PAST MASTERS 240

R. Austin Freeman
Erckmann-Chatrain
Violet Hunt
Val Jameson
"Saki"
Richard Connell
Bertram Atkey
Mary Shipman Andrews
Dion Fortune

and more

PAST MASTERS 240

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

27 October 2025

Contents

_____

1: Three Thousand Dollars

Anna Katharine Green
Mrs. Charles Rohlfs, 1846-1935
Woman's Home Companion Dec 1908

"NOW state your problem."

The man who was thus addressed shifted uneasily on the long bench which he and his companion bestrode. He was facing the speaker, and though very little light sifted through the cobweb-covered window high over their heads, he realized that what there was fell on his features, and he was not sure of his features, or of what effect their expression might have on the other man.

"Are you sure we are quite alone in this big, desolate place?" he asked.

It seemed a needless question. Though it was broad daylight outside and they were in the very heart of the most populated district of lower New York, they could not have been more isolated had the surrounding walls been those of some old ruin in the heart of an untraversed desert.

A short description of the place will explain this. They were in the forsaken old church not far from Avenue A, a building long given over to desolation, and empty of everything but débris and one or two broken stalls, which for some inscrutable reason— possibly from some latent instinct of inherited reverence— had not yet been converted into junk and sold to the old clothes men by the rapacious denizens of the surrounding tenements.

Perhaps you remember this building; perhaps some echo of the bygone and romantic has come to you as you passed its decaying walls once dedicated to worship, but soulless now and only distinguishable from the five-story tenements pressing up on either side, by its one high window in which some bits of colored glass still lingered amid its twisted and battered network. You may remember the building and you may remember the stray glimpses afforded you through the arched opening in the lower story of one of the adjacent tenements, of the churchyard in its rear with its chipped and tumbling headstones just showing here and there above the accumulated litter. But it is not probable that you have any recollections of the interior of the church itself, shut as it has been from the eye of the public for nearly a generation. And it is with the interior we have to do— a great hollow vault where once altar and priest confronted a reverent congregation. There is no altar here now, nor any chancel; hardly any floor. The timbers which held the pews have rotted and fallen away, and what was once a cellar has received all this rubbish and held it piled up in mounds which have blocked up most of the windows and robbed the place even of the dim religious light which was once its glory, so that when the man whose words we have just quoted asked if they were quite alone and peered into the dim, belumbered corners, it was but natural for his hardy,

resolute, and unscrupulous companion to snort with impatience and disgust as he answered:

"Would I have brought you here if I hadn't known it was the safest place in New York for this kind of talk? Why, man, there may be in this city five men all told, who know the trick of the door I unfastened for you, and not one of them is a cop. You may take my word for that. Besides—"

"But the kids? They're everywhere; and if one of them should have followed us—"

"Do you know what would happen to him? I'll tell you a story— no, I won't; you're frightened enough already. But there's no kid here, nor any one else but our two selves, unless it be some wandering spook from the congregations laid outside; and spooks don't count. So out with your proposition, Mr. Fellows. I—"

"No names!" hoarsely interrupted the other. "If you speak my name again I'll give the whole thing up."

"No you won't; you're too deep in it for that. But I'll drop the Fellows and just call you Sam. If that's too familiar, we'll drop the job. I'm not so keen on it."

"You will be. It's right in your line." Sam Fellows, as he was called, was whispering now— a hot, eager whisper, breathing of guilt and desperation. "If I could do it alone— but I haven't the wit— the—"

"Experience," dryly put in the other. "Well, well!" he exclaimed impatiently, as Fellows crept nearer, but said nothing.

"I'm going to speak, but— Well, then, here's how it is!" he suddenly conceded, warned by the other's eye. "The building is a twenty-story one, chuck full and alive with business. The room I mean is on the twelfth floor; it is one of five, all communicating, and all in constant use except the one holding the safe. And that is visited constantly. Some one is always going in and out. Indeed, it is a rule of the firm that every one of the employees must go into that room once, at least, during the day, and remain there for five minutes alone. I do it; every one does it; it's a very mysterious proceeding which only a crank like my employer would devise."

"What do you do there?"

"Nothing. I'm speaking now for myself. The others— some of the others— one of the others may open the safe. That's what I believe, that's what I want to know about and how it's done. There are thousands in that safe, and the old man being away—"

"Yes, this is all very interesting. Go on. What you want is an artist with a jimmy."

"No, no. It's no such job as that. I want to know the person, the trusted person who has all those securities within touch. It's a mania with me. I should have been the man. I'm— I'm manager."

The hoarseness with which this word was uttered, the instinct of shame which made his eyes fall as it struggled from his lips, wakened a curious little gleam of hardy cynicism in the steady gaze of his listener.

"Oh, you're manager, are you!" came in slow retort, filling a silence that had more of pain than pleasure in it. "Well, manager, your story is very interesting, but by no means complete. Suppose you hurry on to the next instalment."

Cringing as from a blow, Fellows took up his tale, no longer creeping nearer his would-be confederate, but, if anything, edging away.

"I'VE watched and watched and watched," said he, "but I can't pick out the man. Letters come, orders are given, and those orders are carried out, but not by me. I'm speaking now of investments, or the payment of large sums; anything which calls for the opening of that safe where the old man has stuffed away his thousands. Small matters fall to my share. There is another safe, of which I hold the combination. Child's play, but the other! It would make both of us independent, and yet leave something for appearances. But it can't be worked. It stands in front of a glass door from which the curtain is drawn every night. Every passerby can look in. If it is opened it must be done in broad daylight and by the person whom the old man trusts. By that means only would I get my revenge, and revenge is what I want. He don't trust me, me who have been with him for seven years and—"

"Drop that, it isn't interesting. The facts are what I want. What kind of safe is it?"

"The strangest you ever saw. I don't know who made it. There's nothing on it to show. Nor is there a lock or combination. But it opens. You can just see the outline of a door. Steel— fine steel, and not so very large, but the contents—"

"We'll take its contents for granted. How does it stand? On a platform?"

"Yes, one foot from the floor. The platform runs all the way across the room and holds other things; a table which nobody uses, a revolving bookcase and a series of shelves, fitted with boxes containing old receipts and such junk. Sometimes I go through these; but nothing ever comes of it." He paused, as if the subject were distasteful.

"And the safe is opened?"

"Almost every week. I'm ashamed to tell you the old duffer's methods; they're loony. But he isn't a lunatic. At any rate, they don't think so in Wall Street."

"I'll make a guess at his name."

"Not yet. You'll have to swear—"

"Oh, we're both in it. Never mind the heroics. It's too good a thing to peach on. Me and the manager! I like that. Take it easy till the job's done, anyway. And now I'll take a fly at the name. It's—"

He had the grace to whisper.

YOUNG Fellows squirmed and turned a shade paler, if one could trust the sickly violet ray that shot down from the once exquisitely colored window high up over their heads.

"Hush!" he muttered; and the other grinned. Evidently the guess was a correct one.

"No, he's no lunatic," the professional quietly declared. "But he has queer ways. Which of his queers do you object to?"

"When his letters come, or more often his cablegrams, they are opened by me and then put in plain view on a certain little bulletin board in the main office. These are his orders. Any one who knows the cipher can read them. I don't know the cipher. At night I take them down, number them, and file them away. They have served their purpose. They have been seen by the person whose business it is to carry out his instructions, and the rest you must guess. His brokers know the secret, but it is never discussed by us. The least word and the next cablegram would read in good plain English, 'Fire him!' I've had that experience. I've had to fire three since he went away two months ago."

"That's good."

"Why good?"

"That cuts out three from your list. The person is not among the ones dismissed."

"That's so." New life seemed to spring up in Fellows. "You'll do the job," he cried. "Somehow, I never thought of going about it that way. And I know another man that's out."

"Who?"

"Myself, for one. There are only seven more."

"Counting all?"

"All."

"Stenographers included?"

"Oh, stenographers!"

"Stenographers must be counted."

"Well, then, seven men and one woman. Our stenographer is a woman."

"What kind of a woman?"

"A young girl. Ordinary, but good enough. I've never noticed her very much."

"Tell me about the men."

"What's the use? You wouldn't take my word. They're a cheap lot, beneath contempt in my estimation. There's not one of them clever enough for the business. Jack Forbush comes the nearest to it, and probably is the one. The way he keeps his eye on me makes me suspect him. Or is he, too, playing my game?"

"How can I tell? How can I tell anything from what you say? I'll have to look into the matter myself. Give me the names and addresses and I'll look the parties up. Get their rating, so to speak. Leave it to me, and I'll land the old man's confidential clerk."

"Here's the list. I thought you might want it."

"Where's the girl's name?"

"The girl! Oh, pshaw!"

"Put her name down just the same."

"There, then. Grace Lee. Address, 74 East — Street. And now swear on the honor of a gentleman—"

Beau Johnson pulled the rim of Fellows's hat over his eyes to suggest what he thought of this demand.

NEXT day there appeared at the offices of Thomas Stoughton, in Nassau Street, a trim, well-looking man, who had urgent business with Mr. Fellows, the manager. He was kept waiting for some time before being introduced into that gentleman's private room; but this did not seem to disturb him. There was plenty to look at, or so he seemed to think, and his keen, noncommittal eyes flashed hither and thither and from face to face with restless activity. He seemed particularly interested in the bookkeeper of the establishment, but it was an interest which did not last long, and when a neat, pleasant-faced young woman rose from her seat and passed rapidly across the room, it was upon her his eyes settled and remained fixed, with a growing attention, until a certain door closed upon her with a sound like a snapping lock. Then he transferred his attention to the door, and was still gazing at it when a boy summoned him to the manager's office.

He went in with reluctance. He had rather have watched that door. But he had questions to ask, and so made a virtue of necessity. Mr. Fellows was not pleased to see him. He started quite guiltily from his seat and only sat again on compulsion— the compulsion of his visitor's steady and quelling eye.

"I've business with you, Mr. Fellows." Then, the boy being gone, "Which is the room? The one opening out of the general office directly opposite this?"

Mr. Fellows nodded.

"I have just seen one of the employees go in there. I should like to see that person come out. Do you mind talking with this door open? I know enough about banking to hold up my end of the conversation."

Fellows rose with a jerk and pushed the door back. His visitor smiled easily and launched into a discussion about stocks and bonds interspersed with a few assertions and questions not meant for the general ear, as:

"It's the girl who is in there. Not ordinary, by any means. Just the sort an old smudge like Stoughton would be apt to trust. Now what's that?"

"Singing. She often sings. I've forbidden it, but she forgets, she says," answered Fellows.

"Pretty good music. Listen to that note. High as a prima donna's. Does she sing at her work?"

"No; I'd fire her if she did. It's only when she's walking about or when—"

"She's in that room?"

