The head was withdrawn, and a moment afterwards to the accompaniment of creaking bolts and locks, a door was opened. MacTavish entered and followed the shambling figure of Inky up a rickety night of stairs to the dirty and ill-kept room which that worthy inhabited. Arrived, he dusted chair carefully with his handkerchief and sat down. Inky, sensing something important, lit an old day pipe and puffed vigorously, his eyes on Alonzo's face.

"Listen Inky," said MacTavish. "I did you a good turn two years ago. I want you to do something for me. Are you on?"

"I'm on Mac," replied Inky promptly. "I'd be doing five years if it wasn't for you. What's the lay?"

"Caesar D'Alvarez is over here and I want to know what he's doing," said MacTavish. "He arrived today at the Splendide and a girl met him. Not his sort of girl either. Just afterwards I read that Count Caesar D'Esterro was marrying her, and D'Alvarez had registered under that name. Is he after the girl's money? Surely he doesn't expect to get away with that? The Italian police want him badly at the moment. Find out what he's at, Inky, and as quickly as you can!"

Inky grinned as be refilled his old clay pipe. "I don't 'ave to find out nothing, Mac," he wheezed with a grin. He leaned across the table. "I knows!"

Alonzo, as excited as he ever allowed himself to get, drew his chair closer. "Well, what is lt. Inky?" he demanded.

"I 'eard larst night, round at Blooey Stevens," said Inky. "D'Alvarez 'as got a big idea. 'E's after the Rodney Diadem— you know, the diamond tiara wot belongs to Lord Rodney. Well D'Alvarez lays that he can crack the crib all right— the stuff is in the 'ouse at Pont-street— it's easy for a man like D'Alvarez, but the thing wot he couldn't do was to get the stuff out of England. 'E knows that the perlice is after 'im, an' directly that tiara is pinched every port in England will be watched, and D'Alvarez knows that 'e'd never get through. So 'e 'as a brain wave. 'E meets this American girl in Paris were she's stayin' with 'er people an' tells 'er 'e's a Count, an' she falls for 'im. So 'e gets 'er to come over 'ere to marry 'im. See the game? 'E cracks the crib on the night of the ninth, after the ball at Rodney 'Ouse. 'E marries the girl on the mornin' of the tenth an' then she goes back to Paris to tell 'er people. See the idea? D'Alvarez will stick the bloomin' diamonds in the' girl's jewel case without 'er knowin.' If she gets through all right, 'e'll join 'er in Paris that night, take the stuff and take 'is 'ook. If she don't get through, well, the police'll find the stuff on 'er an' D'Alvarez will be orlrlght. 'E's a dirty dog is D'Alvarez!"

Alonzo smiled. "So he's going to crack the crib on the ninth, is he?" he said. "The day after tomorrow. Thanks for your information, Inky." MacTavish extracted a five pound note from his well filled case and threw it across the table to Inky. "You need not tell anyone you've seen me," he continued. "We'll keep this little meeting to ourselves. Goodnight, Inky!"

Inky watched the retreating figure of Alonzo as it disappeared down the narrow passage, and grinned.

"Well, Mister Bloomin' D'Alvarez," he wheezed, as he ascended, the rickety staircase with Alonzo's fiver held tightly in his dirty fingers. "I wouldn't give much for your bloomin' chances now!"

IMMEDIATELY after leaving Inky, Alonzo, a slight smile playing about the corners of his well-cut mouth, walked rapidly to Poplar High-street, where he secured a taxi-cab. He drove westward alighting at a block of mansions in

Bloomsbury. He paid off the cab, and mounting the stairs quickly, knocked at the door of a flat on the second floor. After an interval the door opened and a red bead peered round the corner.

"Mac, by all that's holy!" said Lon Ferrers, the possessor of the red head, and Alonzo's trusted henchman. "I thought you were in Paris. What's brought you here? Come right in!"

Alonzo entered, took off his coat and hat, and seated himself.

"A little job is afoot, I think, Lon," he said smilingly. "One of those charming little jobs where one is able to combine business with pleasure. Ever heard of Caesar D'Alvarez?"

"I should think so!" answered Ferrers. "The dirtiest crook in the whole world. He'd sell his own mother for sixpence!"

"Exactly," said Alonzo. "Well, he's not out to sell his own mother this time. He's out to sell a rather pretty girl in a green grown. She's much too nice for D'Alvarez, Lon, and I think we can take a hand in the game. Tell me, has Blooey still got the keys of that empty house in Camberwell? He has. Good. Now." he drew his chair close, 'listen to me. Lon...."

THE LAST CAR had driven away from Rodney House after the ball, and one by one the brilliant lights went out, leaving the mansion In darkness. An hour passed, and, as a neighbouring clock struck three, a beam of light from an electric torch played over the walls of the library and came to rest on the safe which stood in one corner. In which reposed the Rodney Diadem.

D'Alvarez, for it was he who held the torch, drew an electric lamp from his overcoat pocket, switched it on, so that the beam of light played on the indicator dial of the safe, took oft his overcoat, and opening the attaché case which he carried, took out a small oxy-acetylene blow pipe, the tool of the modern burglar.

For an hour be worked rapidly and silently on the safe, the beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. Then a sigh of relief broke from him, and putting down the blow lamp, he pulled at the massive safe door. It swung open easily, and with feverish hands he pulled at the drawers and searched the different compartments until he found what he sought.

He stepped back from the safe his eyes feasting on the piece of incomparable jewellery which flashed and glittered in the light of the electric lamp. Then he looked up and a gasp escaped his lips, for he found himself looking straight down the barrel of an automatic pistol behind which smiled the face of Mr. Alonzo MacTavish.

"Good evening, or rather, good morning, D'Alvarez," said Alonzo. "There's no need to get excited. Just pack up your attaché case, put the Rodney Diadem inside your overcoat breast pocket, close the safe door and walk quietly downstairs in front of me. When you get outside turn to the left and walk until you meet a car,

which will be driven by my friend and colleague, Lon Ferrers. Be quick, or I'll give the alarm and hand you over. It would be very easy for me to say that I found the front door open and seeing the light of your torch, surprised you."

"Look here," snarled D'Alvarez. "What's the game MacTavish. What are you after?"

"The game is, briefly, this," replied Alonzo with a smile. "You are not going to be married to Miss Carnford in the morning, friend D'Alvarez, not at all. At the moment we propose to take you out to Camberwell for a. little rest cure, and when you get there you are going to write a letter to Miss Carnford informing her that you are not Count Caesar D'Esterro, but a rather second-rate crook, and apologising to her for any inconvenience to which you may have put her. Now then, my friend, get a move on!"

D'Alvarez obeyed with a muttered oath. He knew Alonzo of old, and that he meant what he said. Five minutes afterwards the pair quietly left the house. Down the street Lon Ferrers awaited them with the car and two hours afterwards, Mr. D'Alvarez, tied hand and foot, reposed on a bed in a small house in Camberwell, using language which was worthy of a better cause.

NEXT AFTERNOON. Alonzo, delicately sipping a cup of tea in the lounge of the Hotel Splendide, looked up with a smile as Lon Ferrers appeared.

"Everything is O.K. Mac," said Ferrers. "I've just seen Miss Carnford off. Needless to say she was amazed when she read D'Alvarez's confession. Jove, how he hated writing it. She'll be back in Paris with her people tonight."

"Good," murmured Alonzo, pouring himself out some more tea. "I feel at peace with the world, and now for the reward of virtue. Tell me, did you give Blooey his instructions?"

"I did," answered Ferrers, "and I've just telephoned him. D'Alvarez is trussed up on the bed. He could never escape in a thousand years, and the Rodney Diadem is in his coat pocket as per your instructions. Blooey is leaving the house in five minutes' time. What's the idea, Mac?"

Alonzo grinned. "Just this, Lon. In this afternoon's paper Lord Rodney offers a reward of five thousand pounds for the recovery of the Rodney Diadem. Well, when I have finished this cup of tea. I'm going round to tell his lordship where his diadem is. In half an hour's time he will have back the family jewels, our friends from Scotland Yard will have D'Alvarez, and we shall collect five thousand, the reward. Although," murmured Alonzo, with a dreamy smile. "I would have done it for the lady in green for nothing. It's almost a shame to take the money!"

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9: Beyond the Veil

E.Mary Gurney

Elizabeth Mary Gurney, 1900–38

The Bulletin, Christmas Number, 9 Dec 1936

New Zealand author and horsewoman

AS THOUGH CONSCIOUS of the slight that had been put upon her in mating her with an ass, the old thoroughbred mare that Van Thorn had picked up at the sale of a bankrupt circus took one look at her misshapen offspring and died.

Purchased mainly out of pity, she was no loss, except as a mother, and Van Thorn's first instinct was to knock the foal on the head, since it would obviously be chance-got, and more nuisance to rear than it would be worth.

But, in spite of its dam's debility, and the more-than-probable debility of its sire, it was a sturdy little atom, born, so to speak, on its feet. Propped on gangling, uncertain legs, it surveyed the world from large, trusting, bluish-grey eyes, and sucked hopefully at the finger the man offered it.

Because he loved dumb things, it needed only the confiding touch of its baby lips to dispel the man's instinctive desire to be quit of the worry consequent on bottle-feeding. The ungainly colt's lips were soft past dreaming, its scarcely-dry coat like satin to the touch.

When he took his hand away the little beast made tiny, funny noises, and staggered after him, nosing his trouser-legs, tugging hopefully at the frayed hem of his jacket.

"Hell!" said Van Thorn. "You're a cute little beggar!"

And, picking the foal up bodily, he carried it from the side of its dead dam.

Without premeditation, he christened it Tom Mix, and grew to regard it with a mixture of admiration and incredulity; for even to him, prejudiced as he was by pride of possession, it was abnormally ugly, scraggy-tailed and lop-eared ; but a whole fortnight elapsed before the horrible truth dawned on Van Thorn.

Then he sat down on an upturned tin and laughed until he was sick. Tom Mix stood in front of him and regarded him with a comical mixture of mischief and sorrowful reproach.

His eyes, like his coat, were by then darkening to brown and losing that confiding baby look that had saved him from the axe. Already they were growing almost ludicrously shrewd— developing that aloof, mystic look that is the heritage of horses. Also, he had taken to turning up the whites of his eyes, which gave him a leering and, at times, incredibly evil look. And already he was addicted to sly nipping, to little, furtive, semi-playful, semi-spiteful kicks.

Van Thom, who regarded him with almost paternal indulgence, was not as yet resentful, but was learning to keep a wary eye on his vagaries.

IT was Tom Mix himself who ended Van Thorn's ribald acceptance of his discovery, rearing up on his hind legs and striking with a deliberateness of purpose that might have been either malice or mischief, or a compound of both.

His tiny hooves caught the man's shoulder a shrewd blow that knocked him off his seat. By the time, half-wrathful, half-amused, he had gained his feet, the foal was away across the paddock, gambolling with an extravagance that brought an unwilling smile back to Van Thorn's lips.

After all, he thought, ruefully rubbing his shoulder, you couldn't judge a mule by ordinary standards. It was a crime against Nature, a freakish, man-connived abortion, conceived in ignominy and born to a life of dishonor and unwarranted abuse. So Tom Mix, generously bottle-fed, grew alike in stature and shrewd malice. Not that he was without affection or gratitude, but it was as though he had been born with a devil that made it impossible for him to forget for a moment that he was a mule.

In more ways than one he was a problem, for, from birth upward, he was a bundle of destructive, misspent energy. No door or gate was sufficient against his ingenuity. No gap in hedge or fence too small for him to find a way through; and where he went disaster followed.

He killed fowls and ate cabbages with equal gusto. He upset bins and water-butts, and danced on lawns and chewed linen with a prodigality of purpose that was as amazing as it was exasperating. Yet, with it all, his was a singularly engaging, not to say intriguing, personality.

When he had been bad— and he knew he was bad— sometimes he would be wholly unrepentant, at others ludicrously contrite, offering himself up to punishment with a dog's meekness and singleness of purpose.

The horses on the farm he treated disgracefully, harrying them with the viciousness of, a mosquito, but it was some time before it occurred to Van Thorn that their avoidance of him was disproportionate. When, light as thistledown and as heartless, he gambolled in their pastures, they watched him with a nervous interest that was as intense as it was unnatural.

SOMETIMES at dusk Van Thorn would go out to the fields to smoke and watch the day die, latterly to watch Tom Mix at his extravagant games, flying round the paddock, flirting with shadows. He was, maybe, some six months old before it dawned on the man that the little brown mule flirted with more than shadows.

The races he ran were not all with himself. When he curveted, kicking and sheering away, it was not from shadows only or from creatures of his imagining. Ghosts raced with him in the dusk.

Sometimes he would pause, arching his neck as strange horses will when they meet ; and, watching him, Van Thorn remembered that it had always been so. He

was a strange thing, a fey thing, owing to mankind a debt of everlasting hatred for the manner of his begetting.

Watching the little beast's antics gave the man a queer, uncanny feeling that lifted the hair on his nape as the dogs' hackles went up when Tom Mix went near them. They avoided him when they could, but, cornered, threatened him with bared teeth and lifted, bristling hackles. Subconsciously, the man had noted that that, too, dated from the foal's beginning. It grew to be a habit with Van Thorn, that going out at dusk to watch the little mule flirting with his unseen comrades.

The hacks, heads lowered and prick-eared, would watch him, eyes wide, nostrils flaring nervously, scattering at his approach, their gait stiff-legged, their snorts less of play than of fear.

When the moon was full so that the shadows of the trees were flung out in dark rifts and blotches on the grass, the chained dogs howled dolorously, and it seemed to Van Thorn that the very birds were uneasy in their sleep. But through it all Tom Mix, growing from ugly, bull-headed babyhood, through gangling adolescence, to a queer, stocky adult grace that was all his own, played his brave, solitary part, unconsciously but intensely individual. Yet from foalhood upward, in spite of his malice prepense, he was curiously tractable and teachable.

FOLLOWING the method he invariably used in breaking horses, Van Thom handled the little mule from the beginning, accustoming him to brush, bit and saddle, teaching him to lift his feet and to move over at a word of command.

Tom Mix, rolling his shrewd eye, learned all his lessons at their inception, but neither unending patience nor judicious punishment could break him of the habit of nipping and kicking— not viciously, but painfully.

He seemed able to judge to a fraction of an inch how hard he could kick or bite without doing any real damage. He possessed, or so it seemed to the man, a deliberate and perverted sense of humor. Twice before he was a year old he caught Van Thorn bending, and once he kicked and once he bit, and both times he laughed.

At two years old he was a solid, chunkily elegant little brute, satin-brown, with a black stripe running from his wither to the base of his jet-black rat tail. He was a devil on four legs. Van Thorn's dogs he tolerated, but woebetide any chance cur that happened in his path. Death was in his hooves, not only for them, but for all things feathered or possessed of wool or horns. The house cow he recognised as a possession, Van Thorn's pet lambs were also sacred, and when he grew to working strength and went about the farm he developed a curious sense of property; but in his early years he was a problem that almost turned Van Thorn's hair grey.

Strange things he would not tolerate, be they human or beast. Until Van Thorn hit upon the expedient of putting up warning notices, he lived in daily dread of returning home to find a mangled corpse in the mule's domain, for there was the

constant nightmare menace of inquisitive people invading Tom Mix's paddock for a closer inspection of anything so unusual as a mule.

Twice indignant strangers produced evidence of narrow escapes from sudden, violent death. Twice Tom Mix escaped on to the road, once ditching a car and once stampeding a herd of inoffensive dairy cows. And once, by dint of burrowing through thick-set hedges, he got among the pedigree ewes.

That was the time Van Thorn decided to shoot him, but in the night Tom Mix broke through the garden gate and called under his window, and for a day and a night Van Thorn fought a grim fight against the inexplicable attack of colic that had the mule in its grip.

TOM was rising four when a series of minor earthquakes, culminating in two nasty jerks, shook the district, bringing down rocks, slips, chimneys and bridges and making things generally unpleasant without providing any real excitement.

It was the height of the lambing season, and Van Thorn was far too preoccupied to pay any particular attention to the mule's idiosyncrasies, to which, in any case, through familiarity, he was growing indifferent.

Tom, at the moment, was leading an idle life, being too unreliable for hacking at the peak period, so the devil kept an eye on him, and he got into sundry mischief until Van Thorn's mare wrenched herself in a bog and he had to have another hack in a hurry.

The mule, in one of his most perverse moods, resented first the bit, then the saddle and finally the man. He kicked and bit like a fury, so that when Van Thorn ultimately succeeded in mounting, he was bruised in several places, and in as evil a mood as Tom Mix himself, using spurs and whip with more justice than mercy.

Surprisingly, Tom took what was coming to him, and behaved throughout the day with a contrite meekness that was utterly disarming. Once again, overcome with secret pride, Van Thorn forgave him.

When in the dusk they returned to the homestead there was a message necessitating a three-mile trip through the hills.

There had been two or three unpleasant shakes during the day, and the prospect of a long ride through the night was anything but alluring. However, there was nothing for it, and Van Thorn set off riding the reluctant mule.

Tom, in much better case to do the extra journey than was the man, who had been working from daylight, elected to behave like a pig. On the way home the weary Van Thorn would most cheerfully have given him a bullet. When they reached the small bridge that spanned a deep, narrow ravine Tom finally dug his toes in and refused to go at all.

THE road that led up to the bridge wound along the top of a ridge, and was solid, but on the far side the approach was built up over a distance and dropped sheerly on each side to the ravine. Van Thorn, weary to the bone, cursed his

mount high and low, and dismounted, for bitter experience had proved the futility of argument. Once Tom Mix dug his toes in, the only thing that would move him was dynamite. Controlling his temper with an effort that was praiseworthy, Van Thorn lifted the reins over Tom's head with the intention of leading the mule across, but Tom promptly swung between him and the bridge and deliberately began to haze him away from it. Before he could do more than jerk on the mule's mouth the whole world began to heave and jerk and twist in a devil's dance of torment. Van Thorn was flung down, and even Tom went to his knees. Then, with a passing shudder, the shake was over, leaving the world drenched in the murky red light of the new-risen moon.

From the ravine a slow dust rose in ugly little spirals, and from its depths echoed back the rattle of still-falling stones. All that remained of the bridge was a few twisted planks nailed to a broken pile. The rest of it and most of the opposite approach were down in the ravine.

Van Thorn put up a none-too-steady hand and touched the mule's face. Promptly, with more than ordinary spite, Tom bit him, but Van Thorn was hardly conscious of the twist of the brute's teeth on his arm. There was a horror on the world, a sense of death in dreadful guise, walking the hills unseen. The stars had a glazed, unreal look, like sunken dead eyes in the hazy dome of the sky. The moon leaned down grinning hatefully, its face pock-marked as though with some hideous disease. Even the air had died, and lay like a mighty pall of silence drawn down over the world.

A wave of nausea swept over Van Thorn, leaving him weak and spent, and Tom Mix pawed the earth and brayed with a Machiavellian laughter that profaned the ghostly silence.

THERE was about Van Thorn nothing timorous or imaginative, but, with the death of the echoes of Tom's eldritch laughter, fear took him by the throat, the ghastly, soul-shaking fear that belonged to primitive man caught in the solitary night.

Breathless, shuddering, he waited, but never a sound came back from the dead heart of the world. Tox Mix pawed with sudden impatience, nosing the man's arm, and Van Thorn caught the bridle as a child might cling in strange darkness to a known hand.

To reach home now they would have to go many miles round, for the ravine ran north and south, steep and sheer, without a break.

Trembling still with the dark, primitive horror that had seized him, Van Thorn mounted.

Tom Mix stood tractably enough, but, turned once again from home, all his accustomed perversity descended upon him sevenfold, and he gave Van Thorn the

devil's ride, digging his toes in every hundred yards and refusing to budge until the spirit moved him.

For the second time that night Van Thorn dismounted. In him anger warred with the thought that in all probability the mule had saved him from certain death. And mingling with his anger and his gratitude was that primitive fear, not only of the night, but of that uncanny, intangible something that set Tom Mix apart from all living things.

The powers of darkness were leagued in him. He was a constant and fearful reminder of the eternal, the unknown.

Van Thorn turned the mule loose, and began to walk back up the road. Abandoned, docility descended on the mule, and he followed at the man's heels, reproachful and dependent, and braying at intervals so that the echo trembled back, dying flatly against the stark, uneasy earth. Presently he trotted ahead, and once again attempted to turn the man back. Van Thorn, his temper frayed with his fear, struck the brute savagely, and Tom Mix reared above him, immense and terrible in the bloody light; pivoted on his heels, kicked, squealed and fled back down the road, his shod hooves seeming to make no sound on the ironstone flint of its surface.

But when he was long gone from sight the world was rent again and again with the faint and ever-fainter echoes of his hideous, eerie braying. When it finally died out the old fear descended on Van Thorn.

The world on which he stood ceased on a sudden to be finite. It lost dimension and solidity, consequence or purpose, and became a thing of insignificance— a speck smaller than dust, hurtling from no known beginning, through the infinite, towards no known ending.

The moon thrust its mottled face down closer, grinning with dreadful malice. The stars shrank back, dead worlds in a dead sky. In all of space, in all eternity, he alone was. He alone had conscious thought and a spirit that could not die.

Abject terror took Van Thorn. Within him his spirit cried aloud on unknown gods, but no sound passed his lips. Blindly he turned and began to run.

FENCES halted him, but he scrambled through and went on, up the hills and down the hills, with bursting lungs and beating heart threatening to break against his ribs. In the hot valleys were a darkness and a silence. On the hillcrests the murky light lay still as death. Over them his shadow, immense and grotesque as some fire-born beast that was conceived with the world, went before him, seeming to mock the futility of all flight.

Outraged nature checked him on the rim of the ravine, far below the road and the broken bridge. Spent, exhausted, he went down the sheer side; climbed doggedly from its menacing depths back to the sullen light of the midnight world. Memory stirred in him, and he thought of Tom Mix, wondering vaguely what had

become of the ill-starred brute, what devil's world had fastened on him now. Into his overwrought mind flashed a picture of the mule, overtaken by the bloodlust and killing, killing. Not sheep or dogs, but humans. Through the silence, it seemed to him that he caught a faint echo of the hideous, braying laughter. Incontinently he began to run again.

That mental vision of the mule slaughtering men had repeopled the world, so that the awful sense of solitude was in a measure dispelled; but sight of the homestead where he lived brought it back with redoubled intensity. In the murky light the old place sprawled with the impression of the body of a thing that has died a violent death.

It was a husk, an empty shell, yet the haunt of evil memories. The chimneys were down, the windows shattered so that the unquiet spirits of the night might enter in. Van Thorn stopped with his hands on the gate and shivered with a dread against which reason had no power.

Out in the empty desolation of the hills home had seemed a haven of strange, incalculable peace.

A sudden wave of sick longing went over Van Thorn; for warmth, for light, for living things. He thought of Tom Mix, and the mule no longer seemed evil but a thing of life and loveliness, of caprices and a wisdom beyond the wisdom of men. His malice was a splendid thing, rich with unpremeditated humor.

VAN THORN pushed the gate open and went down the drive, past the staring house, towards the dark blotch of the stable. The horses were out to pasture, but the buildings held their homely smell, were instinct with their warmth and abundant life. Standing in the open door of a loosebox, he thought with gratitude that horses were sane and splendid things, giving much, asking little, yet faithful unto death. Within the box was movement— a sudden deep sighing followed by a harsh whinnying that was like low laughter. Tom Mix, waking from deep and easy slumber.

Van Thorn heard him scrambling to his feet, vigorously shaking straw from his ears. Mechanically the man found and lit the storm-lantern that hung above the manger. Feverishly he closed the door. In the dim light the mule blinked sleepy, red-rimmed eyes, and yawned prodigiously; snorted and blew expectantly in the empty manger.

The comfortable smell of the horses, the warm, sane life of the mule did much to dispel the man's stark terror. Four walls were about him again, shutting away the urgency of space and life without end. Here were sane things, normal things, the tangible stuff of life, holding life's dimensions— sound and scent and touch: Tom Mix, yawning and rolling the whites of his eyes and demanding service.

Thought of the indignities to which the brute had subjected him filled the man with sudden, wholesome rage. He pictured the mule sleeping while he toiled, with a child's terror whipping him, through the red solitude of the hills and the night.

Tom Mix stretched, luxurious as a cat, and nosed him with trustful expectancy. Outside one of the chained dogs whined, first living sound of the night. It barked, short, urgent yaps, then whined again, and bayed the red-rimmed moon.

Within Van Thorn some tension seemed to snap. He brushed his hands over his face and stood a moment, breathing deeply. Then he moved to unsaddle the mule. The saddleflaps were badly torn, the tree smashed past repairing.

Reaction took hold of Van Thorn. He, who never struck a beast in anger, jerked savagely at the mule's mouth and kicked him in the belly. Tom Mix lost his trustful apathy. He whirled, a red-eyed fury, biting and kicking like a devil gone mad; and it was some minutes before it occurred to Van Thorn that, had the mule not willed it, he certainly could not have escaped out of the door.

For a long time he lay on the ground where he had fallen, fighting the fresh terror that, had him in its grip— reawakened terror of the mule that was like no other beast he had ever known. He thought, "I'll get rid of the brute— have him destroyed"... and he thought with a queer shuddering "That would be murder"...

AFTER a time Van Thorn got up and saw Tom Mix standing absolutely motionless in the open doorway of the The mule could have followed him out and killed him on the ground... He spoke whisperingly, but Tom took no notice.

He was staring out into the paddock intently with an interest, or so it seemed to the man, that was tinged with uneasiness. His nostrils flared nervously, and his huge prick ears twitched with uncertain inquiry. Van Thorn touched his face, but Tom ignored him; so, satisfied that the devil was out of the beast, the man edged back into the box and removed the broken saddle. But when he tried to lead Tom Mix out across the threshold the mule refused to move.

He took the bridle off and hung it on the peg in the back of the box and stood there for a long time, fighting the repugnance that overcame him at thought of returning to the empty, sprawling house. Tom Mix maintained his motionless vigil, but ever and again in the dim light of the lantern the man saw a tremulous ripple, like a slow shudder, go over the beast's body. Always was that nervous twitching of the ears, the questing, nervous flaring of the nostrils; but slowly the intent, watching eyes grew half-fearful, yet red-rimmed with rage.

The moon slid westering and a cloud went over it. Through the open doorway a cold breath seemed to creep into the stable and a sudden fantasy of shadows writhed athwart the night. Tom Mix threw up his head, rearing a little, and went out of the stable, stiff-legged, and snorting like a stallion. He went out across the pasture with that curious, stiff-legged gait, neither run nor walk nor yet an amble. His forefeet came off the ground one after the other, yet both were clear of the

ground together. His ears were pricked forward, his short mane seemed to bristle, and he held his rat tail stiffly erect, cocky as a stallion that is drunk with pride.

The cloud left the face of the moon, but still the pastures were dark with unspeakable shadows that writhed. Beyond them, in the hollows above the swamps, the mist rose sickly in strange goblin shapes that had neither form nor substance and yet were fraught with menace.

Tom Mix snorted again, curveting and arching his neck, reared suddenly, ears flattened to his neck, teeth villainously bared in the light.

Perpendicular on his hind legs he braced himself to meet some terrific shock that rocked him almost off: his balance, but, active as a cat, he twisted to earth and leaped away, and the night was sundered by his high-pitched, savage screaming. He swerved and went up again, slashing with appalling savagery at his ghostly opponent.

Once, screaming with hate and terror, he went to his knees, driven there by a hail of invisible blows that sickened the watching man to his soul, and then he was up again, fighting with whirlwind fury the terror of the unseen.

Behind the stables the dogs howled and moaned, while down the pasture the horses milled, snorting until the air was vibrant with the sound.

Tom Mix reared up and up, striking blindly, flailing his wicked head to and fro, crashed over and over, half-rose and crashed again, screaming with pain and a fear that transcended pain.

Van Thorn ran from the stable door shouting crazily at the thing that he could neither hear nor see, and the earth heaved again in its unutterable torment and the voice of its agony surged upward in a roar that drowned out all individual sound. Flung down, Van Thorn scrambled on hands and knees towards the dark blot that was Tom Mix, silent now, and still. The red light was gone from the face of the moon and all the pastures were bathed in a pure white glow. Over the swamps the little fingers of the mist shone with a gossamer loveliness.

Van Thorn stood up. In him a great peace warred with a great sorrow and a sense of loss. Tom Mix lay unmoving, his head flung back, his teeth bared in a savage grin, but there was no mark on him. And no strange hoof-marks mingled with his on the turf.

Van Thorn knelt beside him, touching the strong, ugly head that was already hardening in death; and in his soul was a sense of dismay and of abiding sorrow for the spirit of the beast that could never know fulfilment.

To the muffled dream of hoof beats a little wind went past him and away under the moon. Life passing, passing by...

His fingers slid down the dead beast's muzzle and rested there with unpremeditated tenderness.

"Green pastures," said Van Thorn, "and an understanding God"...

No longer fearful, but infinitely troubled, he left Tom Mix lying there and went towards the house. Before he went in he paused a moment to look back on the quiet earth.

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10: The Queen's Necklace

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

Popular Magazine 20 Oct 1918

JUST before the war I was in Paris, and, happening to be in the Rue de la Paix, I called on my friend Leverrier. He was a jeweler in a large way of business, but to-day is temporarily serving as cook somewhere in the Argonne until such time as he can be a jeweler again.

I met him first in Biarritz seven or eight years ago, and we at once became friends, for our tastes were sympathetic, and it was often a wonder to me that a man who loved an out-of-door life and all that goes with it in the form of movement and adventures could live cooped up in the Rue de la Paix, year in, year out, with little relaxation and no change to speak of.

That day I called upon him I happened to mention this fact. We were seated in the office at the back of his shop and there in the midst of ledgers and papers and an atmosphere prosaic as the atmosphere of a bank he told me this story.

"Well," said he, "it may seem a trifle dull, this life of mine, but I assure you there are moments in the life of a jeweler when he gets all the excitement and action he requires, especially when the stock is worth a couple of million francs, with a couple of thousand jewel thieves in Paris; men, moreover, who have made a fine art of their business. I could tell you a good many stories to prove my point, but I will content myself with one, just to show you that the word business covers more things than profit and money changing. It was my first adventure in life, all my future turned on it and in a most curious way.

"My father was a small jeweler in Marseilles. He died when I was twenty-one years of age. I was an only child, my mother had passed away some years before, and I was alone in the world. I had big ideas. I saw quite clearly that a small business is eternal labor and little profit, and

that if I wished to live a full life I must strike out, take my fortune and my courage in both hands, and risk everything to gain everything.

"I collected all my available cash, some sixty thousand francs, and, still continuing in business with the aid of one assistant, I crouched waiting to spring on Fortune should she come in sight.

"She came.

"Just at that time occurred the sale of the Polignac jewels. I attended it. On the second morning of the sale and just before the luncheon hour a necklace of opals' was put up, the most lovely work of art, fire opals, some of large size, and set with small brilliants; but it was less the value of the stones that attracted me than the workmanship of the whole. You may guess my surprise when the bidding started

at only fifteen thousand francs and the three succeeding bids only raised it to eighteen thousand. But the fact of the matter was that opals just then were out of favor. There is nothing more curious than the fashions that come and go in precious stones, diamonds always excepted. Opals are, as you know, considered unlucky, and just then there had been a murder case or a divorce case or something of that nature in which opals had figured, so I suppose the *grande dames* of Paris and London were not buying; at all events, the big dealers present were absolutely unenthusiastic. Then I came in, and the sight of a young and enthusiastic bidder seemed to hearten the others, for they put the price up on me till twenty-eight thousand francs was reached. At thirty thousand francs the hammer fell and the necklace was mine.

"Now, only a week before the sale I had read in a paper— the *Echo de Paris*, no less— that the Queen of Spain had a passion for opals, and it was that paragraph in my head, no less than the beauty of the article at auction, that had made me keen on the purchase. I had, in fact, resolved that, if I could buy it, I would endeavor, by hook or by crook, to sell it to her majesty, not so much for the profit as for the sale, for let me tell you that the fortune of a jeweler lies often at the back door of a palace, if he can once slip in, and that the history of the Rue de la Paix is, in part, the history of the Tuileries during the Second Empire, and the histories of the courts of London, Vienna and Berlin.

"Well, I had my necklace at the cost of half my available capital, and it only remained with me now to make the sale. I wrote to the chamberlain of the Spanish court stating the facts and got no reply to my very civil letter though I waited a month. Then I cast about me for other ways to forward my scheme, but without success, and several Spaniards whom I knew, so far from encouraging me, gave me to understand that of all courts in the world the court of Spain is the most exclusive and the most difficult to manipulate.

"Well, there I was with my hands tied and my necklace round my throat, so to speak, and my thirty thousand francs lying unproductive. Many people would have given the thing up, but I am very tenacious by nature. Once I get hold of a plan I stick to it like one of those dogs you English keep for setting upon bulls and, in fact, I would not be defeated.

"It occurred to me, suddenly, to apply to our deputy, Monsieur Villenois, a black-bearded southerner, a man from Tarbes, who might have stood for the portrait of Daudet's Numa Roumestan. I interviewed him, and he listened to my story with interest. He became enthusiastic as though it were an affair of his own.

" 'The Queen of Spain is now at Biarritz,' said he. 'Go there, my dear Monsieur Leverrier, with your necklace and wait. I will obtain a letter of introduction from our foreign minister and forward it to you at your hotel.' He refused to be thanked, all but embraced me, dismissed me with the highest hopes— and forgot

me. He was not a scoundrel, simply a man who could not refuse; one of those genial southern souls, all sunlight, and to whom a promise signifies nothing.

"Well, I put up at an hotel in Biarritz and I saw. her majesty often at a great distance, but I did not see the promised letter from my deputy.

"There were some pleasant people in the hotel and among them there was an old gentleman, Don Pedro Gommera, with whom I struck up a close acquaintanceship. He was, as it afterward turned out, the owner of a rubber estate on the Amazon, a man very wealthy, but of the type of the old buccaneers. It was this in him, perhaps, that pleased me; he was different from others, and in our conversations he talked of the wilderness of the Amazon, of his life there; of the rubber workers who, though paid, were practically his slaves; and in such a manner that I seemed listening to the voice of Cortez himself.

"Bold spirits attract one another, and one day, still waiting for my deputy's letter, I told him of my intended attack on her majesty of Spain and of the necklace. It interested him and he asked to see it, as he was a connoisseur of jewels, and I unfortunately, or rather fortunately, acceded to his request.

"I kept the casket containing the thing in a tin box, and the tin box in my valise, and my valise in my bedroom. We went up to my room and there, opening the valise, I produced the necklace with which he at once fell in love. He was completely fascinated, just as a man is fascinated by a beautiful woman, and I could tell without any word of his, but just by the manner in which he held it and hung over it, the effect it had produced on his mind. But he said nothing much till that night after dinner when he approached me in the smoking room where I was smoking a cigar.