"Yes."

"At par? I buy nothing at par. There! She's coming. I wish I dared intercept her, rifle her pockets. Do you know if she has pockets?"

"No; how should I?"

"Fellows, you're not worth your salt. Ah! there's a face for you, and I can read it like a book. Did a letter or cablegram come to-day?"

"Yes; didn't you see it? Hung up in the outer office."

"I thought I saw something. Ninety-five? That's a quotation worth listening to. Three at ninety-five. That girl's a trump. I will see more of my lady." Here he took care to shut the door. "I've been the rounds, Fellows. Private-detective work and all that. She is the only puzzler among the group. You'll hear from me again; meanwhile treat the girl well. Don't spring any traps; leave that to me."

And Fellows, panting with excitement, promised, muttering under his breath:

"A woman! That's even worse than I thought. But we'll make the old fellow pay for it. Those securities are ours. I already feel them in my hand."

The sinister twitch which marred the other's mouth emphasized the assertion in a way Grace Lee's friends would have trembled to see.

THAT evening a young woman and a young man sat on one of the benches in Central Park. They were holding hands, but modestly and with a clinging affection. No one appeared in sight; they had the moon-light, the fragrance of the spring foliage, and their true love all to themselves. The woman was Grace, the young man was Philip Andrews, a candid-eyed, whole-hearted fellow whom any girl might be proud to be seen with, much more to be engaged to. Grace was proud, but she was more than that; her heart was all involved in her hope—a good heart which he was equally proud to have won. Yet while love was theirs and the surroundings breathed peace and joy, they did not look quite happy. A cloud was on his brow and something like a tear in her eye as she spoke gently but with rare firmness.

"Philip, we must wait. One love does not put out another. I cannot leave my old father now. He is too feeble and much too dependent on me. Philip, you do not know my father. You have seen him, it is true, many, many times. You have talked with him and even have nursed him at odd moments, when I had to be

out of the room getting supper or supplying some of his many wants. Yet you do not know him."

"I know that he is intelligent."

"Yes, yes, that is evident. Any one can see that. And you can see, too, that he is frequently fretful and exacting, as all old people are. But the qualities he shows me— his strong, melancholy, but devoted nature, quickened by an unusually unhappy life— that you do not see and cannot, much as you like him and much as he likes you. Only the child who has surprised him at odd moments, when he thought himself quite alone, wringing his hands and weeping over some intolerable memory— who has listened in the dead of night to his smothered but heart-breaking groans, can know either his suffering or the one joy which palliates it. If I could tell you his story— but that would be treason to one whose rights I am bound to reverence. You will respect my silence, but you must also take my word that he needs and has a right to all the pleasure and all the hope my love can give him. I cannot be with him much; my work forbids, but the little time I have is his, except on rare occasions like this, and he knows it and is satisfied. Were I married— . But you will wait, Philip. It may not be long— he grows weaker every day. Besides, you are not ready yet yourself. You are doing wonderfully well, but a year's freedom will help you materially, as it will me. Every day is adding to our store; in a year we may be almost independent."

"Grace, you have misunderstood me. I said that I was no good without you, that I needed your presence to make a man of me, but I did not mean that you were to share my fortunes now. I would not ask that. I would be a fool or worse, for, Grace, I'm not doing so well as you think. While I knew that my present employment was for a specified time, I had hopes of continuing on. But this cannot be. That's what I have to tell you to-night. It looks as if our marriage would have to be postponed indefinitely instead of hastened. And I can't bear it. You don't know what you are to me, or what this disappointment is. I expected to be raised, not dismissed, and if I had had—"

"What?"

The word came very softly, and with rare tenderness. It made him turn and look at her sweet, upturned face, with its resources of strength and shy, unfathomable smile. "What?" she asked again, with a closer pressure of her hand. "You must finish all your sentences with me."

"I'm ashamed." He uttered it breathlessly. "What am I, to say, 'If I had three thousand dollars the Stickney Company would keep me?' I have barely three hundred and those are dedicated to you."

"IF you had three thousand!" She repeated it in surprise and yet with an indescribable air, which to one versed in human nature would have caught the

attention and aroused strange inner inquiries. "Does the Stickney Company want money so badly as that?"

"That's not it. They have plainly told me that for three thousand dollars and my services they would give me ten thousand dollars' stock interest, but insist that the man who assumes the responsibility of the position must be financially interested as well. But I haven't the money, and without the money my experience appears to them valueless. I despair of getting another situation in these hard times and— Grace, you don't look sorry."

"Because—" she paused, and her fine eyes roamed about her jealous of a listener to her secret, but did not pierce the bush which rose up, cloudy with blossoms, a few feet behind their bench—"because it is not impossible for you to hope for those thousands. I think— I am sure that I can get them for you."

Her voice had sunk to a whisper, but it was a very clear whisper.

Young Andrews looked at her in surprise; there was something besides pleasure in that surprise.

"Where?" he asked.

She hesitated, and just at that moment the moon slipped behind a cloud.

"Where, Grace, can you get three thousand dollars? From Mr. Stoughton? He is generous to you, he pays you well for what you do for him, but I do not think he would give you that amount, nor do I think he would risk it on any venture involving my judgment. I should not like to have you ask him. I should like to rise feeling absolutely independent of Mr. Stoughton."

"I never thought of asking him. There is another way. I'd— I'd like to think it over. If your scheme is good— very good, I might be brought to aid you in the way my mind suggests. But I should want to be sure."

She was not looking at him now. If she had been, she might have been startled at his expression. Nor could he see her face; she had turned it aside.

"Grace," he prayed, "don't do anything rash. You handle so much money that three thousand dollars may seem very little to you. But it's a goodly sum to get or to replace if one loses it. You must not borrow—"

"I will not borrow."

"Nor raise it in any way without telling me the sacrifice you must make to obtain it. But it's all a dream; tell me that it's all a dream; you were talking from your wishes, not from any certainty you have. Say so, and I will not be disappointed. I do not want your money; I'd rather go poor and wait till the times change. Don't you see? I'd be more of a man."

"But you'd have to take it if I gave it to you, and— perhaps I shall. I want to see you happy, Philip; I must see you happy. I'd be willing to risk a good deal for that. I'm not so happy myself, father suffers so, and the care of it weighs on me. You are all I have to make me glad, and when you are troubled my heart goes down, down. But it's getting late, dear. It's time we went home. Don't ask me

what's in my mind, but dream of riches. I'm sure they will come. You shall earn them with the three thousand dollars you want and which I will give you."

"I shall earn them honestly," were the last words he said, as they rose from the seat and began to move toward the gate. And the moon, coming out from its temporary eclipse, shone on his clear-cut face as he said this, but not on her bowed head and sidelong look. They were in the shadow.

There was something else in the shadow. As they moved away and disappeared in the darkness the long, slim figure of a man rose from behind the bush I have mentioned. He had a sparkling eye and a thin-lipped mouth, and he smiled very curiously as he looked after the pair before turning himself about and going the other way.

It was not Fellows; it was his chosen confederate in the nefarious scheme they had planned between them.

ANOTHER meeting in the old church, but this time at night. The somberness of the surroundings was undiminished by any light. They were in absolute darkness. Absolute darkness, but not absolute silence. Noises strange and suggestive, but not of any human agency, whispered, sighed, rattled, and grumbled from far away recesses. The snap of wood, the gnawing of rats, the rustling of bat wings disturbed the ears of one of the guilty pair, till his voice took on unnatural tones as he tried to tell his story to his greedy companion. They were again astride the bench, and their thin faces were so near that their breaths commingled at times; yet Fellows felt at moments so doubtful of all human presence that instinctively his hand would go groping out till it touched the other's arm or breast, when it would fall back again satisfied. He was in a state of absolute terror of the darkness, the oppressive air, the ghostly sounds, and possibly of the image raised by his own conscience, yet he hugged to himself the thought of secrecy which it all involved, and never thought of yielding up his scheme or even shortening his tale, so long as the other listened and gave his mind to the problem which promised them thousands without the usual humdrum method of working for them.

We will listen to what he had to say, leaving to your imagination the breaks and guilty starts and moments of intense listening and anxious fear with which he seasoned it.

"I did as you bid me," he whispered. "Yesterday fresh orders came from abroad, in cipher, as usual. (It's an unreadable cipher. I've had experts on it many times.) I had hung it up, and though business was heavy, my business, you know, I had eyes for our fair friend, and knew every step she took about the offices. I even knew when her eyes first fell on the cablegram. I had my door open, and I caught her looking up from her work, and what was more, caught the pause in the click-click of the typewriter as she looked and read. If she had

not been able to read, the click-click would have gone on, for I believe she could work that typewriter with her eyes shut. But her attention was caught, and she stopped. I tell you I've been humiliated for the last time. I'm in for anything that will make that girl step down and out. What was that!"

Muttered curses from his companion brought him back to his story. With a gulp he went on:

"You may bet your bottom dollar that I watched her after that, and sure enough, in less than half an hour she had gone into the room where the safe is. Instantly I prepared my coup d'êtat. I waited just long enough to hear her voice in that one song she sings, then I jumped from my seat and rushed to the door, shouting, 'Miss Lee! Miss Lee! Your father! Your father!' making hullabaloo enough to raise the dead and scare her out of her wits; for she dotes on that old man and would sell her soul for his sake, I do believe.

"Great heavens, it worked! As I live, it worked. I heard her voice fail on that high upper note of hers, and then the sound of her feet staggering, slipping over the floor, and in another moment the fumbling of her hand on the knob and the slow opening of the door which she seemed to have no power to manage. Helping her, I pulled it open, and there beyond her and her white, shocked face, I saw— I saw—"

"GO on! Don't be a fool; that was nothing."

"I don't know; it was like a great sigh at my ear. But this is awful! Couldn't we have one spark of light?"

"And have the police upon us the next minute? Look up at that window. You can see it, can't you?"

"Yes, yes, but very faintly," Fellows whispered.

"But you can see it. So could those outside, if we had one glimmer of light in here. No, no, you'll have to stand the dark or quit. But you shan't quit till you've told me what you saw in the room where the safe is."

"The safe door opening." His voice trembled so that the other shook him to steady his nerves. "Not opened, mind you, but opening. It was like magic, and I stared so that she forgot her fears and forgot her questions. Turning from me with a startled cry, she looked behind her, and saw what I saw, and tried to push me out. 'I'll come, I'll come,' she whispered. 'Leave me a minute and I'll come.'