"He sat down beside me, and after talking for a while on various subjects he came to the point.

" 'I have been thinking of that necklace you showed me,' said he, 'and if you will excuse me for talking to you on business, I should like to purchase it.'

" 'Ah, monsieur,' I replied, 'nothing would give me greater pleasure than to do business with you, but, unfortunately, it is not for sale, or only to one person—and her name you know.'

" 'I would point out to you, monsieur,' said he, 'that when I take a thing into my head money to me is no object. Name your price.'

" 'And I would point out to you, monsieur,' I replied, 'that when I take a thing into my head money is no object. I wish to sell this article to her majesty, not so much for the sake of the money she will pay me as for the sake of a business introduction to the court. I hope yet to be jeweler to the court of Spain; yet, leaving all that aside, there is the fact that I have set before myself an object to be attained, and I have never yet desisted once I have started on a journey toward an object.'

" 'You are an obstinate man,' said he.

" 'No, monsieur, a tenacious one,' I replied, 'and as that is not a bad description of your own character, if my instinct for physiognomy is not at fault, you can sympathize with me.'

" 'You refuse to sell?'

" 'Absolutely, monsieur.

" 'Very well,' said he, 'let us say no more on the matter.'

"He left Biarritz next day, and the day following going to my portmanteau I found it unlocked. I opened it, and found the tin box containing my treasure gone.

"It was like a blow in the stomach.

"I had left the portmanteau locked, of course. That was what I told myself. Then doubt assailed me. Had I omitted to lock it in putting back the necklace, and had Don Gommera noticed the fact? That he was the thief was a fact of which I had an instinctive surety, based on the instinctive knowledge that nothing at all would stop this man from attempting to obtain any object upon which he had set his mind. As I knelt holding the lid of the portmanteau open and looking at the contents something drew my eye. It was an envelope, an ordinary envelope with the name of the hotel on the back, bulky but unsealed. I took out the contents and found notes on the Bank of France for the sum of forty thousand francs. Not a word, not a line, just the notes in an unsealed envelope.

"Despite my rage and mortification, I could have laughed. There was something so childlike and primitive in the whole business, so rascally and yet so ingenuous. I seemed to see before me more fully the character of the man— a man who dared all the risks of burglary, a man who did not hesitate to steal, yet a man who disdained taking a jeweler's goods without paying for them. He would have cut my throat, perhaps, to obtain what he craved for— yet have left the payment in notes on my person.

"The thought of applying to the police occurred to me, but I dismissed it. First of all, he was no common criminal, he was an hidalgo, but not of our day, and I had that much fine feeling that the thought of dragging him and his white beard and his noble manner into the dirt of a common police court was repugnant to me. He had treated me as an equal, and I did not see myself standing before him as the figure of a prosecuting tradesman.

"Secondly, he had robbed me not of a necklace, but of an object in view. He had gained his object, I had lost, for a time, mine. No, it was a question of man to man, not of jeweler and thief.

"I packed my portmanteau and started back for Marseilles, and the day after my arrival I called upon Chardin.

"You may not have heard of Chardin. He is the inquiry agent employed by all the great business houses of Marseilles; his office is in the Rue Noailles and he has subagencies everywhere. Give him a week and he will tell you all things about any man from the name of his dentist to the number of his shoes. In less than a week

Chardin placed before me all I wanted to know, the exact address of my man and how to reach it. Also, Chardin told me that Don Pedro Gommera had departed for home by the last boat, and that if I took the next boat, which started in eight days' time, I would arrive on his heels. So far, so good, but what an address that was! The Estate of Flores, on the left bank of the river Amazon, and a thousand miles from its mouth, enough to daunt any man as it did me for the space of a day and a half-

"For a day and a half I held off, but I was young, my will was strong, and that something which makes for adventure was in me.

" 'Will you let distance beat you?' I asked of myself, and the answer came on the question, 'No.' There was also something else, I do not know what, something like the tide which leads men along to fortune, and whose ripples men sometimes hear by a finer sense than that which brings us the sound of the dinner gong. I felt that I was doing the right thing— and then, again, beyond that, I felt that if I allowed this old man's will the victory I would start in life handicapped by the sense of defeat and the knowledge that another man's will was Stronger than mine. So I packed my traps, I left my business with my assistant, and started.

"*Ma foi*, that wonderful journey! It burns still in my mind like a blue jewel, first the ocean that seemed to turn to a deeper indigo each day, and then the vast river and the tropical forests that hide its banks. I took passage up it in a Royal Mail steamer, a great white boat that seemed built for deep-sea service, but none too big for the Amazon where the *Mauretania* herself might navigate even a thousand miles from the mouth.

"And the forests forever and forever lining the banks, and the birds flying above the forests— birds that yelped like dogs and birds of all colors from snow to flame. It seemed a strange place for a man to come in search of a lost necklace!

"The Flores plantation where I had arranged to be put off was well known to the captain and officers of the ship, also- Don Pedro Gommera who seemed to be a character. They had many stories about him, of his wealth and the number of tons of rubber Flores put out each year, and so forth. Hearing I was going on a visit to him, they declared that I would be treated royally, and so I hoped, but I had my doubts. I only wanted to be treated fairly, to receive back my necklace and, if possible, the expenses of my journey.

"Once in our conversations at Biarritz the old man had said that some day I must pay him a visit on his estate. I determined in my mind to take that cue, to be absolutely courteous, and to win my necklace back with a laugh, so to say— Well, man proposes and God disposes, as you shall hear.

"At breakfast one morning the captain told me that I had better get my belongings together as in the course of an hour or so we would be off Flores, and at eleven o'clock, standing on the deck with 'my belongings beside me, the

plantation came into view with golden fields and native houses and a great wharf like a deep sea harbor wharf alongside of which we came and tied up.

"The stoppage was made not entirely on my account, for there was some cargo to be discharged at the plantation. I watched the wharf-side crowd of colored men as I waited for the gangplank to be lowered, and as I watched, there, sure enough, came a figure through the crowd, the figure of a tall old man clad in white wearing a Panama and smoking a cigar. The crowd parted before him as he came, just as the Red Sea parted before Moses. It was Don Pedro Gommera.

"Was he surprised when, stepping from the gangway, I saluted him, bag in hand? I don't know. I can only say he showed nothing of surprise, and when I told him I had come to pay my promised visit he seemed charmed, called porters to collect my luggage and then, having boarded the steamer for a moment to speak to the captain about the cargo consigned, to him, came off again, apologizing for the delay, inquiring as to whether I had had a pleasant journey, and all with such an air of having expected me, such warmth, such courtliness, that confusion seized me as much as it could seize a jeweler with a grievance, a tradesman who had been wronged and had come over four thousand miles to have his wrongs redressed. But not for long. As he led me off toward a large, low, white house set beyond tree ferns and surrounded with a miraculous garden, where palmistes waved against the sky and butterflies like blossoms chased each other over flowers more brilliant and lovely than jewels, I became myself again, or, rather, I became that self which contact with the personality of my courtly host engendered in me, for it is perfectly true that one takes one's color from one's companions, and that a man of true stateliness and good form diffuses his qualities as a lamp diffuses its light or a flower its perfume.

"You may laugh to hear me talk so of Don Pedro Gommera— ah, well, if you had met him, you would know exactly what I mean, and if you had met him in his home on the banks of the Amazon you would know even better.

"The house where he led me was verandaed so that nearly every room on its two floors gave upon a veranda space, it was shadowed by vast trees and surrounded by a tropical garden— a garden where one might, lose oneself in broad daylight— a garden where one came upon marble seats set in coigns of shadow and before vistas of tree-fern alleys and views, now giving one the picture of the forest's heart, and now of the broadly flowing Amazon.

"The house itself was furnished with the simplicity that is born of warm climates and, when I had been shown to my room by a manservant, I returned to the veranda where I had left my host. There, while we sat in rocking-chairs and talked, another servant made his appearance bearing a large silver tray on which was' a bowl of crushed ice, glasses, decanters containing rum, liqueurs and lime juice, cigars and cigarettes.

"The tray, having been placed on a table beside us, we helped ourselves to its contents and the conversation turned to my voyage and far-away Europe.

" 'It is difficult,' said Don Pedro, 'for European people to understand the life out here, simply, monsieur, because the life out here is so different from the life of Europe. There civilization holds sway and the old laws of the different countries, Being the products of centuries of experience and practice, work of their own accord, so to speak, smoothly and meeting every requirement that may turn up. The crimes are all tabulated and the punishments. It is like the contents of a shop. , If a man wishes to invest in murder, let us say, he knows the price he may be expected to pay, but here I am the Law, and on this estate justice is my caprice. For, if a man were to murder another, his punishment would lie entirely in my hands, and I might hang him or shoot him or imprison him in a dungeon or let him off, as my fancy chose."

" 'You are, in fact, king,' said I.

" ' I am, in fact, king— absolutely.'

" 'I am just a tradesman;' I went on, 'and though I may have been intended for higher things than the life of cities, fate has placed me where I am.'

"He laughed.

" 'Do not run down tradesmen,' said he. 'They were the first adventurers. I myself am a tradesman of a sort since I sell the rubber for which I pay my laborers. To me, men are men and the worth of a man is to me everything, his position in life nothing. I am so placed that I can look on things like that, unblinded by the false views that make up civilization.'

"Just then a voice, clear, golden, sweet as the voice of a bird, full as the voice of a woman, came to us from the trees; the rear foliage shook, parted, and disclosed the form of a girl, the most lovely, wild, entrancing vision that ever fell on the sight of mortal man.

"Lightly attired as a Greek of old days, almost barbaric, with raven hair moist as though from a bath in some lagoon of the river, and red gold bangles upon her perfect arms, she stood with hands spread out in astonishment at the sight of a stranger.

"Around her neck and resting on her snow-white bosom adding a last touch to the strangeness of the picture, lay a string of blazing opals.

"My necklace.

"You can fancy the situation.

" 'My daughter,' said the old man quietly, and then to the vision: 'Juanita.'

"She came toward him and they spoke together in Spanish. He introduced us with a few words as she hung beside him gazing at me with the eyes of a forest creature, eyes luminous and deep and dark, friendly— yet destructive to peace of mind.

"Then she vanished into the house.

"Then he turned to me.

" 'Monsieur,' said he, 'you are a connoisseur in gems, what do you think of my daughter's necklace?'

" 'Senor,' replied I, 'I did not see the necklace you speak of. I saw nothing but the beauty of the Queen of Flores.'

"He bowed. As for me, I almost spoke the truth for I was in love.

"As for the necklace, it was never spoken of again during my stay at Flores. It had reached the destination I had designed for it. It was worn by a queen. It is still worn by a queen— my wife."

"Ah, you married, then— "

"We married. At first, the King of Flores refused the idea of such a union, not on account of my position so much as of the fact that he did not want to lose her. But she prevailed. She brought with her a dot of a million francs, and when I declared my intention of carrying on the only business I knew and my conviction that no man ought to live on his wife's money, he agreed.

" 'Go forward,' he said, 'but do big things, start in Paris, and for a beginning I will lend you what money you want at an interest of five per cent.' So I came to the Rue de la Paix.

"You see, he was a great man. So much above the littleness of life that he saw no discredit in the word shop. So great that he did not hesitate to buy by force the object he wanted, or to hand over to me through reason the object he wished to keep.

"Civilization would have called him a brigand, but civilization could not have understood this man of a larger and simpler day."

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11: Out of the Air

Fred MacIsaac

1886-1940

The Popular Magazine, 7 March 1927

THE fascinating phrase "Voyage of Discovery," which camouflaged a cruise to the Mediterranean of the twenty-thousand-ton steamship Durango, and whith justified, in a way, the title by touching at ports in Africa, on the Adriatic and in the Augean Sea not ordinarily visited by cruising ships, captivated Jasper Billings and made him a passenger— or, explorer, if you wish. Billings was a novelist— rather an obscure novelist— whose income was hardly sufficient to rescue him from an office desk and regular hours, but he forced it to do so, hoping always to hit a popular theme and burst into fame and affluence. When he had graduated from Princeton six or seven years before, with a record of holding two of the best pitchers the college ever produced, speed merchants, who are now burning up the big leagues, he had refused an offer to join the catching staff of a famous American League team because, even then he had literary aspirations. Often since, however, he had sighed to realize that catching would have profited him more than writing.

When the flaring advertisement of the "Voyage of Discovery" captured his imagination, he happened to be in possession of three thousand dollars, the largest amount he had ever owned, his bills were paid, and there was nothing to detain him in New York. Accordingly, assuring himself that he could beat out on his folding typewriter enough work to pay for the voyage, he passed across the counter of the steamship company the sum of one thousand dollars, in exchange for which he received a ticket which entitled him to an upper berth in a two-berth stateroom.

Billings, like most persons who have never crossed the ocean, had an impression that acquaintances were easily made on shipboard, that social barriers were down, and, after a few days, everybody knew everybody else— just one happy family. He soon decided that those who were most sociable were least desirable.

There were expensive individuals in the 'smoking room who chewed on toothpicks and drank too much; there were eager elderly widows and old maids and herds of young girls, too tender in age, to interest a man of twenty-eight; but he saw no males who seemed to him congenial traveling companions. In his stateroom he found a hay-and-grain man from Duluth, an honest, but uninteresting individual. Moreover, he drew a dull lot at the dining table. On the whole, rather a depressing aggregation, he decided, and he would have been depressed if he hadn't seen a certain girl.

When he boarded the ship, she had been standing beside the rail, inspecting the arrivals, in company with another girl. His heart gave a glad leap when he met her great dark eyes, as she regarded him impersonally; then she turned her head to say something to her friend, and he saw a smile that was enchanting. She wore a little blue head covering, something like a tam-o'-shanter, a blue traveling dress, and a silver-fox piece around her neck. What did the other travelers matter, when he would be locked up on shipboard for two months with a girl like that?

However, the girl disappeared after the first night in the dining saloon, when he caught a glimpse of her at the captain's table. With the coming of rough weather, she had vanished. The weather having moderated, Jasper was pleased to see her again in the dining room. After dinner he made his way to the big '"Social Hall" on the top deck, where dancing occurred nightly. He was hoping that he might meet her, or at least have a chance to feast his eyes upon her.

Finding a small vacant table against the wall in one corner of the room, he planted himself expectantly, while the hall quickly filled with the younger element among the passengers, and the orchestra gave agonizing evidence of an intention to burst into cacophony. Just as the first dance began, he saw her enter, look about, then move directly for a vacant table a few feet from him. Surely luck was running his way to-night. The young woman faced him, while her friend— Jasper did not notice her— sat at the side and did not obstruct the view. He saw that she had lustrous black hair— quantities of it— prettily dressed, and he approved of the fact that it was long. Evidently she was a sensible girl. The eyes were more brilliant than he had expected, and he had expected much; her complexion was dazzling, with hardly a suggestion of artificial coloring.

Her nose was thin, but perfectly formed; her mouth spoke of sweetness; her chin was firm, rather self-assertive, and her lovely gown of white satin revealed very beautiful arms and shoulders. If Jasper Billings had wished to create a girl, he would have created one exactly like this. Not by an iota would he have changed her.

"Crash! Bang! Brrrs! Smash!" challenged the orchestra, and black-coated, white-shirt-bosomed young men were weaving their way through the throng at the table, seeking partners. One paused before the girl and bowed; he was unctuous, sleek, and objectionable, thought Jasper. He murmured a request.

"No, thank you," said the girl coldly.

THE young man. faded, to be replaced by a stouter, more impudent fellow, with greasy hair and foxlike eyes.

"No, thank you," repeated the young woman.

Jasper sighed, relieved. Although he would not have dared to approach thisgirl with a proposition-to dance, yet he would have suffered had more daring persons

carried her off. The girls tittered and began to talk in low tones. He wanted to hear her voice, so he listened.

The nondescript girl was saying rather scornfully:

"They have plenty of assurance."

His girl answered in a mezzo-soprano voice, haunting in tone, now rather: contemptuous.

"Both of them have spoken to me before. Of course I was courteous, but I let them see that they were presumptuous. y men suppose they may meet, unconventionally, on shipboard a girl whom they could not meet in that manner ashore, I do not understand."

"Bad breeding. There seems to be many of that sort on board."

"Yes; I have had to snub half a dozen already, including several who were introduced by that ridiculous hostess. She seems to think that anybody who bought a ticket is entitled to the companionship of every one else."

They were interrupted by the purser, who sought out the beautiful girl, called her "Miss Reynolds," and invited her to dance. She smiled acceptance, and, while they were on the floor, Jasper Billings escaped from the room and sought the deck.

Mr. Billings was angry. Although he had as poor an opinion of their fellow passengers as the two girls, he considered they were unnecessarily severe, and their conversation stamped them as nothing but a couple of snobs. Had he not been fortunate enough to overhear their views upon the men on board, he might have been foolish enough to try to meet a girl with whom he was to travel for two months. Extremely sensitive, it might have taken him some time to pluck up courage enough to address her; but, if he had made an overture and been treated, as she boasted she had treated others, he would have jumped overboard.

Sitting in a corner and sneering at poor chaps who were polite enough to invite them to dance! Conceited little beasts. And their fling at the hostess, whose assistance he had contemplated invoking to bring about an introduction. How lucky he was to have learned that presentation by the social mentor of the voyage carried no more consideration than an unconventional attempt at acquaintance.

Compared to the men whom she had snubbed, he knew he was not personable. Holding out his big hands, almost deformed from catching speed pitching for four years and more, he laughed self-contemptuously. While he might consider himself refined and well educated, his rough-hewn visage and massive shoulders made him look more like a farm hand than a novelist.

No matter how beautiful a young woman may be, if her nature is hard and cold and repelling, she is not a desirable acquaintance; and, so far as he was concerned, he was through with her before he began; in fact, this experience would end his desire for shipboard friendships; she was impossible, and nobody else interested him in the slightest degree.

AS days passed, he saw Miss Reynolds out on deck with her friend. Apparently they were enthralled by each other's conversation. One night, as he paced the promenade deck, he very nearly bumped into her, walking alone. But he drew back in time, with a muttered word of apology, and he did not see a gleam of interest in her eyes.

A few evenings after this incident, the purser, with whom, like every passenger, he had a slight acquaintance, found him in the smoking room, sipping a long drink and reading. The purser seated himself beside Jasper.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Billings?" he asked. "You are a young man, and we have lots of pretty girls who need attention. If you are too shy to do your own picking, let me introduce you around."

"Thanks," he replied. "I appreciate your good intentions, but I really think I am happier alone."

"Nobody is. Have you noticed a very lovely brunette, rather tall, looks like an old picture I have of Maxine Elliot?"

"I don't think so," lied Jasper.

"Miss Reynolds, a very intelligent girl. She would be good company for a literary man like yourself."

"How did you know that I wrote?" he asked hurriedly, in an effort to conceal his emotion at the mention of her name.

The purser chuckled. "Our press agent looks all the passengers up. I know you wrote a novel and a lot of short stories."

"I'm nobody in particular."

"On board the *Durango* you could be a celebrity, if you liked. Come into the hall, and I'll introduce you to Miss Reynolds."

"No, thanks. There is nothing about me to interest a young lady."

"Don't be uppish. Miss Reynolds will interest you."

"I have seen the young lady," he said, his carefully nursed resentment making him more emphatic than he supposed. "T particularly do not wish to make her acquaintance."

Baxter looked astonished. "But she's a raving beauty. Say, you haven't approached her, or did she throw you down?"

"Certainly not. I have never approached her— never addressed a word to her. I do not speak to people without an introduction."

"Or with one, apparently," said the purser coldly, as he rose. "Well, see you later."

"Well-meaning jackass," grumbled Jasper, as he walked away. "Imagine my walking into that proposition."

Soon the ship began to make the ports on her schedule, and Billings went ashore and prowled, drinking in impressions of sun-bathed cities, hearing with

delight the clatter of foreign tongues, visiting historic spots and making copious notes for future use. For the first time during the voyage he was beginning to enjoy himself in hermit fashion.

In Naples he encountered the purser and captain escorting Miss Reynolds and her friend through the old castle; he received a cold nod from the officers and an impersonal glance from the other girl; but Miss Reynolds did not appear to see him at all.

He shrugged his shoulders. She was featherbrained— vapid enough to be mad about brass buttons. But what a wonderful creature she would have been if the Lord had given that beautiful body a soul to match.

In the course of time the steamer entered the harbor of Taliglio, capital of Yugo-Monrovia on the east coast of the Adriatic, with only six hours allotted for the inspection of a city full of relics of the astonishing civilizations that flourished here, first under the Greeks and then in the days of Rome's supremacy.

Following his customary routine, Jasper poked around old towers, went out to

a Roman theater, and finally entered a picturesque-looking inn, halfway up the side of the mountain on which the city clung. Here he ate his lunch.

It was a poor luncheon, and the wine was rather unpleasant and soon began to have a soporific effect upon him. Struggling against the craving for sleep, he half rose from his chair, then dropped heavily down again, his head fell on his breast, and he slept.

WHEN he awoke it was pitch dark, and his bed was hard. His eyes pained, and his head ached. Throwing out his arm it struck against a stone wall, and then he appreciated that he was lying on a pavement, an astonishing thing, for he had been sitting in a chair at a lunch table. What the deuce? With an exclamation, he scrambled to his feet and saw that it was night— that he had been lying in a narrow alley, which, to judge from the smell, was a dumping place for garbage and refuse. He clapped his hands to his breast pocket. It was empty. Then he felt for his watch. It was gone. The pocketbook had contained five hundred dollars in American money and one thousand dollars in travelers' checks, also a few dollars in Yugo-Monrovia currency.

Half dazed, he staggered toward a lighted street below. The alley was a series of very wide steps, and, as his head cleared, the calamity began to impress itself. Of course the wine had been drugged. It had a peculiar taste, he now remembered, which made it evident that they had gone through his clothes and tossed him into the alley to come back to life or not, as he pleased. It was

nighttime. Good heavens! The *Durango* must have sailed, for she was due to depart at four in the afternoon.

He was penniless and abandoned in a remote port. All his capital had been on his person. While the travelers' checks were supposed to be an insurance against loss, it would be necessary to wire to the nearest office of the concern which issued them, and weeks might elapse before he was reimbursed. In the meantime, what?

In a distracted state of mind he reached the street and turned aimlessly into another thoroughfate, which debouched upon the central avenue of the city. This street was brightly lighted and filled with a multitude who were making a great noise.

Instinctively he approached the crowd and bright lights, and when he reached the avenue he found it filled, from wall to wall, by a capering mob which shouted, sang and rejoiced; ruefully he wondered if Yugo-Monrovia was celebrating the augmentation of the national wealth by the contents of his pocketbook.

The blare of a brass band added to the din, and the movement of the multitude, which immediately engulfed him, was southward toward the central plaza of the city, where something was evidently about to take place. Ordinarily this animated scene would have interested Jasper, for a large percentage of the people on the street wore the picturesque costume of the hill folk, not unlike the traditional gypsy garb 'of our musical comedies, and the place was obviously en féte. His predicament, however, took up all of his attention, and he was in no carnival mood; nevertheless, when a band of laughing young men and women, who were dancing along, hand in hand, surrounded him and pulled him along with them, he had sense enough to submit, although their shouts were quite without meaning in his ears.

In time they entered the Plaza, a space several hundred feet square, with a small central park, where he had rested earlier in the day. On the farther side was the palace of the king, resembling the home of a minor executive in New York; the cathedral was on the left, and the university on the right. Close to where he stood, rose the whitestone facade of the six-story Bristol Hotel.

Upon a platform in the park stood a man in a brilliant uniform, making a speech, while behind him sat a row of other uniformed individuals, who probably also intended to make speeches, to hear which was the cause for the gathering of so many thousands. Jasper's -merry captors began to wedge their way toward the rostrum, which left him to his own devices.

It seemed to him that he should enter the hotel, where there were persons who spoke English and might advise him, or, at least, direct him to the refuge of American strays in all ports— the office of the consul.

Taliglio, teeming with excitement, paid no heed to the anxious alien who elbowed his way to the gate of the courtyard of the Bristol Hotel; but Jasper,

looking back upon the animated scene, sighed to think he would have enjoyed it under other conditions. It was a pretty little city, with the general characteristic of east-European towns, which wedge themselves uncomfortably between ocean and mountains. Taliglio was just a few, broad, well-lighted avenues, which ran parallel to the water front, lined with substantial five and six story stone buildings. At right angles to the water front, narrow, badly lighted streets began to climb the hills and speedily became winding mountain roads, passing villas tucked securely on ledges, but resembling in their bright coats of paint so many butterflies resting on a wall. Oh, it was colorful, vibrant, fascinatingly picturesque, but no place for a penniless Yankee.

THE lobbies of the hotel were thronged with people in evening clothes and brilliantly garbed army officers, but, though the clatter of tongues was deafening, he did not distinguish an English word in the babel, and when he had won through to the booking office, he could not attract the attention of a clerk who understood his language. In the general hysteria, he felt he could not expect to interest a soul in his personal difficulties, and, despondent as he was, he began to wonder what the tumult was about.

Somehow he would get through the night, and in the morning, when things were quiet, he would find the consul and try to make some arrangements. In the meantime, he might as well wander around and discover what was going on. Picking his way through the throng in the lobby, he was passing the entrance to the women's salon when he was astounded to hear a woman call his name and, swinging around in delight, he came face to face with Miss Reynolds.

There was nothing haughty now about this girl; her eyes were alight, ahd her electric smile drenched him with its effulgence, as she came forward with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Billings," she said delightedly, "It is so good of you. You came back for me, and I'm so glad."

Jasper was so completely astonished that his face was without expression, and it chilled the young woman, who suddenly colored and became confused.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered. "I know we have not met, but I was a fellow passenger on the *Durango*. I was so frightened and distressed that, when I saw a familiar face, I was at once impelled to speak to you."

"I do not understand," Jasper mumbled. 'Hasn't the *Durango* sailed?"

"Hours and hours ago. I was left behind."

"Oh, I see! And you thought I had come back to find you."

Her hands were clasped, her fingers were working nervously, her eyes fell, and she faltered.

"I really didn't know what I was saying— it was just my excitement. Of course, you wouldn't do that, since you never met me— perhaps, never saw me on the steamer."

"I saw you, all right," he said with a faint smile. "I just do not understand how it was possible for the ship to sail without you. They would not be apt to miss me, but— well, it's incomprehensible."

"Then you were left behind, too— we are fellows in distress?"

"I'm afraid so. Do you know what this uproar is about?"

"Don't you?"

"I don't seem to know anything about anything," he said ruefully.

"It's a declaration of war. This afternoon Yugo-Monrovia declared war on Albania. They closed the port and ordered all foreign steamers to sail. Didn't you hear the siren of the *Durango*?"

"No," he said stupidly.

She regarded him in perplexity. "I do not see how you could have failed to hear it."

"I'll explain later. Please tell me how you happen to be left behind."

"Can't we go somewhere out of this mob? I can hardly hear myself think." "I saw some benches in the courtyard; perhaps we can find a vacant one."

RATHER timidly she tucked her little hand in his arm, and he conducted her through the brilliant assemblage. Outside they found a stone bench, under a neglected-looking palm tree. The girl, having found a man of her own nationality and class, was no longer so troubled; for, uninvited, she had piled her burden on his back, confident of his willingness to carry it.

"Now," he said, "please tell me how the steamer happened to leave without you."

"It was driven out by a warship, and I would have been on board, only a very terrible thing happened. Miss Jackson, the girl with whom I am traveling— you must have noticed her, she is charming—"

He nodded.

"She had a headache to-day and decided not to come ashore, and I accepted the invitation of Count Madrone, who came aboard at Naples and sat at my table— the captain's table, you know. We wandered about the town and were lunching here at the hotel, when suddenly all the bells began to ring, and the whistles to blow, and a waiter rushed in and told us that war was declared. We had finished our lunch and were smoking a cigarette, when the siren of the *Durango* began to blow. At first, we supposed it was just joining in the celebration, but the waiter came to us and told us she was leaving immediately. All the *Durango* passengers were hurrying away, and we followed; but in the lobby the count excused himself for a moment, and he never came back, Mr. Billings."

"The dirty hound!" exclaimed Jasper.

"I waited for more than half an hour and then decided to take a cab to the quay. I was stepping into a cab when I discovered that in the excitement of leaving the dining room I had left my bag on the table. I returned for it, and it was gone. Nobody would pay any attention to me, Mr. Billings, and, after I had wasted half an hour without getting the slightest assistance, I decided to walk to the quay. I walked rapidly, but, when I reached the water front, judge of my dismay when I saw the *Durango* outside the breakwater, escorted by a torpedo-boat destroyer."

"Why didn't you hire a tug and chase her?"

"I had no money," she said in tones which proved that it was an entirely novel experience for her to have no money. "I was terrified, but I thought that Count Madrone must have returned and would be looking for me at the hotel. So I returned there and looked, but he was nowhere to be found. What, do you suppose, happened to him?"

"I don't know, but I'd like to lay hands on him— the rat!"

"So I just sat in the hotel, growing more and more distressed. I was never so frightened in my life. I searched the crowd for an American face; I listened eagerly for somebody speaking English, but they were all foreigners, and gradually it grew dark, and the bands were playing in the streets, and the people shouting, and in the lobby, officers in uniform began to appear, and women in evening gowns. Then it was dinner time, but I had no money to buy dinner, and I just sat and sat and wondered what was going to become of me. Finally, just as I was ready to die, I saw you, and that explains why I rushed upon you madly and was foolish enough to suppose you had come to look for me, when you probably didn't even know who I was."

"Oh, yes," said Jasper, "I knew you, all right."

As the girl had told her story, he had understood what an opportunity was offered to him to win her interest and gratitude. Although he had tried to convince himself that she was a worthless little snob, had sneered when he saw her in the company of the ship's officers, and told himself that he wanted nothing to do with her, deep down, inside, he craved her just as much as he had on the first day, when she stood near the gangplank.

When a woman's smile has enchanted a man, it doesn't help him to have his reason assure him that she is not worthy of his interest, for reason has nothing whatever to do with the behavior of the heart. Her voice was an exquisite instrument, and her pretty friendliness delighted him, even if he considered it based entirely upon self-interest. Doubtless she would have greeted the most obnoxious passenger upon the *Durango* as warmly, upon the same principle which causes a drowning man to grasp at a straw. She was hungry; she wanted to eat; she was homeless; she had to have a place to sleep; she was friendless and needed a friend; almost anybody would do. Most decidedly she had descended

from her high horse. She was purring contentedly now, confident that Jasper would take care of her. How quickly she would change her attitude when she learned that he was in quite as parlous a condition as she.

JASPER would have rejoiced if he could have accepted a whipping in lieu of making a confession, but it had to be done. He cleared his throat.

"I'm very hungry," she murmured.

He winced, hesitated, coughed and plunged into his explanation.

"So far as I can be of service, you know that I am at your disposal," he began uncomfortably. "I wish from the bottom of my heart I could buy your dinner. I'd like to dine, too, Miss Reynolds, but unfortunately I am absolutely penniless."

"What! How can that be?" she asked in wide-eyed dismay.

"I lunched at an inn near an old castle, on the outskirts of the town, and my wine was drugged. When I woke up I found myself lying in an alley, my pocketbook and watch had been taken, and everything was dark. I knew the ship must have sailed, and I made my way to this hotel in the hope of finding somebody who understood English, to whom I could tell my story. That's the sort of protector you've found," he said bitterly. It had cost him so much to make the explanation.

"Oh," said the girl, her dismay changing to sympathy. "How terrible! It's perfectly dreadful."

"I would give anything to aid you. A man can get by somehow, but a girl in such a position— it's unthinkable! Til do something— really, I will."

Suddenly Miss Reynolds began to laugh softly. Looking at her in astonishment, Jasper saw that it was not hysteria, but mirth, which shone in her eyes.

"It's really funny," she explained.

"Oh, highly comical!"

"I mean my hurling myself upon you when you already were deep in trouble, with quite enough to do to take care of yourself."

"I don't care anything about myself— it's you I'm thinking of. What the deuce can we do?" -

"Please pardon me for laughing. My sense of humor always works at the wrong moment. It is funny— really, it is."

"Just as funny as a murder. I've got to get money to hire a room for you at the hotel and get you something to eat, and I haven't got a thing I can pawn. They cleaned me out."

"And I haven't a ring or a bracelet-— not even my watch. The purser warned me always to leave my valuables in the safe when I went on these shore excursions, and I only had twenty-five dollars in my bag; but it was a lovely bag."

"What do you suppose they are doing on the Durango? They must know you are missing."

"I am sure the captain will be distressed, but he had 'no option except to sail, and they probably won't let the steamer return."

"He can wireless your loss— perhaps mine— to the American consul. If we could find him, he'd help us. He'd take you in, anyway. Have you a small coin to pay for a phone call?"

"Not a stivver."

"Nor I."

"I am deeply humiliated, Miss Reynolds."

"Don't be absurd," she said, with a sweet little laugh. "It's something to have found you."

"A broken reed!"

"No, really. I was frightened almost to death, but I am not terribly concerned now. You are a countryman, and you are not a weakling," she said, with an approving glance at his brawny arms and heavy shoulders." Misery loves company. We can talk to each other. In a way, it's an adventure."

"But you are hungry."

"Missing a dinner won't do either of us any great harm, and we'll find a way — out. Let's see if we can find the consul's address." :

"You are a darn good sport," he said admiringly.

"I try to make the best of things. At least, I have an escort— a fellow vagabond."

THEY entered the hotel and found the crowd rapidly thinning out. A great bell began to boom the hour, and they counted ten strokes. A clerk who spoke English gave them the address of the American consul, who lived only a few blocks distant, and the pair set out hopefully through the crowded street. Without much difficulty they arrived at the consulate. It was a private house in a block distinguished from the rest only by a small flagstaff, poking out from the second-story window; a house which was completely dark. They ascended the steps and punched the bell, waited a few moments and rang again. After ten minutes they were forced to conclude that there was nobody in the house, and they went down the steps to the street.

"What now?" asked the girl.

"I suppose we had better go back to the hotel."

Again they moved through the avenue, no longer so thick with people, but many of those who remained were waving the queer-looking flag of the nation and singing various songs.

"Poor, foolish people," commented the girl. 'A declaration of war ought to be cause for mourning instead of rejoicing. Were you in our war, Mr. Billings?"

"Not exactly. I was a buck private in a regular-army outfit that never got across."

"Think of these little toy countries, with their comic-opera uniforms, flying at each other's throats."

"Thought the League of Nations was supposed to prevent that sort of thing."

They discussed the subject of war and international policy during the walk back to the hotel, in order to take their minds off more intimate troubles. When one is compelled to go without dinner because he has no money to pay for it, the pangs of hunger are very hard to control, and Jasper was miserably sure that the girl suffered equally with himself.