"But I wasn't going to do that. 'The safe door is opened,' I cried. 'Did you do it?' She didn't know what to say. I have never seen a woman in such a state; then she whispered in awful agitation, 'Yes; I've been given the combination by Mr. Stoughton. I'm duly following his orders. But my father! What about my father? You frightened me so I forgot that— ' I waited, staring at her, but she didn't finish. She just asked, 'My father? What has happened to him?' 'Nothing serious,' I managed to say. I wished the old father was in ballyhack. But he'd

served his turn; I must say that he'd served his turn. 'A telephone message,' I went on. 'He had had a nervous spell and wanted you. I said that you could go home at noon.' She stood looking at me doubtfully; then her eyes stole back to the safe. 'You will have to leave me here for a few minutes,' she said. 'I have Mr. Stoughton's business to attend to. He will not be pleased at my having given away his secret. He did not wish it known who controlled his affairs in his absence, but now that you do know, you will be doing the right thing to let me go on in the way he has planned for me. His orders must be carried out.'

"She is very determined, and understands herself only too well, but I am manager, and I paid her back in her own coin. 'That's all very well,' said I, 'but what proof have I that you are telling me the truth? You have opened the safe— you say you have the combination— but people sometimes surprise a combination and open a safe from other interests than those of their employer. You seem a good girl, but you are a girl, and there are men here much more likely to be in Mr. Stoughton's confidence than yourself. With that open safe before us I cannot leave you here alone. What you take from it I must see, and if possible be present at your negotiations. That I consider a manager's duty under the circumstances.' 'Mr. Fellows,' she asked, 'can you read this morning's telegram?' 'No,' I felt bound to reply. 'Then that acquits you. I can.' And again she tried to urge me to go out. But I would not be urged. I was staring across the room at the open safe and in fancy clutching its contents. In fact, I made one step toward them. But she drew herself up with such an air that I paused. She's a big girl, you know, and not to be fooled with when she's angry. 'Come a step farther and I will scream for the watchman,' she whispered. All our talk had been low, for there were listening ears everywhere— we couldn't risk that, and I stepped back. Immediately she saw her advantage, and added, 'If you do not think better of it and leave the room, I'll scream.' For answer to this I said that I—"

"What?"

A yell answered him.

"Something hit me! Something hit me!"

"Yes, I hit you; and I'll hit you again if you don't go on."

Fellows shivered, attempted some puerile protest, balked, and stammeringly obeyed his restless and irritated companion.

"I— I said— I wasn't such a fool then as I am now— that she had lied when she told me that she had the combination. There was no combination. The safe did not even have a lock. The door opened with a spring. How had she induced that spring to give way? I demanded to know."

"And did she tell you?"

"No. She merely repeated, 'I will scream, and that will cause a scandal which will lead to your discharge, not mine.' So— so, I came out."

"Blast your eyes! And when did she come out?"

"Within five minutes. I watched the clock."

"And what did she have?"

"Nothing in sight."

"I see. A deep game. But I know a deeper. There is no possibility of breaking into that safe by night, undetected by the watchman?"

"None; and that watchman is incorruptible. The whole contents of the safe wouldn't move him to connect himself with this job."

"The job must be done by day and during office hours?"

"Yes."

"And cannot be done without the assistance of this girl?"

"You've heard."

"Very well; I have a scheme. Now listen to me."

Not even the rat which at that minute nibbled at Fellows's boot heel could have heard what followed. The panting of two breasts was, however, audible; and when, fifty minutes later, both crawled out of the cellar window among the rubbish which littered the rear of this once holy place, the one was trembling with excitement and the other with fear. They parted at the first thoroughfare, neither having eyes to see nor hearts to appreciate the touching scene which miles away was taking place in a little flat not very far from Harlem. An old man, frail in body, but with a sturdy spirit yet, was looking up from his pillow at the loving face of a young girl who was bending over him.

"I cannot sleep to-night," he said to her; "I cannot sleep; but that must not disturb you. I have so many things to think, pleasant things; but you have only cares, and must rest from them. You look very tired to-night, tired and worried. Leave me and sleep. I want to see you bright in the morning."

THE next day there was a dearth of assistants in the office. One was sick, one had pleaded a long-delayed vacation, two had business for the concern which took them into different quarters of the city, and Mr. Beers, who was next in authority to Mr. Fellows, had been summoned to serve on the grand jury. Perhaps it was this knowledge that Mr. Beers would be absent which had led to the manager's easiness in regard to the others. For he had been easy, or so Miss Lee thought when she arrived in the morning and saw the office almost empty. However, it did not trouble her much. On the contrary, the quiet and non-surveillance of the two clerks who did the business of the day seemed rather to elate her, and she went about her work, copying letters and taking down notes with an alacrity and air of cheerful hope which caused the manager to cast toward her more than one suspicious look from his desk in the adjoining room. He was not busy, though he had been the first to arrive that morning; and he had brought with him a large square package which he had taken into the room

which held the safe. He pretended to be busy, but any one watching him closely would have noticed that his eyes, and not his hands, were all that were engaged, and they were anywhere but on his desk or the letter he appeared to be reading. An observer would also have noticed that his nervousness was of the extreme sort, and that the trembling which shook his whole body increased visibly whenever his glance fell on the door of Mr. Beers's private room, opening at his back. No one was supposed to be in that room to-day, and had Miss Lee not been one minute late this especial morning, perhaps there might not have been. But in that one minute's grace a man had entered the office who had not gone out again, and where could he be if not in that one closed room?

The room which held the safe was open as usual, and many of Mr. Fellows's glances traveled that way. He had entered it once only since his first hurried visit of the early morning, but only to pull down the shade over the glass in the door communicating with the outside hall. This was his usual custom, and it attracted no attention. Why shouldn't he enter it again? He thought he would. A fascination was upon him. The problem he had given Beau Johnson to solve was to receive a test this day which would make him a rich man or a felon; but before that hour why not make his own study, his own investigation? True, he had made these many times before, but not with such lights to guide him. He might learn—

But no, the very conceit was folly. He knew his own limitations, else he had not called in the services of this crook. He could learn nothing by himself, but he might look the place over and see if all was in shape for the great attempt. That was only his duty. Beau Johnson had a right to expect that of him. If the scrub woman had moved anything—

At the thought that this possibly might have happened, he jumped to his feet and hurried into the outer office; but when he turned toward the room of the safe, he met Miss Lee's eye fixed upon him with such a keen, inquiring look that he faltered in his determination, and went in another direction instead. She knew that he had no business in that room, and she also knew that he knew she knew this. Any pretense that he had would only rouse her suspicions, and these must be lulled to the point of security, or she might not enter there herself, and on her entering there everything depended. Almost immediately upon the thought he was back in his seat, and the weary moments crept on. Would she never make her accustomed visit to that room? No cablegram had come that morning, but she would find some reason for going in. Of that he had been assured by Johnson. Why, he had not been told. "She will go in," Beau Johnson had said, and Fellows believed him. He believed everything the other said, otherwise he could not have gone on with this business. But she was very long about it. Harlowe would be coming back—

AH, he had an idea! It was not his own, but for the moment he thought it was. He would leave the office himself and thus give her an opportunity to quit her work and shut herself up with the safe. But— (was his mind leaving him?) there was something to be done first. The way must be cleared for the man in hiding to enter that room before she did. How was this to be accomplished? A dozen suggestions had been given him by his confederate, but he had forgotten them all. He was in too great a whirl to think, yet he must think; some way must be found. Ah, he had it. Taking up the receiver at his side, he telephoned to a German friend to call him up in five minutes, giving him the number of the telephone in the farthest room. This he did in German, telling him it was a joke and that he was not to insist upon an answer. Then he waited. In five minutes this farther bell rang. Calling to Miss Lee, he asked her to answer for him, saying he was very busy. As she rose, he gave a preconcerted signal on the door of Mr. Beers's room. As she disappeared in the one beyond, the dapper figure of Johnson crossed the outer office and slipped into the one holding the safe. A minute later she was back reporting the message and getting instructions, but the one thing she had to fear had been done; the trap had been laid, and now for its victim!

It was not long before that victim responded to the call. On the departure of the manager from the room Grace Lee rose, and with a conscious look toward the two clerks, slipped across the floor to the open door of the safe room. Entering, she swung to the door, which closed with a snap; then, with just a moment of hesitation, in which she seemed to be trying to regain her breath, she passed quickly across to the safe and took up her stand before it. So directly and so quickly had she done this that she had not seen the slim, immovable figure drawn up against the wall at her right behind the projection of a large bookcase. Nor did any influence for good or evil cause her to turn after she had reached the safe. All her thoughts, all her hopes, all the dreams which she had cherished seemed to be concentrated in the blank, eyeless object which confronted her, impenetrable to all appearance— a block of steel without visible opening— an enigma among safes— the problem of all problems to every cracksman in town but one— which was about to be solved if one could judge from the thrill which now shook her, and in shaking her communicated the same excitement to the silent, breathless, determined man in her rear, watching her as the tiger watches the quarry, and with the same tiger spring latent in his eye. In a moment her secret would be out, and then—

FOR just a minute Grace Lee paused before the blank door of the safe, then she passed around to an unused speaking tube in the neighboring wall. Halting before it, in low but distinct tones she began to sing the famous aria from "The Magic Flute."

All agog, with eyes starting and ears alert, the man behind listened and watched. Nothing happened.

Then came a change. Gradually her voice rose, sweet and piercing, till it reached that famous F in alt so rarely attempted, so exciting to the ear when fairly taken and fairly held. Grace Lee could take it, and as it hung, sweet and deliciously thrilling in the air, Beau Johnson saw, to his amazement, though he was in a way prepared for it, the heavy safe door slip softly ajar. She had done it with her voice. How, he could only vaguely guess. He was better educated than most of his class, or he could not have understood it at all. As it was, he laid it to the vibration caused by a certain definite note acting on some delicate mechanism set in accord with that note, which mechanism starting another and a stronger one gradually led up to that which drew the bolts and set the door ajar. Whether his theory were true or not mattered little at the moment. The event for which he waited had been accomplished and accomplished before his eyes. To profit by it was his next thought, and to this end he held himself ready for the spring which had laid latent in his eyes since he first saw her advance toward the safe.

She was ignorant of his presence. This was evident from the jaunty way she turned from the tube, still singing, but in a desultory way, which showed that her thoughts were no longer on her music. But she was not so engrossed that she did not see him. The moment that her face turned his way, her eyes enlarged, her body stiffened, her whole personality took on power and purpose and she sprang more quickly than he did and shut the safe door with one quick movement of her hand that fastened it as securely as before. Then she drew herself up to meet his rush, a noble figure of resolute womanhood which any other man would have hesitated to assail. But he was proof to any appeal of this kind. She had been quicker than he who was esteemed the readiest in his class, and he owed her a grudge, if only for that. Smiling— it was a way of his when deeply moved or deeply dangerous— he accosted her with smooth and treacherous words.

"Don't scream, young lady; screaming will do you no good. Mr. Fellows has left the business to me and I am quite competent to manage it. I am from headquarters— a detective. Yesterday you aroused the manager's suspicions, and I was detailed this morning to watch you. What do you want from Mr. Stoughton's safe? An honest answer may help you. Nothing else will."

"I want—" she hesitated, eyeing him over with an insight and an undoubted air of self-command which told the hardy rascal that in this woman he was likely to meet his match. "I want some securities of Mr. Stoughton's which he has ordered me to dispose of for him. I am in his confidence, as I can prove to you if you will give me the opportunity. I have papers at home that will satisfy any one

of my right to open this safe and to negotiate such papers as are designated in Mr. Stoughton's cablegrams."

"I don't doubt it." The words came easily from the mobile lips of the wily Beau Johnson. "But it was not to do Mr. Stoughton's business that you opened the safe just now. You have had no orders to-day; you had no order yesterday. Another purpose is in your mind— a personal purpose. It is this abuse of Mr. Stoughton's confidence which brings me here. You want three thousand dollars badly!"

SHE recoiled. Strong as she was, she was not proof against this surprise.

"How do you know that?" she asked, her voice losing its clear tone. "I do not deny it, but how could you know what I thought to be a secret between—"

"You and your lover? Well— we— the police know many things, young lady. We have a gift. We also have a kind of foreknowledge. I could tell you something of your future if you will deign to listen to me. Your lover is an honest man. What do you suppose he will do when he hears that you have been arrested for attempted burglary on your employer's effects?"

He had been slowly advancing as he reeled off these glib sentences, but he paused as he met her smile. It was not of the same sort as his, but it was not without a certain suggestiveness which he felt it would be best for him to understand before he threw off his mask.

"I don't know what he will do," said she, meeting the false detective's eye as she laid her hand on the safe, "but I know what I shall do if you carry out the purpose you threaten. Show my papers to the police and demand evidence of my having any bad intentions in opening this safe this morning. I think you will have difficulty in producing any. I think that you will only prove yourself a fool. Are you so strong with the authorities as to brave that?"

Astonished at her insight and more than astonished at her self-control, the experienced cracksman paused, and then in tones he rarely used, remarked quietly:

"You are playing with your life, Miss Lee. I have a pistol leveled at you from my pocket, and I'm the man to fire if you give me the slightest occasion to do so. I'm Beau Johnson, miss, a detective if you please, but also a tolerably experienced cracksman, and I want a taste of those bonds."

"And Mr. Fellows?"

The words rang out clear and fearlessly.

"Oh, he? He's a muff. You needn't concern yourself about him. The matter's between us two. Three thousand dollars for you, and a little more, perhaps, for me, and I to take all the blame."

Her eye stole toward the door. No one could enter that way, she knew. Even her screams, if she survived them, might alarm, but could not bring her help for several minutes, if not longer. Yet she did not tremble; only grew a shade paler.

"You do not answer. What have you to say?"

"This." She was like marble now. "You will not kill me, because that would be virtually to kill yourself. You cannot leave this room without my help, nor fire a shot without being caught like a rat in a trap. I want three thousand dollars, and I mean to have them, but I do not see how you are going to get the few more which you promise yourself. Certainly I am not going to aid you in doing so, and you cannot open that safe. You have not the musical training."

"No." The word came like a shot, possibly in lieu of a shot, for if ever he felt murderous it was at that moment. "I have not a musical training, but that does not make me helpless. In a few moments I shall have the pleasure of hearing you test your voice again. There's the office clock ticking; count the strokes."

She stood fascinated. What did he mean by this? Involuntarily she did his bidding.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven!"

"Yes," he repeated, "eleven! And at half past your old father dies."

"Dies?" Her lips did not frame the words; her eyes looked it, her whole sinking, suddenly collapsing figure gave voice to the maddening query, "Dies?"

"YES. Such is the understanding if I do not telephone my pals to hold off. He's not at home; he's with my friends. They don't care very much about old men, and if I have not a decent show of money by half-past eleven this morning the orders are to knock him on the head. It won't take a very hard knock. He was far from being in prime condition this morning."

She had shown great feeling at the beginning of this address, but at its close she drew herself up again and met him with something of her old composure.

"These are all lies," said she. "My father would never leave his house at the instigation of any gang. In the first place, he is not strong enough to attempt the stairs. You cannot deceive me in this fashion."

"He might be carried down."

"He wouldn't submit to that, nor would the other lodgers in the house allow it without an express order from me."

"They got the order; not from you, but from him. He demanded to be allowed to go. You see, Mr. Fellows sent a message that you were hurt— I will speak the whole truth, and say dying. The old man could not be held after that. He went with the messenger."

Her cheeks were now like ashes. She had gauged the man before her and felt that he was fully capable of this villainy. How great a villainy she alone knew who had the history of this old man in her heart.

"He went with the messenger," repeated Johnson, watching her face with a cruel leer. "That messenger knew where to take him. You may be sure it was to a place quite unknown to the police and to every one else but myself. Five minutes more gone, miss. In just twenty-five minutes more you will be an orphan and one impediment to your marriage will be at an end. How about the other?"

"Oh!" she wailed. "If I could really believe you!"

"I can smooth away that doubt. If you will promise not to compromise me with the clerks or any one inside there, I will allow you to telephone home and learn the truth of what I have told you. Anything further will end all business between us and wind up your father's affairs at the hour set. I can afford to humor you for ten minutes more in this nonsense."

"I will do it," she cried. "I must know what I am fighting before—" She caught herself back, but he was quite able to finish the sentence for her.

"Before you submit to the inevitable," he smiled.

Her head fell and he pointed toward the door.

"I will trust you to guard my— our interests," said he. "Open and go directly to your own telephone."

With a staggering step she obeyed. Creeping up stealthily behind her he watched her manner of opening the door and profited by the one quick glance he got of the office as she stepped through and passed hurriedly forward to her desk. There was no one within sight. Mr. Fellows had not yet returned and the clerks were too remote to notice her agitation or pay attention to her gait or the tremulousness of her tone as she called for her home number.

"Couldn't be better," thought he. "Now if Fellows will stay away long enough, I'll be able to double the boodle I've promised myself." This with a chuckle.

Meantime Miss Lee had got in her message. The answer sent her flying toward him.

"He's gone! He's gone!" she gasped. "My old, old father! Oh, you wretch! Save him and—"

"You save me first," he whispered, and was about to draw her back into the room with the safe, when the outer door opened and a stranger entered on business.

Her agony at the interruption and the few necessary words it involved caused the visitor to stare. But she was able to make herself intelligible and to turn him over to one of the clerks, after which she rejoined Johnson, closing the door quietly behind her.

His greeting was characteristic.

"You waste breath," said he, "by all this emotion. You'll need it to open the safe."

"What guarantee have I that you will keep your part of the contract?" she cried. "I sing— the door opens— you help yourself, and you go. That does not restore to me my father."

"Oh, I'll play fair. In proof of it, here's my pistol. If on our going out I do not stop with you at the telephone and let you communicate with your father and send my own message of release, then shoot me in the back. I give you leave."

Taking the pistol he held out, she cocked it, and looking into the chambers, found they were all full.

"I know how to use it," she said simply.

Admiration showed in his face. He bowed and pointed toward the tube.

"Now for the song," he cried.

WITH a bound she took her stand. She was white as death and greatly excited. Watching her curiously, the crafty villain noted the quick throbbing of her throat and the feverish grip on the pistol.

"Time is galloping," he remarked.

She gave a gasp, opened her lips and essayed to sing. An awful, indescribable murmur was all that could be heard. Stiffening herself, she resolutely calmed down her agitation and tried again. The result was but little better than before. Turning with a cry, she looked with horror-stricken eyes into the unmoved, slightly sardonic face of the man behind her.

"I cannot sing! You have frightened away my voice. I cannot raise that note even to save my father's life. I'm choking, choking." Then as she caught the devilish gleam lighting up his eye, she added, "You will never have those thousands! The safe is closed to us both."

He laughed, a very low, cautious laugh, but it made her eyes distend with uncertainty and dread.

"You fail to do justice to my fore-thought," said he.

"I took this into my calculations. I know women; they can be wicked enough, but they lack coolness. Let me see now what I can do. I cannot sing, but I have a little aide de camp which can."

Walking away from her, he approached a small table on which stood an object she had never seen in that room before. It was covered with a cloth, and as he removed this cloth, she reeled with surprise; then she became still with hope and the rush of fresh and overpowering emotions.

A graphophone stood revealed, one of the finest quality. It was set to play the air so often on her lips, and in another moment that keen, high note rang through the room,— that and no more.

It answered. Slowly, softly, after one breathless moment, the door they both watched with fascinated gaze swung slowly ajar, just as they had seen it do at

the beginning of this interview, and Johnson, coming forward, pulled it open with a jerk and began to fumble among the contents of the safe.

She could have killed him easily. He had forgotten— but so had she, and there was no one else by to remind her. Had there been, he would have seen a strange spectacle, for no sooner had Johnson's hand struck those shelves and minute drawers, than Grace Lee's whole attitude and expression changed. From a terrified, incapable woman, she became again her old self, strong, self-controlled, watchful. Creeping up behind him, she looked over his shoulders as he examined with his quick, experienced eye the various papers he drew out, noting his anger and growing disappointment as he found them unavailable for immediate use. Conscious of her presence, his rage grew till it shot forth in words. Not stinting oaths, he whirled on her after a moment and asked where the securities were. "You meant to have them; you know where the ready money is. Show me, show me at once or—"

Then a great anguish passed across her face, a look of farewell to hopes sweet and dearly cherished. If he saw it he did not heed. All his evil, indomitable will shone in the eye he turned up askance at her, and though she held the means of killing him in her hand, she bowed to that will, and leaning over him, she whispered in his ear:

"It was not paper I meant to have, but— but something else— I—"

She stopped, for breath was leaving her. His slim, assured hand was straying toward a certain knob hidden partly from sight, but plain to the touch if his fingers crept that way.

"Listen!" She was gasping now, but her hand laid on his shoulder emphasized her words. "There are jewels at the other end; Mrs. Stoughton's bridal jewels. They are worth thousands. I— I— meant to take those. They are in a compartment under that lower drawer. Yes, yes— there they are; take them and be gone. I— I have lost— but you will give me back my father? See! there are not many minutes left. Oh, be merciful and—"

HE was looking at the jewels, appraising them, making sure they were real and marketable. She was looking at them, too, with a wild longing and a bitter disappointment, which he, turning at that moment to mark her looks, saw and rated at its full value.