Again they entered the hotel, where Jasper suggested that the girl seat herself, while he sought the manager to throw himself upon his mercy. Under ordinary circumstances the manager of the Bristol might have been interested in the story of two passengers left behind by the cruising steamer and without funds, but he had more weighty problems before him to-night, and he dismissed Billings very ungraciously.

"Seek your consul. I can do nothing. You had no business to miss your steamer," he replied, when Jasper had finally succeeded in locating him in a tiny office at the rear of the main desk of the hotel.

The droop of his shoulders told the girl of his ill success, but she greeted him with a smile which heartened him.

"By morning there will be search parties on our trail," she said, "and somehow we shall survive until morning. Sit here and talk to me."

Before the conversation was well under way, a porter approached them rudely.

"Guests of the hotel?" he asked.

"No; that is—" stammered Jasper.

"Then you must go. Orders. War is declared."

Pink with shame, Miss Reynolds rose, and Jasper followed her out into the court, the porter on their heels to make sure that they passed the gate.

"Driven from home," she said with false gayety.

"Don't see what war has to do with refusing to let us sit in the lobby," grumbled Jasper. "Do you suppose we've got to walk the streets all night?"

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Even that seems to be forbidden."

Policemen with drawn swords were driving the crowd from the avenue, and the pair were carried by the throng along toward the south, the multitude

dwindling as they drifted. Jasper and Miss Reynolds had walked half a mile when they were alone on the avenue, the lights of which were suddenly extinguished.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he asked. "It's only eleven o'clock."

"Let us go into that little park," she suggested, pointing to a green spot directly ahead, a breathing space in the city, heavily wooded and surrounded by a high, iron picket fence, the gate of which was invitingly open. It was so dark that she timorously took his hand, as they entered the park, and they moved cautiously forward until they found a bench upon which they dropped, already fatigued.

"What a situation!" she said nervously. "Two people who never met, thrown together by mad circumstances, outcasts in a land where nobody understands us, penniless, compelled to spend the night upon a bench in a park. Yet I am so glad we encountered each other. Heaven only knows what would have become of me— alone."

"I appreciate your attitude more than I can tell you. If my own folly had not thrown me into this situation, I would not be compelled to ask you to spend the night in such a place."

"But if you had not been drugged and robbed, you would have boarded the *Durango*, and then I would have been alone. It terrifies me to think what might have happened— into whose hands I might have fallen. In the insanity that prevails to-night, neither police nor anybody else would bother about the fate of an American girl."

"And a beautiful one."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, and, despite the fact that they could not see each other's faces, he felt her warm smile. "Yet you do not like me, Mr. Billings."

"How can you say that?"

"You avoided me on the steamer. When people have been passengers on the same ship for three weeks and have not even a bowing acquaintance, it is obvious that there is dislike on one side or the other. And, as I did not avoid you, therefore you must have deliberately kept away from me."

"I knew hardly anybody," he protested, his cheeks on fire.

"But I am not to be classed among the mob. I gave you numerous opportunities; once I bumped into you deliberately."

"No!" he exclaimed.

She nodded. 'You wouldn't even look at me, just mumbled an apology and turned your back."

"I hesitated to speak without an introduction," he parried.

She lunged again.

"The purser offered to introduce me, and you refused."

"How did you know?"

"He told me."

"It was just that I was rather shy about meeting people."

"I'm not talking about 'people'— I mean me. He mentioned my name, and you said you particularly did not wish to meet me."

"Oh— there must have been a misunderstanding."

"There was not. I sent Mr. Baxter to bring you over, and he described me, but you said you had seen me and did not wish to meet me. What is the matter with me, Mr. Billings?"

"How can you think there is anything the matter?"

"There must be. You say I am pretty. I know you are a distinguished writer, and I am just a girl who has never done anything. I can understand your not wishing to be bothered talking to your fellow passengers, but why were you particularly determined not to make my acquaintance?"

"Well," said Jasper, backed into a corner, "do you remember early in the voyage, coming with your friend into the hall? I think it was just after the storm, about three days out. I was sitting near you." ;

"Yes, I noticed you. You never came again to the hall."

"I overheard a conversation between you and your friend. After you refused to dance with several men, you made some very sharp reflections upon passengers who addressed you unconventionally, or who were introduced by the hostess."

"Oh!" said a very small voice. "That was it."

"I naturally felt that you did not wish to make acquaintances, and I had no desire to be snubbed, if I sought an introduction; therefore I avoided one."

"But I didn't mean you," she said reproachfully.

"You turned down better-looking men than I."

"You don't understand," she pleaded. "We were two girls alone. There is a certain type of man on board ship who tries to take advantage of such a situation, and an intelligent. girl can tell one a mile away. I am not a prude, and if a man who impressed me as a gentleman, and interesting as well, had scraped acquaintance, I would not have resented it. We were talking about certain persons and certainly had no idea we were being overheard. You had no business to eavesdrop."

"I know it," he said meekly.

"And for that you prevented us from meeting weeks ago and perhaps having a lovely time. You humiliated me by refusing the purser's introduction— hurt me deeply, Mr. Billings, because I did want to meet you. I saw you when you came on board. I deliberately led my friend to that table because I thought there might be an occasion for a word or two— perhaps you might ask me to dance."

"Would you have danced with me that first night?"

"I expect so," she said with a slight laugh.

"I'll be hanged. Why did you talk like that?"

"Well, my friend started the conversation, and I had to agree with her. Besides, I did not like the men who came over."

"What an ass I've been!" claimed. 'Please forgive me, Miss Reynolds. What is your first name?"

"Marion."

"May I?"

"In view of the fact I am sitting up all night with you in the dark, you may."

"Marion, I was crazy to meet you, and, because I wanted to do so much, I resented what I thought was your attitude."

"Well, it's all right now."

"Rather."

Silence for a moment. "My hands are getting cold," she .whispered.

"May I take them in mine— to warm them?"

"That was why I mentioned it." She laughed. Two little hands crept into his big ones. More silence.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "What was that?"

In the distance they heard a sound which he recognized instantly.

"Troops on the march," he said. "They are coming this way."

"But there is no music, no drums."

"It's war time."

On the pavements sounded the clatter of horses' hoofs, the rumble of artillery wagons, and the *clod! clod! clod!* of thousands of marching men.

"Let's go see the parade," she said. "It will kill time, and we can look at them through the park fence."

Hand in hand, they moved across the thick grass, under the trees until they reached the high, iron fence, and by that time the head of the column was passing. It was the army of Yugo-Monrovia going forth to war.

A regiment of cavalry moved by at a walk, followed by a brigade of field artillery. The gaudy uniforms had been packed away. These troops wore dark gray; the cavalry's silver helmets were covered with dark cloth, and even the spikes in the helmets were painted gray. Jasper approved their businesslike appearance; if this were a comic-opera kingdom, its army had good training, was well armed, and likely to fight savagely. The artillery was succeeded by infantry, just a multitude of gray shadows moving through the black night, their rifles without the betraying glint of bayonets, the officers minus their ornate swords. Company after company glided by, with mo sound save the trample of leather on wide-stone flaggings. One regiment after another, until ten had passed. 'Then came a second division, preceded by its cavalry and artillery, its commander in a big, closed motor car. They had been peering through the fence for an hour, and imperceptibly the girl

had crept closer to the man, until she leaned against him, and his right arm passed protectingly over her shoulder. She was shivering slightly in the chill night air. And then men poured on them from behind, the girl was violently dragged away, and Jasper found himself confronting four policemen, who menaced him with their swords.

"God in heaven! They take us for spies!"

As a soldier, he should have known better than look out from a dark garden through a picket fence at an army in war time. Had they stood on the sidewalk, they would not have awakened suspicion, but they were concealed, furtive, and in a war-crazed nation their actions were a confession of guilt.

THE army marched in the dead of night through streets which had been emptied of spectators, without lights or beat of drum, secrecy its purpose. The enemy would give much to learn how many divisions passed, how strong was its artillery, how effective its cavalry. What more likely than that spies would hide in the park to count the effectives of Yugo-Monrovia?

That their situation was deadly serious he understood at once, and he shuddered for the girl, innocent victim of his own stupidity. But the police were already driving them both before them, and when Marion called to him they were harshly bidden to be silent.

They left the park from the farther side and were bundled into an automobile, while four policemen crowded in with them, and four more clung to the side of the car, standing upon the running board.

"What are we arrested for?" she whisered.

"They take us for spies. Don't worry."

"How ridiculous," she said, with a clear laugh, whereupon all eight policemen roared the local equivalent for ''Silence!"

In no time at all they were passing into a forbidding gray building. For a moment they stopped before a desk in a dimly lighted hall, where they were arraigned, in a language they did not understand, and then thrust into separate cells.

Not a chance for a word with Marion was given him. Spies must not be allowed to communicate, and he dropped upon a dirty cot in a squalid cell and buried his head in his hands. Jasper remembered the spy hysteria at the beginning of our late war, when innocent people were arrested on absurd charges and sometimes kept for months in jail. In some countries they execute men and women on equally ridiculous complaints. He and Marion were foreigners, enough to condemn them in an isolated Balkan kingdom, suddenly ablaze with hatred of an equally obscure enemy.

Their disposal would be summary. If a miracle did not happen, they would be tried and convicted in the morning, to face a firing squad an hour later. The

American consul must be reached; a wireless must be sent to the Durango. All depended upon whether their judges were intelligent or stupid, and whether the court troubled to provide an English interpreter.

His personal plight was insignificant beside that of the lovely innocent girl whom he had just learned to be so sweet and wonderful, who had confessed so bravely her liking for him, and whom he had been insane enough to avoid on the steamer. Whatever happened to him, she must be saved. All night he writhed in agony, born of his impotence.

Marion, conscious of her innocence, rather amused by the preposterousness of the charge against her— think of being a spy for an unknown country— confident that everything would be explained in the morning, was grateful for the warmth of the cell, dirty though it was. After a few grimaces Marion lay down on the cot and slept soundly all night.

At eight in the morning she was awakened by a policeman and ordered to follow him. She marched into a chamber at the far end of the hall, where were seated seven officers in the gray uniforms of the marching troops. At the same moment, Jasper, wild-eyed and disheveled, was driven into the room through another door, and the pair were forced to stand before what was passing for justice in Taliglio that morning.

"THERE was a conversation between the officers. An officer, whose eyes displayed very boldly his admiration for 'Marion, addressed her, first in YugoMonrovian, then in Turkish, finally in French.

"I understand French," she said gladly.

"You are charged, mademoiselle, with spying upon our army from behind the grille of the Prater Park last night."

"We were looking at the parade. Is there any harm in that?" she demanded,

"You are Albanian spies."

"Do not be absurd. We are Americans, left behind by the *Durango*, when you drove her out of the port yesterday."

"Why were you hiding in the park?" he demanded in some surprise.

"We had no money. We were turned away from the hotel and driven off the avenue."

"Americans without money— that is droll!" He laughed and then explained to the court, which seemed to be impressed. At that moment a policeman hurried into the room, walked up to Marion and gazed at her intently then said something to the judges.

"Ho!" exclaimed the interpreter. "Mademoiselle, you lunched' yesterday at the Bristol Hotel with a man named Madrone."

"Count Madrone? Certainly," she said eagerly.

"The Albanian secret agent," he shouted, then talked rapidly to the other judges. All looked grave and conversed together. The young man looked sad, shrugged his shoulders, and spoke again in French.

"You were the companion of Madrone, who has already been executed. You are caught with your accomplice, enumerating our forces. You are condemned to be shot."

Jasper turned pale, cast a look of agonizing commiseration at Marion, but she thought her French must be at fault. Shot for looking at a parade? Nonsense!

The oldest of the judges spoke to the officer, who listened intently and then suddenly smiled.

"There is a chance for you," he said. "You will be sent to general staff headquarters. If you reveal your system of ciphers and a list of your fellow secret agents, you will be imprisoned for life instead of executed."

"But we— I— I don't know what you mean," she replied stammeringly. Jasper, who understood very little French, but who had gathered the gist of the conversation, now mustered enough of his college French to make a statement:

"We are American citizens. I demand to see the American consul."

With a laugh the young officer repeated the demand, and the judges all unbent enough to smile.

"We have no time for consuls," said the young officer. 'You are guilty. You have the choice of betraying your confederates or being shot within an hour. Take them to headquarters."

"Jasper, are they serious?" exclaimed the girl.

"My heart is breaking, Marion. It's all my fault," he said.

"Silence!" roared the interpreter.

A file of soldiers now entered with rifles, lined up on either side of the boy and girl, and, at a command barked by a sergeant, marched them out of the room. For some reason they were returned to their cells, left there for an hour, and then taken forth again. Although he was soon to be shot, Jasper was ravenously hungry. He had had no dinner the night before, no breakfast this morning. It seemed strange that he could think of eating under the circumstances.

They waited in an anteroom, attended by a dozen soldiers— little dark. men, with rifles too large for them, who glowered at them fiercely, and then a whiskered sergeant entered. Immediately they were escorted down a wide flight of stone steps into a courtyard, where they were told to halt. For a second they stood side by side.

"Marion," he whispered, "we are going to die. I want to tell you I love you— it's our last chance."

The girl looked up at him with a brave smile. Weak as they are, women have a way of facing terrible events.

"I love you, Jasper," she whispered back. "I learned it last night. Don't give up hope. Something may happen."

"God bless you," he said brokenly.

Now a platoon of infantry, gray and warlike, marched into the courtyard and, at a string of commands from a lieutenant, divided into squads, the first of which halted in front of Jasper, while the second closed in behind him. Marion was led to a position in the rear, while a third squad drew up behind the pale and trembling girl. With a protesting squeak, the great gate swung open, and the march of doom began. Jasper wondered why he had not been handcuffed nor his arms bound behind him; and, despite his alarm, he grinned at the thought that they had probably arrested so many possible spies that they had: run out of manacles. If they had only permitted him to walk beside Marion, he might have been of some help to her. Marion had confessed that she loved him, and ne she was instantly torn away from im.

They moved from the prison down a narrow street, which entered the central Plaza, which, he could see, was packed with humanity. Throngs were moving with the detachment toward the square, and many of these, observing the alien prisoners, jeered and taunted and cursed, probably to demonstrate their own patriotism.

He heard music— an incongruous melody for such a remote and barbarous region— the "*Manhattan Beach March*" of John Philip Sousa, its strains recalling almost forgotten scenes and incidents of a life soon to be snuffed out. The soldiers had to force a way through the mob, which blocked the end of the nardow street, and reached open ground just as half a dozen mounted police came galloping along from the north side, clearing a route for a procession. Behind was a mounted band, and in the rear were the tall beaver hats of the cavalry. The lieutenant in command of Jasper's escort ordered a halt, whereupon the squad behind closed in upon the heels of the prisoner, and Jasper saw Marion, when he looked back, only a few feet behind him, separated by two ranks of soldiers. She threw him a brave, but rather piteous, smile, which he returned before his head was forcibly turned front by a hard hand on the back of his neck.

He saw that they had entered the Plaza from a street which ran along the side of the Hotel Bristol, and he observed that its windows fronting on the Plaza were occupied by guests in holiday attire, who had small flags or streamers in the national colors of red, black and green.

The cavalry were already moving past — household troops, to judge from their brilliant uniforms. Already he had surmised that it was a royal procession. Behind the cavalry, coming from the left, was a train of automobiles. The first car to approach was a splendid machine, which drew a roar of applause, and now the people on every side were dropping on their knees, while the soldiers of the guard of Jasper and Marion presented arms. All these things he observed with bitter

indifference. What did he care about the stupid rulers of an idiotic nation, which had condemned two innocent people, one of them the loveliest girl in the world, to death? In a defiant mood he inspected the king and queen in the open automobile. A chauffeur in magnificent scarlet-and-gold livery drove the car, and beside him sat a military aid, whose green coat was almost hidden beneath medals, crosses, and other decorations. He saw the king, rather a noble person, with a long, white beard, a green coat, with a white sash, and huge gold epaulets. Beside him was a stout, motherly woman in black velvet. His majesty carried in his hand his head covering, a gold Roman helmet, with black plume, and he was bowing, unsmiling, to the noisy plaudits of his subjects.

Above the rumble of obeisance there penetrated the shrill scream of a woman who stood upon the opposite side of the path of the procession, and who was pointing upward. Immediately her scream was echoed from a _ hundred throats, and others pointed. Jasper involuntarily followed the direction of her finger.

ON the roof of the Hotel Bristol, leaning over the parapet was a tiny figure, some seventy feet above the ground, a black-bearded person, with menace in his attitude.

The creature bellowed something, and Jasper, ignorant of Yugo-Monrovian, understood what he said. It was the Latin battle cry of all political fanatics. The man on the roof shouted:

"*Sic semper tyrannis*."

As he spoke, he lifted his right hand which held a round, black object.

Immediately fifty thousand people went mad with terror. The kneeling mob was upon its feet. What had been a sea of faces was a sea of backs. The soldiers surrounding the prisoners melted, joining the futile stampede. Jasper saw the magnificent chauffeur stop the royal car and make a flying leap into the street, where he began to claw at the backs of the crowd. Women were already lying on the ground, trampled. The military aid cowered in the front seat, his arms held protectingly over his head.

As though turned to stone, the king and queen sat in their car. Some of the cavalry ahead were trying to turn their horses, others were driving forward. Soldiers may be brave, but they flee from a bomb.

The madman, with a shriek of laughter, swung his bomb out, so that it would drop into the car; but Jasper saw it would strike the ground, six feet or so in front of the radiator— where it would be equally effective.

The poor queen was making the sign of the cross, and the king's eyes widened, as he saw a slender figure rush forward where all were moving away. Jasper was standing in front of the machine, his eyes fixed upon the black ball which was falling. He was on the balls of his feet, swaying slightly; now he moved a pace to one side, now he ran forward a couple of feet. To him the scene had faded. King,

castle and pageant were gone. He stood in the Princeton diamond, on the day of the deciding game with Yale, waiting. There were three on bases; it was the ninth inning; the score was Princeton, three; Yale, two. There were two men out, and the clean-up batter of the blue had hit a swift one and sent up a high-fowl fly.

The Yale stands were howling like dervishes, but the Princeton stands were silent as the tomb, probably praying. He had judged that ball correctly, and at the proper second his cupped hands closed round it, though he had to bend backward. But this ball drove his hands against his chest, with sickening force, and knocked him flat on his back, where he lay— the ball safe, the game won.

The bomb had weighed a pound, filled with a high explosive, which would go off by percussion. Only such trained and massive hands as those of Jasper Billings could have caught it and retained it.

He was dazed, but conscious; he had hit the back of his head against the stone flagging, but he heard the thunder of the multitude and, above it, what was sweeter to his ears— a woman's voice, shouting in English:

"Hold it, catcher!"

King Nicholas of Yugo-Monrovia was out of his car and upon his knees beside the man who had caught the bomb. The multitude of backs had become fronts, and the soldiers were drawing around. The cheering might have been heard in the hills of distant Albania and caused the enemy to quake.

King 'Nicholas heard the girl's quaint call, and his waxen face broke into a smile. In perfect English he said:

"By God's great mercy, a baseball player came to Taliglio. Permit me to assist our preserver to rise that I may shake the hand which saved her majesty and myself."

Jasper grinned up at him. "Don't shake it too hard, your majesty. I think I have a couple of broken fingers."

Aided by the king, he gct upon his feet, the diabolical instrument clutched to his breast.

"I took a chance that it wasn't a fuse bomb, sir," he said. "You must have seen a game of baseball."

"Before I came to the throne, I visited America," replied the monarch. "Come with me that her majesty may thank you."

"Listen, sir: I'm condemned to death as an Albanian spy, and that young lady, too. We're both Americans— tourists from the Durango."

HE talked fast because he saw that the guards were returning and again surrounding Marion Reynolds.

King Nicholas looked angry.

"T saw the cowardly dogs run. Of course, you are free, sir— you and your wife."

"Not my wife— not yet."

"Approach, mademoiselle," | commanded his majesty, and Marion came timidly, her face aglow, her eyes betraying her wonder. This was her first king, but she saw him dimly. She was adoring Jasper, still with the bomb in his hands.

"Your fiancé, mademoiselle," Nicholas said, offering her his hand, which she knew was to be kissed, not shaken, "is the bravest man I have seen in my seventy years. To catch a bomb in his hands, knowing it would probably explode and obliterate him— to run forward where everybody else ran away!"

"Except your majesties," said Marion.

"We rulers must face our fate," said the king, with dignity. "Here, Dimitri," to his aid, "dispose of this bauble. It won't hurt you now."

The officer, crimson with shame, took the bomb from Jasper.

"Come, young Americans. Her Majesty will wish to thank you."

He took Jasper by the arm, and otfered his other arm to Marion. As they moved to the car, they passed through a lane of kneeling people, who were singing the national anthem with tears on their cheeks. Some of the women kissed the hem of Marion's rather short dress.

Police and soldiers were overflowing the Bristol in search of the would-be assassin; and, as they reached the car, several rifle shots told that they had probably found him.

"Americans, my dear," said the king, when they stood beside the automobile. "We owe our lives to a baseball player whom they were going to shoot as an Albanian spy."

The old queen smiled at Marion. "The fools!" she said in English. "Nicholas, turn these cowards out of the car and let this lovely young girl and her brave man ride through the city, so that our subjects may see those who saved us and whom we delight to honor."

So, through the capital of Yugo-Monrovia, rode Marion and Jasper, sitting in the tonneau of a royal car, with a king and queen. If they both wore clothes in which they had slept in a prison, the people knew already what they had done for the nation, and for an hour they moved through a multitude delirious with joy, as they showered every species of blessing upon their uncombed heads.

That night they dined at the palace, after the court physician had set and bandaged two broken fingers of the man who caught bombs, after which they removed to the finest suite in the Bristol, the manager of which was ready to lick the polish from Jasper's shoes. Marion's bag and Jasper's watch and money miraculously appeared upon the table of their sitting room, and the king had assured them that the *Durango* had been summoned by wireless to take them on their way. On the breast of Jasper Billings glittered the gold star of a Knight Commander of the Dragon of Yugo-Monrovia, which the king had taken from his own uniform coat.

"I am still dazed by the wonderful things which have happened to us," declared Marion, "yet I am most unable to understand how you ever had nerve enough to try to catch the bomb."

"It was like this," said Jasper. "Very shortly they were going to shoot us. If the bomb hit the stone pavements, we would have been blown to bits. So why not take a chance?"

"But if it had had a fuse?"

"Only another chance."

"I think you are just the bravest man!" she exclaimed. "But I am so sorry for your poor broken fingers." To prove it she kissed them.

"I'll catch a bomb every day if you'll do that?"

"If you ever take such a chance again like—"

"Pooh! I'd sooner catch a bomb than try to hold some pitchers I know."

"Jasper," she said, "of course I'd love the wedding to-morrow in the palace, with the queen as matron of honor and the king giving me away; but if you think it too sudden— if you don't really love me— after all, you hated me on the steamer— "

"Do you want to know how much I love you?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Like this," he said.

In motion pictures they would have had to cut most of that kiss.

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12: The Fatal Fishing Line

W. L. Alden
1837-1908
The Pall Mall Magazine, Nov 1895
Collected in: *Van Wegener's Ways*, 1898

"FISHING," remarked the Colonel, "is like learning a foreign language. The more brains a man has the more difficult it is for him to catch fish or to learn languages. You take a child and put him in a French school, and in six months he will speak French like a native, whereas the brainiest man in England might work at French for six years, and even then he would not speak it well. As for fishing, the best fisherman I ever knew was a half-witted darkey boy. He could catch more fish in an hour than any six of the leading citizens of New Berlinopolisville could catch in a day. There was my old friend and neighbour Professor Van Wagener. He was in some respects the ablest scientific man I ever met, but he never caught a fish in his life, except an occasional minnow. Now and then a trout would take his hook, but, the moment that trout was pulled far enough out of the water to see the man that had caught him, he would say to himself: 'Excuse me,' and he'd wriggle off that hook and go and hide himself under a rock for the rest of the day, as if he were ashamed of having paid any attention to Van Wagener's bait.

"Speaking of fishing reminds me of the electric fishing line fishing line that Professor Van Wagener invented. He and I had been fishing together one day, and neither of us had caught anything worth speaking of. On our way home Van Wagener says to me: 'The reason why we don't catch any fish is the grossly unscientific way in which we go about it. When a fish gets on my hook, I always lose him before I can get him out of the water. Now, if I had a metallic line, connected with a small battery, and could give the fish a shock the moment he took the hook in his mouth, I could land him without the least trouble.'

" 'Very likely you could,' said I. 'But where would be the sport of playing the fish?'

" 'I don't care anything for sport,' replied the Professor. When I go fishing I want to catch something, and I tell you right here that I'm going to invent an apparatus that will catch fish every time. You stick to your old apparatus and have all the sport you want. I'll have my electric fishing line, and catch every trout there is in the stream. If I was a betting man I wouldn't mind betting you that the first time I go fishing with my scientific apparatus, I'll make the biggest catch that has ever been known in the State of Illinois.'

"And so he did, though it wasn't just the sort of catch that he wanted to make.

"About a week later Van Wagener called me over to his house, which, as I told you before, was next door to mine, and showed me what he had done. He had a fishing rod with a long line fastened to it made of thin, flexible, braided wire.

Instead of a reel he had a small battery attached to the rod, and by pressing a button with his thumb he could send a current through the line which would astonish any fish that it might happen to hit. I forgot to say that he had about half-a-dozen hooks fastened to his line, and he explained to me that if these hooks were baited properly, he would be sure of catching half-a-dozen trout at once. There was one thing about the apparatus which I couldn't help admiring. The line was flexible as a silk line, but it was about as strong as a ship's cable. Van Wagener showed me that you couldn't break it either as by pulling or twisting, and that it would turn the edge of any knife that you might try to cut it with. I knew well enough that his electric battery was all nonsense, but it did seem as if he had invented a first-class fishing line, though, of course, he couldn't appreciate its real merits.

"Van Wagener wanted me to go to the nearest trout stream with him and try the new apparatus, but I declined. I knew that he wouldn't succeed in catching any fish, and that he would naturally be disappointed, and express himself in scientific language that might not be so easy to bear. He was a good man, but when things went wrong with him he would use scientific terms in a way that was about four times as irritating as any ordinary unscientific cursing would have been. So I told him he had better try his apparatus alone, and that if it didn't happen to meet his expectations he could come to my house and free his mind after the thing was over. He didn't like it that I declined to go with him, and when he started out, with his rod on his shoulder and a big basket on his arm, he called to me that I needn't expect him to bring me any trout, for he intended to sell his whole catch to the fishmonger.

"The nearest place for trout fishing was a pool about two miles from where the Professor lived, and about half a mile from any house. I had told Van Wagener about this pool, for it was the place where I had once lost the biggest trout I ever hooked; but I hadn't told him that the pool was the property of Deacon Sammis, and that the Deacon wouldn't allow any man to fish there without paying for the privilege. It so happened that Deacon Sammis was away from home that day, and the Professor went to the trout pool and baited his hooks— for he never tried to fish with flies— and sat down on the bank, and started in to fish, without being interfered with. Mrs. Sammis, however, had seen him crossing the field with his rod and basket, and, being a woman who looked sharply after the family interests, she resolved to go down to the pool and tell the Professor that he must either pay or leave.

"Mrs. Sammis was a young woman, being the Deacon's third wife, and a remarkably good-looking woman. When she came behind the Professor and said: 'No trespassing allowed here, sir! You can't fish in this pool unless you pay five dollars first!' he looked up at her, and exclaimed: 'Bless my soul! What a pretty woman!' He didn't mean anything by it, having a sort of habit of talking out loud

to himself, but it had its effect on Mrs. Sammis all the same. She knew who the Professor was, and was mightily pleased to be complimented by so distinguished a man. So she said: 'I didn't know it was you, Professor! Of course you're welcome to fish here as much as you please. My husband says there's no danger of your catching anything.' Then she asked Van Wagener what bait he was using; and, being glad of the opportunity to explain his new invention, he asked her to sit down beside him and see what really scientific trout-fishing would do.

"Mrs. Sammis was an intelligent woman, and she was a good deal interested in the electric fishing line. She drew pretty close to the Professor while he was explaining the battery to her, and she said that she did hope he would catch something, just to show how the battery would work. All of a sudden a big trout jumped clean out of the water. This excited Van Wagener, and he resolved to catch that trout then and there, so as to give Mrs. Sammis a convincing proof of the great merit of his apparatus. So he started to throw his line just over the place where the trout had jumped, making sure that the fish was waiting for him. Now, Van Wagener knew no more about casting a line than a baby knows. He swung the hooks over his head till they rested on the grass behind him, and then he tried to fling them back into the pool, with about as much judgment and delicacy as if he had been working with a flail. The result was that one hook caught Mrs. Sammis in the upper part of the right ear, and another caught the Professor in the nape of the neck, and there they were, fastened to one another by a bit of line about a foot long, that couldn't be cut except by the finest sort of steel file.

"Of course Mrs. Sammis gave a scream when the hook went into her ear; and what with that, and the pain in the back of his own neck, the Professor lost his presence of mind, and accidentally pressed the button of the battery. This brought another shriek from Mrs. Sammis, for there are few things more startling than a good smart electric shock. Next the Professor threw down the fishing-rod, and this gave a fresh twist to the hook, and led him to use a few scientific terms. It was foolish in him to try to break the line, knowing as he did that it was much too strong to be broken; but for all that he did try to break it, and in the process pulled at Mrs. Sammis's ear till she burst out crying, and begged him to let her die where she was. By this time he began to realise that he was in a mighty bad situation, but he grappled with it like the intelligent man he always was— that is, when he had had time to cool down a little.

"He took up the rod again very carefully, and succeeded in unfastening the line. Then he coiled the line up into a tight little ball, so that it couldn't trail on the ground or catch in anything. Meanwhile he was begging Mrs. Sammis to be calm, and assuring her that he would instantly take her to the doctor's and have the hook taken out of her ear. Mrs. Sammis cried a little longer, and then she stopped and said that the sooner they saw the doctor the better, and she did hope that the Deacon wouldn't get home until she and the Professor had been cut loose. You

see the Deacon, though he was one of the best of men, was a little hasty in his temper, and two or three times he had shot a man in circumstances that really didn't call for any such energetic action, as he afterwards admitted himself.

"Well, the Professor and Mrs. Sammis set out for the doctor's, which was a good mile from the trout pool. The line that connected the two unfortunate people was so short that nearly every step they took it would stir up the hooks to fresh activity, and fetch fresh shrieks from Mrs. Sammis. Finally the Professor told her that she must allow him to put his arm around her waist, and that she must put her head on his shoulder. By this means they could walk without jerking the line. Mrs. Sammis at first wouldn't hear of any such plan, but after a few minutes the pain was too much for her, and she accepted the Professor's proposal. It must have been rather a pretty sight to see the two walking slowly across the field in such close proximity, and if I had been a younger man I don't know that I should have objected to take the Professor's place, fish-hooks and all.

"Before they were fairly out of the field the Deacon's first wife's mother, who lived with him, saw them out of her window, and called the servant girl to help her to pack up and leave the house where such an abandoned and shameless female lived. Mrs. Sammis knew of a sort of back path, by which she and the Professor could reach the doctor's office with- out taking to the main street; and of course they took this back path, not expecting to meet anybody. But you all know how it is. If you happen to be in a situation where you don't wish to be seen, all the friends and all the enemies you ever had will be sure to show up inside of twenty minutes. Why, I knew a young American man who wanted to have a quiet talk with a young American girl here in London. They had just arrived on the same steamer, and the girl's parents didn't like the young man, and wouldn't let the girl see him if they could help it. Well, he made an appointment with her to meet at St. Paul's Cathedral, calculating that if they went up into the ball nobody would see them except the guide, and they didn't care anything about him. Of course they had no sooner got up to the highest gallery than they met a party of nine Americans, who were old friends of the girl's, and were overjoyed to see her. They told her that they were going to call on her parents that very evening. It's my opinion that if the prophet Jonah had made an appointment to meet his best girl in the whale's cabin, he'd have found about a dozen friends leaning up against the ribs and waiting for him with bull's-eye lanthorns in their hands.

"However, I'm wandering from the subject. What I intended to say was that just as soon as the Professor and Mrs. Sammis turned into the path they began to meet people, especially boys. The grown folks merely looked at them sadly and gave them a wide berth, so as not to contract any of their wickedness; but the boys generally hooted at them, and called the Professor names, and said they were going to tell Deacon Sammis. This was pretty hard to bear, but there was no help for it. The Professor wanted to stop and explain the state of things to

everybody whom they met, but Mrs. Sammis wouldn't allow him to do anything of the sort. She told him he had better keep his breath until he should come to explain things to the Deacon, which she calculated he would find a middling tough job. In spite of the fact that she had her head on the Professor's shoulder and he had his arm around her waist, she was about as mad at him as a woman could be, and told him fifty times that he was the worst specimen of a chattering idiot that she had ever dreamed of.

"As for the Professor, he was just scientific enough to wonder why she made so much disturbance over so small a matter, and he hadn't the least idea that the Deacon would feel annoyed, even if he should happen to meet them on the way to the doctor's. So he walked on, talking about his new fishing apparatus, and trying his best to console Mrs. Sammis. When they reached the doctor's office the two hooks were extracted with very little difficulty, and the Professor went home and explained to his wife why he hadn't caught any trout.

"That was the beginning of the great scandal that divided all New Berlinopolisville into two parties— those who believed the Professor's story, and those who didn't. I am sorry to say that the latter was very much the larger party, and that Mrs. Van Wagener belonged to it. The Professor came over to my house that evening, and said that he rather thought he had better stay with me for a while, which accordingly he did. At times Mrs. Van Wagener would come to my door and say that she wanted to see that miserable man; but I never let her in, knowing that there would be trouble if I did. Similarly Deacon Sammis came one day with a big horsewhip, and demanded to see 'that scientific hound,' but I explained to him that if he wanted to interview anybody with a horsewhip, I was at his service, but that no hounds, scientific or otherwise, were to be found on my premises. Nothing came of it, for the Deacon hadn't brought his pistol with him and he never thought it worth while to call a second time. The Deacon's divorce suit was a failure, for the testimony of the doctor who had cut out the fish-hooks satisfied the jury, and they gave a verdict which entirely exonerated Mrs. Sammis and the Professor. But of course that had no effect so far as the public was concerned. People had made up their minds about the affair long before the suit came to be tried, and they didn't allow such a little thing as a verdict to influence them.