"Well, I guess they'll do," he exclaimed, pausing in his task of thrusting the gems in his pocket to hand her a bracelet ornamented with one small diamond. "But I expected more from all this fuss and feathers. Was it to guard these—"

"Yes," she murmured, thrusting the bracelet into the neck of her dress and stepping quickly back. "They are priceless to the owner. Associations you know. Mrs. Stoughton is dead— There! that will do. Now for my part of the bargain,"

and bethinking her at last of the pistol, she raised it and pointed it full in his face. "You will close that door now and send the telephone you promised."

He rose and banged to the door.

"All right," he cried. "You've behaved well. Now hide that pistol in your waist and we'll step into the outer office."

She did as she was bid, and in a moment more they were crossing the floor outside. As they did so, she noticed that the two clerks had been sent out to luncheon, leaving them alone with Mr. Fellows. This was not encouraging, nor did she like the click which at this moment Beau Johnson made with his tongue. It sounded like a preconcerted signal. Whether so or not, it brought Mr. Fellows from his room, and in another instant he was standing with them before the telephone. There was a clock over the safe-room door. It stood at just twenty-five minutes after eleven.

"Hurry!" she whispered as the other took up the receiver.

She did not need to say it. His own anxiety seemed to be as great as hers, but his anxiety was to be gone. The nerve which sustained him while the issue was doubtful gave some slight tokens of failing, now that his efforts had brought success and only this small obligation lay between him and the enjoyment of the booty he had won at such a risk. She was sure that his voice trembled as he uttered the familiar. "Hello!" and during the interchange of words which followed, the strain was perhaps as great on him as on her.

"Hello! how's the old man?"

She could hear the answer. It swept her fears away in a moment.

"Well, but anxious about the girl."

"She's all right, everything's all right. Take the sick man home and tell him that his daughter will be there almost as soon as he is."

"I must hear my father's voice." It was Grace who was speaking. "I will give a cry that will echo through this building if you do not put me in communication with him at once."

Her hand went out to the receiver.

The veins on Beau Johnson's forehead stood out threateningly.

"Curse you!" he muttered; but he gave the order just the same.

"Hello! Don't shut off. The girl's nervous; wants to hear her father's voice. Have him up! two words from him will answer."

"Father!"

Grace's mouth was at the phone.

No reply.

She cast one look at Johnson.

"They're getting him on his feet," he grumbled. His eye was on the door.

"Father!" she called again, her voice tremulous with doubt and anxiety.

A murmur this time, but she recognized it.

"It's he! it's he," she cried. "He's safe; he's well. Father!"

But Johnson had no time for dilly-dallying. Catching the receiver back, he took his place again at the phone and shouted a few final injunctions. Then he faced her with the question:

"Are you satisfied?" She nodded, speechless at last and almost breathless from exhaustion. He bowed and made for the door. As he opened it, Mr. Fellows slid forward and joined him. Both were leaving. He as well as Johnson. She caught the look which the manager threw her as he closed the door behind them. There was threat in that look and her heart strings tightened as she stood alone there facing her fearful duty. Mr. Fellows was a thief! The manager of this concern was even then perhaps walking off with the booty wrenched from her care by the devil's own inquisition. What should she do? Send for Philip? Yes, that was all her tortured mind could grasp. She would send for her own Philip and get his advice before she notified the police or sent the inevitable cablegram. She was too ill, too shaken to do more. Philip! Philip!

She was fainting— she felt it, and was raising her voice to call in one of the clerks, when the outer door opened and Mr. Fellows came in. She had not expected him back. She had fondly believed that he had gone with his professional comrade; and the sight of him caused her to rise again to her feet.

"You!" she murmured, facing him in dull wonder at his renewed look of threat. "I cannot stay in the same room with you. You are—"

"NEVER mind me," came clearly and coldly from his lips. "It is of yourself you must think. Here, officer!" he cried, opening the door again and ushering in a man in plain clothes, but evidently one of the force. "This is the young lady. I accuse her of taking advantage of her power to open Mr. Stoughton's private safe to steal his jewels. Her confederate has escaped. He had a pistol and I had no means of stopping him. But she is right here and you will make no mistake in arresting her. The booty is on her, and smart as she is, she cannot deny that proof."

With a cry, Grace's hand went up to her throat.

Then she settled into her usual self once more.

The officer, eyeing her, asked what she had to say for herself.

"A great deal," was her low answer. "But I shall not say it here. If Mr. Fellows will go with me to wherever you take people suspected of what you suspect me, I can soon make plain my position. But first I should like to send for my friend, Mr. Philip Andrews. He is with the Stickney Company, and he is acquainted with my affairs and the understanding between Mr. Stoughton and myself by which I have access to that gentleman's safe and do much of his private business for him."

"That's all right. Send for Mr. Andrews if you wish, but you mustn't expect to talk to him without witnesses. Is that your coat and hat?"

"Yes."

"Well, put them on."

Mr. Fellows advanced and whispered something in the officer's ear. Immediately the suspicious look grew in his eyes, and he watched her every movement with increased care. She saw this and stepped up to him.

"I shall not deny having this piece of jewelry about my person," she said, drawing the bracelet from its hiding place. "The man whom Mr. Fellows calls my confederate gave it to me and I took it; but it will be hard for him or any one else to prove that it is a theft, harder than it will be for me to prove who is the real culprit here and the man whom you ought to arrest. Watch me, but watch him also; he is more deserving of your close attention than I am."

Her disdain, her poise, the beauty which came out on her face when she was greatly stirred, gave her a striking appearance at that moment. The officer stared, then followed her glance toward Mr. Fellows. What he saw in him made him thoughtful. Turning back to Miss Lee, he said kindly enough, "Will you let me have that bracelet?"

She passed it over and he thrust it in his pocket.

"Now," said he, "I will go first. In a few minutes follow me and go down Nassau Street. A carriage will be at the curb. Take it. As for Mr. Fellows—"

"I cannot leave till some of the clerks come in."

"We will all wait till a clerk comes."

Mr. Fellows paled.

"Here is one now."

The door opened and Philip Andrews came in.

"Oh, Philip!"

"What is this? What have you done among you?"

It was no wonder he asked. At sight of him Grace Lee had fainted.

TWO hours later Grace was explaining herself. She was still pale, but very calm now, though a little sad. The sadness was not occasioned by any doubt she felt about her father. She had telephoned home and learned that he had arrived there and was well, and had nothing but good to say of his captors. No, there was another cause for her manifest depression, a cause not disconnected with Philip, toward whom her eyes ever and anon stole with an uneasy appeal which her mother would have been troubled to see. But it comforted Fellows, who began to regard her threats as idle in face of the evidence of her complicity as afforded by the concealed bracelet.

The officer on duty was questioning her. Had she done this and that? Yes, she had. Why? Then she told her story— the story you have already read. As she

proceeded with it, every eye sparkled under the graphic tale, and the police, who had some acquaintance with Beau Johnson, recognized his hand in all that she told. One face only wore a sneer, and that was Fellows's. But no sneer could discredit a story told with such vim and straightforward earnestness. As she mentioned the emptying of the office, each person present turned and gave him a look. The manager had undertaken a piece of work too big for him. His explanations of the presence of the graphophone in this inner office were feeble and contradictory.

But he had his revenge, or thought he had, when she came to the jewels. She had pointed them out, but only to save a worse disaster. Injury to her father? "Yes, and—" She paused and her voice thrilled. "In one of the secret drawers," she continued, "there was an immense amount of currency in large denominations, the loss of which would cripple the business, if not bankrupt Mr. Stoughton. His hand was feeling its way along the face of this drawer. In another moment he would have discovered the tiny knob by the manipulation of which this drawer opens. To save the struggle which would have ensued, I directed his attention elsewhere. I don't believe I did wrong."

"But you accepted one of these articles as your share. Do you believe you did right in this?"

"Yes. I will not mention the smallness of the share, for that makes the portion saved for the owner of little account. Yet that portion is saved. I wish it had been a larger one."

"No doubt. So that was your motive— to save this souvenir for Mr. Stoughton?"

Casting a proud look at Philip, she moved a step nearer to the table on which the bracelet lay. "Will you be good enough," she asked her interrogator, "to take up that bracelet and read the initials on the inner side?"

"R. S. T.," read the official.

"Does any one here know Mrs. Stoughton's maiden name?"

Evidently not, for all remained silent.

"Does any one here know my mother's maiden name?"

Philip started.

"Yes," he cried, "I do. Her name was Rhoda Selden Titus."

"R. S. T.," smiled Grace. "This bracelet was my mother's. Mr. Stoughton allowed me to place this keepsake and some other valuables of mine in his private safe. Gentlemen, the whole of those jewels were mine— my sole and only fortune. I was keeping them for"— her eyes stole toward Philip—"for my marriage portion, the secret and great surprise I had planned for my future husband. They are worth some five thousand dollars— my mother was the daughter of a wealthy man. They would have given us a home if I could have kept them; they would also have given my husband a start in business, and this I

should have preferred, but I could not let Mr. Stoughton's securities be endangered, and so they had to go. Philip, cannot you forgive me when you think that it was through my folly the secret of the safe became known?"

"I forgive you?" He could not show his feelings, but his eyes were eloquent; so were Fellows's; so were those of the various officials.

"You can prove these statements, Miss Lee?" asked one.

"Easily," she replied.

Then they turned to Fellows.

GRACE never got back her jewels. The wily Johnson was not caught, though Fellows turned state's evidence and did all he could to have the professional netted in the same manner as himself. But she did not suffer from this loss. When Mr. Stoughton learned the full particulars of this daring robbery, he made good to her the value of those jewels, and the prosperity of this young couple was secured. He was even present at the wedding. Grace wore her mother's bracelet, but on her breast was a jewel of far greater value. On its back was engraved,

To brave G. L.
From her grateful friend, T. S.

2: The Man That Died at Alma

Gilbert Parker
1862-1932
Phil May's Annual, Winter 1897
Collected in: *The Lane That Had No Turning*, 1902

THE MAN who died at Alma had a Kilkenny brogue that you could not cut with a knife, but he was called Kilquhanity, a name as Scotch as McGregor. Kilquhanity was a retired soldier, on pension, and Pontiac was a place of peace and poverty. The only gentry were the Cure, the Avocat, and the young Seigneur, but of the three the only one with a private income was the young Seigneur.

What should such a common man as Kilquhanity do with a private income! It seemed almost suspicious, instead of creditable, to the minds of the simple folk at Pontiac; for they were French, and poor, and laborious, and Kilquhanity drew his pension from the headquarters of the English Government, which they only knew by legends wafted to them over great tracts of country from the city of Quebec.