"It was so clear to me that the Professor's usefulness in New Berlinopolisville was gone that I induced him to accept a Professorship in Chicago that was offered to him while he was stopping at my house. at my house. What with Mrs. Van Wagener waiting to make it hot for him day and night, and what with the Deacon swearing to shoot him on sight, New Berlinopolisville didn't afford that quiet and seclusion which a scientific man needs, if he intends to do any valuable scientific work. The upshot of it all was that one night I drove the Professor out of town, and took him to a railway station where he took the train for Chicago. I wish he

had given me that recipe for making his metallic fishing line. There would have been a lot of money in that invention if it had been properly handled."

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13: The Secret of Zogra Island

William J. Makin
1894-1944
Blue Book, March 1933

A "Red Wolf of Arabia" adventure

WITH a face as expressionless as a saucer, the Chinese woman Foo Wong placed the platter of fried *bêche-de-mer* upon the table before the dark Eurasian. With eyes that seemed smoldering queerly, he watched her.

She poured out the coffee.

"There is a man— a white man— lying on the beach," she said calmly.

Ignatius Moylan, keeper of the lighthouse, jerked to his feet.

"A white man!" he cried.

Still with that expressionless face, the Chinese woman nodded. Her black hair, cut in a fringe, fell in a jet cascade over her forehead. The high cheek-bones, the oblique eyes, and the pink flush suffusing her yellow skin enhanced her fantastic beauty. And to emphasize the pallor of her detachment, she wore a long black silk coat.

"Who is he? How did he get here?" asked Ignatius Moylan.

The woman gave a hardly perceptible shrug of her shoulders.

"I do not know. I saw him lying on the beach. He may be dead." And she placed a bowl of sugar on the table.

But Ignatius Moylan had already abandoned his breakfast, and seizing his topee, he plunged through the doorway. The hot blanket of dazzling light that in the daytime smothers the Red Sea, almost obliterated the tall white column of the lighthouse from which he emerged. It burned all color from sky and sea; it reflected the dazzling whiteness of the coral beneath his feet.

Foo Wong was right. A figure lay sprawled on the beach, half in and half out of the sea— an almost naked figure, with one blotch of color that even the sun could not change. The white man had a head of bright red hair.

After the first shock of surprise, Ignatius Moylan recovered himself. He drew a revolver from his pocket and cautiously approached that still figure; scarce a yard away, he halted. And then he received a second shock. The recum-bent man was regarding him with open eyes. This red-haired waif washed up by the sea was not dead.... He even spoke.

"Give me a hand!"

The brown finger of the Eurasian crooked round the trigger of his revolver.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The man smiled.

"Sorry I haven't a visiting-card with me. Is a name really necessary under these circumstances?"

The Eurasian bent a little forward.

"It is very necessary," he said quietly.

The red-haired man tried to scramble to his feet. He found the revolver thrust against his body.

"I want your name— and the reason for your being on this island," said the Eurasian in the high-pitched voice of his kind.

"Does Rex Nerval convey anything to you?" asked the man, now squatting on the beach.

"Nothing at all," replied the Eurasian.

"Thank goodness for that," murmured the other. "I have to admit that it is known only too well to the police in Paris and London. They even sent two men out to Aden to take me back to the dubious security of Dartmoor. We were on our way last night when I saw the homely flash of this lighthouse. I decided to drop overboard and swim for it. I hardly expected to be received with —er— a revolver."

"An escaped crook, eh?" The Eurasian considered. The revolver was still directed at the squatting figure.

"I hate the term, but— er— well, as you will."

"And you mean to tell me you swam a mile— two miles probably— through this sea?"

"I do. It was a little wearying; but here I am."

"What was the liner ? The P. and O. ship doesn't pass until Tuesday."

"Doesn't it ?" The figure on the beach was unconcerned. "I'm afraid I wasn't traveling luxuriously. The ship I left so unceremoniously was a Dutch liner, the *Batavia*. They're probably lamenting my loss at the moment."

The smoldering light seemed to die away for the moment in the eyes of the Eurasian. At the same time the redheaded man stifled a sigh of relief. It was luck that the dhow in which he had voyaged near to the island should have seen the Dutch liner coming toward them. The lighthouse keeper had also marked it. Later, the red-headed man had dropped overboard from the dhow, and dressed only in a thin shirt, a pair of khaki shorts and a belt, he had swum quietly to the island. Then he lay there, waiting for the morning.

But the Eurasian was considering a problem.

"My duty is to hand you over to the first British ship I can signal," he said.

"I suppose it is," replied the stranger cheerfully. "But is it really necessary?"

"Get upl" ordered the Eurasian.

The man staggered to his feet.

"Put your hands above your head!"

He did as he was told. He felt the revolver held by the Eurasian thrust into his back while a hand went through his scanty clothing. Satisfied there was no weapon, the Eurasian took his revolver away.

"That's right," he said. "Now we'll go inside. And please remember that I possess a revolver and will not have the slightest hesitation in using it. My companion happens to be ill. You can work in his place. Later, you'll be put aboard a British ship."

The other smiled.

"Excellent! Perhaps I may be permitted to have breakfast?"

They were walking toward the lighthouse as they spoke. The Chinese woman Foo Wong appeared.

"Breakfast is ready," she murmured.

Two places had been laid at the table.

Ignatius Moylan regarded her shrewdly. But with that unchanged, expressionless face she was pouring out the coffee for the red-headed man, who had calmly seated himself.

"I'M the perfect fool," decided Paul Rodgers. "A bottle of Japanese beer and the babble of a drunken skipper has sent me on a wild-goose chase. A fortnight wasted! The sooner I get off this damned island the better."

It was a humiliating conclusion. For five days Rodgers— an Intelligence officer known throughout the Sudan as the Wolf of Arabia— had been on the island, and a more placid, unexciting existence could not have been imagined. Ignatius Moylan had taught him the necessary duties —the cleaning of the reflectors, even the working of the mechanism, the clickclick-click of which was a tantalizing rhythm in his brain every night.

The flash had never varied. It had been "*four— three— four*," for night after night. The first two nights Rodgers had remained awake, lying in his little room and peering into the darkness of the Red Sea. He could see the surface of the water caught by that bright beam. He knew the ghostly touch of the light. And despite the click-click-click of the mechanism that sounded like some gigantic clock throughout this slender white pillar in the midst of the sea, he also counted the light. But it never varied. There was something godlike in its inevitability.

True, Ignatius Moylan never allowed the man he had found on the beach to be on duty at night. But was there anything extraordinary in that? The Eurasian seemed a stickler for duty. The idea that he might be the brain behind this gun-running into the Sudan became preposterous. The man was merely part of the mechanism of the lighthouse— a machine.

YET the fellow had moments of emotion. In the circular dining-room a caged canary whistled blithely. Occasionally Ignatius Moylan would press his brown face

against the gilded bars, his smoldering eyes alight with emotion, and he would whistle to the bird in some tuneless fashion of his own.

"Prettee bird!" he would whisper, and reluctantly take himself away. He insisted upon feeding the bird and cleaning the cage himself. Once, when Rodgers out of sheer curiosity had gone near the cage, the Eurasian jerked forth the revolver and leveled it at him.

"Get away!" he cried. "Leave the bird alone, you crook!"

With a shrug of his shoulders, the other had left the room. While the Eurasian slobbered over the bird, Paul Rodgers had taken the opportunity of exploring the lighthouse thoroughly. Except for one locked room, he could find nothing suspicious. He was trying the door of this room, where he judged the stores to be kept, when he realized instinctively that he was being watched. He swung round. The expressionless, saucer-like face of Foo Wong was there.

"You want something?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Through oblique eyes she watched him depart....

A strange, exotic creature with her black silk coat and polished fringe of hair—yet, otherwise, the respectable wife of a lighthouse-keeper; she cooked, managed the stores, and spent several hours each day fishing for beche-de-mer. Both she and her husband had a passion for this delicacy fried. Foo Wong was silent and efficient. Like her husband she had a sense of duty. She also looked after the other Eurasian who was ill.

RODGERS had seen this man on the . day of his arrival. He was the John Petersen whose name had been included in that message from the Residency. The fellow seemed to have an attack of malaria.

"Why not signal a passing ship for a doctor?" suggested Rodgers.

Ignatius Moylan had smiled.

"A little fever is not dangerous. I have medicine here." Then his smoldering eyes had turned upon Rodgers. "When I signal for a ship it will be to hand you over, my friend! So don't be in a hurry."

Paul Rodgers had also stood in the blazing sunshine on the narrow platform surrounding the reflectors. This was the place where the old beggar who had cringed in Kelly's Bar had been trapped one night and blinded by the light. It was a cage of glass and steel poised in the white scorched sky. A small gun, almost like a miniature howitzer, was clamped to the platform; this was the rocket-firing apparatus.

He gazed into the dizzying depths below. The sea was pellucid. Coral and sea plants seemed to sway lazily in the current. And through these placid wa ters a shark nosed, its white belly swirling upward as it glided after small fish. Rodgers shivered, even in the sunshine.

One... two... three... four— How that rhythm persisted in the mind! He sensed it, even though in the daytime the prisms were silent. Ignatius Moylan had accompanied him to this height, to gaze across the shimmering surface of the Red Sea at some passing vessel that had the appearance of a toy ship on a sheet of glass. The Eurasian focused a telescope. In the log-book, which Rodgers had secretly conned, careful entries had been made of such ships as came within the orbit of the lighthouse.

A more satisfactory lighthouse-keeper at a salary of one hundred rupees a month could not be imagined.

ON the sixth morning, as they stood upon the little gallery, a gray shape came stealing through the sun haze. The Eurasian leveled his telescope. He peered for a few seconds, lowered the telescope and said quietly:

"It's the cruiser *Lexingham*— with the Admiral aboard. She's sure to signal us if she comes close."

Rodgers did not reply. His humiliation seemed complete. At the same time he recognized that here was his opportunity of being taken off Zogra Island. Should he seize it? Why not confess to this ordinary and respectable lighthouse-keeper that he wanted to reach the mainland? He could be ashore again in a few hours and begin his search for the gun-runners in more likely surroundings. He turned abruptly to the other.

But the words stopped short; for the Eurasian had his smoldering eyes fixed on him, and there was a sardonic twist to his features. For one brief moment the mask had dropped from the face of Ignatius Moylan. And in that same brief moment Rodgers drew in his breath sharply.

"You were going to say—" As the Eurasian spoke the mask dropped into place.

"Nothing," replied Rodgers, gazing in the direction of the cruiser.

He felt the keen glance of the Eurasian upon him. The next moment he heard Moylan's voice, saying carelessly:

"They're signaling now— asking us if everything is all right.... Keep them in sight while I run up the flags."

Rodgers nodded. He heard the Eurasian depart through the trap door, and begin the descent of those stone steps that plunged in circular fashion to the base of the lighthouse.

And as Rodgers Stood on that little gallery, a telescope to his eye, and the cruiser in full view, his mind was singing like a dynamo with an exciting thought. Was the ordinary attitude of the Eurasian lighthouse-keeper a deliberate pose ? He had seen Ignatius Moylan without his,mask. A different man— a dangerous man. The most dangerous criminal was not the convict-marked, old-offender type. The police could easily discover the man in that gallery. But the criminal who lived an ordinary life in an ordinary suburb— who caught the 9:20 every morning and

returned by the 6:15— such a man might baffle the police for years. Only the pseudo artist goes about with long hair and a black shirt; the real artist is often undistinguished in his bowler hat.

Ignatius Moylan was ordinary— too ordinary. He was playing a drama, but playing it too well. Was this man with the expressionless wife and the chirruping canary the master gun-runner of the Red Sea?

"I think I'll stay a little longer," Rodgers decided.

At that moment two signal flags fluttered up a cord toward the gallery; by their color Rodgers realized what they indicated.... "O.K."

Through his telescope he saw the cruiser signal a farewell. Then he turned his back upon that expanse of sea and sky and walked to the trapdoor that led downward to adventure.

NEARLY midnight.... Paul Rodgers was sleeping lightly in his room. Suddenly he jerked his head in the darkness, every sense alert. Something had happened.

At once he realized what had wakened him. The symphony of the mechanism, amidst which he lived, had changed to a different tune-beat. Thoroughly roused, he listened tensely.

One— two— three. One— two— three— four. One— two— three.

He clawed quickly at the window. He gazed out at the waste of sea. There was the light, sweeping like a giant beam to the horizon.

One — two — three. Then darkness. With the mechanism clicking in his mind, he counted.

Then the light again. It had changed. It was the "three-four" flash. Some signal was being sent out!

His Arab training sent him quickly and silently out of bed. In a few moments he had dressed. From the moment of his waking it could not have been three minutes. Yet even as he moved stealthily toward the door, the symphony changed again.

One— two— three— four. *One— two— three*. *One— two— three— jour*.

He turned abruptly to the window. Yes, the light was sweeping with its accustomed regularity. The old flash: Four — three — jour. A man doubtful of his own senses might easily have believed that the whole business had been a trick of sleep. But Rodgers knew.

There was a sudden knock on the door.

"Are you awake?" a voice growled.

Rodgers recognized the Eurasian. He did not reply.

Again the knock.

"Get up you lazy crook!"

"What's matter?" yawned Rodgers, from the darkness.

"I want you down below— at once!" ordered the Eurasian. "Get dressed and come down. The store-ship is arriving."

"All right."

Rodgers moved silently to the window again. He peered into the waste of sea, following that flashing beam as it sliced the darkness. But he could see no steamer lights. Two minutes later he opened the door and descended the stairs.

In the living-room Ignatius Moylan was busy writing in his log-book. He looked up as Rodgers entered.

"You've got to do some honest work tonight, landing stores," he said. "A change of occupation is good for a crook."

A chuckle escaped him as he spoke. His eyes shone with excitement. Rodgers realized that the man was finding it difficult at this moment to preserve his mask of an ordinary lighthouse-keeper.

"A damned queer time for a supply ship to land stores," yawned Rodgers.

An angry snarl came from the Eurasian.

"It'll be a damned queer time for you, if you don't get out on the beach.... Here, wait until I get a lantern! "

The Eurasian turned to take a lantern from a corner of the room. At the same moment Rodgers bent to read the last entry in the log-book. There, in the fine handwriting of the Eurasian, was the brief announcement:

11:0 p. m. Cruiser *Lexingham* turned on course— apparently making for Massawak.

"I'm ready," said Rodgers quietly, and he followed the Eurasian through the doorway toward the beach.

IT was a still, hot night. The sea lapped the coral reef with the gentle ripple of lake water. There was no moon. Dimly the white pillar of the lighthouse could be discerned in the darkness. And the beam flashed with regular monotony.

Then came the soft chug-chug of a motor-launch. It was almost upon the island before Rodgers realized it. He judged the exhaust had been skilfully silenced. A tall man stepped ashore with practised ease.

The Eurasian held the lantern aloft. "Good-evening, Captain!"

"Goot-evenin', sir!" replied a voice that sounded familiar to Rodgers. "I haf the stuff."

"Well, get it ashore, and don't hang about."

There was the tone of command in the Eurasian's voice now. Ignatius Moylan was sloughing off the character of a lighthouse-keeper, for that of a man engaged in the biggest gun-running enterprise of the Red Sea.

"Is der cache open?" asked the tall man who had stepped ashore.

"Yes. So get to work!"

As the lantern swung across the darkness it flashed for a moment on the tall figure, revealing a sallow face with a shock of fair hair. The Finn— the same man who had sneered openly in Kelly's Bar in Aden. Rodgers was grateful for the darkness. He lurched toward the boat where a number of seamen were unloading cases with exceptional care.

"Vere iss Petersen?" he heard the Finn ask.

"Ill in bed— fever," replied the Eurasian.

"Who den iss dis?"

"A crook— jumped from a liner. He's safe enough."

Stumbling over the coral, bowed down with the weight of the cases, the Wolf of Arabia sweated and grinned. He realized at once that these were rifles and ammunition that were being landed on the island. Methodically and scientifically they were being stacked in the basement storeroom of the lighthouse. Rodgers wondered what the Admiral would say if he could see this sweating, red-headed figure actually engaged with the gang of gun-runners. And the rendezvous was a lighthouse that had calmly signaled "O.K." to the cruiser *Lexingham*! Moreover, the master mind of the gun-running business was an Eurasian drawing a Government salary of one hundred rupees a month.

But the situation was serious enough. Although Rodgers was in the heart of the enemy's camp, he was powerless to do anything. Some five hundred rifles had been landed, and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Twice the softly chugging motorboat had made the journey between the phantom steamer of the darkness and the ghostly coral reef lapped gently by the sea. And above their activities the beam was slicing the darkness. *One— two— three— four*.

In another ten minutes the job would be finished, and the steamer and its crew would take their departure. Mixing with the crew,— chiefly Finns, a few negroes, two Portuguese, and some nondescripts,— Rodgers heard them whisper the name of the steamer— *Baroud*. They chuckled over the ease with which they had evaded the cruiser Lexingham. H.M.S. *Lexingham*! That last entry in the log-book flashed into the mind of Rodgers. Somewhere within the orbit of the lighthouse the cruiser would now be throbbing toward the Italian coastline of the Red Sea.

THERE was a chance, a thousand-to-one chance; it must be taken. The last cases were being carried ashore. Calmly Rodgers stalked into the livingroom of the lighthouse. Beneath the gilded cage of the canary, the Finn and the Eurasian were bent over papers. They spoke in whispers. Foo Wong, dressed in the inevitable black silk coat, was pouring out coffee for the two men. All three glanced up as Rodgers entered.

He felt their eyes upon him. At all costs he must not betray himself, for a few minutes. The whispers had stopped. There was silence. The canary chirruped sleepily.

"What do you want?" asked the Eurasian, a dangerous gleam in his eyes. Rodgers smiled, unperturbed. "Everything's ashore. I'm just going to my room for a moment."

He could see a puzzled expression coming into the Finn's eyes. It was the prelude to recognition. With a casual nod to the Eurasian, Rodgers strolled across the room. Hurry would be fatal. He reached the door, opened it, and began to climb the stone staircase.

"Dat man haf very red hair," he heard the Finn say.

"What of it?" asked Ignatius Moylan.

"Somehow I seem to remember dat—"

RODGERS heard no more; he was racing cat-like up that stone staircase. He ran into his room, tore a strip of sheet from his bed, and in three seconds was again racing upward. The noise of the prisms as they clicked endlessly in their symphony came nearer to him. He sweated and staggered, his lungs nearly bursting in the agony of effort. With a convulsive gesture he flung open the trapdoor. The next moment he was on the little gallery, feeling his way with outstretched hands, like a blind man through the white-hot brilliance of light.

One — two — three — four. Then blessed darkness for three seconds. But it left Rodgers more blind than ever. He stumbled; he almost pitched forward into the sea, one hundred and eighty feet below. But he had found what he sought—the rocket apparatus.

Once again that white hell of light.... Convulsively Rodgers seized one of the rockets. He fitted it, feeling in the blindness of this dazzling light for the socket. Darkness again. He sobbed with relief...

"But I remember now," the Finn was saying, in the living-room below.

"Remember what?" asked the Eurasian. The papers were cleared from the table and he was anxious for the Finn to get the steamer away.

"Why, I remember dat red-haired man! "

"The crook, eh?" smiled the Eurasian, pushing his brown face against the bars of the gilded cage.

"He no crook," snarled the Finn. "I see him, a sailor in Kelly's Bar at Aden. He talk to a drunken skipper who say he see this light gif a one— two— dree flash. I remember him well."

The Eurasian twisted round. In his dark eyes there was a sudden gleam. "Are you sure?" he asked quietly. Foo Wong removed the coffee-cups. At that same moment there was an explosion followed by a screaming sound. It sounded like something tearing the black envelope of the sky. Instinctively both men left the

room and rushed to the reef. They were just in time to see the fiery trail of a red and green rocket falling to the sea.

"*Mein Gott*!" growled the Finn, drawing a revolver. "Dat red-haired devil is signaling! He must die."

But even as he stumbled back to the lighthouse, another rocket soared into the night sky. Like children, all the figures on the reef stood static, waiting for the burst. It came, a few seconds later, a shower of red and green trailing lights.

The beam of the lighthouse swung round. *One — two — three — four*. They caught a glimpse of a tiny figure poised in that cage of light, fumbling desperately with the rocket apparatus.

"The cunning devil has guessed everything," snarled the Eurasian. "Come on, Captain. He's got to be stopped. He'll have a cruiser here if they sight those rockets."

"A cruiser!"

The word was enough for the Finn. He and the Eurasian rushed into the lighthouse. They scrambled up the stone staircase; they reached the trapdoor. It was locked from the other side. The Finn thrust his revolver forward.

"ONE moment!" And the Eurasian caught at his hand; that sardonic twist was on the brown features. In the darkness both men waited. They heard the explosion of another rocket, and that screaming, tearing sound in the darkness. Above all was the monotonous click of the prisms as they moved into place.

One — two — three — four.

"We vaste time!" growled the Finn.

"No." The Eurasian shook his head. "I expect the cruiser has already sighted those rockets and is turning back on her course. She'll be here in three hours, and will be asking awkward questions."

"Vell?"

"Am I to show them the body of a man with bullet-holes in him?"

"Vy not drow him into der sea?"

"Because the sea has a habit of throwing up its dead, Captain."

"Vell, let me take his body aboard der *Baroud*."

Again the Eurasian shook his head. "And how explain those rockets being fired in the night ?"

The Finn was puzzled. As he stood there the scream of another rocket was heard.

"I shall let them take away a madman, a blind madman," said the Eurasian quietly. "Once before a man who saw too much was caught in that case of light. They tell me he still crawls about Aden."

Even the sallow face of the Finn paled.

"You tink he be der same ?" he whispered.

Ignatius Moylan smiled. He had recovered his poise.

"I'm sure of it. The light is controlled from the chamber below. And he is unarmed." As he spoke, the Eurasian stretched a hand above his head. There was the noise of a bolt being shot. "Our red-haired friend is now a prisoner— a human moth dancing against six million candle-power. I think three hours will be quite long enough, eh, Captain?"

And with a laugh he clapped the Finn on the shoulder. That laugh unnerved the Finn. Hurriedly he scrambled down the stone staircase.

"I must my ship get away!" he growled over his shoulder. "Dat cruiser might be curious."

"The sooner the better," the Eurasian agreed, and followed him out of the lighthouse on to the reef. There was a hurried hustling of the sailors, a few whispers in the darkness, and a minute later the soft chug-chug of the motorboat was lost.

Ignatius Moylan stood alone on that ghostly white coral reef. He looked up at that glass cage of light. A lurching figure was placing the last rocket in position. A flash, and it screamed through the night bursting into a trail that drooped toward a steamer already moving silently into the darkness.

One — two — three — four. The blinding beam of light flashed forth. The Eurasian saw that puny figure place its hands against its eyes as though to protect itself.

He laughed softly, and strolled back to the living-room. He pushed his brown face once more against the cage that held the canary.

"Prettee bird!" he whispered.

In the background Foo Wong watched him, her face saucer-like.

THREE hours later another beam broke athwart that of the Zogra Island light. It was the searchlight of the cruiser Lexingkam. It wavered a little, and then rested on the white coral. Simultaneously, a steam launch fussed toward the island.

A lieutenant landed. A group of bluejackets followed. They were met by an apologetic Eurasian.

"What's the trouble?" asked the lieutenant. "A dozen distress rockets have been fired."

"A sad case— a very sad case," murmured the Eurasian. "A man who jumped overboard from a liner, a crook, calling himself Rex Nerval, was washed up on this island. He has been helping me, for my companion is sick. And tonight this crook went mad. He ran to the gallery at the top of the lighthouse, locked himself in with the light, and began firing all those rockets."

"Why didn't you get after him?" asked the lieutenant, striding toward the lighthouse.

"I couldn't, being unarmed," said the Eurasian. "And my wife here too. He was very dangerous."

"How long has he been there?"

They were climbing the stone staircase now.

"Three hours," replied the Eurasian.

"Good heavens! He'll be blind."

"I hope not," said the Eurasian solicitously.

They reached the trapdoor. It was still locked from the outside. The lieutenant gave an order. A bluejacket came forward and with an ax began smashing through the lock. A moment later they were all clambering onto the terrace.

For some time they stood there, blinded by the light.

"Switch off this beam for a minute!" ordered the lieutenant.

"Yes, sir," replied the Eurasian, and descended the staircase.

A MINUTE later the lieutenant bent over the prone figure of a man in the darkness. He dragged him toward the trapdoor. Then he brought an electric torch to bear upon his burden. What he saw caused him to whistle in surprise. For the figure was a red-haired man with a bandage bound tightly round his eyes.

Quickly he removed the strips of white cloth. Gray eyes blinked into his.

"By all that's wonderful, Rodgers!" cried the lieutenant.

The gray eyes blinked again.

"Is it— er— Adamson?"

"It is," grinned the lieutenant. "Thank goodness you came, even though it's almost too late.... But get a grip on that damned Eurasian."

"What d'you mean?"

The lieutenant was beginning to think it was a madman who lay before him!

"He's a gun-runner of the first order," said the Wolf of Arabia. "Down below in this excellent lighthouse you'll find enough arms and ammunition to set the whole Sudan ablaze. But go down and get that Eurasian, my dear fellow, before he discovers that I have my sight still, and also some sanity."

The lieutenant hurried down the staircase. The Eurasian was still bending over the mechanism of the lights. With a jerk of his wrist he switched on the beam again.

"Is the poor fellow blind?" he asked softly.

The lieutenant nodded, but that nod was to the bluejackets. They seized Ignatius Moylan.

"You're going for a trip in a cruiser, my little chee-chee," said the lieutenant. "And we're going to inspect that storeroom of yours."

BLANK amazement was in the brown face of the Eurasian. He raised his gleaming eyes and saw Rodgers slowly descending the staircase. A thick bandage was in his hands. The Intelligence officer nodded.

"Yes, I was ready for the light. You see I met that poor devil who had been trapped here before. I realized the danger. And after I had fired the rockets, I bandaged my eyes."

"Who are you?" asked the Eurasian. "Oh, just nobody," smiled Rodgers in reply. "I think we'll go down below, Lieutenant."

They began the slow descent. Rodgers stumbled slightly; his gray eyes were still blinking.

"But why should the fellow choose a lighthouse for gun-running?" asked the lieutenant.

"Because it was the rendezvous least likely to be suspected," explained Rodgers. "A Finnish steamer cruised in this neighborhood. As soon as the flash changed to '*three— four— three*,' the skipper knew that the coast was clear. He steamed in, delivered his cargo, and was off again. Later, a signal— the same signal— was given to the dhows waiting off the African coast. They sailed out, collected the guns, and delivered them ashore. Each party knew it was safe, for the lighthouse-keeper had every opportunity of knowing the whereabouts of the cruiser or the sloops."

"Damned clever," agreed the lieutenant.

They reached the living-room. The canary still chirruped in its cage.

"I think he really was fond of that bird," said Rodgers, taking the cage in his hands. "But he had a reason for it. In the bottom of this cage," he drew out a drawer—"are all the papers giving details of his gun-running ventures. Very useful information for the Admiral, I imagine."

As he spoke he extracted the cluster of papers and thrust them in his pocket. Simultaneously, the Chinese woman Foo Wong entered the room. She gazed round blankly at the group of bluejackets. Then her eyes fell upon the Eurasian, guarded by two bluejackets. For once, that saucer-like expression was wiped away, and tears started to her eyes.

"My wife," explained the Eurasian to the lieutenant. "Will you permit me to say good-by to her?"

The lieutenant nodded and the Eurasian stepped forward. Foo Wong did not move. Once again her face had become set. Quietly she spoke a few words in Chinese.

Ignatius Moylan drooped his head. She came closer, her arm extended. The Eurasian raised his smoldering eyes to her face. The next moment he collapsed— she had plunged a knife into him.

"Thank you," he murmured to her, in English.

The lieutenant, the bluejackets, and Rodgers had started forward; but they were too late. The knife fell from Foo Wong's hand, and clattered to the floor. Something resembling a smile broke across her yellow face.

"That's the end of things here," said Rodgers, gazing down at the dying Eurasian. "Perhaps it's the best ending."

He turned to the lieutenant. "I want to get aboard the cruiser, quickly. There's a steamer somewhere in that darkness, that I want to find. Can I borrow your launch?"

"Of course."

FIVE minutes later Rodgers stepped aboard the gently throbbing deck of H.M.S. Lexingham.

"Is the Admiral aboard?" he asked the captain.

"Asleep!" was the whispered reply.

Rodgers squared his shoulders. "I think he'd better be wakened," he said boldly.

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14: The Pipes of Snow

Randolph Bedford
1868-1941
The Home, 1 Feb 1925

THE STAR OF TORRES lifted her black hull so that the band of red below the black gleamed for a moment above the long lazy swell that had carried her from Bernardino Straits to China Strait, by Samarai. Her lawful occasion was Australia, and that North which the English call the Far East— Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville, Samarai, Rabaul, Angaur, Manila, Hongkong, Yokohama and South again. From Japan, China and the Philippines with general merchandise— Japanese silks, Japanese toys, Japanese notions—including shaving brushes suspect of anthrax; from China, tea, rice, hair goods, preserved eggs, silk, rattans and more notions; from Manila, rattans, timber and ropes— including cables and hangmen's goods. From Angaur, copra and guano; copra from Rabaul and Samarai.

Australia's export by the *Star of Torres* included: flour, trepang. pearl and trocus shell, beer and biscuits, and bonedust and abattoir blood; and to Manila the *Star of Torres* carried meat in the roomy freezing space; hindquarters of beef from Brisbane River, Lake's Creek, Bowen or Alligator— in long, steel chambers that repeated the temperature of the Antarctic circle— biological change arrested by ammonia machines circulating their product through Pipes of Snow.

There were other imports from the North, but these were never on the manifest. They were contraband; birds of paradise from Rabaul; from Yokohama, heroin and cocaine, but rarely; from China, opium, and magic brandy bearing a saturation of the eyes of tigers of Pearl River— alleged aphrodisiacs for the healing by faith of old impotents from Canton and Honam.

These imports not on manifest were the private merchandise of Jamaica Darbon— the big, competent Chief Officer of the *Star of Torres*— black-bearded, black-haired, laced with silver; big framed, big nosed, dark eyes with the devil in them, heavy jaw, carrying strong teeth as of the carnivore, in a large mouth red-lipped as the Medici were— a mouth of edacious desire.

The sun and the sea and his full-blooded habit had painted his face brick red, and his habit of rum-drinking when all other men drank whisky had given him his front name of Jamaica, and had darkened his complexion so that in the red there was a Mephistophelian suggestion of black. His life had been a turmoil of storm and labour on a diet of beef and rum; his age forty-five, and he had lived already the experience of a dozen average lives. Hard as nails, competent so that his resource seemed endless, and as strong as a bull, he drank the world like wine, spent it like water, took the full of his voluptuousness, and let no flower of the springtime pass him by. His appetites demanded more money than any sailor can

earn at sea; hence his dealings in running silk, Chinese brandy, opium, drugs and birds of paradise; but he loved the illicit activities for their own sake, grinning his superior grin as he saw another Customs officer beaten.

THE *Star of Torres* left Samarai, and laid a course for an opening in the Barrier Reef most convenient to Townsville. Darbon left the bridge, bathed, ate the meal of two ploughmen, lighted one of his biggest and blackest cheroots and lounged lazily aft from the Chief Engineer's cabin in the starboard alleyway.

By the Purser's room he stopped, grinned as he saw the occupation of the youth who was the Purser's clerk, and, still puffing at the big cheroot said:

"Give me a sight of that."

Lewis Petrie, the Purser's clerk, started at the voice, blushed with all the self-consciousness of his years, and attempted to hide the photograph he had looked upon with eyes of worship.

Darbon's great hand imprisoned the hand of Petrie's that attempted to conceal the photograph. He twisted the hand, and at the sudden pang the boy loosed his hold. Darbon coolly took the photo, and looked at it for a moment— seeing a young girl whose fairness even the black and white of the print could not conceal— one of those honey blondes, impossible of any other eyes than blue, and of any other hair but of the colour of ripening corn.

The boy had risen; his fists were clenched, he looked at the towering bulk of Jamaica Darbon, and faltered forward, as if he were afraid, but too brave to let his fear master him. Darbon looked up from the photo, saw the menace, and laughed his contempt. Then he threw the photo back to Petrie's desk and said, "Not a bad little Jane— barmaid at the Jack's Come Home, eh?"— laughed again, and resumed his walk aft. Petrie, trembling with the stress of the situation and sick with the sense of his own impotence, locked the photo in the desk drawer and sat there staring— torturing himself with exaggerations of the insult to the girl and his failure of its punishment.

THE *Star of Torres* slipped down the coast, port to port, using the three-knot current to Gabo and then losing it; and so to Melbourne to discharge the last of the cargo and take in consignments for Papua, the Philippines, China and Japan.

It was at Sydney on the way North that the original of the photograph came aboard to see the Purser's clerk. Darbon saw her with Petrie, and mentally withdrew his first estimate of her as "the barmaid at the *Jack's Come Home*."

Honey blonde she was, and later to be indolent and trivial as most of her type; but not yet much more than a child, and still with much of the child's readiness to be the friend of all the world.

The great bulk of Darbon's shadow fell between Petrie and the girl, as they stood talking at the head of the gangway; and they faltered apart.

"Give us an intro., kid," commanded Darbon.

PETRIE looked at his tormentor, in part supplicatingly, yet with enough temper in his eyes to show that he felt himself outraged. Darbon saw the look that appraised him at his lowest, as something too vile to breathe in the same air as innocence; he turned from Petrie contemptuously, and in the same moment his gaze and Petrie's were directed at the girl on the bridge deck. Pentecost, the Third Mate, known as Cape Horn, because, being too old in the service of the North Sea to change his ways, he wore in the tropics a Cape Horn suit of brass-buttoned broadcloth, saw the look, and translated it later to the Second Officer— "Both of 'em lookin' at her,— Petrie like a nun looks at a church, and Jamaica like a dog lookin' at a steak."

"If you won't give me the intro.," said Darbon, "I'll do it myself, —Jack Darbon, me, Chief Officer. What's her name, clerk ?"

Petrie's courage had evaporated— "Miss—Miss Perrin," he said.

"Good oh," said the big man— "That'll be all to-day, clerk, get back to y'r pew."

"You—"

"No lip, clerk, back to y'r kennel."

Darbon's big splay hand moved Petrie aside as if he were a leaf. "I'll show you the ship. Miss Perrin," said Darbon, and put his hand on her arm.

She was afraid, yet attracted; faltering from him and wavering back again. When he moved she followed the touch on her arm, looking back but once at the Purser's clerk now so ashamed that he could not move.

When, the ship-seeing finished, Darbon returned with the girl, Petrie was not in sight, and the door of the Purser's office was closed. Darbon, winning confidence by his respect of her hinted under his brusquerie, took the girl ashore. When he came aboard again and met Petrie in the starboard alleyway.

Darbon answered Petrie's look of hatred with a grin, and turned over the big cheroot in his mouth as if he tasted a delicacy.

PETRIE'S girl was gone from him, and in the fortnight of the Sydney stay Petrie came to believe it. When the *Star of Torres* sailed, Alice Perrin, with eyes only for Darbon, waved from the dock farewells that did not include the boy who had worshipped her— and had therefore lost her to the man who worshipped nothing, succeeding by devotion to the business of men and women— which is love, in one or other of its many modifications of sincerity.

Cape Horn jollied his superior officer, knowing that Jamaica loved that sort of flattery.

"See the kid's on y'r manifest, Chief," said Cape Horn.

"As tender a chicken as man ever put tooth in," replied Darbon, laughing loudly, so that Petrie heard words and laughter as Darbon intended.

That Petrie did not then dare to resent for the sake of his manhood the final insult, proved to Petrie his own shameful impotence.

All he could do was to nurse his hatred of the piratical Darbon until, on the next voyage South, he saw the girl at her home only for a moment; for she evaded him. She haunted the ship, seeing Petrie but dimly, even when he spoke to her; all her feverish attention directed to Darbon who openly laughed at her, so that after the third trial she came to the ship no more But the sight of them together was enough to tell Petrie that Darbon had succeeded— and forgotten. Petrie saw her pale, etiolated, suddenly become woman, and all her girlhood departed, and Petrie knew that Darbon's implied boast was true. The impotence of his desire for revenge left his hatred cold; no more in his imagination did he make Darbon piecemeal; in his hottest moments Petrie merely hoped for fire from Heaven to wither this mass of edacious appetite that gratified itself in scorn of consequence.

FOR two voyages Petrie had been a candidate for transfer; having been afraid to stay in the Star of Torres; now he was not afraid to go, but in such despair that he became resigned to Darbon and the ship— caring nothing where he went, presenting equal listlessness to inward or outward vovage, and hoping for nothing in the world.

The Star of Torres had become a market ship for Customs men. Silk, opium, cocaine, run by Jamaica Darbon for many voyages, had in the last two fallen to the law; leaving the ship, not connected, but suspect.

On the third voyage South, after the rude discovery by Darbon of Petrie's photograph of the girl, Darbon had dropped his goods of contraband at Samarai, to come South by a coaster. The lowered profit by the double delivery did not greatly exercise his greedy mind, for he had aboard human contraband—15 Chinese and a prize of a hundred pounds each for their delivery in Australia— 6 at Townsville, 5 at Brisbane, 4 at Sydney.

The Star of Torres dropped the Townsville six, discharged at Brisbane almost all her cargo and brought her frozen space into action in Brisbane River; shipping there two thousand hindquarters of beef. A bile she loaded, Darbon, with all the brutality of his anxiety, dropped five unauthorised immigrants, and drove the last four— almost green-faced with fear and long endurance— back to their breathless hell built in the bunker coals.

DARBON'S Townsville and Brisbane collections (he called his illegal gains either taxation or tariff duty— just as the draper advertises his newest extortion as a sale regardless of cost, which in a way it is) he drafted with his Townsville and Samarai profits to Sydney; and the *Star of Torres* put to sea again with her Chief Officer's mind satisfied that his Sydney deliveries and collections would he as safe and easy.

But the Custom's secret knowledge of the old sins of the *Star of Torres* made its officers loth to leave her, and as the ship passed Cape Moreton eastward, to leave Point Danger well to starboard, Darbon knew he carried two Customs men. He felt his hold on liberty and accrued profits more precarious than he had ever known before; watching the Customs men as if his and their positions were reversed. As soon as he could leave the bridge he sought the Chief Engineer— a sallow little man, the physical opposite of Darbon— a man steamed until he seemed sapless. The Engineer was, as Darbon phrased it, "in the joke'' of smuggling the Chinese.

They debated the position with anxious mutterings ; Darbon not resourceless, but puzzled as to the proper resource of the moment, at last listened while the Engineer declared his plans. These were apparently satisfactory to Darhon, for he slapped the Engineer's hack almost cordially, and went to his bath humming the song of a sailorman in a tight place—

Oh, I wish I was married
And nothing to rue,
Plenty of money,
And nothing to do;
Toorali oorali oorali-oo.

And then *da capo.*

THREE hours before *the Star of Torres* entered at dawn the port of Sydney, Darbon left the bridge and sought the Engineer. At his signal the Engineer brought four coal-blackened Chinese from their dungeon in the coal.

"Four pongs," said he, delivering the shambling, confinement-sore prisoners as if they were inanimate merchandise. The door of the forward bulkhead opened to Darbon's hand; bearing an electric torch he led the unauthorised immigrants through the door and closed it behind them. He ordered them to follow, and they staggered on his tracks in the darkness relieved only by the moving circle of light.

Darbon opened another door and two feet behind it a third door. A breath as from polar ice made the Chinese shiver; Darhon switched on the light and they saw a hall of ice with 2,000 frozen bodies hanging within— bodies that looked like dead men, and were merely 2,000 hindquarters of beef. The circulating fans drove the icy air to and around them in two hundred thousand cubic feet of Antarctic space— the ammonia circulation showing in their long pipes of snow.

The Chinese drew hack, one of them hysterically clamouring for his comparative heaven among the coal— all suddenly chilled to the marrow by the transition from furnace-heat to atmosphere of the poles.

Darhon anticipated their retreat, and threw the nearest man from him against the others.

"In, you damned swine," said Darhon— "wait till she's tied up and the Customs gone."

He switched off the light within the freezer, and their terrified clamour was suddenly shut off as by death. Darbon closed the inner door and bolted it, retreated through the insulation area of thick silicate cotton, locked the outer door, and went his way.

THE *Star of Torres* dropped anchor at Watson's Bay, and A Darhon waited anxiously for the doctor's clearance and a quick run to the company's wharf. But the doctor's boat did not come alongside until 8 o'clock, and some new Customs men boarded the ship before him. Not until half-past nine did the *Star of Torres* tie up beyond Dawes Point, and there the old Customs men left, their search abandoned, having produced nothing. But the Customs Officers who had embarked at Watson's Bay stayed by her, and Darbon dared not risk showing them the place of contraband by approaching it. Petrie stood by the rail listlessly surveying his home port in which he had no home, and then he saw Alice Perrin— waiting. She was thinner, paler, changed—he knew, without having seen it before, her attitude of the wearied— and of the forsaken. He called to her, she looked quickly at him and turned away in shame, which he thought was aversion. At that he moved away without conscious aim or volition, and habit led him to the Purser's office, and much work, each of its details requiring immediate completion, presented itself and was welcomed.

Darbon, watching the Customs men, was brought to the gangway by his pursuit of them —the girl on the wharf called to him: "Mr, Darbon!"

"Yes, what is it? H'lo, it's you, eh... All right, eh?"

"I must speak to you."

"Can't now; busy as a cyclone."

"If you don't I'll shout what I've got to tell you."

"Hell! And me eating a peck of trouble! All right. All right!"

He descended to the wharf, and led her out of earshot of the deck; his defiance of convention and authority suspended in his anxiety of the presence of the Customs men.

IN the wharf-store the girl aided the return of his resourcefulness by ceasing to threaten, and beginning to plead. Pleading was something Darbon understood, and despised; his coolness and his grin returned to him— he but listened to her to gain time. She thought his silence meant softening and agreement; she told her story, breaking in on her main theme to ask over and over again: "What is to become of me?"

"What is to become of me?"

Then Darbon saw the Engineer in his shore clothes pass through the store and into the street; thought of hailing him, and decided against it as he saw the Customs men following Then Darbon dosed the conference. "No good whining," the Engineer and walking like defeated men.

"Money's no good, Jack; marry me."

"Marry you... and get time for bigamy," he said. "Give me y'r address and I'll send you fifty quid."

"Bigamy," she repeated.... "Married!"

"Thousands of times... give me the address."

She staggered as if the blow had been physical, recovered herself, faltered out of his sight, her own eyes seeing him not; and so faltered out of his life.

DARBON forgot her in a moment in the work to be done. He entered the ship by the doors in her side, now open to discharge cargo, raced to the door of the freezing chamber, glad that he was seen by no man.

He unlocked the outer door, drew the bolts of the inner, and tried to throw back the heavy door. Then he felt an obstruction, put his right shoulder with all his weight and strength behind it to the door, and forced it open. Switching on the light he saw the tragedy— the four adventurers, robbed of their resistence by confinement in their narrow cell of darkness, skeletonised by five weeks of hell within the coal— and now frozen in that white world beneath the Pipes of Snow.

The chill air of the place came to Darbon as from a sepulchre. Mechanically he closed the doors and locked them, the dank sweat of fear bursting from him as he locked himself in his cabin to think.

Two drams of the spirit that nicknamed him lifted the inactivity from his brain. In half an hour he had made his plan, dissecting and reconstructing until it seemed flawless.

"Customs men may search the freezer before we leave. A dead man can look like a hindquarter of beef if he's covered and hung up among the real stuff. Put covers on the four; distribute them among the beef; then early morning watch at sea dump 'em, somewhere about Gabo....

"Covers from the Purser.... Who's to help?"

Nobody to help for love of him... who then feared him most?

The Purser's clerk.... "Bring Petrie into it, make him a party, and he'll hold his tongue for his own sake."

He drank another dram, and thereby fixed his intention. In the Purser's cabin, Petrie, his rush work finished for the time, sat back in his chair looking at nothing, his hatred of Darbon lost in his pity for the girl. Darbon's voice struck him as if it were a blow.

"Up with you, clerk; come along o' me."

"Where?"

"Never mind where; come."

"Why?"

"Why, you little cur. Why? Because I'll pull you thro' your own ears if you don't. D'ye hear?"

He glared down at Petrie, and the honest man quailed before the rogue. Darbon's hand fastened on Petrie's collar.

"Upend yourself," said he; "upend yourself."

Petrie went with him.

IN the freezing-room Petrie's horrified gaze fastened on the dead adventurers, as if their frozen death fascinated him.

"My God! My God!"

"Forget it, you fool... you're in it."

"I'm not! Oh, my God!"

"You are. If I'm in it I'll put you in too."

"The poor things. God! God! God!"

"Nobody knows. Hang 'em up with the rest of it... and let all the Customs in the Commonwealth search, and they'll never find 'em.... Here's the hooks... up they go; then you get the covers."

"Covers ?"

"Beef covers... you get four."

"Four covers!"

"Four days from now, over they go at Gabo."

Petrie had taken the hook with its square loop for the bar and now held it by the hook end, staring blindly at the loop.

"Get a move on; get the covers. You're in it."

"By God!" said Petrie, "I'm not."

Darbon grinned his cruellest and moved a step nearer Petrie, lifting his heavy hand for the blow.

"Damn it." he said, "you're in it... take that for luck, partner."

He struck Petrie with his open hand.

Hatred, horror and despair nerved Petrie. He did not know that he had a weapon in his hand, he struck blindly; and then he looked down at the quiet bulk of his enemy lying stunned beside the four adventurers.

A trickle of blood came from the wound above Darbon's left temple; the hypnotised Petrie noted curiously for a moment Darbon's prominent temporal artery; then he saw the crossed and re-crossed footprints of the Chinese who had padded in the sawdust, as wild beasts traverse a cage, until the freezing air slowed them down to death.

The horror of the dead men returned to Petrie. He staggered from the freezer, locked the double doors behind him, and left the ship for ever.

CAPE HORN and the Second Mate agreed that Jamaica Darbon had taken fright at the endless attentions of the Customs, and had stayed ashore to realise his investments in contraband. They offered no explanation of the disappearance of Petrie.

That also puzzled the sallow Engineer, who could have stated the place of Darbon. The sallow Engineer superintended the coolie firemen who jettisoned five packages— "deteriorated," off Gabo.

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15: The Pay-Off

Cleve F. Adams

1895-1949

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The great bulk of Cleve Adams' writing for the pulps was in the crime and hard-boiled genre, so I was surprised to find this pulp western under his by-line.

HE WAS A STRANGER to Little Gila, this slim young fellow astride the great roan stallion. Yet Little Gila was not strange to him.

It looked just about as he'd pictured it from his brother Jed's letters: a dozen or so ramshackle buildings sprawled along the one dusty street; the sharp smell of sage brush tainted a little with the sour, sickish odor of stale liquor and fresh horse dung. Flies buzzed about the roan's sweat-stained flanks, and the late afternoon sun dipped toward the distant Tombstones as he dismounted stiffly, wearily, and anchored the . stallion with trailing reins near the greenscummed water trough. He stretched long arms wide and yawned sleepily, giving the loungers plenty of time to note his arrival.

After that he clumped across the street, kicking up little clouds of powdery dust as he went, and pushed into the eating house which was run, according to the sign, by one Hop Lee.

The place was dim and deserted but for a lone waddy and the undersized Chinese who served him. The stranger leaned elbows on the counter, waited. Presently the. Chinese pattered up.

"You Hop Lee?" queried the stranger, tilting his tall beaver hat back on his head.

The yellow face became wooden, the almond eyes blank, inscrutable. "Me Hop Lee, aw light. You catchum wanna eat?"

"Mebbe. Mebbe not."

"Velly nice lamb chops, today. Velly plenty nice."

The waddy got up, headed for the door. "The Chink's lyin' like hell, pardner. Them ain't lamb chops. Them's mutton." He tossed a silver dollar to the counter, stared hard at the little yellow man, let his eyes flick carelessly over the stranger's face. He sauntered out, hitching at his gun belt as if it irked him.

Hop Lee said, "I think this velly bad town fo' you. Look plenty too damn' much like yo' blotheh Jed. You Smoky Sto'ment, heh?"

"Yeah, I'm Smoky. Took a long time for your message to reach me, Hop Lee. I've been kinda driftin' around some. But I'm here, and I'm askin' who killed my brother Jed."

"Pete Wahl smoke him, Smoky. Pete Wahl, he own Gold Dollah Saloon acloss stleet. Velly mad 'cause he no can find wheh Jed get gold. Ev'ybody mad at yo' blotheh. All but China boy, Hop Lee."

"Yeah," said Smoky. A fleeting grin touched his grim lips. "Yeah, Jed usta write me about you, Hop Lee. Well, I expect we'd better forget them lamb chops for a spell. I gotta see a man." He went out.

He felt curious eyes upon him as he crossed the street, but no one offered a greeting. Evidently an unfriendly town, Little Gila. Lamps were being lit along the way, the Tombstone range had at last swallowed the sun, and in the Gold Dollar a tinny piano was being banged by inexpert hands.

Smoky patted the great roan affectionately. "We better get you a bath, old son, and mebbe a bowl of oats, hunh?" He tossed the reins over the stallion's head, strode off down the dusty street to where a single lantern illuminated-a crude livery stable sign. The roan followed, nibbling at his hip pockets,

The liveryman, a huge fellow with a drooping walrus mustache, stared, "Hell, you done give me a start, sonny. You look so danged much like... Say, you ain't no relation to Jed Storment, be ye?"

"Mebbe," said Smoky. "Then again, mebbe not. Depends on who I'm talkin' to, mostly. You a friend of Jed's?"

The big fellow stepped to the doors, glanced out cautiously, "Yep," he said, "yep, I reckon I was a friend o' his'n. 'Fore he got took bad with lead poisonin'. Old Jed had quite a bunch o' friends around Little Gila."

"I heard different, partner." Smoky's blue eyes grew suddenly hard, steely. "Yep, a little birdie told me that most folks in Little Gila just naturally hated Jed's guts."

"Lookee, young 'un, I don't aim to argue none at all, but Jed's friends warn't in no position to do much about it when... when Pete Wahl perforated him. Pete kinda runs this town, he do, when the sheriff's at the county seat. The deppity, he's one o' Pete's gang, and so...

"Jed had him a little spread out under them hills," he continued. "Ran himself two-th'ee hundred head and was doin' right well till he started bringin' in a poke o' dust once in a while. Folks got curiouser and curiouser about where that thar gold was comin' from, and they finally figgered that Jed was the one holdin' up the stages. Me, I never thought so,"

"Why?"

"Fer one thing, Jed 'lowed to me that he'd found him a little pocket in one o' the gulches out his way."

"So yuh had to blab it all over town, hunh? And Pete Wahl and his gang bored Jed so they could cop his claim!"

"Now lookee, young 'un, they ain't no call to go a-flarin' off like that. I never abbed nothin' to nobody. Far as Jed's killin's consarned, he was took while playin'

cyards with Pete Wahl and some o' the others. We found him with a gun in his hand, so accordin' to the deppity ever'thing was all open and above board. But me, I got a idea that Pete Wahl's gang knew Jed wasn't a-robbin' of the stages 'cause they was doin' it theirselves. And consequent, they mought have suspicioned whar he was gettin' his gold. On'y they ain't found out yet."

"An' who's runnin' the spread now?"

"Ain't no spread. Leastways, they ain't no cows. Somebody done run 'em off after Jed got took with..."

"Yeah, lead poisonin'. Well, old timer, take care of Hogan for me, will yuh? I reckon I'm gonna stay in Gila for a spell. If I should happen to stay here— uh— permanent, why I reckon you and Hop Lee can split whatever yuh get for Hogan."

He tugged at his hat, patted the stallion's rump. "Hogan's a top hand," he said gently. "So long, old timer."

"Lookee here, young 'un, Little Gila's two-gun territory. You're only packin' one, I see, an' it pears to me like yuh pack that one kinda awkward like. I'd— well, I wouldn't go foolin' around Pete Wahl if I was you."

"Me," said Smoky, "me, I don't fool— much! Adios." He went out.

THE GOLD DOLLAR was flourishing. They started their fun early in Little Gila. Smoky came in quietly, blue eyes taking in the garish lights, the painted girls and the groups of hard-bitten men about the faro and roulette layouts. There were three or four men at the long bar. One of them wore a deputy's star on his flapping vest. Smoky took off his hat, placed it beside him on the bar, ordered a drink. In the mirror he could see furtive eyes appraising him. A hush descended on the room, was dispelled instantly as everyone began to talk at once. The man with the star moved down to Smoky's side,

"An' who might you be, stranger?"

Smoky stared at him. "You know who I am," he said easily. "I look enough like Jed Storment to be his twin. So yuh can call me Smoky and let it go at that. What's your handle, deputy?"

"Daingerfield. And I'm warnin' yuh, little boy, that if you're figgerin' on takin' up for Jed yuh better keep on driftin'. This is a bad town for strangers. It's worse for the brother of a..."

"I wouldn't say it, was I you."

"I am sayin' it. Jed Storment was a dirty thief!" His hands slapped leather, started up.

A second man stumbled against Smoky, blocked the single gun on his leg. And just as the deputy's iron cleared its holster Smoky's hat belched flame. Once. Daingerfield dropped. Gun in hand, Smoky kicked the stumbler in the face, stood there bareheaded, quiet.

"Any more?" he queried. "Anybody else think I oughta be driftin'?"

"Me," said a hard voice behind him. A gun muzzle tickled his neck. "Yep, vou oughta be driftin' "— a hoarse chuckle— "driftin' where yore brother done drifted. I think I'm gonna help yuh on yore way." A hammer clicked back.

And Smoky fired over his shoulder. Flame scorched his cheek; the blast of his own gun deafened him. But the pressure of that other gun on his neck was gone. He swiveled, dropped to his haunches, leaned back against the bar surveying the room. It was suddenly very quiet.

"Anybody else?" Smoky's voice sounded muffled, even to himself. His blue eyes were a little cloudy. "Anybody here achin' to hurry me along the trail?"

There was no answer. It seemed like a long time before three punchers got up from a poker table, came over and stopped beside the fallen men. Smoky stood up, caught the flash of a bottle as the bartender raised it high, ducked again just in time to avoid being brained. The bottle crashed on the edge of the bar.

"Daingerfield ain't dead yet," said one of the punchers, "But the other one got it straight between the eyes." He grinned suddenly and Smoky recognized him as the waddy from Hop Lee's. "Them mutton chops musta done somethin' to yuh, pardner. Wish to hell they'd do as much for me. Yuh bored Hank over your shoulder."

"Yeah," said Smoky. "Well, folks, I hate to disturb the peace thisaway, but it kinda seems yuh don't like us Storments. Mebbe one of yuh could point out this here Pete Wahl to me, hunh? It's time for the pay-off."

"Pete ain't around right now," grunted the bartender. "Lucky fer yuh he ain't. Yuh just dropped two o' his best friends and he'd sure like to meet yuh."

"I'LL be in town," said Smoky. 'Tell him what I said about the pay-off. Tell him to look me up,"

Eyes watchful, he backed slowly to the bat-wing doors. "I'll settle for that drink later, old timer. After I've had it." He was outside.

There were people in the street now, people attracted by the sound of the shots. Keeping to the shadows, Smoky went $wiftly, silently along the raised board walk, descended to the street and headed for the livery stable. Walrus-mustache looked relieved.

"Kinda feared them thar slugs was a-buried in yore hide, young 'un. You'll be high-tailin' it outa town now?"

"Nope." Smoky sighted his saddle and roll atop a feed bin, loosed the roll and changed gun belts. The new one had two holsters. He filled them with the .45's from his hat and the discarded belt. "The hat trick," he said, "is like a shirt gun... necessary at times, old timer, when you don't know what you're headin' into. Yep, I reckon I'd be plumb dead if it wasn't for my hat."

"Yuh mean more'n one of 'em tried to taken yuh? An' yuh beat 'em to it?"

"Yuh might say. Daingerfield is right sick and one o' his helpers is gettin' cold. And another one, a hombre that's got a bad habit o' stumbling at the wrong time. well, he's gonna hafta eat mush for a spell. I done kicked all his teeth out."

"Glory be! 'You ain't much like your brother Jed, young 'un, Jed, he war right peaceable."

"Which is why, old timer, I'm kinda figurin' on evenin' the score. Yuh see, knowin' Jed, I'm damn' sure he never started the fight."

SMOKY tugged his hat low over his eyes, went out into the night, A rider passed him, going toward the Gold Dollar; a rider with a star on his vest. Smoky went on, entered Hop Lee's. More customers now. Hop Lee was busy.

Smoky found a seat at the back, a vantage point from which he could view the entrance, Presently Hop Lee came to his side.

"Who," Smoky inquired, "was the waddy said your lamb chops was no good?"

"Him Jo-Jo Long. One time he wuk fo' yo' blotheh. Otheh man wuk too, but him dead. Pete Wahl no likee him."

"Anybody Pete Wahl don't like just ups and dies, hunh? Looks bad for me, don't it? 'Cause I expect Pete is gonna be downright displeased with me, Hop Lee. Well, shovel out some ham and eggs."

Watchful eyes on the door, he waited. No one in the place paid him the slightest attention, but he was expecting visitors. The man with the star, surely. His ham and eggs came and he ate quietly, almost absently, without hurry.

The eating-house had almost emptied when the screen door opened and the man with the star came in. The star said SHERIFF, And the face above it was seamed, weathered mahogany. Jutting, craggy. brows shadowed eyes that were very hard, very direct. But the sheriff's hands hung straight down, well away from his guns. He came over, sat at the counter beside Smoky. —

"Hear you're a brother o' Jas Storment."

"Yep."

"Smokin' deputy sheriffs is bad business.... Smoky."

"Havin deputies like him is worse."

The sheriffs mouth tightened. "I reckon," he said, "that you better be - comin' along with me, Smoky Storment." His right arm scarcely seemed to move, yet Smoky felt a gun muzzle buried in his ribs.

"Yuh see," the sheriff continued, "Daingerfield and the rest allus claimed it was yore brother stickin' up the stages and I couldn't prove no different. An' another funny thing is that as soon as you got in this territory... well, last night the Big Gila stage was took."

"Meanin' I did it?"

"Meanin' you might have." The gun jabbed a little harder now. The sheriff's left hand snaked down, jerked Smoky's guns, tossed them across the counter to Hop Lee.

"I ain't got room in my pockets right now, Hop, so you can take care o' them irons fer me." He got up slowly. "Okay, Smoky, let's go."

The little jail office was jammed with an old oak desk, a rowel-scarred table and odds and ends of decrepit chairs and benches. A single hanging lamp cast a feeble glow over the collection. Sheriff O'Hara motioned Smoky to a seat.

"You don't act so hard, Smoky. I had a notion I was gonna have trouble corrallin' yuh."

"ME," Smoky grinned crookedly, "me, I ain't hard. It's this damn' town of yours that's hard. I didn't even get a chance to down a drink over at the Gold Dollar before Daingerfield and a coupla others was pawin' my frame. But don't let my mild blue eye fool yuh, O'Hara. Nobody ever relieved me o' my 45's yet 'thout I wanted 'em to. Yuh see, I heard this town wasn't really tough only when you was away, so I figured mebbe you was straight."

O'Hara's eyes glinted dangerously. "Youre damned right I'm straight! Straighter'n others I could spit on! Where'd yuh cache the loot from the Big Gila stage? I already been through your saddle roll and it ain't there."

"No," said Smoky, "it ain't there 'cause it never was there. I never pulled that Stick-up, an' I got a hunch you know it. An' while were on the subject of bein' straight, what happened to my brother's personal belongin's—the stuff he had in his pockets? How come I wasn't notified of his death? How come yuh let somebody rustle his cows? What the hell kind of a razzle-dazzle are yuh runnin' in this county, anyway?"

"You... you wasn't notified?"

"Nary a notice!"

"But Daingerfield said he'd written you! Said he sent on your brother's tack, too. An' put a coupla hands out on the spread to watch things till you got here."

"And one o' the hands was killed, hunh? Defendin' them pore little cows! And the other one probably escaped... to turn up later as a pal o' Daingerfield and Pete Wahl. Looks like this end o' your county needs a house-cleanin', Sheriff."

"An' you're electin' yourself to do it, eh? Well, mebbe I'd consider lettin' yuh, if I was sure yuh wasn't a thief like yore..."

The dart of Smoky's hand was swifter than the strike of a sidewinder. The sheriff's .44 was on the table before him but he never touched it. Smoky's hat fanned down across O'Hara's eyes, his left hand got the gun. He stood there, balancing it easily.

"Yore deputy got drilled right after he made a like remark about Jed. Mebbe you'd better let me do the talkin', Sheriff. Then yuh won't get into no trouble."

O'Hara made a half-hearted movement toward his left thigh, changed his mind. "You're dealin'," he said grimly.

"From the top o' the deck, O'Hara. The way the Storments always deal."

Smoky's left hand fumbled at a shirt pocket, came out with a crumpled letter. "I reckon that'll explain where Jed was gettin' the dust instead of where you thought he was gettin' it. And where Pete Wahl claimed he was gettin? it."

"Drop that gun, hombre!" The voice came from a side window. Smoky couldn't even see the owner. He let his gun thud to the floor, swiveled slowly.

THE MAN outside the open window grinned, showing even white teeth in a broad dark face. 'You're lookin'," he said, "at none other than ol' Pete Wahl hisself. I hear you been havin' a little argument in my place and that. yuh left word fer me to look you up. So here I am. "

Sheriff O'Hara had his second gun out now. He said, "Okay, Pete, I got him covered." He came around the table, kicked Smoky's fallen .45 away, stooped and picked it up.

"Yeah," said Wahl, "you got him covered. And I got you SS a Don't move!"

Faces appeared in the front i, then in the one door. After that the little office became crowded. Wahl, climbing in through the side window, knocked O'Hara's gun down. Two other men pinioned Smoky's arms. Another emptied the sheriff's holster.

"The boys seem to think this hombre needs lynchin', Sheriff. 'Course, I'm all for law and order myself, but yuh see how it is." Wahl leered, and continued:

"Little Gila just nacher'ly hates to have a stranger come bustin' in, a-killin' and a-robbin' of our citizens. Besides, you wasn't actin' like yuh took your deppity's murder to heart, so..."

"Daingerfield is dead?"

"Plenty. An' his dyin' words was to string this dirty so-and-so up to the nearest cottonwood."

"And I say you're not stringing him up!"

A gun descended on the sheriff's unprotected head. He dropped without a sound. Smoky's right foot lashed out in a vicious kick at the man in front of him. The fellow yowled.

But the two holding Smoky's arms were too much for him. A gun butt caught him behind the ear as he struggled. Another. ` He went down. Lights swirled before his eyes. Somebody kicked him, hard. The lights stopped swirling. Smoky Storment was out.

After a long, long time he became aware of the rumble of voices. He opened his eyes cautiously. Light assailed them. He closed them again to shut out the unbearable ache, lay there supine. His wrists were tied behind him, his ankles

lashed together. Exploring fingers felt a splintery floor beneath his back. And still the voices rumbled on.

One of them sounded like Pete Wahl's:

"You fools might have killed him and I don't want him killed, yuh hear me? Not yet, anyway. Not till I can beat somethin' outa him I wanta know."

Smoky opened his eyes again. It was better this time. He could see a little. Yes, it was Pete Wahl doing the talking. And there was the puncher Hop Lee had said worked for Smoky's brother Jed. And the fellow Smoky had kicked in the face. This one wasn't saying much; his lips were too cut and swollen.

Over beyond the table Smoky could see the boots of two others, likely the two coyotes who'd held him back there in the sheriff's office. He wondered about O'Hara a little, became interested once more in the talk above him.

Pete Wahl said, "Hell, I was listenin' at the window, wasn't I? When the dumb kid tells O'Hara about the letter? I heard him say right out that Jed's scrawl would prove where all that gold dust was comin' from.

"But hell's fire, when I get the damn' thing it don't say a word 'cept that Jed Storment had found a gulch with free gold in it. An' we knew that already. Leastways"—he winked broadly—"leastways we knew damn' well it wasn't him robbin' the stages."

"Yeah, an' yuh had to smoke Jed before we found out which gulch. Smart, you are!"

Wahl scowled. "Some o' these days, Lefty, you're gonna talk too much with your mouth. And when yuh do I'm gonna fill it plumb full o' lead!"

He strode over to Smoky's side, nudged him with a heavy foot. "We'll make the kid talk instead o' his brother. I got a hunch Jed might've wrote him about the location."

Smoky lay still. Jed had written him about the location, but he'd be damned if Pete Wahl would ever find it out. He felt a sudden draft creep along the floor as one of the men opened the door, looked out.

"The rest o' the lynchin' party oughta be ketchin' up with us pretty soon, Pete."

Wahl said, "Yeah, yuh better fetch in a bucket o' water, Mesquite. We'll see what makes this here Smoky tick, Time he was wakin' up, anyway."

The man went out, closed the door behind him. There came the sound of a scuffle, an agonized curse, a thump as of a heavy body falling. A sudden rush of feet smothered Smoky's prone figure.

"Somebody got Mesquite!"

"Knifed, by God! Spread out, men. We'll hafta get him or the whole damned town'll be down around our ears!"

Smoky was left in sole possession of the shack. But not for long. Presently the door creaked open a little. There was the slither of soft-shod feet. And Hop Lee,

very pleased with himself from felt-soled sandals to inky queue, knelt beside him. There was a knife in his hand.

"Me fix 'um," Hop grinned, "Me fix um good, heh?"

"I b'lieve yuh," Smoky chuckled, and sat up as the ropes parted. He was stiff and sore; his head ached like the very devil, but he was free. "I don't suppose yuh happened to bring my guns, too?"

"Me bring 'um," said Hop Lee cheerfully. He produced the two .45's from his blouse. "So we betteh get to hell out befo' they come back, heh?"

Smoky stood up. "We can try it, old timer, but I done think we're too late to | do much runnin'. They're back!"

Clumping boots approaching on the run attested the fact that they were indeed back. A swift blow from one of his guns shattered the lamp. The shack was plunged into darkness. There was the mutter of surprised voices from without. And then a concerted rush hit the door.

Smoky's guns blazed. Other blazed at him. He dropped to the floor, wriggled forward on his belly. Feet trampled him. He fired straight up, rolled over as a body toppled on him. Using the body as a shield he emptied his guns at wavering, twisting shadows. A curse, as another man came down. And a ricocheting slug seemed to lift the roof right off Smoky's head.

THERE were lights again. Lanterns, this time. Sheriff O'Hara's broad face seemed to be floating in the acrid haze of black powder smoke. Smoky rolled to his feet, grinned foolishly at the ring of men around him. And then he saw Hop Lee. The little Chinese was huddled on the floor. - Blood seeped from a wound in his scalp.

Smoky dropped to his knees, turned the little fellow over. Hop opened his eyes. " 'S'malla you, Smoky? You all blood!" He sat up, sloe-black eyes surveying the scene about him without emotion. One yellowed hand crept up, explored the gash in his own head. "Cleased, by God!" he said. And fainted,

O'HARA said grimly, "I thought they were gonna lynch you." His hard eyes stared from Smoky to the still forms on the floor, came back to rest on the reviving Hop Lee.

"There's another very bad man outside," said Smoky. "In case you missed him. Name of Mesquite. How come you arrived on the scene, O'Hara?"

The sheriff waved at the men about him. "Why, these is some o' the neck-tie party that wasn't saddled up like Pete Wahl's boys. I kinda came to life "fore they got away and turned the lynchin' bee into a rescue, What was Pete gonna do to yuh?"

"He was gonna try to tease some information outa me, O'Hara. Pete wanted to know right bad where Jed's dust came from. He kinda hinted that he knew Jed wasn't gettin' it from the stages 'cause Pete himself was workin' that end."

O'Hara cursed. "All right, men, Pete Wahl and the other two are ridin' west. We're high-tailin' after 'em!"

"Me," said Smoky, "me, I got no horse, so I expect I'm headin' east. Besides, I gotta get ol' Hop Lee patched up."

His words were lost in the bustle of a hurried departure. Presently he and Hop Lee were left alone, standing beside the dusty trail, listening to the diminishing hoofbeats of the sheriff's posse.

"Come on, yuh yella heathen," Smoky urged. "We got business in town."

They trudged off toward the distant glimmering lights which marked Little Gila.

After a time, when he'd reloaded his guns and they'd covered better than half the distance to town, Smoky reached out a tentative hand, patted a black-clad shoulder.

"You're white, Hop Lee," he muttered embarrassedly. "I expect I owe yuh plenty for droppin' in like yuh did. Which reminds me, how come yuh did drop in?"

"Me," said Hop Lee, trying to ape Smoky's style, "me, I keep eyes open, heh? Long time I know 'bout Pete Wahl shack on hidden tlail. I tag 'long behin' lynch pahty, heh?"

Smoky grinned. "Yeah, you must have, at that. Only they had broncs and you was afoot, hunh? Yuh know, old timer, I kinda like you. Fact is, I know damn' well I like yuh!"

"Me likee you, Smoky," said the little man gravely. "Me likee yo' blotheh, me likee you. You savvy?"

"Yes," said Smoky. "I savvy, Hop Lee." They entered Little Gila's one street. "That slug kinda ripped your queue loose, old timer. Yuh better get a sawbones to stitch it back on. Me, I gotta see a man."

He left Hop Lee flat, departed at a trot into the deep shadows behind a row of buildings.