When Kilquhanity first came with his wife, it was without introductions from anywhere— unlike everybody else in Pontiac, whose family history could be instantly reduced to an exact record by the Cure. He had a smattering of French, which he turned off with oily brusqueness; he was not close-mouthed, he talked freely of events in his past life; and he told some really wonderful tales of his experiences in the British army. He was no braggart, however, and his one great story which gave him the nickname by which he was called at Pontiac, was told far more in a spirit of laughter at himself than in praise of his own part in the incident.

The first time he told the story was in the house of Medallion the auctioneer.

"Aw the night it was," said Kilquhanity, after a pause, blowing a cloud of tobacco smoke into the air, "the night it was, me darlin's! Bitther cowld in that Roosian counthry, though but late summer, and nothin' to ate but a lump of bread, no bigger than a dickybird's skull; nothin' to drink but wather. Turrible, turrible, and for clothes to wear— Mother of Moses! that was a bad day for clothes! We got betune no barrick quilts that night. No stockin' had I insoide me boots, no shirt had I but a harse's quilt sewed an to me; no heart I had insoide me body; nothin' at all but duty an' shtandin' to orders, me b'ys!

"Says Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick to me, 'Kilquhanity,' says he, 'there's betther places than River Alma to live by,' says he. 'Faith, an' by the Liffey I wish I was this moment'— Liffey's in ould Ireland, Frenchies! 'But, Kilquhanity,' says he, 'faith, an' it's the Liffey we'll never see again, an' put that in yer pipe an' smoke it!' And thrue for him.

"But that night, aw that night! Ivery bone in me body was achin', and shure me heart was achin' too, for the poor b'ys that were fightin' hard an' gettin' little for it. Bitther cowld it was, aw, bitther cowld, and the b'ys droppin' down, droppin', droppin', droppin', wid the Roosian bullets in thim!

" 'Kilquhanity,' says Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick to me, 'it's this shtandin' still, while we do be droppin', droppin', that girds the soul av yer.' Aw, the sight it was, the sight it was! The b'ys of the rigimint shtandin' shoulder to shoulder, an' the faces av 'm blue wid powder, an' red wid blood, an' the bits o' b'ys droppin' round me loike twigs of an' ould tree in a shtorm. Just a cry an' a bit av a gurgle tru the teeth, an' divil the wan o' thim would see the Liffey side anny more. "'The Roosians are chargin'!' shouts Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick. 'The Roosians are chargin'— here they come!' Shtandin' besoide me was a bit of a lump of a b'y, as foine a lad as ever shtood in the boots of me rigimint— aw! the look of his face was the look o' the dead. 'The Roosians are comin'— they're chargin'!' says Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick, and the bit av a b'y, that had nothin' to eat all day, throws down his gun and turns round to run. Eighteen years old he was, only eighteen— just a straight slip of a lad from Malahide. 'Hould on! Teddie,' says I, 'hould on! How'll yer face yer mother if yer turn yer back on the inimy of yer counthry?' The b'y looks me in the eyes long enough to wink three times, picks up his gun, an' shtood loike a rock, he did, till the Roosians charged us, roared on us, an' I saw me slip of a b'y go down under the sabre of a damned Cossack. 'Mother!' I heard him say, 'Mother!' an' that's all I heard him say— and the mother waitin' away aff there by the Liffey soide. Aw, wurra, wurra, the b'ys go down to battle and the mothers wait at home! Some of the b'ys come back, but the most of thim shtay where the battle laves 'em. Wurra, wurra, many's the b'y wint down that day by Alma River, an' niver come back! "There I was shtandin', when hell broke loose on the b'ys of me rigimint, and divil the wan o' me knows if I killed a Roosian that day or not. But Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick— a bit of a liar was the Sergeant-Major— says he: 'It was tin ye killed, Kilquhanity.' He says that to me the noight that I left the rigimint for ever, and all the b'ys shtandin' round and liftin' lasses an' saying, 'Kilquhanity! Kilquhanity! Kilquhanity!' as if it was sugar and honey in their mouths. Aw, the sound of it! 'Kilquhanity,' says he, 'it was tin ye killed;' but aw, b'ys, the Sergeant-Major was an awful liar. If he could be doin' annybody anny good by lyin', shure he would be lyin' all the time.

"But it's little I know how many I killed, for I was killed meself that day. A Roosian sabre claved the shoulder and neck of me, an' down I wint, and over me trampled a squadron of Roosian harses, an' I stopped thinkin'. Aw, so aisy, so aisy, I slipped away out av the fight! The shriekin' and roarin' kept dwindlin' and dwindlin', and I dropped all into a foine shlape, so quiet, so aisy. An' I thought that slip av a lad from the Liffey soide was houlding me hand, and sayin' 'Mother! Mother!' and we both wint ashlape; an' the b'ys of the rigimint when

Alma was over, they said to each other, the b'ys they said: 'Kilquhanity's dead.' An' the trinches was dug, an' all we foine dead b'ys was laid in long rows loike candles in the trinches. An' I was laid in among thim, and Sergeant-Major Kilpatrick shtandin' there an' looking at me an' sayin': 'Poor b'y— poor b'y!'

"But when they threw another man on tap of me, I waked up out o' that beautiful shlape, and give him a kick. 'Yer not polite,' says I to mesilf. Shure, I couldn't shpake— there was no strength in me. An' they threw another man on, an' I kicked again, and the Sergeant-Major he sees it, an' shouts out. 'Kilquhanity's leg is kickin'!' says he. An' they pulled aff the two poor divils that had been thrown o' tap o' me, and the Sergeant-Major lifts me head, an' he says 'Yer not killed, Kilquhanity?' says he.

"Divil a word could I shpake, but I winked at him, and Captain Masham shtandin' by whips out a flask.

" 'Put that betune his teeth,' says he. Whin I got it there, trust me fur not lettin' it go. An' the Sergeant-Major says to me: 'I have hopes of you, Kilquhanity, when you do be drinkin' loike that.'

" 'A foine healthy corpse I am; an' a foine thirsty, healthy corpse I am,' says I."

A dozen hands stretched out to give Kilquhanity a drink, for even the best story-teller of Pontiac could not have told his tale so well.

Yet the success achieved by Kilquhanity at such moments was discounted through long months of mingled suspicion and doubtful tolerance. Although both he and his wife were Catholics (so they said, and so it seemed), Kilquhanity never went to Confession or took the Blessed Sacrament. The Cure spoke to Kilquhanity's wife about it, and she said she could do nothing with her husband. Her tongue once loosed, she spoke freely, and what she said was little to the credit of Kilquhanity. Not that she could urge any horrible things against him; but she railed at minor faults till the Cure dismissed her with some good advice upon wives rehearsing their husband's faults, even to the parish priest.

Mrs. Kilquhanity could not get the Cure to listen to her, but she was more successful elsewhere. One day she came to get Kilquhanity's pension, which was sent every three months through M. Garon, the Avocat. After she had handed over the receipt prepared beforehand by Kilquhanity, she replied to M. Garon's inquiry concerning her husband in these words: "Misther Garon, sir, such a man it is— enough to break the heart of anny woman. And the timper of him— Misther Garon, the timper of him's that awful, awful! No conshideration, and that ugly-hearted, got whin a soldier b'y! The things he does— my, my, the things he does!" She threw up her hands with an air of distraction.

"Well, and what does he do, Madame?" asked the Avocat simply.

"An' what he says, too— the awful of it! Ah, the bad sour heart in him! What's he lyin' in his bed for now— an' the New Year comin' on, whin we ought

to be praisin' God an' enjoyin' each other's company in this blessed wurruld? What's he lying betune the quilts now fur, but by token of the bad heart in him! It's a wicked could he has, an' how did he come by it? I'll tell ye, Misther Garon. So wild was he, yesterday it was a week, so black mad wid somethin' I'd said to him and somethin' that shlipped from me hand at his head, that he turns his back on me, throws opin the dure, shteps out into the shnow, and shtandin' there alone, he curses the wide wurruld— oh, dear Misther Garon, he cursed the wide wurruld, shtandin' there in the snow! God forgive the black heart of him, shtandin' out there cursin' the wide wurruld!"

The Avocat looked at the Sergeant's wife musingly, the fingers of his hands tapping together, but he did not speak: he was becoming wiser all in a moment as to the ways of women.

"An' now he's in bed, the shtrappin' blasphemer, fur the could he got shtandin' there in the snow cursin' the wide wurruld. Ah, Misther Garon, pity a poor woman that has to live wid the loikes o' that!"

The Avocat still did not speak. He turned his face away and looked out of the window, where his eyes could see the little house on the hill, which to-day had the Union Jack flying in honour of some battle or victory, dear to Kilquhanity's heart. It looked peaceful enough, the little house lying there in the waste of snow, banked up with earth, and sheltered on the northwest by a little grove of pines. At last M. Garon rose, and lifting himself up and down on his toes as if about to deliver a legal opinion, he coughed slightly, and then said in a dry little voice:

"Madame, I shall have pleasure in calling on your husband. You have not seen the matter in the true light. Madame, I bid you good-day."

That night the Avocat, true to his promise, called on Sergeant Kilquhanity. Kilquhanity was alone in the house. His wife had gone to the village for the Little Chemist. She had been roused at last to the serious nature of Kilquhanity's illness.

M. Garon knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again more loudly, and still no answer. He opened the door and entered into a clean, warm living-room, so hot that the heat came to him in waves, buffeting his face. Dining, sitting, and drawing-room, it was also a sort of winter kitchen; and side by side with relics of Kilquhanity's soldier-life were clean, bright tins, black saucepans, strings of dried fruit, and well-cured hams. Certainly the place had the air of home; it spoke for the absent termagant.

M. Garon looked round and saw a half-opened door, through which presently came a voice speaking in a laboured whisper. The Avocat knocked gently at the door. "May I come in, Sergeant?" he asked, and entered. There was no light in the room, but the fire in the kitchen stove threw a glow over the bed

where the sick man lay. The big hands of the soldier moved restlessly on the quilt.

"Aw, it's the koind av ye!" said Kilquhanity, with difficulty, out of the half shadows.

The Avocat took one burning hand in both of his, held it for a moment, and pressed it two or three times. He did not know what to say.

"We must have a light," said he at last, and taking a candle from the shelf he lighted it at the stove and came into the bedroom again. This time he was startled. Even in this short illness, Kilquhanity's flesh had dropped away from him, leaving him but a bundle of bones, on which the skin quivered with fever. Every word the sick man tried to speak cut his chest like a knife, and his eyes half started from his head with the agony of it. The Avocat's heart sank within him, for he saw that a life was hanging in the balance. Not knowing what to do, he tucked in the bedclothes gently.

"I do be thinkin'," said the strained, whispering voice— "I do be thinkin' I could shmoke."