And came to the rear of the Gold Dollar. A horse was tethered there, a horse whose lathered flanks still heaved. Smoky loosed the cinch strap but left the saddle on. After that he went around the building, pushed through the bat-wing doors.

Apparently everyone was not away. The dealers were still at their tables, the tinny piano still tinkled, and two maudlin couples were trying to dance on the sawdust-covered floor. Behind the bar the bald-headed bartender was watching Pete Wahl clean the till.

Smoky said, "I kinda thought you might be needin' money on your travels, Pete. So I came back, too," Wahl whirled. "You would!" he grated. "Well, yowre askin' for it—so take it!" His hands came up filled with .45's.

Their roar echoed the blast of Smoky's guns. Smoky's hat was flung from his head. Another slug nicked his ear. He dived forward, rose halfway down the bar. The barkeep's bald head was all he could see. Wahl was gone. One of the drunks threw a bottle. It crashed at Smoky's side.

There was another shot and little slivers kicked into his face. Wahl came up at the far end of the bar, snapped two harmless slugs in Smoky's general direction, ran for the back door. And Smoky plugged him in the leg.

Wahl staggered, went to his knees, got up and disappeared through the door.

Smoky went after him. A slug from behind tore off one of his heels. He kept on going, emerged just in time to see the saddle come off in Wahl's hands.

"All right, Pete, this is the pay-off. I'm takin' yuh."

"Like hell!" One of Wahl's guns jerked up, then the other. And Smoky let him have it, straight between the eyes.

"For Jed," he said softly as Wahl dropped. "At that, yuh had a better chance than yuh gave old Jed."

He holstered his guns, turned back into the Gold Dollar. The bald-headed barkeep, in the act of jerking trigger, suddenly thought better of it. He dropped his gun as if it were hot, and the rosy hue of his moon face turned ashen.

"I'll pay for that drink now," said Smoky. "If you'll set the bottle out."

———————

16: The Little Steel Coils

Anna Katharine Green
1846-1935
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"A LADY to see you, sir."

I looked up and was at once impressed by the grace and beauty of the person thus introduced to me.

"Is there anything I can do to serve you?" I asked, rising.

She cast me a childlike look full of trust and candour as she seated herself in the chair I had pointed out.

"I believe so; I hope so," she earnestly assured me. "I— I am in great trouble. I have just lost my husband— but it is not that. It is the slip of paper I found on my dresser, and which— which—"

She was trembling violently and her words were fast becoming incoherent. I calmed her and asked her to relate her story just as it had happened; and after a few minutes of silent struggle she succeeded in collecting herself sufficiently to respond with some degree of connection and self-possession.

"I have been married six months. My name is Lucy Holmes. For the last few weeks my husband and I have been living in an apartment house on Fifty-ninth Street, and, as we had not a care in the world, we were very happy till Mr. Holmes was called away on business to Philadelphia. This was two weeks ago. Five days later I received an affectionate letter from him, in which he promised to come back the next day; and the news so delighted me that I accepted an invitation to the theatre from some intimate friends of ours. The next morning I naturally felt fatigued and rose late; but I was very cheerful, for I expected my husband at noon. And now comes the perplexing mystery. In the course of dressing myself I stepped to my bureau, and seeing a small newspaper slip attached to the cushion by a pin, I drew it off and read it. It was a death notice, and my hair rose and my limbs failed me as I took in its fatal and incredible words.

" 'Died this day at the Colonnade, James Forsythe De Witt Holmes. New York papers please copy.'

"James Forsythe De Witt Holmes was my husband, and his last letter, which was at that very moment lying beside the cushion, had been dated from the Colonnade. Was I dreaming or under the spell of some frightful hallucination which led me to misread the name on the slip of paper before me? I could not determine. My head, throat, and chest seemed bound about with iron, so that I could neither speak nor breathe with freedom, and, suffering thus, I stood staring at this demoniacal bit of paper which in an instant had brought the shadow of death upon my happy life. Nor was I at all relieved when a little later I flew with the notice into a neighbour's apartment, and praying her to read it to me, found

that my eyes had not deceived me and that the name was indeed my husband's and the notice one of death.

"Not from my own mind but from hers came the first suggestion of comfort.

" 'It cannot be your husband who is meant,' said she; 'but some one of the same name. Your husband wrote to you yesterday, and this person must have been dead at least two days for the printed notice of his decease to have reached New York. Some one has remarked the striking similarity of names, and wishing to startle you, cut the slip out and pinned it on your cushion.'

"I certainly knew of no one inconsiderate enough to do this, but the explanation was so plausible, I at once embraced it and sobbed aloud in my relief. But in the midst of my rejoicing I heard the bell ring in my apartment, and, running thither, encountered a telegraph boy holding in his outstretched hand the yellow envelope which so often bespeaks death or disaster. The sight took my breath away. Summoning my maid, whom I saw hastening toward me from an inner room, I begged her to open the telegram for me. Sir, I saw in her face, before she had read the first line, a confirmation of my very worst fears. My husband was—"

The young widow, choked with her emotions, paused, recovered herself for the second time, and then went on.

"I had better show you the telegram."

Taking it from her pocketbook, she held it toward me. I read it at a glance. It was short, simple, and direct:

"Come at once. Your husband found dead in his room this morning. Doctors say heart disease. Please telegraph."

"You see it says this morning," she explained, placing her delicate finger on the word she so eagerly quoted. "That means a week ago Wednesday, the same day on which the printed slip recording his death was found on my cushion. Do you not see something very strange in this?"

I did; but, before I ventured to express myself on this subject, I desired her to tell me what she had learned in her visit to Philadelphia.

Her answer was simple and straightforward.

"But little more than you find in this telegram. He died in his room. He was found lying on the floor near the bell-button, which he had evidently risen to touch. One hand was clenched on his chest, but his face wore a peaceful look, as if death had come too suddenly to cause him much suffering. His bed was undisturbed; he had died before retiring, possibly in the act of packing his trunk, for it was found nearly ready for the expressman. Indeed, there was every evidence of his intention to leave on an early morning train. He had even desired to be awakened at six o'clock; and it was his failure to respond to the summons of the bellboy which led to so early a discovery of his death. He had never complained of any distress in breathing, and we had always considered him a perfectly healthy man; but there was no reason for assigning any other cause than

heart failure to his sudden death, and so the burial certificate was made out to that effect, and I was allowed to bring him home and bury him in our vault at Woodlawn. But"— and here her earnestness dried up the tears which had been flowing freely during this recital of her husband's lonely death and sad burial— "do you not think an investigation should be made into a death preceded by a false obituary notice? For I found when I was in Philadelphia that no paragraph such as I had found pinned to my cushion had been inserted in any paper there, nor had any other man of the same name ever registered at the Colonnade, much less died there."

"Have you this notice with you?" I asked.

She immediately produced it, and while I was glancing it over remarked:

"Some persons would give a superstitious explanation to the whole matter; think I had received a supernatural warning and been satisfied with what they would call a spiritual manifestation. But I have not a bit of such folly in my composition. Living hands set up the type and printed the words which gave me so deathly a shock; and hands, with a real purpose in them, cut it from the paper and pinned it to my cushion for me to see when I woke on that fatal morning. But whose hands? That is what I want you to discover."

I had caught the fever of her suspicions long before this and now felt justified in showing my interest.

"First, let me ask," said I, "who has access to your rooms besides your maid?"

"No one; absolutely no one."

"And what of her?"

"She is innocence herself. She is no common housemaid, but a girl my mother brought up, who for love of me consents to do such work in the household as my simple needs require."

"I should like to see her."

"There is no objection to your doing so; but you will gain nothing by it. I have already talked the subject over with her a dozen times and she is as much puzzled by it as I am myself. She says she cannot see how any one could have found an entrance to my room during my sleep, as the doors were all locked. Yet, as she very naturally observes, some one must have done so, for she was in my bedroom herself just before I returned from the theatre, and can swear, if necessary, that no such slip of paper was to be seen on my cushion at that time, for her duties led her directly to my bureau and kept her there for full five minutes."

"And you believed her?" I suggested.

"Implicitly."

"In what direction, then, do your suspicions turn?"

"Alas! in no direction. That is the trouble. I don't know whom to mistrust. It was because I was told that you had the credit of seeing light where others can see nothing but darkness that I have sought your aid in this emergency. For the

uncertainty surrounding this matter is killing me and will make my sorrow quite unendurable if I cannot obtain relief from it."

"I do not wonder," I began, struck by the note of truth in her tones. "And I shall certainly do what I can for you. But before we go any further, let us examine this scrap of newspaper and see what we can make out of it."

I had already noted two or three points in connection with it to which I now proceeded to direct her attention.

"Have you compared this notice," I pursued, "with such others as you find every day in the papers?"

"No," was her eager answer. "Is it not like them all—"

"Read," was my quiet interruption. " 'On this day at the Colonnade'— on what day? The date is usually given in all the bona fide notices I have seen."

"Is it?" she asked, her eyes, moist with unshed tears, opening widely in her astonishment.

"Look in the papers on your return home and see. Then the print. Observe that the type is identical on both sides of this make-believe clipping, while in fact there is always a perceptible difference between that used in the obituary column and that to be found in the columns devoted to other matter. Notice also," I continued, holding up the scrap of paper between her and the light, "that the alignment on one side is not exactly parallel with that on the other; a discrepancy which would not exist if both sides had been printed on a newspaper press. These facts lead me to conclude, first, that the effort to match the type exactly was the mistake of a man who tried to do too much; and, secondly, that one of the sides at least, presumably that containing the obituary notice, was printed on a hand-press, on the blank side of a piece of galley proof picked up in some newspaper office."

"Let me see." And stretching out her hand with the utmost eagerness, she took the slip and turned it over. Instantly a change took place in her countenance. She sank back in her seat and a blush of manifest confusion suffused her cheeks. "Oh!" she exclaimed; "what will you think of me! I brought this scrap of print into the house myself, and it was I who pinned it on the cushion with my own hands! I remember it now. The sight of those words recalls the whole occurrence."

"Then there is one mystery less for us to solve," I remarked, somewhat drily.

"Do you think so?" she protested, with a deprecatory look. "For me the mystery deepens, and becomes every minute more serious. It is true that I brought this scrap of newspaper into the house, and that it had, then as now, the notice of my husband's death upon it, but the time of my bringing it in was Tuesday night, and he was not found dead till Wednesday morning."

"A discrepancy worth noting," I remarked.

"Involving a mystery of some importance," she concluded.

I agreed to that.

"And since we have discovered how the slip came into your room, we can now proceed to the clearing up of this mystery," I observed. "You can, of course, inform me where you procured this clipping which you say you brought into the house?"

"Yes. You may think it strange, but when I alighted from the carriage that night, a man on the sidewalk put this tiny scrap of paper into my hand. It was done so mechanically that it made no more impression on my mind than the thrusting of an advertisement upon me. Indeed, I supposed it was an advertisement, and I only wonder that I retained it in my hand at all. But that I did do so, and that, in a moment of abstraction, I went so far as to pin it to my cushion, is evident from the fact that a vague memory remains in my mind of having read this recipe which you see printed on the reverse side of the paper."

"It was the recipe, then, and not the obituary notice which attracted your attention the night before?"

"Probably, but in pinning it to the cushion, it was the obituary notice that chanced to come uppermost. Oh, why should I not have remembered this till now! Can you understand my forgetting a matter of so much importance?"

"Yes," I allowed, after a momentary consideration of her ingenuous countenance. "The words you read in the morning were so startling that they disconnected themselves from those you had carelessly glanced at the night before."

"That is it," she replied; "and since then I have had eyes for the one side only. How could I think of the other? But who could have printed this thing and who was the man who put it into my hand? He looked like a beggar, but— Oh!" she suddenly exclaimed, her cheeks flushing scarlet and her eyes flashing with a feverish, almost alarming glitter.

"What is it now?" I asked. "Another recollection?"

"Yes." She spoke so low I could hardly hear her. "He coughed and—"

"And what?" I encouragingly suggested, seeing that she was under some new and overwhelming emotion.

"That cough had a familiar sound, now that I think of it. It was like that of a friend who— But no, no; I will not wrong him by any false surmises. He would stoop to much, but not to that; yet—"

The flush on her cheeks had died away, but the two vivid spots which remained showed the depth of her excitement.

"Do you think," she suddenly asked, "that a man out of revenge might plan to frighten me by a false notice of my husband's death, and that God to punish him, made the notice a prophecy?"

"I think a man influenced by the spirit of revenge might do almost anything," I answered, purposely ignoring the latter part of her question.

"But I always considered him a good man. At least I never looked upon him as a wicked one. Every other beggar we meet has a cough; and yet," she added after a moment's pause, "if it was not he who gave me this mortal shock, who was it? He is the only person in the world I ever wronged."

"Had you not better tell me his name?" I suggested.

"No, I am in too great doubt. I should hate to do him a second injury."

"You cannot injure him if he is innocent. My methods are very safe."

"If I could forget his cough! but it had that peculiar catch in it that I remembered so well in the cough of John Graham. I did not pay any especial heed to it at the time. Old days and old troubles were far enough from my thoughts; but now that my suspicions are raised, that low, choking sound comes back to me in a strangely persistent way, and I seem to see a well-remembered form in the stooping figure of this beggar. Oh, I hope the good God will forgive me if I attribute to this disappointed man a wickedness he never committed."

"Who is John Graham?" I urged, "and what was the nature of the wrong you did him?"

She rose, cast me one appealing glance, and perceiving that I meant to have her whole story, turned towards the fire and stood warming her feet before the hearth, with her face turned away from my gaze.

"I was once engaged to marry him," she began. "Not because I loved him, but because we were very poor— I mean my mother and myself— and he had a home and seemed both good and generous. The day came when we were to be married— this was in the West, way out in Kansas— and I was even dressed for the wedding, when a letter came from my uncle here, a rich uncle, very rich, who had never had anything to do with my mother since her marriage, and in it he promised me fortune and everything else desirable in life if I would come to him, unencumbered by any foolish ties. Think of it! And I within half an hour of marriage with a man I had never loved and now suddenly hated. The temptation was overwhelming, and, heartless as my conduct may appear to you, I succumbed to it. Telling my lover that I had changed my mind, I dismissed the minister when he came, and announced my intention of proceeding East as soon as possible. Mr. Graham was simply paralysed by his disappointment, and during the few days which intervened before my departure, I was haunted by his face, which was like that of a man who had died from some overwhelming shock. But when I was once free of the town, especially after I arrived in New York, I forgot alike his misery and himself. Everything I saw was so beautiful! Life was so full of charm, and my uncle so delighted with me and everything I did! Then there was James Holmes, and after I had seen him— But I cannot talk of that. We loved each other, and under the surprise of this new delight how could I be expected to remember the man I had left behind me in that barren region in which I had spent my youth? But he did not forget the misery I had caused him. He followed me to New York; and on

the morning I was married found his way into the house, and mixing with the wedding guests, suddenly appeared before me just as I was receiving the congratulations of my friends. At sight of him I experienced all the terror he had calculated upon causing, but remembering our old relations and my new position, I assumed an air of apparent haughtiness. This irritated John Graham. Flushing with anger, and ignoring my imploring look, he cried peremptorily, 'Present me to your husband!' and I felt forced to present him. But his name produced no effect upon Mr. Holmes. I had never told him of my early experience with this man, and John Graham, perceiving this, cast me a bitter glance of disdain and passed on, muttering between his teeth, 'False to me and false to him! Your punishment be upon you!' and I felt as if I had been cursed."

She stopped here, moved by emotions readily to be understood. Then with quick impetuosity she caught up the thread of her story and went on.

"That was six months ago; and again I forgot. My mother died and my husband soon absorbed my every thought. How could I dream that this man, who was little more than a memory to me and scarcely that, was secretly planning mischief against me? Yet this scrap about which we have talked so much may have been the work of his hands; and even my husband's death—"

She did not finish, but her face, which was turned towards me, spoke volumes.

"Your husband's death shall be inquired into," I assured her. And she, exhausted by the excitement of her discoveries, asked that she might be excused from further discussion of the subject at that time.

As I had no wish, myself, to enter any more fully into the matter just then, I readily acceded to her request, and the pretty widow left me.

OBVIOUSLY the first fact to be settled was whether Mr. Holmes had died from purely natural causes. I accordingly busied myself the next few days with the question, and was fortunate enough to so interest the proper authorities that an order was issued for the exhumation and examination of the body.

The result was disappointing. No traces of poison were to be found in the stomach nor was there to be seen on the body any mark of violence with the exception of a minute prick upon one of his thumbs.

This speck was so small that it escaped every eye but my own.

The authorities assuring the widow that the doctor's certificate given her in Philadelphia was correct, the body was again interred. But I was not satisfied; and confident that this death had not been a natural one, I entered upon one of those secret and prolonged investigations which for so many years have constituted the pleasure of my life. First, I visited the Colonnade in Philadelphia, and being allowed to see the room in which Mr. Holmes died, went through it carefully. As it had not been used since that time I had some hopes of coming upon a clue.

But it was a vain hope, and the only result of my journey to this place was the assurance I received that the gentleman had spent the entire evening preceding his death in his own room, where he had been brought several letters and one small package, the latter coming by mail. With this one point gained— if it was a point— I went back to New York.

Calling on Mrs. Holmes, I asked her if, while her husband was away, she had sent him anything besides letters, and upon her replying to the contrary, requested to know if in her visit to Philadelphia she had noted among her husband's effects anything that was new or unfamiliar to her. "For he received a package while there," I explained, "and though its contents may have been perfectly harmless, it is just as well for us to be assured of this before going any further."

"Oh, you think, then, he was really the victim of some secret violence."

"We have no proof of it," I said. "On the contrary, we are assured that he died from natural causes. But the incident of the newspaper slip outweighs, in my mind, the doctor's conclusions, and until the mystery surrounding that obituary notice has been satisfactorily explained by its author I shall hold to the theory that your husband has been made away with in some strange and seemingly unaccountable manner, which it is our duty to bring to light."

"You are right! You are right! Oh, John Graham!"

She was so carried away by this plain expression of my belief that she forgot the question I had put to her.

"You have not said whether or not you found anything among your husband's effects that can explain this mystery," I suggested.

She at once became attentive.

"Nothing," said she; "his trunks were already packed and his bag nearly so. There were a few things lying about the room which I saw thrust into the latter. Would you like to look through them? I have not had the heart to open the bag since I came back."

As this was exactly what I wished, I said as much, and she led me into a small room, against the wall of which stood a trunk with a travelling-bag on top of it. Opening the latter, she spread the contents out on the trunk.

"I know all these things," she sadly murmured, the tears welling in her eyes.

"This?" I inquired, lifting up a bit of coiled wire with two or three rings dangling from it.

"No; why, what is that?"

"It looks like a puzzle of some kind."

"Then it is of no consequence. My husband was forever amusing himself over some such contrivance. All his friends knew how well he liked these toys and frequently sent them to him. This one evidently reached him from Philadelphia."

Meanwhile I was eyeing the bit of wire curiously. It was undoubtedly a puzzle, but it had appendages to it that I did not understand.

"It is more than ordinarily complicated," I observed, moving the rings up and down in a vain endeavour to work them off.

"The better he would like it," she said.

I kept working with the rings. Suddenly I gave a painful start. A little prong in the handle of the toy had started out and pierced me.

"You had better not handle it," said I, and laid it down. But the next moment I took it up again and put it in my pocket. The prick made by this treacherous bit of mechanism was in or near the same place on my thumb as the one I had noticed on the hand of the deceased Mr. Holmes.

There was a fire in the room, and before proceeding further I cauterised that prick with the end of a red-hot poker. Then I made my adieux to Mrs. Holmes and went immediately to a chemist friend of mine.

"Test the end of this bit of steel for me," said I. "I have reason to believe it carries with it a deadly poison."

He took the toy, promising to subject it to every test possible and let me know the result. Then I went home. I felt ill, or imagined I did, which under the circumstances was almost as bad.

Next day, however, I was quite well, with the exception of a certain inconvenience in my thumb. But not till the following week did I receive the chemist's report. It overthrew my whole theory. He found nothing, and returned me the bit of steel.

But I was not convinced.

"I will hunt up this John Graham," thought I, "and study him."

But this was not so easy a task as it may appear. As Mrs. Holmes possessed no clue to the whereabouts of her quondam lover, I had nothing to aid me in my search for him, save her rather vague description of his personal appearance and the fact that he was constantly interrupted in speaking by a low, choking cough. However, my natural perseverance carried me through. After seeing and interviewing a dozen John Grahams without result, I at last lit upon a man of that name who presented a figure of such vivid unrest and showed such a desperate hatred of his fellows, that I began to entertain hopes of his being the person I was in search of. But determined to be sure of this before proceeding further, I confided my suspicions to Mrs. Holmes, and induced her to accompany me down to a certain spot on the "Elevated" from which I had more than once seen this man go by to his usual lounging place in Printing House Square.

She showed great courage in doing this, for she had such a dread of him that she was in a state of nervous excitement from the moment she left her house, feeling sure that she would attract his attention and thus risk a disagreeable encounter. But she might have spared herself these fears. He did not even glance

up in passing us, and it was mainly by his walk she recognised him. But she did recognise him; and this nerved me at once to set about the formidable task of fixing upon him a crime which was not even admitted as a fact by the authorities.

He was a man-about-town, living, to all appearances, by his wits. He was to be seen mostly in the downtown portions of the city, standing for hours in front of some newspaper office, gnawing at his finger-ends, and staring at the passers-by with a hungry look alarming to the timid and provoking alms from the benevolent. Needless to say that he rejected the latter expression of sympathy with angry contempt.

His face was long and pallid, his cheek-bones high, and his mouth bitter and resolute in expression. He wore neither beard nor moustache, but made up for their lack by an abundance of light-brown hair, which hung very nearly to his shoulders. He stooped in standing, but as soon as he moved, showed decision and a certain sort of pride which caused him to hold his head high and his body more than usually erect. With all these good points his appearance was decidedly sinister, and I did not wonder that Mrs. Holmes feared him.

My next move was to accost him. Pausing before the doorway in which he stood, I addressed him some trivial question. He answered me with sufficient politeness, but with a grudging attention which betrayed the hold which his own thoughts had upon him. He coughed while speaking, and his eye, which for a moment rested on mine, produced an impression upon me for which I was hardly prepared, great as was my prejudice against him. There was such an icy composure in it; the composure of an envenomed nature conscious of its superiority to all surprises. As I lingered to study him more closely, the many dangerous qualities of the man became more and more apparent to me; and convinced that to proceed further without deep and careful thought would be to court failure where triumph would set me up for life, I gave up all present attempt at enlisting him in conversation and went away in an inquiring and serious mood.

In fact, my position was a peculiar one, and the problem I had set for myself one of unusual difficulty. Only by means of some extraordinary device such as is seldom resorted to by the police of this or any other nation, could I hope to arrive at the secret of this man's conduct, and triumph in a matter which to all appearance was beyond human penetration.

But what device? I knew of none, nor through two days and nights of strenuous thought did I receive the least light on the subject. Indeed, my mind seemed to grow more and more confused the more I urged it into action. I failed to get inspiration indoors or out; and feeling my health suffer from the constant irritation of my recurring disappointment, I resolved to take a day off and carry myself and my perplexities into the country.

I did so. Governed by an impulse which I did not then understand, I went to a small town in New Jersey and entered the first house on which I saw the sign

"Room to Let." The result was most fortunate. No sooner had I crossed the threshold of the neat and homely apartment thrown open to my use, than it recalled a room in which I had slept two years before and in which I had read a little book I was only too glad to remember at this moment. Indeed, it seemed as if a veritable inspiration had come to me through this recollection, for though the tale to which I allude was a simple child's story written for moral purposes, it contained an idea which promised to be invaluable to me at this juncture. Indeed, by means of it, I believed myself to have solved the problem that was puzzling me, and, relieved beyond expression, I paid for the night's lodging I had now determined to forego, and returned immediately to New York, having spent just fifteen minutes in the town where I had received this happy inspiration.

My first step on entering the city was to order a dozen steel coils made similar to the one which I still believed answerable for James Holmes's death. My next to learn as far as possible all of John Graham's haunts and habits. At a week's end I had the springs and knew almost as well as he did himself where he was likely to be found at all times of the day and night. I immediately acted upon this knowledge. Assuming a slight disguise, I repeated my former stroll through Printing House Square, looking into each doorway as I passed. John Graham was in one of them, staring in his old way at the passing crowd, but evidently seeing nothing but the images formed by his own disordered brain. A manuscript roll stuck out of his breast-pocket, and from the way his nervous fingers fumbled with it, I began to understand the restless glitter of his eyes, which were as full of wretchedness as any eyes I have ever seen.

Entering the doorway where he stood, I dropped at his feet one of the small steel coils with which I was provided. He did not see it. Stopping near him, I directed his attention to it by saying:

"Pardon me, but did I not see something drop out of your hand?"

He started, glanced at the seemingly inoffensive toy I had pointed out, and altered so suddenly and so vividly that it became instantly apparent that the surprise I had planned for him was fully as keen and searching a one as I had anticipated. Recoiling sharply, he gave me a quick look, then glanced down again at his feet as if half expecting to find the object of his terror gone. But, perceiving it still lying there, he crushed it viciously with his heel, and uttering some incoherent words dashed impetuously from the building.

Confident that he would regret this hasty impulse and return, I withdrew a few steps and waited. And sure enough, in less than five minutes, he came slinking back. Picking up the coil with more than one sly look about, he examined it closely. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry and went staggering out. Had he discovered that the seeming puzzle possessed the same invisible spring which had made the one handled by James Holmes so dangerous?

Certain as to the place he would be found next, I made a short cut to an obscure little saloon in Nassau Street, where I took up my stand in a spot convenient for seeing without being seen. In ten minutes he was standing at the bar asking for a drink.

"Whiskey!" he cried. "Straight."

It was given him, but as he set the empty glass down on the counter he saw lying before him another of the steel springs, and was so confounded by the sight that the proprietor, who had put it there at my instigation, thrust out his hand toward him as if half afraid he would fall.

"Where did that— that thing come from?" stammered John Graham, ignoring the other's gesture and pointing with a trembling hand at the insignificant bit of wire between them.

"Didn't it drop from your coat-pocket?" inquired the proprietor. "It wasn't lying here before you came in."

With a horrible oath the unhappy man turned and fled from the place. I lost sight of him after that for three hours, then I suddenly came upon him again. He was walking uptown with a set purpose in his face that made him look more dangerous than ever. Of course I followed him, expecting him to turn towards Fifty-ninth Street, but at the corner of Madison Avenue and Forty-seventh Street he changed his mind and dashed toward Third Avenue. At Park Avenue he faltered and again turned north, walking for several blocks as if the fiends were behind him. I began to think that he was but attempting to walk off his excitement, when, at a sudden rushing sound in the cut beside us, he stopped and trembled. An express train was shooting by. As it disappeared in the tunnel beyond, he looked about him with a blanched face and wandering eye; but his glance did not turn my way, or, if it did, he failed to attach any meaning to my near presence.

He began to move on again and this time towards the bridge spanning the cut. I followed him very closely. In the centre of it he paused and looked down at the track beneath him. Another train was approaching. As it came near he trembled from head to foot, and, catching at the railing against which he leaned, was about to make a quick move forward when a puff of smoke arose from below and sent him staggering backward, gasping with a terror I could hardly understand till I saw that the smoke had taken the form of a spiral and was sailing away before him in what to his disordered imagination must have looked like a gigantic image of the coil with which twice before on this day he had found himself confronted.

It may have been chance and it may have been providence; but whichever it was it saved him. He could not face that semblance of his haunting thought; and turning away he cowered down on the neighbouring curbstone, where he sat for several minutes, with his head buried in his hands; when he arose again he was his own daring and sinister self. Knowing that he was now too much master of his faculties to ignore me any longer, I walked quickly away and left him. I knew

where he would be at six o'clock and had already engaged a table at the same restaurant. It was seven, however, before he put in an appearance, and by this time he was looking more composed. There was a reckless air about him, however, which was perhaps only noticeable to me; for none of the habitués of this especial restaurant were entirely without it; wild eyes and unkempt hair being in the majority.

I let him eat. The dinner he ordered was simple and I had not the heart to interrupt his enjoyment of it.

But when he had finished and came to pay, then I allowed the shock to come. Under the bill which the waiter laid at the side of his plate was the inevitable steel coil; and it produced even more than its usual effect. I own I felt sorry for him.

He did not dash from the place, however, as he had from the liquor saloon. A spirit of resistance had seized him and he demanded to know where this object of his fear had come from. No one could tell him (or would). Whereupon he began to rave and would certainly have done himself or somebody else an injury if he had not been calmed by a man almost as wild-looking as himself. Paying his bill, but vowing he would never enter the place again, he went out, clay white, but with the swaggering air of a man who had just asserted himself.

He drooped, however, as soon as he reached the street, and I had no difficulty in following him to a certain gambling den, where he gained three dollars and lost five. From there he went to his lodgings in West Tenth Street.

I did not follow him. He had passed through many deep and wearing emotions since noon, and I had not the heart to add another to them.

But late the next day I returned to this house and rang the bell. It was already dusk, but there was light enough for me to notice the unrepaired condition of the iron railings on either side of the old stoop and to compare this abode of decayed grandeur with the spacious and elegant apartment in which pretty Mrs. Holmes mourned the loss of her young husband. Had any such comparison ever been made by the unhappy John Graham, as he hurried up these battered steps into the dismal halls beyond?

In answer to my summons there came to the door a young woman to whom I had but to intimate my wish to see Mr. Graham for her to let me in with the short announcement:

"Top floor, back room! Door open, he's out; door shut, he's in."

As an open door meant liberty to enter, I lost no time in following the direction of her finger, and presently found myself in a low attic chamber overlooking an acre of roofs. A fire had been lighted in the open grate, and the flickering red beams danced on ceiling and walls with a cheeriness greatly in contrast to the nature of the business which had led me there. As they also served to light the room, I proceeded to make myself at home; and drawing up a chair,

sat down at the fireplace in such a way as to conceal myself from any one entering the door.

In less than half an hour he came in.

He was in a state of high emotion. His face was flushed and his eyes burning. Stepping rapidly forward, he flung his hat on the table in the middle of the room, with a curse that was half cry and half groan. Then he stood silent and I had an opportunity of noting how haggard he had grown in the short time which had elapsed since I had seen him last. But the interval of his inaction was short, and in a moment he flung up his arms with a loud "Curse her!" that rang through the narrow room and betrayed the source of his present frenzy. Then he again stood still, grating his teeth and working his hands in a way terribly suggestive of the murderer's instinct. But not for long. He saw something that attracted his attention on the table, a something upon which my eyes had long before been fixed, and starting forward with a fresh and quite different display of emotion, he caught up what looked like a roll of manuscript and began to tear it open.

"Back again! Always back!" wailed from his lips; and he gave the roll a toss that sent from its midst a small object which he no sooner saw than he became speechless and reeled back. It was another of the steel coils.

"Good God!" fell at last from his stiff and working lips. "Am I mad or has the devil joined in the pursuit against me? I cannot eat, I cannot drink, but this diabolical spring starts up before me. It is here, there, everywhere. The visible sign of my guilt; the— the—" He had stumbled back upon my chair, and turning, saw me.

I was on my feet at once, and noting that he was dazed by the shock of my presence, I slid quietly between him and the door.

The movement roused him. Turning upon me with a sarcastic smile in which was concentrated the bitterness of years, he briefly said:

"So I am caught! Well, there has to be an end to men as well as to things, and I am ready for mine. She turned me away from her door to-day, and after the hell of that moment I don't much fear any other."

"You had better not talk," I admonished him. "All that falls from you now will only tell against you on your trial."

He broke into a harsh laugh. "And do you think I care for that? That having been driven by a woman's perfidy into crime I am going to bridle my tongue and keep down the words which are my only safeguard from insanity? No, no; while my miserable breath lasts I will curse her, and if the halter is to cut short my words, it shall be with her name blistering my lips."

I attempted to speak, but he would not give me an opportunity. The passion of weeks had found vent and he rushed on recklessly:

"I went to her house to-day. I wanted to see her in her widow's weeds; I wanted to see her eyes red with weeping over a grief which owed its bitterness to

me. But she would not grant me admittance. She had me thrust from her door, and I shall never know how deeply the iron has sunk into her soul. But"— and here his face showed a sudden change— "I shall see her if I am tried for murder. She will be in the courtroom— on the witness stand—"

"Doubtless," I interjected; but his interruption came quickly and with vehement passion.

"Then I am ready. Welcome trial, conviction, death, even. To confront her eye to eye is all I wish. She shall never forget it, never!"

"Then you do not deny—" I began.

"I deny nothing," he returned, and held out his hands with a grim gesture. "How can I, when there falls from everything I touch the devilish thing which took away the life I hated?"

"Have you anything more to say or do before you leave these rooms?" I asked.

He shook his head, and then, bethinking himself, pointed to the roll of paper which he had flung on the table.

"Burn that!" he cried.

I took up the roll and looked at it. It was the manuscript of a poem in blank verse.

"I have been with it into a dozen newspaper and magazine offices," he explained with great bitterness. "Had I succeeded in getting a publisher for it I might have forgotten my wrongs and tried to build up a new life on the ruins of the old. But they would not have it, none of them; so I say, burn it! that no memory of me may remain in this miserable world."

"Keep to the facts!" I severely retorted. "It was while carrying this poem from one newspaper to another that you secured that bit of print upon the blank side of which yourself printed the obituary notice with which you savoured your revenge upon the woman who had disappointed you."

"You know that? Then you know where I got the poison with which I tipped the silly toy with which that weak man fooled away his life?"

"No," said I, "I do not know where you got it. I merely know it was no common poison bought at a druggist's, or from any ordinary chemist."

"It was woorali; the deadly, secret woorali. I got it from— but that is another man's secret. You will never hear from me anything that will compromise a friend. I got it, that is all. One drop, but it killed my man."

The satisfaction, the delight, which he threw into these words are beyond description. As they left his lips a jet of flame from the neglected fire shot up and threw his figure for one instant into bold relief upon the lowering ceiling; then it died out, and nothing but the twilight dusk remained in the room and on the countenance of this doomed and despairing man.

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17: The Owl's Ear

Erckman-Chatrian

É Erckmann, 1822–1899, & A Chatrian, 1826–1890

(“L’oreille de la chouette”, in: *Les Contes Fantastiques*, 1860

(Translator unknown; This translation from Julian Hawthorne's "Library of the World's Best Mystery and Detective Stories", 1907*)*

ON THE 29TH OF JULY, 1835, Kasper Boeck, a shepherd of the little village of Hirschwiller, with his large felt hat tipped back, his wallet of stringy sackcloth hanging at his hip, and his great tawny dog at his heels, presented himself at about nine o'clock in the evening at the house of the burgomaster, Petrus Mauerer, who had just finished supper and was taking a little glass of kirchwasser to facilitate digestion.