The Avocat looked round the room, saw the pipe on the window, and cutting some tobacco from a "plug," he tenderly filled the old black corn-cob. Then he put the stem in Kilquhanity's mouth and held the candle to the bowl. Kilquhanity smiled, drew a long breath, and blew out a cloud of thick smoke. For a moment he puffed vigorously, then, all at once, the pleasure of it seemed to die away, and presently the bowl dropped down on his chin. M. Garon lifted it away. Kilquhanity did not speak, but kept saying something over and over again to himself, looking beyond M. Garon abstractedly.

At that moment the front door of the house opened, and presently a shrill voice came through the door: "Shmokin', shmokin', are ye, Kilquhanity? As soon as me back's turned, it's playin' the fool—" She stopped short, seeing the Avocat.

"Beggin' yer pardon, Misther Garon," she said, "I thought it was only Kilquhanity here, an' he wid no more sense than a babby."

Kilquhanity's eyes closed, and he buried one side of his head in the pillow, that her shrill voice should not pierce his ears.

"The Little Chemist 'll be comin' in a minit, dear Misther Garon," said the wife presently, and she began to fuss with the bedclothes and to be nervously and uselessly busy.

"Aw, lave thim alone, darlin'," whispered Kilquhanity, tossing. Her officiousness seemed to hurt him more than the pain in his chest.

M. Garon did not wait for the Little Chemist to arrive, but after pressing the Sergeant's hand he left the house and went straight to the house of the Cure, and told him in what condition was the black sheep of his flock.

When M. Garon returned to his own home he found a visitor in his library. It was a woman, between forty and fifty years of age, who rose slowly to her feet as the Avocat entered, and, without preliminary, put into his hands a document.

"That is who I am," she said. "Mary Muddock that was, Mary Kilquhanity that is."

The Avocat held in his hands the marriage lines of Matthew Kilquhanity of the parish of Malahide and Mary Muddock of the parish of St. Giles, London. The Avocat was completely taken aback. He blew nervously through his pale fingers, raised himself up and down on his toes, and grew pale through suppressed excitement. He examined the certificate carefully, though from the first he had no doubt of its accuracy and correctness.

"Well?" said the woman, with a hard look in her face and a hard note in her voice. "Well?"

The Avocat looked at her musingly for a moment. All at once there had been unfolded to him Kilquhanity's story. In his younger days Kilquhanity had married this woman with a face of tin and a heart of leather. It needed no confession from Kilquhanity's own lips to explain by what hard paths he had come to the reckless hour when, at Blackpool, he had left her for ever, as he thought. In the flush of his criminal freedom he had married again— with the woman who shared his home on the little hillside, behind the Parish Church, she believing him a widower. Mary Muddock, with the stupidity of her class, had never gone to the right quarters to discover his whereabouts until a year before this day when she stood in the Avocat's library. At last, through the War Office, she had found the whereabouts of her missing Matthew. She had gathered her little savings together, and, after due preparation, had sailed away to Canada to find the soldier boy whom she had never given anything but bad hours in all the days of his life with her.

"Well," said the woman, "you're a lawyer— have you nothing to say? You pay his pension— next time you'll pay it to me. I'll teach him to leave me and my kid and go off with an Irish cook!"

The Avocat looked her steadily in the eyes, and then delivered the strongest blow that was possible from the opposite side of the case. "Madame," said he, "Madame, I regret to inform you that Matthew Kilquhanity is dying."

"Dying, is he?" said the woman, with a sudden change of voice and manner, but her whine did not ring true. "The poor darlin', and only that Irish hag to care for him! Has he made a will?" she added eagerly.

Kilquhanity had made no will, and the little house on the hillside, and all that he had, belonged to this woman who had spoiled the first part of his life, and had come now to spoil the last part.

An hour later the Avocat, the Cure, and the two women stood in the chief room of the little house on the hillside. The door was shut between the two

rooms, and the Little Chemist was with Kilquhanity. The Cure's hand was on the arm of the first wife and the Avocat's upon the arm of the second. The two women were glaring eye to eye, having just finished as fine a torrent of abuse of each other and of Kilquhanity as can be imagined. Kilquhanity himself, with the sorrow of death upon him, though he knew it not, had listened to the brawl, his chickens come home to roost at last. The first Mrs. Kilquhanity had sworn, with an oath that took no account of the Cure's presence, that not a stick nor a stone nor a rag nor a penny should that Irish slattern have of Matthew Kilquhanity's!

The Cure and the Avocat had quieted them at last, and the Cure spoke sternly now to both women.

"In the presence of death," said he, "have done with your sinful clatter. Stop quarrelling over a dying man. Let him go in peace— let him go in peace! If I hear one word more," he added sternly, "I will turn you both out of the house into the night. I will have the man die in peace."

Opening the door of the bedroom, the Cure went in and shut the door, bolting it quietly behind him. The Little Chemist sat by the bedside, and Kilquhanity lay as still as a babe upon the bed. His eyes were half closed, for the Little Chemist had given him an opiate to quiet the terrible pain.

The Cure saw that the end was near. He touched Kilquhanity's arm: "My son," said he, "look up. You have sinned; you must confess your sins, and repent."

Kilquhanity looked up at him with dazed but half smiling eyes. "Are they gone? Are the women gone?" The Cure nodded his head. Kilquhanity's eyes closed and opened again. "They're gone, thin! Oh, the foine of it, the foine of it!" he whispered. "So quiet, so aisy, so quiet! Faith, I'll just be shlaping! I'll be shlaping now."

His eyes closed, but the Cure touched his arm again. "My son," said he, "look up. Do you thoroughly and earnestly repent you of your sins?"

His eyes opened again. "Yis, father, oh yis! There's been a dale o' noise— there's been a dale o' noise in the wurruld, father," said he. "Oh, so quiet, so quiet now! I do be shlaping."

A smile came upon his face. "Oh, the foine of it! I do be shlaping— shlaping."

And he fell into a noiseless Sleep.

———————

3: The Professor's Mummy

Fergus Hume
Ferguson Wright Hume, 1859-1932
The Queen August 20 1898
Collected in: *The Dancer in Red*, 1906

GOSSIP consists commonly of lies; yet occasionally, by acute observers grains of truth may be discerned in the untrustworthy mass. As a specimen of how iron of fact intermingles with clay of falsehood, may be instanced the rumours relative to Professor Carberry, his wife, and young Mr. Vale. It was said— and with good reason— that Carberry coveted Vale's celebrated mummy of the XX. Dynasty, while Vale envied the professor his wife.

The Camford cynics suggested an exchange as conducive to the happiness of all parties. A sale, and the Professor would gain possession of the desired mummy; a divorce, and Mrs. Carberry would be free to become Mrs. Vale. But to the proposed course there was one objection: Vale was a poor man, and could better support a dried-up corpse, which had no needs, than extravagant Mrs. Carberry, who was said to have many. Into the ostensible truth of this latter assertion creeps falsehood.

Despite outward evidence to the contrary, Lucy Carberry was not extravagant. She had no chance of being so; for her husband kept the purse, and was niggardly in doling out its contents. He allowed a meagre sum for household expenses, a still smaller amount for clothes befitting the wife of a Camford University Professor, and not a single penny for pleasure or relaxation. Out of means barely sufficient for necessaries, Mrs. Carberry was supposed to provide the miracle of a lavish table, and achieve the impossible of a fashionable appearance. If the meals were not dainty and plentiful, if the wife was not dressed with taste and refinement, Carberry made it his business to be disagreeable, and became so to the point of ill-treatment. It was a life of blows in private, smiles in public; and poor pretty Lucy had a wholesome dread of her domestic tyrant.

Why, when, or where she married him no one knew. One day the newly-wedded pair unexpectedly took up their abode in Camford— of which scholastic town Carberry was an old resident, and a professor of Michael's College— and so great was the contrast of her fair loveliness and his dour blackness that they speedily became known as Beauty and the Beast. Carberry himself was a wizen little man with a large head and a lined yellow face, suggestive of evil instincts kept under by force of will. He had malicious black eyes, a wisp of black moustache straggling over thin lips, and a lean small-waisted figure, straight and nervously alert. His smile and speech were cynical, his dress scrupulously neat, and in every way he was the antithesis of his pretty soft girl-bride.

She, poor soul, was one of those delicate timid women who require attention and kindness to bring out their good qualities. Lucy was a flower which bloomed best in sunshine; a tender blossom susceptible to the least chill in the atmosphere. Pink and white in complexion, blue-eyed and golden-haired, she was emotional and charming; at once angel and martyr. Carberry, grim realist as he was, did not understand her in the least. He termed her a sentimental fool, and crushed her innocent aspirations with sneering cynicism, so that within a few months of her marriage Lucy lost her angelic wings, and became a domestic martyr, whose daily life was one of torture and silent endurance. She had not even a child to comfort her bruised heart, and the Carberry household represented a sort of domestic hell, wherein the wife was the damned, the husband the devil. And alas, alas! God was deaf to the prayers of this tortured woman.

The professor and his victim— a more appropriate name than wife— kept silent as to their meeting, and wooing, and subsequent marriage. Only John Vale knew the truth, and he gained his knowledge first hand.

"I was sold," exclaimed Mrs. Carberry to him. "Sold by my mother like any slave in the East, and into a worse bondage. We lived at Bournemouth, mother and I. Father had been dead three years, and we supported ourselves by keeping a boarding-house. Mr. Carberry came to stay there one summer and took a fancy to me. I can't say that it was love," interpolated Mrs. Carberry, "for my husband does not know what that word means. I hated him from the first and refused his offer, but mother was talked over by him, and she forced me into the marriage. I was sold as a slave to this learned Pasha, and a slave he makes of me. Oh, I wish I were dead! I do! I do!" And the wretched little woman concluded the miserable story with a burst of tears.

It can be seen from this outburst that to the unhappy wife Vale was more than an acquaintance. He was a friend, and if the truth must be stated, his friendship showed signs of developing into yet closer relationship. Vale had no idea to what lengths this intimacy might go, but without intending anything definite, he had permitted himself— in the most innocent manner, be it said— to drift into a somewhat anomalous position. Friendship between a young man and a pretty woman is the most dangerous of all relationships, and Vale was aware that Mrs. Carberry claimed more of his time and thoughts than was consistent with the attitude— morally and socially— he ought to preserve towards her. Moreover the miserable life she led with an exacting and tyrannous husband aroused his pity, and that passion, according to Shakespeare, is akin to love. One false step and the result might be dangerous.