This burgomaster was a tall, thin man, and wore a bushy gray mustache. He had seen service in the armies of the Archduke Charles. He had a jovial disposition, and ruled the village, it is said, with his finger and with the rod.

"Mr. Burgomaster," cried the shepherd in evident excitement.

But Petrus Mauerer, without awaiting the end of his speech, frowned and said:

"Kasper Boeck, begin by taking off your hat, put your dog out of the room, and then speak distinctly, intelligibly, without stammering, so that I may understand you."

Hereupon the burgomaster, standing near the table, tranquilly emptied his little glass and wiped his great gray mustachios indifferently.

Kasper put his dog out, and came back with his hat off.

"Well!" said Petrus, seeing that he was silent, "what has happened?"

"It happens that the *spirit* has appeared again in the ruins of Geierstein!"

"Ha! I doubt it. You've seen it yourself?"

"Very clearly, Mr. Burgomaster."

"Without closing your eyes?"

"Yes, Mr. Burgomaster— my eyes were wide open. There was plenty of moonlight."

"What form did it have?"

"The form of a small man."

"Good!"

And turning toward a glass door at the left:

"Katel!" cried the burgomaster.

An old serving woman opened the door.

"Sir?"

"I am going out for a walk— on the hillside— sit up for me until ten o'clock. Here's the key."

"Yes, sir."

Then the old soldier took down his gun from the hook over the door, examined the priming, and slung it over his shoulder; then he addressed Kasper Boeck:

"Go and tell the rural guard to meet me in the holly path, and tell him behind the mill. Your *spirit* must be some marauder. But if it's a fox, I'll make a fine hood of it, with long earlaps."

Master Petrus Mauerer and humble Kasper then went out. The weather was superb, the stars innumerable. While the shepherd went to knock at the rural guard's door, the burgomaster plunged among the elder bushes, in a little lane that wound around behind the old church.

Two minutes later Kasper and Hans Goerner, whinger at his side, by running overtook Master Petrus in the holly path.

All three made their way together toward the ruins of Geierstein.

These ruins, which are twenty minutes' walk from the village, seem to be insignificant enough; they consist of the ridges of a few decrepit walls, from four to six feet high, which extend among the brier bushes. Archaeologists call them the aqueducts of Seranus, the Roman camp of Holderlock, or vestiges of Theodoric, according to their fantasy. The only thing about these ruins which could be considered remarkable is a stairway to a cistern cut in the rock. Inside of this spiral staircase, instead of concentric circles which twist around with each complete turn, the involutions become wider as they proceed, in such a way that the bottom of the pit is three times as large as the opening. Is it an architectural freak, or did some reasonable cause determine such an odd construction? It matters little to us. The result was to cause in the cistern that vague reverberation which anyone may hear upon placing a shell at his ear, and to make you aware of steps on the gravel path, murmurs of the air, rustling of the leaves, and even distant words spoken by people passing the foot of the hill.

Our three personages then followed the pathway between the vineyards and gardens of Hirschwiller.

"I see nothing," the burgomaster would say, turning up his nose derisively.

"Nor I either," the rural guard would repeat, imitating the other's tone.

"It's down in the hole," muttered the shepherd.

"We shall see, we shall see," returned the burgomaster.

It was in this fashion, after a quarter of an hour, that they came upon the opening of the cistern. As I have said, the night was clear, limpid, and perfectly still.

The moon portrayed, as far as the eye could reach, one of those nocturnal landscapes in bluish lines, studded with slim trees, the shadows of which seemed to have been drawn with a black crayon. The blooming brier and broom perfumed the air with a rather sharp odor, and the frogs of a neighboring swamp sang their

oily anthem, interspersed with silences. But all these details escaped the notice of our good rustics; they thought of nothing but laying hands on the *spirit*.

When they had reached the stairway, all three stopped and listened, then gazed into the dark shadows. Nothing appeared— nothing stirred.

"The devil!" said the burgomaster, "we forgot to bring a bit of candle. Descend, Kasper, you know the way better than I— I'll follow you."

At this proposition the shepherd recoiled promptly. If he had consulted his inclinations the poor man would have taken to flight; his pitiful expression made the burgomaster burst out laughing.

"Well, Hans, since he doesn't want to go down, show me the way," he said to the game warden.

"But, Mr. Burgomaster," said the latter, "you know very well that steps are missing; we should risk breaking our necks."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Yes, what's to be done?"

"Send your dog," replied Petrus.

The shepherd whistled to his dog, showed him the stairway, urged him— but he did not wish to take the chances any more than the others.

At this moment, a bright idea struck the rural guardsman.

"Ha! Mr. Burgomaster," said he, "if you should fire your gun inside."

"Faith," cried the other, "you're right, we shall catch a glimpse at least."

And without hesitating the worthy man approached the stairway and leveled his gun.

But, by the acoustic effect which I have already pointed out, the *spirit*, the marauder, the individual who chanced to be actually in the cistern, had heard everything. The idea of stopping a gunshot did not strike him as amusing, for in a shrill, piercing voice he cried:

"Stop! Don't fire— I'm coming."

Then the three functionaries looked at each other and laughed softly, and the burgomaster, leaning over the opening again, cried rudely:

"Be quick about it, you varlet, or I'll shoot! Be quick about it!"

He cocked his gun, and the click seemed to hasten the ascent of the mysterious person; they heard him rolling down some stones. Nevertheless it still took him another minute before he appeared, the cistern being at a depth of sixty feet.

What was this man doing in such deep darkness? He must be some great criminal! So at least thought Petrus Mauerer and his acolytes.

At last a vague form could be discerned in the dark, then slowly, by degrees, a little man, four and a half feet high at the most, frail, ragged, his face withered and yellow, his eye gleaming like a magpie's, and his hair tangled, came out shouting:

"By what right do you come to disturb my studies, wretched creatures?"

This grandiose apostrophe was scarcely in accord with his costume and physiognomy. Accordingly the burgomaster indignantly replied:

"Try to show that you're honest, you knave, or I'll begin by administering a correction."

"A correction!" said the little man, leaping with anger, and drawing himself up under the nose of the burgomaster.

"Yes," replied the other, who, nevertheless, did not fail to admire the pygmy's courage; "if you do not answer the questions satisfactorily I am going to put to you. I am the burgomaster of Hirschwiller; here are the rural guard, the shepherd and his dog. We are stronger than you— be wise and tell me peaceably who you are, what you are doing here, and why you do not dare to appear in broad daylight. Then we shall see what's to be done with you."

"All that's none of your business," replied the little man in his cracked voice. "I shall not answer."

"In that case, forward, march," ordered the burgomaster, who grasped him firmly by the nape of the neck; "you are going to sleep in prison."

The little man writhed like a weasel; he even tried to bite, and the dog was sniffing at the calves of his legs, when, quite exhausted, he said, not without a certain dignity:

"Let go, sir, I surrender to superior force— I'm yours!"

The burgomaster, who was not entirely lacking in good breeding, became calmer.

"Do you promise?" said he.

"I promise!"

"Very well— walk in front."

And that is how, on the night of the 29th of July, 1835, the burgomaster took captive a little red-haired man, issuing from the cavern of Geierstein.

Upon arriving at Hirschwiller the rural guard ran to find the key of the prison and the vagabond was locked in and double-locked, not to forget the outside bolt and padlock.

Everyone then could repose after his fatigues, and Petrus Mauerer went to bed and dreamed till midnight of this singular adventure.

On the morrow, toward nine o'clock, Hans Goerner, the rural guard, having been ordered to bring the prisoner to the town house for another examination, repaired to the cooler with four husky daredevils. They opened the door, all of them curious to look upon the Will-o'-the-wisp. But imagine their astonishment upon seeing him hanging from the bars of the window by his necktie! Some said that he was still writhing; others that he was already stiff. However that may be, they ran to Petrus Mauerer's house to inform him of the fact, and what is certain is that upon the latter's arrival the little man had breathed his last.

The justice of the peace and the doctor of Hirschwiller drew up a formal statement of the catastrophe; then they buried the unknown in a field of meadow grass and it was all over!

NOW about three weeks after these occurrences, I went to see my cousin, Petrus Mauerer, whose nearest relative I was, and consequently his heir. This circumstance sustained an intimate acquaintance between us. We were at dinner, talking on indifferent matters, when the burgomaster recounted the foregoing little story, as I have just reported it.

"'Tis strange, cousin," said I, "truly strange. And you have no other information concerning the unknown?"

"None."

"And you have found nothing which could give you a clew as to his purpose?"

"Absolutely nothing, Christian."

"But, as a matter of fact, what could he have been doing in the cistern? On what did he live?"

The burgomaster shrugged his shoulders, refilled our glasses, and replied with:

"To your health, cousin."

"To yours."

We remained silent a few minutes. It was impossible for me to accept the abrupt conclusion of the adventure, and, in spite of myself, I mused with some melancholy on the sad fate of certain men who appear and disappear in this world like the grass of the field, without leaving the least memory or the least regret.

"Cousin," I resumed, "how far may it be from here to the ruins of Geierstein?"

"Twenty minutes' walk at the most. Why?"

"Because I should like to see them."

"You know that we have a meeting of the municipal council, and that I can't accompany you."

"Oh! I can find them by myself."

"No, the rural guard will show you the way; he has nothing better to do."

And my worthy cousin, having rapped on his glass, called his servant:

"Katel, go and find Hans Goerner— let him hurry, and get here by two o'clock. I must be going."

The servant went out and the rural guard was not tardy in coming.

He was directed to take me to the ruins.

While the burgomaster proceeded gravely toward the hall of the municipal council, we were already climbing the hill. Hans Goerner, with a wave of the hand, indicated the remains of the aqueduct. At the same moment the rocky ribs of the plateau, the blue distances of Hundsrück, the sad crumbling walls covered with somber ivy, the tolling of the Hirschwiller bell summoning the notables to the council, the rural guardsman panting and catching at the brambles— assumed in

my eyes a sad and severe tinge, for which I could not account: it was the story of the hanged man which took the color out of the prospect.

The cistern staircase struck me as being exceedingly curious, with its elegant spiral. The bushes bristling in the fissures at every step, the deserted aspect of its surroundings, all harmonized with my sadness. We descended, and soon the luminous point of the opening, which seemed to contract more and more, and to take the shape of a star with curved rays, alone sent us its pale light. When we attained the very bottom of the cistern, we found a superb sight was to be had of all those steps, lighted from above and cutting off their shadows with marvelous precision. I then heard the hum of which I have already spoken: the immense granite conch had as many echoes as stones!

"Has nobody been down here since the little man?" I asked the rural guardsman.

"No, sir. The peasants are afraid. They imagine that the hanged man will return."

"And you?"

"I— oh, I'm not curious."

"But the justice of the peace? His duty was to—"

"Ha! What could he have come to the *Owl's Ear* for?"

"They call this the *Owl's Ear*?"

"Yes."

"That's pretty near it," said I, raising my eyes. "This reversed vault forms the *pavilion* well enough; the under side of the steps makes the covering of the *tympanum*, and the winding of the staircase the *cochlea*, the *labyrinth*, and *vestibule* of the ear. That is the cause of the murmur which we hear: we are at the back of a colossal ear."

"It's very likely," said Hans Goerner, who did not seem to have understood my observations.

We started up again, and I had ascended the first steps when I felt something crush under my foot; I stopped to see what it could be, and at that moment perceived a white object before me. It was a torn sheet of paper. As for the hard object, which I had felt grinding up, I recognized it as a sort of glazed earthenware jug.

"Aha!" I said to myself; "this may clear up the burgomaster's story."

I rejoined Hans Goerner, who was now waiting for me at the edge of the pit.

"Now, sir," cried he, "where would you like to go?"

"First, let's sit down for a while. We shall see presently."

I sat down on a large stone, while the rural guard cast his falcon eyes over the village to see if there chanced to be any trespassers in the gardens. I carefully examined the glazed vase, of which nothing but splinters remained. These fragments presented the appearance of a funnel, lined with wool. It was

impossible for me to perceive its purpose. I then read the piece of a letter, written in an easy running and firm hand. I transcribe it here below, word for word. It seems to follow the other half of the sheet, for which I looked vainly all about the ruins:

"My *micracoustic* ear trumpet thus has the double advantage of infinitely multiplying the intensity of sounds, and of introducing them into the ear without causing the observer the least discomfort. You would never have imagined, dear master, the charm which one feels in perceiving these thousands of imperceptible sounds which are confounded, on a fine summer day, in an immense murmuring. The bumble-bee has his song as well as the nightingale, the honey-bee is the warbler of the mosses, the cricket is the lark of the tall grass, the maggot is the wren— it has only a sigh, but the sigh is melodious!

"This discovery, from the point of view of sentiment, which makes us live in the universal life, surpasses in its importance all that I could say on the matter.

"After so much suffering, privations, and weariness, how happy it makes one to reap the rewards of all his labors! How the soul soars toward the divine Author of all these microscopic worlds, the magnificence of which is revealed to us! Where now are the long hours of anguish, hunger, contempt, which overwhelmed us before? Gone, sir, gone! Tears of gratitude moisten our eyes. One is proud to have achieved, through suffering, new joys for humanity and to have contributed to its mental development. But howsoever vast, howsoever admirable may be the first fruits of my *micracoustic* ear trumpet, these do not delimit its advantages. There are more positive ones, more material, and ones which may be expressed in figures.

"Just as the telescope brought the discovery of myriads of worlds performing their harmonious revolutions in infinite space— so also will my *micracoustic* ear trumpet extend the sense of the unhearable beyond all possible bounds. Thus, sir, the circulation of the blood and the fluids of the body will not give me pause; you shall hear them flow with the impetuosity of cataracts; you shall perceive them so distinctly as to startle you; the slightest irregularity of the pulse, the least obstacle, is striking, and produces the same effect as a rock against which the waves of a torrent are dashing!

"It is doubtless an immense conquest in the development of our knowledge of physiology and pathology, but this is not the point on which I would emphasize. Upon applying your ear to the ground, sir, you may hear the mineral waters springing up at immeasurable depths; you may judge of their volume, their currents, and the obstacles which they meet!

"Do you wish to go further? Enter a subterranean vault which is so constructed as to gather a quantity of loud sounds; then at night when the world sleeps, when nothing will be confused with the interior noises of our globe— listen!

"Sir, all that it is possible for me to tell you at the present moment— for in the midst of my profound misery, of my privations, and often of my despair, I am left only a few lucid instants to pursue my geological observations— all that I can affirm is that the seething of glow worms, the explosions of boiling fluids, is something terrifying and sublime, which can only be compared to the impression of the astronomer whose glass fathoms depths of limitless extent.

"Nevertheless, I must avow that these impressions should be studied further and classified in a methodical manner, in order that definite conclusions may be derived therefrom. Likewise, as soon as you shall have deigned, dear and noble master, to transmit the little sum for use at Neustadt as I asked, to supply my first needs, we shall see our way to an understanding in regard to the establishment of three great subterranean observatories, one in the valley of

Catania, another in Iceland, then a third in Capac-Uren, Songay, or Cayembé-Uren, the deepest of the Cordilleras, and consequently—"

Here the letter stopped.

I let my hands fall in stupefaction. Had I read the conceptions of an idiot— or the inspirations of a genius which had been realized? What am I to say? to think? So this man, this miserable creature, living at the bottom of a burrow like a fox, dying of hunger, had had perhaps one of those inspirations which the Supreme Being sends on earth to enlighten future generations!

And this man had hanged himself in disgust, despair! No one had answered his prayer, though he asked only for a crust of bread in exchange for his discovery. It was horrible. Long, long I sat there dreaming, thanking Heaven for having limited my intelligence to the needs of ordinary life— for not having desired to make me a superior man in the community of martyrs. At length the rural guardsman, seeing me with fixed gaze and mouth agape, made so bold as to touch me on the shoulder.

"Mr. Christian," said he, "see— it's getting late— the burgomaster must have come back from the council."

"Ha! That's a fact," cried I, crumpling up the paper, "come on."

We descended the hill.

My worthy cousin met me, with a smiling face, at the threshold of his house.

"Well! well! Christian, so you've found no trace of the imbecile who hanged himself?"

"No."

"I thought as much. He was some lunatic who escaped from Stefansfeld or somewhere— Faith, he did well to hang himself. When one is good for nothing, that's the simplest way for it."

The following day I left Hirschwiller. I shall never return.

———————

18: Challenger!

Max Brand

Frederick Faust, 1892-1944
The American Magazine July 1934
Australian Women's Weekly 30 March 1935

SHE had said to Killan:

"It will only need a little patience, John. Then you and I will have another place in the country. We'll start raising horses again, and they'll be our own. Giving up your present stable— don't let it grieve you too much."

He was a very quiet fellow. His voice was seldom raised, and it was gentler than ever as he answered: "Suppose you had children, Mary, and someone told you to send them away and forget them— because you could raise another family later on?" They looked at each other with sad eyes and said no more, but on the day of the sale they avoided each other.

The women looked at Mary Holm and agreed that Killan had done the only possible thing, and yet, because he had given in, they envied Mary a bit less than before. As for the men, they kept saying to one another, "Killan is a good fellow, anyway. And what the deuce could he do?"

CONSIDERING what Killan was, there was a good deal of doubt about the business, but, considering the millions of Henry Banner that were in prospect, there was no doubt at all about the career. Banner had lent his nephew the cottage and given him a handsome allowance. Those who knew Banner were surprised that Killan had not been forced to walk the chalkline before this.

It was the cold sword of logic that had pierced the heart of Killan. He loved Mary Holm and he loved the horses which he had bred or bought and made. If he wanted Mary, he had to give up the horses; even if he refused to give up the horses they would be taken from him, because they actually belonged to his uncle, Henry Banner. And Henry Banner had decided to close up the country place, where, during these years, he had allowed Killan to be what God had made him: the keenest of horsemen, the gentlest of mortals.

It was Banner's money that made this life possible for Killan, and Banner had not troubled him until after the death of the junior partner in the shipping firm. A month later came the ultimatum which forced Killan to choose between something and nothing. The "something" was a handsome berth in the shipping business, with plenty of income on which to marry Mary Holm; he paid for this by giving up the horses. The "nothing" was the loss of Banner's affection, and the loss of the horses also; the place was to be closed down, in any case, and Killan would be left to make his way in the world with hands which knew little more than the feel of the reins.

That was why he had surrendered. That was why the people had come this day to the sale at Banner Cottage.

Henry Banner had come down to observe the sale with his own stern eyes, and it was not altogether strange that Mary Holm walked about with him. She was very happy, though she kept that happiness from brightening too much in her face, but she felt with honesty that she and the Banner millions could mean more to John Killan than his thoroughbreds and that wide, green galloping country in which he lived.

As for John Killan, he kept himself up to his full inches as a man ought to do. He kept himself smiling as his nine horses were led out, one by one, and taken over the jumps of the schooling ground by the stable boy. Killan wore riding clothes— for the last time, perhaps?—and went about with his hands in the pockets of a topcoat which kept people from seeing when his fists were gripped hard.

Mary Holm paused with Banner at the side of Killan and said, "They're going very well, John, don't you think?"

He turned, with his smile, but his eyes were just missing her as he said, "Oh, yes, quite well."

She took a little grip of the arm of Henry Banner and steered him away from there. "Poor John!" she said.

"Poor John?" exclaimed Henry Banner. He threw up his head, so that his hat slipped back from the jerk. On the Stock Exchange that gesture was known well enough.

He pulled a sugar lozenge out of his pocket and held it poised in his fingers for a moment. He had a tenderness of the throat and was in the habit of using these lozenges whenever he had to talk a great deal. Therefore, from habit, the moment he was greatly moved one of the little white lozenges was sure to appear in his fingertips.

"Hang my immortal heart and eyes!" said Banner. "Poor John? Poor fool, you mean, doing the first wise act of his spendthrift life in getting rid of this pack of long-legged, scrawny-necked, crazy-eyed fencehoppers."

"But he's made them!" said the girl. She turned her head, suddenly, and saw the somewhat bending shoulders and the smile of John Killan in the crowd. "He's taught them everything they know."

"They know how to eat their heads off on oats that I pay for!" said Banner.

A LOUD ripple of talk, and then a silence came. A burly young man, with a round, red face and the rather glassy eyes that one sometimes sees in those who live by horses, exclaimed, near Mary Holm, "Great Scott, he's selling Challenger, too!"

Back there in the crowd, John Killan did not hear the outbreak of exclamation and he did not feel the silence that followed it. When he saw the big chestnut his mind was so filled that he would not have heard an angel's voice. For Challenger was ten years old and Killan knew every one of those years, from the very first day when the colt had pushed its soft, wet muzzle into the palm of his hand and made him laugh.

Challenger had grown up a bit weedy and slab-sided, a mere blade of a horse. But that was the proper word— a sword-blade full of give and play and suppleness but never ready to break. Four times he had entered the Oakwood Cup, and three times he had come from behind and won, because his master's voice had been close to his ears, entreating.

Last year he had been beaten, with half the spectators vowing that a taste of the whip would have brought him first under the wire. Poor fools! As though Challenger needed more than Killan's word and one slap with the flat of the hand down on the rubbery springing of the shoulder muscles.

Little Helen Jarvis began to jump up and down and clap her hands above her head. "It's Challenger! It's Challenger, Challenger, Challenger!" she cried. Children ought not to be brought along at a time like this. Their sharp voices cut too deep. They cut as deep as the heart.

People began to look at Killan more than they looked at the good horse; their eyes were round.

Killan said to himself, "This is the music and this is where you face it, John." He kept on smiling as he walked up to the stable-boy who led the gelding. "I'll take Challenger around myself," he said.

Little Helen Jarvis was clapping her hands above her head again and screeching "Challenger! Challenger! Challenger!" and Sam Jarvis was patting her on the shoulder and grinning. Sam Jarvis was a big, flat-faced fool. He couldn't have known better than to bring a child to an affair like this; there wasn't any knowing in him, thought Killan.

THEN he straightned Challenger at the first jump. There were five jumps in the circle, and three of them were big. The biggest of all was the ditch with the big hedge beyond it. The gelding walked over those jumps as though they were bumps on a road, but as they came up for the ditch and hedge Killan heard the voice of Helen Jarvis shrilling, "Challenger! Challenger! Challenger!" And then over the squealing little voice closed a roar of men shouting and the frightful screaming of women.

But Killan could not see what it was all about until Challenger actually rose at the jump, mightily; then he glimpsed Helen Jarvis in the middle of the course. She had started to run across the track to the inside. Her father, with the face of a madman, was vaulting the fence to get at her. Her small body pulsed this way and

that to escape from the flying danger; then she threw her arms over her head and huddled on the ground— as clumsy dodgers will do— in the very path of the horse.

Killan had a tenth part of a second, and he used it. He hurled his whole weight to the right and he felt Challenger, like the nobleman that he was, instantly giving his great body to the manoeuvre, so that he slewed around in the air. He landed almost sidewise and hurled Killan in a rolling fall that ended thirty feet away. But when Killan got up, staggering, he saw Helen sprawling and clutching in the arms of her father, unhurt, while the agony was still thumbed into the face of Jarvis as into wet clay. Then Killan saw that Challenger was having a hard time getting to his feet. The gelding managed it; he stood with his left foreleg dragging.

People swarmed all around. They were gripping Killan's arm, patting his shoulder, shaking his hand, and saying a lot of things that Kilian did not hear.

AS for the leg, Doc Whaley was looking at it, lifting it, thumbing so deeply into the slippery shoulder muscles that Challenger winced his ears back now and then, in spite of the fact that Killan was right there face to face with him.

Whaley came around, and said in a voice which he tried to keep down but which emotion made big, "I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's a ligament. I don't know. But I'm afraid it's the nerve. I can't tell you, Mr. Killan, how sorry I am!"

There was a whisper from the others, at that. Everyone began to back away as if from a death, but a crazy voice came out of Sam Jarvis: "I'll bid a hundred for him— no, no, I mean five hundred. I'm bidding five hundred for him. I'll have him sound in no time. Five hundred for him."

Of course, that was Jarvis' way of admitting that his small daughter had caused the fall of the horse. Killan was able to keep on smiling but he had to turn his head slowly, and he saw that Jarvis was crying.

"Please don't," said Killan. "It's just, one of those things; nobody's fault."

Sam Jarvis ducked his head down and almost ran away. All the others were getting away fast, too. There was only Billy, and Mary Holm at the door of the barn with Henry Banner, arguing.

But Banner snapped the padlock on the door. After all, he had ordered that on this day the barn should be cleared of every horse, and now that the thing was done it should not be undone.

Killan kept on smiling as he heard Banner say, "Too bad, John. Five hundred wiped out by bad luck. But now, the car's waiting to take us to the station; everything's ready. I suppose the horse has to be destroyed. And Mary and I will be waiting for you."

He took Mary and marched her off towards the house. Killan felt her backward glances as numb flesh feels a touch.

HE went into the cottage. It was one of those "cottages" with five master bedrooms and five baths. In the gunroom he took a fortyfive calibre revolver, loaded it, and went out through the back door of the house. Then he saw that Challenger had left the schooling ground, and was coming across the meadow, hobbling on three legs, with the fourth dragging. His head bobbed up and down with each effort, but when he saw the master coming he stopped and waited, with something of the old ail. Billy had taken off the saddle and was now approaching, partly in awe and partly to curiosity

Killan put his left hand over one eye of the horse and laid the muzzle of the revolver in the hollow of the temple. In the bottom of that hollow a great pulse beat like a fountain of life that was trying to spring out. After a moment, Killan looked up, but, instead of receiving strength, the low rushing of the clouds made him dizzy.

He put the gun into his pocket and stroked the neck of the old horse.

"Billy," he said, "when Webster comes back, tell him to get in touch with Doctor Whaley About giving Challenger a final look and putting him away, if he's really finished. You could have Whaley out here by to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir," whispered Billy. "Old Challenger—yes, sir. I'll tell Webster."

Killan went back into the house and washed his hands, hard, gripping them together with all his might. Afterwards he went outside to the car.

They got down to the station in time to wait a few cold, windy minutes on the platform. But Killan looked across the dark fields towards the place where Hollowell Hill was lost in the sweep of the storm. Challenger could not be grazing. He could not very well stand on one foreleg and reach the grass, but perhaps Billy would think to blanket him and tie a feed bag over his head...

The train came round the bend, streamed a bit of white from its whistle, and then sent the long call whooping hoarsely against the wind. They got into the Pullman.

Henry Banner and the girl sat on one side, Killan was opposite Mary Holm, still smiling a little. Now and then, when he got his mind back from the distance, he saw Mary looking at him with wide fear always in her eyes. That was the strangest thing he had ever known.

THEN he was aware that the images in the windows were not those of the outdoors but the deep reflections from the lighted interior, for the full night had descended.

Killan looked towards the windows, but the reflection no longer wavered deep in the glass. A mist coated the panes, and outside the mist there was a solid frosting, a thick coat of snow. The thing troubled him because he felt, in the back

of his mind, that there was some dangerous and important connection which he ought to make between the snow and something else.

He had it, suddenly, with a shock and a start: Challenger was out there with his tail to the wind, his head down, and one leg trailing. Whaley would not arrive till the next morning.

The whistle had sounded. The train was slowing for a stop, and Killan rose.

Mary Holm was on her feet at the same moment, saying. "What is it, John? Is something wrong?"

He made a gesture with his head. "I'm going back," he answered.

"You mean that you're going to leave the train?" exclaimed Henry Banner. "Young man, if there is a brain in you capable of thought—"

"Good-bye," said Killan. "Good-bye, Uncle Henry— Mary—"

He saw the pride and anger rush into her face, into her eyes, but instead of speaking she caught back the hand she had stretched out, as though the hand itself might have been guilty of utterance. Henry Banner looked up from beneath his gathered brows and said nothing. So Killan walked past them.

Luck brought along a train in the homeward direction within half an hour, so that he did not have to sit long in the empty waiting-room. He kept thinking about Mary Holm, and loving her, and hating her pride and her coldness. She was like this night full of storms and danger.

He was thinking of that when he got off at the station, remembering only then that all his luggage was on the other train; but a fellow without an income doesn't need many trappings.

The station entrance was lost in a snow-storm through which he had to step slowly until he found a taxicab. Killan sat forward on the edge of the seat, waiting, hungering.

When the car stopped, he paid the man and kicked the gate open. The snow was streaking across a lighted upper window of the cottage, making a wide blur.

IT was not till he came near the stable door the he saw Challenger standing there, with his head down and the wind blowing his tail between his legs. The foreleg was trailing.

He laid his hand on the shoulder of the old gelding. The hide wrinkled and trembled under his touch, but that was the only response. The head of Challenger remained down.

Killan fumbled at the padlock. The snow stuck like frost to the rough wood of the door, and the moonlight kept this frost gleaming, until it seemed to Killan that he was standing outside a door of steel. Then Challenger drew closer, leaning some of his cold weight against the master. Killan, with a groan, laid hold of the big padlock with both hands, and his wrench snapped the rusted chain.

If a man breaks into a locked place he becomes a burglar. Killan thought of that as he thrust the door back on its runners. The stable odor came out at him, mingled with the clean sweetness of hay. Challenger entered at once, his halting step beating heavily on the floor planks; Killan lighted the lantern that hung in the corner and pulled the door shut. Challenger had gone into his box stall, and, when Killan entered, the gelding was already down on the bedding, with his left foreleg horribly twisted under him.

KILLAN worked the leg into a normal position and swept off the snow.

Keeping the blanket drawn over the lame shoulder, he began to work under it with both hands, kneading the muscles, working his finger-tips the bone and running them from the point of the shoulder to the withers. It was not that he really hoped this massage might effect a cure, but because he trusted that the warmth which his hands gave, the blood which the rubbing brought to the injured place, might comfort Challenger.

HE found a tender spot, laid narrow and deep under the flesh. Whenever he touched it an electric vibration ran suddenly through Challenger's body, until he tossed his head a bit and turned it. Killan, hearing the loud breathing, took the feed bag away. After that he could see the red distending of the nostrils as the horse suffered pain. A man will submit himself, like this, to the doctor's hands, but a man possesses reason, and a horse sees by the light of faith only.

As long as the sensitiveness remained buried under the muscles, like a charged wire, Killan felt that therc was a reason for continuing the massage. And he worked for hours. He pushed the head of the gelding down on the bedding and continued the massage until the numb aching of his arms reached up even into his brain. He did not stop until he was sure that the chestnut slept in spite of that painful manipulation. Then Killan sat back against the wall to rest for a moment.

It seemed to him a blessing that he had the woes of Challenger to care about, instead of his own. But when the vet. came in the morning to pass the final opinion before rubbing out the gallant life, Killan would be left alone. It seemed to him, also, that on this night there must have been a sort of madness in him when he left the train, Mary Holm, Henry Banner, and opportunity.

The others were in town now and perhaps the heart of Mary had a small ache in it; but of all women she was the least capable of marrying a fool. When his prospect of inheriting the Banner millions was gone, her interest would be ended, also; not that she was mercenary, but because she deserved to find a dignity of talent or place or wealth in her chosen man. Love, in her, coud not outlive respect.

As for him, he would put distance between him and the people and places of his past, and perhaps it would be great enough to divide him from sorrow.

His meditation began to grow confused; he thought he was reaching more deeply into his problem, but he was merely falling asleep.

There was a heavy weight across his lap— it was the head of Challenger turning his legs numb, that wakened him. Dawn, like a grey dust, was pouring through the small window, set high in the wall. He ran his hand over the bony face of the gelding. The eyes flickered, closed again, the ears pricked forward.

Then Killan was aware that something else was beside him. There was a steady ache in the back of his neck, because his head had been drooped on his breast so long, that was why he turned so slowly, and found himself looking into the face of Mary Holm. She sat in the deep straw at his side. He was not fully awake. She seemed to Killan a twilight vision, an image which hope made him find in sleep; so he put out a hand and touched her.

She was real. She was not smiling, but she was real. Sleeplessness had darkened her eyes. She looked older, but time would never alter or obscure that beauty in her which he was seeing now.

HE got up, with a great effort, because his legs were asleep. She rose with him.

"You know there's nothing ahead?" he told her.

"Good old John," she said. "What do I care? You're the one to care. I don't even know how to cook or sew."

"Don't you?" said he.

"I want you to know the worst of it. I really thought I wanted the Banner millions more than I wanted you. Back there on the train, I hated you, John."

"Go on," said Killan. "I don't care what you say."

"We have to be serious."

"I love being serious."

She began to laugh. Her voice had wobbles in it like the knees of a new foal.

"After I left, tell me about everything," said Killan. "I want to have every moment of your night in my hands, to keep."

"What do we care about anything?"

"There isn't anything," said Killan intelligently. "There's only us. That's all there is. Tell me things, Mary."

"There was a queer scene when I told Henry Banner that I was coming back. He stared at me. His eyes were as bright—"

"As a snake's," said Killan. "He's an old monster. But he isn't anything."

"We're the only things," said the girl. "There never was anything else," said Killan.

"He said that poverty and work would deform our bodies and our souls. He said that the taste of work would soon sicken you and you'd come back to him, begging.' I said you wouldn't come back, now, because I'd never let you."

"Did you say that? God bless you."

"That was where the train stopped. And I got out and didn't hear the rest. He didn't lift a hand to stop me. I had to sit in the station for hours before the right train came. My heart kept dying in me."

"Kind of sick at the stomach?"

"How did you know?"

THERE was a sound of small thunder as the door of the stable was thrust open. A heavily marching step crossed the planking. In the door of the stall appeared the huge shoulders of Henry Banner, with a white dusting of snow on them.

The great voice of Banner made Challenger suddenly lift his head.

"Stable-breaking is burglary!" thundered Henry Banner. "By George, young man, I've a mind to bring the law on you for this. It's the horse that anchors you here. A big, dumb brute holds you. Ruins two lives—and wastes my time, eh? John, that horse belongs to me, and I'm going to put an end to it, now. If you haven't the courage to do your duty, I have the courage to do mine. Stand away from that horse!"

HE pulled out a snub-nosed automatic. It was as black as soot. It was a shadow of a thing.

Challenger had raised his great head. Killan dropped his hand on the face of the horse.

"Put away the gun," said Killan. His voice had changed.

"Stand aside!" shouted Henry Banner.

"Put away that gun," said Killan.

The girl screamed out, "John! John!" She ran to him. He swept her aside without moving his eyes from the face of Henry Banner. "Uncle Henry! Go away! Don't you see?" cried Mary Holm.

Banner dropped the gun into the pocket of his overcoat. A white sugar lozenge appeared in the tips of his fingers.

"I told you what he was," said Banner. "A hysterical young fool. Do you think that you've stopped me, John Killan? From this, day forward—"

He made a gesture with the lozenge. And then Challenger, with a great, lunging effort, rose to his feet and snorted.

"Look!" exclaimed Mary Holm. "He has some weight on the bad leg, John, it isn't the nerve, after all!"

Out of the hot, numb rage that had held him, Killan turned stiffly and saw that in fact the miracle was there before his eyes. The foreleg no longer dragged. The toe was pointed and the knee bent a little, with a tremor in it; but beyond all doubt it had been a matter of strained ligaments and not the incurable snapping of the nerve.

Joy came from the throat of Killan in a groan. With the sharp edge of his hand, he struck the leg of the horse behind the knee. The hoof jerked up from the floor and settled again almost with a stamp. Killan shouted aloud. He threw out his arms to the girl.

"It's true!" cried Killan. "He's going to be sound!"

"Horse or no horse," burst out Henry Banner, "I'm going to tell you—"

His gesture was incomplete; his sentence broke off; for Challenger had reached out with his great head and, with prehensile lip and accurate, careful teeth, had plucked the white lozenge from the fingers of Banner. He tossed his head to get the morsel back on his tongue. The sheen of mischievous delight was in the eyes of Challenger.

"Ha!" said Banner. "Damnation!" But he spoke softly, looking down at his wet, empty hand. "Ha!" muttered

Banner again, and walked straight out of the stall and through the stable.

"What happened to him?" asked the girl. "What happened to Uncle Henry, then?"

"Why should I care? Look at Challenger!" exclaimed Killan. "Now, if he can walk—"

He went slowly out the door of the stall. The gelding followed, limping badly, but undoubtedy putting weight on that injured foreleg. It no longer dragged; it answered the will of the brain.

"Look at him, Mary?" said the beggared John Killan. "Is it the happiest day of my life? He'll be following the hounds again next winter!"

He stopped. Henry Banner stood at the open door of the stable, staring through the dull light at the Jarvis house on the next hill. Without turning, Henry Banner said:

"I SEE the whole trouble with you. No vision. No broad grasp of affairs, John. You've gone at this horse-breeding like a young fool. Nine horses instead of ninety. What could you expect to accomplish? But you seem to know something. With a business man behind you, something might be done. The Jarvis place for instance. Suppose we bought that and threw it in with this one. In ten years the Banner-Killan Stable would be known wherever horses are raced, by George! Known and feared! Do you hear me?"

Killan could not speak. But the girl came suddenly to Banner and peered up into his face. "Do you mean it, Uncle Henry?" she said.

"Of course I mean it," said Henry Banner. "There's a place for horses. Stop this infernal blubbering. And if I was fool enough to try to fit a square post into a round hole, we won't dwell on the fact."

He took a white lozenge from his pocket and was about to put it in his mouth, but as though with an afterthought he held it in the flat of his hand to Challenger.

"I didn't understand," said Killan, as the mighty truth began to dawn on him. "I'm sorry that I didn't—"

"How could I expect you to understand?" demanded Henry Banner. "Young fools never do understand what's meant for their good. But they can be taught, and, by George, I'll be the teacher!"

Challenger began to snuff at the pocket in which the treasure of sugar lozenges remained.

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19: Fifinella

Anonymous

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 5 March 1946

This story was published as by "F/O Flak", that is, Flying Officer Flak. I've searched through the TROVE on-line Australian newspaper and magazine files, and also the Austlit database of Australian author pseudonyms and can find no information, nor any other story by "F/O Flak". It suggests that the author was a serving Royal Australian Air Force officer, and this story was a one-off.

IT ALL REALLY BEGAN with a gremlin— or more exactly, a fifinella; for it was a female gremlin who appeared to the pilot.

We were flying along that night in bad weather, and all feeling pretty jittery.

There was really no adequate reason. We had been on flying boats for a year and knew the old Catalina was thoroughly reliable in all circumstances. She had brought us home three times when she was so full of holes that the Jap ack-ack gunners were morally entitled to be credited with a kill.

But this was different. It was our last job. Our nine months were finished and the tour would be over once we reached our base. Then for six weeks home leave and a spell of non-operational flying Down South.

We had lived in anticipation so long that we each seemed to be holding breath that night and feeling a different fear from the one that had held us on other occasions when bursts of tracer had reached hungrily for our kite and torn through or round it with such mercilessly beautiful claws.

To-night all had been uneventful. We had found the datum point on the enemy coast, made our run and dropped the mines in copy-book fashion. There was no moon and no second run or doubtful circling round to identify the spot.

We sneaked in smoothly at 200 feet, nerves taut and eyes straining for ships or the deadly darts of fire from the shores of the bay. But not a shot was fired, and the only craft visible on the water seemed to be tiny native fishing vessels. Now all we had to do was fly steadily home under the friendly wing of a jet-black night which even shut out the stars. It was true that base was about a thousand miles away, and the same blackness which shut out all revealing light also harbored some fairly dirty weather. But we had plenty of fuel and Cats are pretty sound bad-weather aircraft. They jolt about a bit, but nearly always seem confident and unperturbed, like an experienced nurse with a squalling baby.

None the less we were on edge. Ordinarily we should have been cracking jokes or, singing well-remembered choruses in loud and tuneless bursts. But now we could each hear the others' silence saying "It's too good to last," and queerly mingled thoughts of home and past escapes came tumbling through the intercom earphones as eloquently as any speech.

Yes, we were silent, but not tranquil.

I had given the skipper a course to take us between a couple of hills, and, having a good straight run for the next hundred miles, went forward to find out the prospects of a break in the cloud to check our position later on by astro shots. Meanwhile I was thinking of Kristin and wondering what she would say if I asked her to marry me.

Don had abandoned the attempt to see through the murk and had taken out George, the automatic pilot, because of the rough air. He was hand-flying and concentrating on instruments. As I turned to go back to my navigation compartment the catwalk suddenly surged upwards until I fell to my knees and the heavy craft hurtled round to port in an almost vertically steep turn.

There was a sharp sensation of striking something and just an instant's check in our flight. Then the old ship went heavily on and regained level flight.

The second pilot rushed forward from the bunk and hauled himself into his co-pilot's seat, while I scrambled into the bow to provide another pair of eyes.

Two of the crew were on watch at their posts in the gun-blisters bulging out each side of the aircraft, and they told what little they could see of the ground also. Soon we were once more over the sea and could take stock.

Shining the aldis lamp from the cock-pit we could see part of a dead tree-limb actually hanging from the mainplane, firmly embedded in a hole of its own making.

It had been close.

The fault was largely mine. I had imagined there was ample space between the two island heights, but apparently a strong wind effect through the channel had taken us almost into one of them.

Don came back shortly afterwards, looking pale and strangely puzzled, and I expected him to be annoyed with me.

"That was uncanny," he said. "I can't understand it."

"I'm sorry, Don; a local wind must have carried us right over to starboard," I replied.

He paid little attention, muttering what sounded like "That wasn't what I meant," but went aft for a drink of hot coffee before I could ask him what he did mean.

We had a mild fright from a possible night-fighter soon afterwards and we were all dog-tired anyway, so it was not until the following evening that Don really spoke to me again.

WE HAD SLEPT most of the day and were relaxing in the bush-timber beer garden, each with his weekly bottle.

Several times he commenced to say something, but relapsed into silence. As for me, I was thinking happily of home and such uplifting things as fresh eggs and

butter in place of bully beef and rancid tropical-spread. So it was not surprising that he only broke my mood at about his fourth effort.

"Good Lord, Don, what on earth's the matter with you? You're stammering like a bashful boy trying to propose," I said.

He looked even more uncomfortable for a moment and then asked suddenly; "Frank, have I been acting normally the last few days? Do I seem at all troppo?"

"Oh, I don't think so," I replied. "No more so than anyone else who's been flying up here for a full tour anyway."

"I've been wondering because— er— I've had a funny sort of experience."

"Yes? I suppose we're all a bit jumpy in a way. What happened, Don?"

"It seems queer, I know, but when we were flying last night I saw a— er— well, a woman or fifinella or something."

"So what? I often see them. Very nice too. What are you complaining about?"

"Oh, hell! Listen to me, you fool. We'd have been wrapped round that hill only for her, and you wouldn't be here at all sipping your beer so calmly and thinking up lies to tell your southern friends.

"She was the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. She just sort of materialised in front of me, and then got agitated and shrieked out 'Turn left, quickly. Turn left!' She was so urgent that I'd reefed over into a steep turn before I had time to think. Just as well. You know the rest."

He told me the fifinella was a Nordic blonde, and, though he had only seen her for a moment, he seemed to know every detail of her appearance: suntanned to a light honey-colored perfection, blue eyes, fair hair in shining plaits wound over the top of her head, high cheek-bones, tip-tilted nose, an attractive jutting little chin, flawless teeth and a smile to turn your heart right over.

Don was transformed as he described her, and no wonder.

The whole thing, was uncanny, and I of all people was in a position to know the truth of what he had said, I sat very quietly thinking it over. I did not feel like joking any more.

Then we spoke of telepathy and mirages, premonitions and sixth sense, of widely-authenticated instances of visions like the famous Angel of Mons.

It had been a hard tour, with most of our flights at night and nearly twenty hours in duration. The pressure had been on during the last couple of months in particular, and maybe we were more receptive to unusual influences.

Eastern fanatics prepared themselves by such methods as fasting and privation. We at least had had fear, strain and fatigue.

The skipper went to bed before long, but I stayed deep in thought for, some considerable time, wondering whether there was a sequel to the story of Don's fifinella. I feared there was.

You can almost guess the rest.

DON had agreed to spend the first week or so of his leave with me. We went to a dance the second night, and, as we entered the hall, Don stopped all at once and said calmly, as if hypnotised: "There she is."

I followed his gaze to the other side of the room. There indeed she was, as proud and cold as an iceberg from the North Sea, but looking steadily at Don.

I don't suppose they wasted much time in introductions, because they virtually ignored everyone else, and before very long had left the hall, bright-eyed and deep in understanding.

When I wakened next day Don had packed and gone, leaving behind a quite incoherent note.

So when I heard that they caught a train early in the morning and were married during the day, it did not surprise me, though I had heard Don on the subject of war marriages and hysterical infatuations. Women had never meant much to him, but

I suppose fifinellas have unusual powers.

THREE YEARS LATER, when I was up North once more, my brother Harry was stationed in the South at the drome where Don was now chief flying instructor.

Harry wrote that henceforth he would never regard marriage as a climax or a somewhat dull ending to romance. He said Don and his wife could still be mistaken for honeymooners anywhere.

It all sounds incredible, I know, but it was more or less obvious when you knew as much as I did. You may have noticed that I lead a pretty quiet life and find no interest in women. Silly, perhaps, but you see the Kristin I was thinking of on the night of the fifinella was now Don's wife, and you can't look at another girl after one like Kristin.

I had loved her since she had let me carry her books home from kindergarten, and I used to think of her a lot during the long night flights on the old Cat. Some strange wires must have become crossed that night, and, by a species of telepathic impression, Don had picked up my vision.

After all, more than one man swears he saw the Angel of Mons.

Still, it was strange, wasn't it?

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20: Skule Skerry

John Buchan

1875-1940

Pall Mall Magazine, May 1928

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IT HAPPENED a good many years ago, when I was quite a young man. I wasn't the cold scientist then that I fancy I am today. I took up birds in the first instance chiefly because they fired what imagination I had got. They fascinated me, for they seemed of all created things the nearest to pure spirit— those little beings with a normal temperature of 125º. Think of it! The goldcrest, with a stomach no bigger than a bean, flies across the North Sea! The curlew sandpiper, that breeds so far north that only about three people have ever seen its nest, goes to Tasmania for its holidays.

So I always went bird hunting with a queer sense of expectation and a bit of a tremor, as if I were walking very near the boundaries of the things we are not allowed to know. I felt this especially in the migration season. The small atoms, coming God knows whence and going God knows whither, were sheer mystery. They belonged to a world built in different dimensions from ours. I don't know what I expected, but I was always waiting for something, as much in a flutter as a girl at her first ball. You must realize that mood of mind to understand what follows.

One year I went to the Norland Islands for the spring migration. Plenty of people do the same, but I had the notion to do something a little different. I had a theory that migrants go north and south on a fairly narrow road. They have their corridors in the air as clearly defined as a highway, and keep an inherited memory of these corridors, like the stout conservatives they are.

I didn't go to the Blue Banks or to Noop or to Hermaness or any of the obvious places where birds might be expected to make their first landfall. At that time I was pretty well-read in the sagas, and had taught myself Icelandic for the purpose.

Now it is written in the Saga of Earl Skuli, which is part of the Jarla Saga or Saga of the Earls, that Skuli, when he was carving out his earldom in the Scots Islands, had much to do with a place called the Isle of the Birds. It is mentioned repeatedly, and the saga man has a lot to say about the amazing multitude of birds there. It couldn't have been an ordinary gullery, for the Northmen saw too many of these to think them worth mentioning.

I got it into my head that it must have been one of the alighting-places of the migrants, and was probably as busy a spot today as in the 11th century. The saga said it was near Halmarsness, and that was on the west side of the Island of Una,

so to Una I decided to go. I fairly got that Isle of Birds on the brain. From the map it might be any one of a dozen skerries under the shadow of Halmarsness.

I remember that I spent a good many hours in the British Museum before I started, hunting up the scanty records of those parts. I found— I think it was in Adam of Bremen— that a succession of holy men had lived on the isle, and that a chapel had been built there and endowed by Earl Rognvald, which came to an end in the time of Malise of Strathearn. There was a bare mention of the place, but the chronicler had one curious note: *Insula Avium, quae est ultima insula et proximo abysso.*

I wondered what on earth he meant. The place was not ultimate in any geographical sense, neither the farthest north nor the farthest west of the Norlands. And what was the abyss? In monkish Latin the word generally means hell— Bunyan's Bottomless Pit— and sometimes the grave; but neither meaning seemed to have much to do with an ordinary sea skerry.

I ARRIVED AT UNA about eight o'clock on a May evening, having been put across from Voss in a flitboat. It was a quiet evening; the sky without clouds but so pale as to be almost gray, the sea gray also, but with a certain iridescence in it, and the low lines of the land a combination of hard grays and umbers, cut into by the harder white of the lighthouse.

I can never find words to describe that curious quality of light that you get up in the North. Sometimes it is like looking at the world out of deep water. Farquharson used to call it "milky," and one saw what he meant. Generally it is a sort of essence of light, cold and pure and rarefied, as if it were reflected from snow. There is no color in it, and it makes thin shadows.

Some people find it horribly depressing— Farquharson said it reminded him of a churchyard in the early morning where all his friends were buried— but personally I found it tonic and comforting. But it made me feel very near the edge of the world.

There was no inn, so I put up at the post office, which was on a causeway between a fresh-water loch and a sea voe, so that from the doorstep you could catch brown trout on one side and sea trout on the other. Next morning I set off for Halmarsness, which lay five miles to the west over a flat moorland all puddled with tiny lochans. There seemed to be nearly as much water as land. Presently I came to a bigger loch under the lift of ground which was Halmarsness.

There was a gap in the ridge through which I looked straight out to the Atlantic, and there in the middle distance was what I knew instinctively to be my island. It was perhaps a quarter of a mile long, low for the most part, but rising in the north to a grassy knoll beyond the reach of any tides. In parts it narrowed to a few yards width, and the lower levels must often have been awash. But it was an island, not a reef, and I thought I could make out the remains of the monkish cell. I

climbed Halmarsness, and there, with nesting skuas swooping angrily about my head, I got a better view.

It was certainly my island, for the rest of the archipelago was inconsiderable skerries, and I realized that it might well be a resting-place for migrants, for the mainland cliffs were too thronged with piratical skuas and other jealous fowl to be comfortable for weary travelers.

I sat for a long time on the headland looking down from the 300 feet of basalt to the island half a mile off— the last bit of solid earth between me and Greenland. The sea was calm for Norland waters but there was a snowy edging of surf to the skerries which told of a tide rip.

Two miles farther south I could see the entrance to the famous Roost of Una, where, when tide and wind collide, there is a wall like a house, so that a small steamer cannot pass it. The only signs of human habitation were about a small gray farm in the lowlands toward the Roost, but the place was full of the evidence of man— a herd of Norland ponies, each tagged with its owner's name, grazing sheep of the piebald Norland breed, a broken barbed-wire fence that dropped over the edge of the cliff.

I was only an hour's walk from a telegraph office and a village which got its newspapers not more than three days late. It was a fine spring noon, and in the empty bright land there was scarcely a shadow.

All the same, as I looked down at the island I did not wonder that it had been selected for attention by the saga man and had been reputed holy. For it had an air of concealing something, though it was as bare as a billiard table. It was an intruder, an irrelevance in the picture, planted there by some celestial caprice. I decided forthwith to make my camp on it, and the decision, inconsequently enough, seemed to me to be something of a venture.

That was the view taken by John Ronaldson, when I talked to him after dinner. John was the postmistress's son, more fisherman than crofter; like all Norlanders, a skillful sailor and an adept at the dipping lug, and noted for his knowledge of the western coaSt. He had difficulty in understanding my plan, and when he identified my island he protested.

"Not Skule Skerry!" he cried. "What would take ye there, man? Ye'll get a' the birds ye want on Halmarsness and a far better bield. Ye'll be blawn away on the skerry, if the wind rises."

I explained to him my reasons as well as I could, and I answered his fears about a gale by pointing out that the island was sheltered by the cliffs from the prevailing winds, and could be scourged only from the south, southwest, or west, quarters from which the wind rarely blew in May.

"It'll be cauld," he said, "and wat."

I pointed out that I had a tent and was accustomed to camping.

"Ye'll starve."

I expounded my proposed methods of commissariat.

"It'll be an ill job getting ye on and off."

But after cross-examination he admitted that ordinarily the tides were not difficult, and that I could get a rowboat to a beach below the farm I had seen— its name was Sgurravoe. Yet when I had said all this he still raised objections till I asked him flatly what was the matter with Skule Skerry.

"Naebody gangs there," he said gruffly.

"Why should they?" I asked. "I'm only going to watch the birds."

But the fact that it was never visited seemed to stick in his throat and he grumbled out something that surprised me. "It has an ill name," he said.

But when I pressed him he admitted that there was no record of shipwreck or disaster to account for the ill name. He repeated the words "Skule Skerry" as if they displeased him.

"Folk dinna gang near it. It has aye had an ill name. My grandfather used to say that the place wasna canny."

Now your Norlander has nothing of a Celt in him, and is as different from the Hebridean as a Northumbrian from a Cornishman. They are a fine, upstanding, hardheaded race, almost pure Scandinavian in blood, but they have as little poetry in them as a Manchester radical. I should have put them down as utterly free from superstition and, in all my many visits to the islands, I have never yet come across a folk tale— hardly even a historical legend.

Yet here was John Ronaldson, with his weather-beaten face and stiff chin and shrewd blue eyes, declaring that an innocent-looking island "wasna canny," and showing the most remarkable disinclination to go near it.

Of course, all this only made me keener. Besides, it was called Skule Skerry, and the name could only come from Earl Skuli, so it was linked up authentically with the oddments of information I had collected in the British Museum— the Jarla Saga and Adam of Bremen and all the rest of it.

John finally agreed to take me over next morning in his boat, and I spent the rest of the day in collecting my kit. I had a small E.P. tent, and a Wolseley valise and half a dozen rugs, and since I had brought a big box of tinned stuffs from the stores, all I needed was flour and meal and some simple groceries. I learned that there was a well on the island, and that I could count on sufficient driftwood for my fire, but to make certain I took a sack of coals and another of peats.

So I set off next day in John's boat, ran with the wind through the Roost of Una when the tide was right, tacked up the coast, and came to the skerry early in the afternoon.

You could see that John hated the place. We ran into a cove on the east side and he splashed ashore as if he expected to have his landing opposed, looking all the time sharply about him. When he carried my stuff to a hollow under the knoll which gave a certain amount of shelter, his head was always twisting round.

To me the place seemed to be the last word in forgotten peace. The swell lipped gently on the reefs and the little pebbled beaches, and only the babble of gulls from Halmarsness broke the stillness.

John was clearly anxious to get away, but he did his duty by me. He helped me to get the tent up, found a convenient place for my boxes, pointed out the well and filled my water bucket, and made a zareba of stones to protect my camp on the Atlantic side. We had brought a small dinghy along with us, and this was to be left with me, so that when I wanted I could row across to the beach at Sgurravoe. As his last service he fixed an old pail between two boulders on the summit of the knoll, and filled it with oily waste, so that it could be turned into a beacon.

"Ye'll maybe want to come off," he said, "and the boat will maybe no be there. Kindle your flare, and they'll see it at Sgurravoe and get the word to me, and I'll come for ye though the Muckle Black Silkie himsel' was hunkerin' wi' the skerry." Then he looked up and sniffed the air. "I dinna like the set of the sky," he declared. "It's a bad weatherhead. There'll be mair wund than I like in the next four and twenty hours."

So saying, he hoisted his sail and presently was a speck in the water toward the Roost. There was no need for him to hurry, for the tide was now wrong, and before he could pass the Roost he would have three hours to wait on this side of the Mull. But the man, usually so deliberate and imperturbable, had been in a fever to be gone.

His departure left me in a curious mood of happy loneliness and pleasurable expectation. I was left solitary with the seas and the birds. I laughed to think that I had found a streak of superstition in the granite John. He and his Muckle Black Silkie! I knew the old legend of the North which tells how the Finns, the ghouls that live in the deeps of the ocean, can on occasion don a seal's skin and come to land to play havoc with mortals.

But diablerie and this isle of mine were worlds apart. I looked at it as the sun dropped, drowsing in the opal-colored tides, under a sky in which pale clouds made streamers like a spectral aurora borealis and I thought that I had stumbled upon one of those places where Nature seems to invite one to her secrets. As the light died the sky was flecked as with the roots and branches of some great nebular tree. That would be the weatherhead of which John Ronaldson had spoken.

I got my fire going, cooked my supper, and made everything snug for the night. I had been right in my guess about the migrants. It must have been about ten o'clock when they began to arrive— after my fire had died out and I was smoking my last pipe before getting into my sleeping-bag.

A host of fieldfares settled gently on the south part of the skerry. A faint light lingered till after midnight, but it was not easy to distinguish the little creatures, for they were aware of my presence and did not alight within a dozen yards of me.

But I made out bramblings and buntings and what I thought was the Greenland wheatear; also jacksnipe and sanderling; and I believed from their cries that the curlew sandpiper and the whimbrel were there. I went to sleep in a state of high excitement, promising myself a fruitful time on the morrow.

I slept badly, as one often does one's first night in the open. Several times I woke with a start under the impression that I was in a boat rowing swiftly with the tide. And every time I woke I heard the flutter of myriad birds, as if a velvet curtain were being slowly switched along an oak floor. At last I fell into deeper sleep, and when I opened my eyes it was full day.

The first thing that struck me was that it had got suddenly colder. The sky was stormily red in the east, and masses of woolly clouds were banking in the north. I lighted my fire with numbed fingers and hastily made tea.

I could see the nimbus of seafowl over Halmarsness, but there was only one bird left on my skerry. I was certain from its forked tail that it was a Sabine's gull, but before I got my glass out it was disappearing into the haze toward the north. The sight cheered and excited me, and I cooked my breakfast in pretty good spirits.

That was literally the last bird that came near me, barring the ordinary shearwaters and gulls and cormorants that nested round about Halmarsness. (There was not one single nest of any sort on the island. I had heard of that happening before in places which were regular halting-grounds for migrants.) The travelers must have had an inkling of the coming weather and were waiting somewhere well to the south.

About nine o'clock it began to blow. Great God, how it blew! You must go to the Norlands if you want to know what wind can be. It is like being on a mountaintop, for there is no high ground to act as a windbreak. There was no rain, but the surf broke in showers and every foot of the skerry was drenched with it. In a trice Halmarsness was hidden, and I seemed to be in the center of a maelstrom, choked with scud and buffeted on every side by swirling waters.

Down came my tent at once. I wrestled with the crazy canvas and got a black eye from the pole, but I managed to drag the rums into the shelter of the zareba which John had built and tumble some of the bigger boulders on it. There it lay, flapping like a sick albatross. The water got into my food boxes and soaked my fuel, as well as every inch of my clothing.

I had looked forward to a peaceful day of watching and meditation, when I could write up my notes; and instead I spent a morning like a Rugger scrum. I might have enjoyed it, if I hadn't been so wet and cold, and could have got a better lunch than some clammy mouthfuls out of a tin.

One talks glibly about being "blown off" a place, generally an idle exaggeration— but that day I came very near the reality. There were times when I

had to hang on for dear life to one of the bigger stones to avoid being trundled into the yeasty seas.

About two o'clock the volume of the storm began to decline, and then for the first time I thought about the boat. With a horrid sinking of the heart I scrambled to the cove where we had beached it. It had been drawn up high and dry, and its painter secured to a substantial boulder. But now there was not a sign of it except a ragged rope end round the stone. The tide had mounted to its level, and tide and wind had smashed the rotten painter. By this time what was left of it would be tossing in the Roost.

This was a pretty state of affairs. John was due to visit me next day, but I had a cold 24 hours ahead of me. There was of course the flare he had left me, but I was not inclined to use this. It looked like throwing up the sponge and confessing that my expedition had been a farce. I felt miserable, but obstinate, and, since the weather was clearly mending, I determined to put the best face on the business, so I went back to the wreckage of my camp, and tried to tidy up.

There was still far too much wind to do anything with the tent, but the worst of the spindrift had ceased and I was able to put out my bedding and some of my provender to dry. I got a dry jersey out of my pack and as I was wearing fisherman's boots and oilskins I managed to get some slight return of comfort. Also at last I succeeded in lighting a pipe. I found a corner under the knoll which gave me a modicum of shelter, and I settled myself to pass the time with tobacco and my own thoughts.

About three o'clock the wind died away completely. That I did not like, for a dead lull in the Norlands is often the precursor of a new gale. Indeed, I never remembered a time when some wind did not blow, and I had heard that when such a thing happened people came out of their houses to ask what the matter was. But now we had the deadest sort of calm.

The sea was still wild and broken, the tides raced by like a millstream, and a brume was gathering which shut out Halmarsness— shut out every prospect except a narrow circuit of gray water. The cessation of the racket of the gale made the place seem uncannily quiet. The present tumult of the sea, in comparison with the noise of the morning, seemed no more than a mutter and an echo.

As I sat there I became conscious of an odd sensation. I seemed to be more alone, more cut off not only from my fellows but from the habitable earth than I had ever been before. It was like being in a small boat in mid-Atlantic— but worse, if you understand me, for that would have been loneliness in the midst of a waste which was nevertheless surrounded and traversed by the works of man, whereas now I felt that I was clean outside of man's ken. I had come somehow to the edge of that world where life is and was very close to the world which has only death in it.

At first I do not think there was much fear in the sensation; chiefly strangeness, but the kind of strangeness which awes without exciting. I tried to shake off the mood and got up to stretch myself. There was not much room for exercise, and as I moved with stiff legs along the reefs I slipped into the water, so that I got my arms wet. It was cold beyond belief— the very quintessence of deathly Arctic ice, so cold that it seemed to sear and bleach the skin.

From that moment I date the most unpleasant experience of my life. I became suddenly the prey of a black depression, shot with the red lights of terror. But it was not a numb terror, for my brain was acutely alive— I had the sense to try to make tea, but my fuel was still too damp, and the best I could do was to pour half the contents of my brandy flask into a cup and swallow the stuff. That did not properly warm my chilled body, but— since I am a very temperate man— it speeded up my thoughts instead of calming them. I felt myself on the brink of a childish panic. One thing I thought I saw clearly— the meaning of Skule Skerry. By some alchemy of Nature, which I could not guess at, it was on the track by which the North exercised its spell, a cableway for the magnetism of that cruel frozen uttermost which man might penetrate but could never subdue or understand.

Though the latitude was not far north, there are folds and tucks in space as if this isle was the edge of the world. Birds knew it, and the old Northerns, who were primitive beings like the birds, knew it. That was why this inconsiderable skerry had been given the name of a conquering jarl. The old Church knew it and had planted a chapel to exorcise the demons of darkness. I wondered what sights the hermit, whose cell had been on the very spot where I was cowering, had seen in the whiter dusks.

It may have been partly the brandy, acting on an empty stomach, and partly the extreme cold, but my brain, in spite of my efforts to think rationally, began to run like a dynamo. It is difficult to explain my mood, but I seemed to be two persons— one a reasonable modern man trying to keep sane and scornfully rejecting the fancies which the other, a cast-back to something elemental, was furiously spinning. But it was the second that had the upper hand —

I felt myself loosed from my moorings, a mere waif on uncharted seas. What is the German phrase? *Urdummheit*— primal idiocy— that is what was the matter with me. I had fallen out of civilization into the outlands and was feeling their spell —

I could not think, but I could remember, and what I had read of the Norse voyagers came back to me with horrid persistence. They had known the outlaw terrors— the Sea Walls at the World's end, the Curdled Ocean with its strange beasts. These men did not sail north as we did, in steamers, with modern food and modern instruments, huddled into crews and expeditions. They had gone out almost alone, in brittle galleys, and they had known what we could never know.

And then I had a shattering revelation. I had been groping for a word and I suddenly got it. It was Adam of Bremen's *proxima abysso*. This island was next door to the Abyss, and the Abyss was that blanched wall of the North which was the negation of life.

That unfortunate recollection was the last straw. I remember that I forced myself to get up and try again to kindle a fire. But the wood was still too damp, and I realized with consternation that I had very few matches left, several boxes having been ruined that morning.

As I staggered about I saw the flare which John had left for me, and almost lighted it. But some dregs of manhood prevented me— I could not own defeat in that babyish way— I must wait till John Ronaldson came for me next morning. Instead, I had another mouthful of brandy and tried to eat some of my sodden biscuits. But I could scarcely swallow; this infernal cold, instead of rousing hunger, had given me only a raging thirst.

I forced myself to sit down again with my face to the land. You see, every moment I was becoming more childish. I had the notion— I cannot call it a thought— that down the avenue from the north something terrible and strange might come. My state of nerves must have been pretty bad, for though I was cold and empty and weary I was scarcely conscious of physical discomfort. My heart was fluttering like a scared boy's; and all the time the other part of me was standing aside and telling me not to be a damned fool.

I think that if I had heard the rustle of a flock of migrants I might have pulled myself together, but not a blessed bird had come near me all day. I had fallen into a world that killed life, a sort of Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The brume spoiled the long northern twilight, and presently it was almost dark. At first I thought that this was going to help me, and I got hold of several of my half-dry rugs and made a sleeping-place.

But I could not sleep, even if my teeth had stopped chattering, for a new and perfectly idiotic idea possessed me. It came from a recollection of John Ronaldson's parting words. What had he said about the Black Silkie— the Finn who came out of the deep and hunkered on this skerry? Raving mania! But on that lost island in the darkening night with icy tides lapping about me was any horror beyond belief?

Still the sheer idiocy of the idea compelled a reaction. I took hold of my wits with both hands and cursed myself for a fool. I could even reason about my folly. I knew what was wrong with me. I was suffering from *panic*— a physical affection produced by natural causes explicable, though as yet not fully explained.

Two friends of mine had once been afflicted with it, one in a lonely glen in the Jotunheim so that he ran for ten miles over stony hills till he found a *saeter* and human companionship; the other in a Bavarian forest, where both he and his

guide tore for hours through the thicket till they dropped like logs beside a highroad.

This reflection enabled me to take a pull on myself and to think a little ahead. If my troubles were physical, then there would be no shame in looking for the speediest cure. Without further delay I must leave this God-forgotten place.

The flare was all right, for it had been on the highest point of the island, and John had covered it with a peat. With one of my few remaining matches I lighted the oily waste, and a great smoky flame leaped to heaven.

If the half dark had been eerie, this sudden brightness was eerier. For a moment the glare gave me confidence, but as I looked at the circle of moving water evilly lighted up, all my terrors returned. How long would it take for John to reach me? They would see it at once at Sgurravoe— they would be on the lookout for it. John would not waste time, for he had tried to dissuade me from coming. An hour, two hours at the most.

I found I could not take my eyes from the waters. They seemed to flow from the north in a strong stream, black as the heart of the elder ice, irresistible as fate, cruel as hell. There seemed to be uncouth shapes swimming in them, which were more than the flickering shadows from the flare. Something portentous might at any moment come down that river of death— And then my knees gave under me and my heart shrank like a pea, for I saw that the something had come.

It drew itself heavily out of the sea, wallowed for a second, and then raised its head and, from a distance of five yards, looked me blindly in the face. The flare was fast dying down, but even so at that short range it cast a strong light, and the eyes of the awful thing seemed to be dazed by it.

I saw a great dark head like a bull's— an old face wrinkled as if in pain— a gleam of enormous broken teeth— a dripping beard— all formed on other lines than God has made mortal creatures. And on the right of the throat was a huge scarlet gash. The thing seemed to be moaning, and then from it came a sound— whether of anguish or wrath I cannot tell— but it seemed to me the cry of a tortured fiend.

That was enough for me. I pitched forward in a swoon, hitting my head on a stone, and in that condition three hours later John Ronaldson found me.

They put me to bed at Sgurravoe with hot bottles, and the doctor from Voss next day patched up my head and gave me a sleeping-draught. He declared that there was little the matter with me, except shock from exposure, and promised to set me on my feet in a week.

For three days I was as miserable as a man could be, and did my best to work myself into a fever. I had said not a word about my experience, and left my rescuers to believe that my only troubles were cold and hunger and that I had lighted the flare because I had lost the boat. But during these days I was in a

critical state. I knew that there was nothing wrong with my body, but I was gravely concerned about my mind.

For this was my difficulty. If that awful thing was a mere figment of my brain, then I had better be certified at once as a lunatic. No sane man could get into such a state as to see such portents with the certainty with which I had seen that creature come out of the night. If, on the other hand, the thing was a real presence, then I had looked on something outside natural law, and my intellectual world was broken in pieces.

I was a scientist, and a scientist cannot admit the supernatural. If with my eyes I had beheld the monster in which Adam of Bremen believed, which holy men had exorcised, which even the shrewd Norlanders shuddered at as the Black Silkie, then I must burn my books and revise my creed. I might take to poetry or theosophy, but I would never be much good again at science.

On the third afternoon I was trying to doze, and with shut eyes fighting off the pictures which tormented my brain. John Ronaldson and the farmer of Sgurravoe were talking at the kitchen door. The latter asked some questions, and John replied, "Aye, it was a walrus and nae mistake. It came ashore at Gloop Ness and Sandy Fraser hae gotten the skin of it. It was deid when he found it, but no' long deid. The puir beast would drift south on some floe, and it was sair hurt, for Sandy said it had a hole in its throat ye could put your nieve in. There hasna been a walrus come to Una since my grandfather's day."

I turned my face to the wall and composed myself to sleep. For now I knew that I was sane and need not forswear science.

End