JOHN VALE was the son of an enthusiastic Egyptologist, who had squandered a large fortune upon an archaeological collection. He had educated his son to

succeed to his treasures and labours, but to his disgust John evinced distaste for mummies, coins, tombs, papri, and such-like. Also he cherished literary ambitions, and wished to make his mark as a novelist. Vale senior censured, urged, implored, commanded Vale junior to have done with such trifling: but the son was as obstinate as the father, and the breach widened between them. Finally John took up journalism in London, and Mr. Vale remained at Camford sulking amid his antiquities. In due time the Egyptologist died, and the journalist returned to learn that beyond the house, and a mummy of the XX. Dynasty, he was heir to— nothing. Vale had left his collection to the Camford Museum, and John found himself a pauper. He had been cut off with a mummy instead of the proverbial shilling, "in the hope," said the will, "the sight of this marvellously embalmed Princess of the XX. Dynasty may induce my son John to devote his attention to the civilisation of Ancient Egypt." Needless to say John declined to violate his taste by adopting this posthumous advice. However, he retained possession of his ironical legacy.

Professor Carberry, who long had coveted this special mummy, desired to purchase it, but to his surprise John refused the most advantageous offers. He was quite determined, he said to live in the house, and earn his livelihood by literary work; also to keep the famous mummy which, in itself, represented the fortune he should have inherited. Being a reserved young man he refused further information, and Carberry marvelled at what seemed to him to be the ridiculous decision.

"Bless me, Vale!" said he with acerbity, "why should you adopt this dog-in-the-manger attitude? You don't care for the mummy and I do: you require money and I offer it to you. Why not then consult your own interest and sell?"

"No, Professsor. I shall keep the mummy to remind me that my father squandered twenty thousand pounds on such-like rubbish."

"Don't disparage those whose tastes differ from your own," retorted Carberry with some dryness; "in my eyes your mummy is worth two hundred pounds. Come, I'll let you have that sum for it."

"No! I have made up my mind not to sell!"

"Obstinate man! I'll increase my offer to guineas. It's worth consideration!"

"I dare say: and worth more than the mummy," said John. "However, I can only thank you, and decline your proposal."

arberry was vexed and showed it by frowning. Then he smiled and held out his hand. "Well, Vale, if you won't sell you won't," said he, "but if you should change your mind, let me know. My offer will remain open. And Vale," added the Professor, with a backward glance, "come and see us when you have nothing better to do."

John did not accept this cordial invitation at once, as he had no great love for Carberry and his whims. But one afternoon at a garden party he saw a pale and

delicate face which fixed his wandering attention. Forthwith he begged his hostess for an introduction, and shortly found himself walking and talking with Mrs. Carberry. The Professor was not present, otherwise he would have resented the long conversation which took place between the pair. Both Vale and Lucy were mutually attracted to one another; and after a few moments they were chatting confidentially together as though they were friends of years standing.

"I don't know why I tell you these things," said Lucy, stopping in the middle of a description of her taste in books. "I am sure they do not interest you."

"But Indeed they do, Mrs. Carberry. I am enjoying our conversation more than I dare tell you."

"Ah, that is because you are what the Italians call 'simpatica.' "

"It is the first time such a term has been applied to me," laughed John. "I am not what you term a ladies' man. The Professor is, I understand."

"Is he? That is news to me."

She said this so bitterly that Vale was surprised, and glanced sideways at her charming face. The rosy colour induced by the pleasant conversation had died out, the soft eyes had hardened, and the mobile lips were firmly set in a thin line of scarlet. When Carberry was mentioned Lucy could govern her speech by limiting it to a few cold and careless words, but the expression of her face was beyond her control; and the opinion she entertained of her husband could be read thereon without difficulty. John saw dread and hate in every line of the pretty countenance; and also he deduced fear from the nervous and hurried way in which her eyes travelled round the sunlit lawn. He concluded from such evidence that Mrs. Carberry both feared and hated her husband. And in this conclusion he was absolutely right.

With considerable tact he turned the conversation into another channel, and soon he was confirmed in his opinion of her matrimonial feelings by seeing the face relax and the eyes soften. When Carberry came to take his wife away—which he did in a particularly gracious and smiling manner— Vale noted the Medusa-like transformation once more. When speaking to him Lucy's face had been full of change and colour and charm, when leaving with her husband it was a mask of stone, hard and colourless. Only the expression of the eyes betrayed how terrified was the soul hidden in that slender body. These things afforded Vale food for much reflection on his way home.

"I knew that Carberry was a brute," he mused, taking the most extreme view of the Professor's character. "He tyrannises over that poor little woman. She looked like a dove caught in a snare when her husband appeared. It is a case of joy abroad and grief at home I suspect; but a few enquiries will soon enlighten me on that point."

In this supposition he was wrong, for his few enquiries did nothing of the sort. To all the gossips of Camford he applied artfully for information and from all the gossips— on the best authority— he heard the same story. Professor Carberry was an amiable genius married to a brainless doll. He was the most delightful companion in the world, but he required a clever woman to understand and appreciate him; and Mrs. Carberry— by unanimous opinion— was not a clever women. She was pretty, in a washed-out way, she had a few social tricks like a well-bred poodle, and a feeble stream of parrot-like chatter. But brains? Where was Mr. Vale's talent for character-reading to look for brains in that Dresden china nonentity? On the whole the verdict of Camford womanhood was dead against Lucy.

JOHN, in his own mind, declined to accept this verdict as final. He saw that the Camford ladies grudged Lucy her acquisition of an eligible bachelor, and in revenge were determined to deny her possession of all feminine graces likely to account for the marriage. To learn the other side of the question Vale determined to use the invitation he had received from the Professor, and in pursuance of this idea he called forthwith on Mrs. Carberry. Again the mutual attraction declared itself between the pair, and they spent a most delightful hour together, notwithstanding the inconvenient presence of Carberry himself. In response to an appealing glance from Lucy— she did not dare to put her wish into words— John again repeated his visit. Ultimately, as controlled by some irresistible fate, the young man fell into the habit of passing the greater part of his spare time in the company of Mrs. Carberry. Busy bodies noted the fact, and informed the Professor, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and said that his wife liked to be amused. Nevertheless he thought sufficient of the hint to keep a close watch on the progress of this new acquaintanceship. It was at this point that Camford cynics suggested exchange of wife for mummy.

Ignorant of gossip and espionage the lovers— as they tacitly were— drifted into a knowledge that they could not live without one another. For a considerable time Lucy shrank from revealing her domestic misery, but finally she spoke out, and the indignation with which Vale received her confession drew them still closer together. Carberry made no attempt to end their friendship, but blinking like some sly beast of prey, he kept himself informed of all that was going on. At length the inevitable happened; a look too much, a sigh too long, and John declared his passion. Lucy listened, hesitated, and was lost.

How Carberry learned the actual truth— which at the present time was innocent enough— it is impossible to say. But learn it he did, and then cast about for some means whereby to punish the rebellion of his white slave and the presumption of her lover. The Spanish blood in his veins— his mother was from Catalonia— incited him to frenzy, and without considering that it was his

own brutality which had alienated his wife, he determined upon revenge, and that of the most merciless. To accomplish this he feigned ignorance of the stolen glances and secret interviews of the pair; yet he noted the former, and knew when, where, and at what time the latter took place. Indeed he was actually present at one in the role of eavesdropper; and, in accordance with the proverb, he heard little good of himself.

John was drinking afternoon tea with Lucy, and the short November twilight was drawing to night, so that the room was almost in darkness. Mrs. Carberry was seated before the small tea-table, and Vale, cup in hand, was leaning against the mantel-piece, while the fire diffused a coppery glow upon scene and actors. Hidden like a tiger in a jungle, Carberry crouched behind the half-closed folding door, which opened into the inner drawing-room, and drank in every word. He heard sufficient to convince him that as yet the relationship between the pair was one of ardent friendship merely; but the discovery that they were innocent of offence only added fuel to his wrath. Nor was this allayed by hearing what the two determined upon at the interview.

"I tell you what, Lucy," said John, enraged by the recital of fresh brutality, "you can't live any longer with this slave-driver. Come with me to London."

"But the world!" said Lucy, piteously.

"Never mind the world; it is of ourselves and of our happiness that we must think. As soon as you can get a divorce we will be married, and then we can defy the world. I am poor, it is true, but I have brains, and no doubt will be able to earn sufficient for our support. I love you— you love me; and you will be happier with me than with this reptile of a Carberry."

The listening reptile repaid with a silent curse this plain speaking, and settled himself more comfortably to listen. It was to his advantage to do so.

"We must arrange the matter at once," John was saying when the listener again caught the drift of the conversation. "You know how I love you, my poor darling. I cannot bear to think of your remaining in this wretch's power. Say 'yes,' and we will go to London this week."

"But Mr. Carberry will pursue us."

"What of that? I'm not afraid of the rat!" said John, with a contemptous memory of the Professor's stature. "A dozen Carberrys can't hurt me."

"I have no money!" objected Lucy. "Nor have you, John."

"I have a plan to get sufficient," said her lover, by this time on his knees. "Leave it all in my hands, dearest. You love me?"

"Better than all the world, darling."

"Then leave Carberry, and come with me."

"Oh, John! John!" She threw her arms round his neck. "You will never leave me, you will be good to me!"

"Always! always! I shall devote my life to making you happy!"

Then the pair fell to castle-building, and talking of a golden future, while Carberry crept away maddened with wrath and shame.

DETERMINED upon revenge, he saw as yet no mode to accomplish it befittingly. Ordering John Vale out of the house was too contemptible a means, beating Lucy had staled by repetition, and Carberry was as anxious to devise some new punishment sufficiently cruel, as Xerxes was to discover a new pleasure. Chance put a weapon into his hand the next day, when he received a letter from Vale offering to sell the mummy for two hundred pounds.

"So this is how the money is to be obtained," sneered Carberry, taking in the situation. "The kid is to be seethed in its mother's milk. I am to supply funds for my own dishonour. Very good! Vale has suggested a trap into which he will fall himself."

Undoubtedly, morally speaking, the Professor had right on his side. Vale had no business to take his wife off him, and to trap him into supplying funds for the purpose of the elopement. But morality must at times give way to the law of humanity. Carberry treated his wife like a brute, and— so cunning he was in his attitude— the wretched woman had no redress by law; indeed, she had not the spirit to apply for redress even if it had been obtainable. Vale could only rescue her from a state of bondage and misery by breaking the law of morality, and there was something grimly just in his obtaining money from the husband to save the wife from further brutality. Both Lucy and John were acting wrongly— but look at the provocation. The rule anent the casting of stones may be applied in this instance.

However, Carberry esteeming himself a wronged man, proceeded with his plans for revenge. He wrote a polite note to Vale, intimating that he would call with a cheque that evening, and would bring back with him the case containing the mummy. Upon receipt of this John saw Lucy, and arranged with her to leave for London the next day, meeting her at the railway station for that purpose. Carberry lurking in the garden overheard what was determined upon, and chuckled to think what might happen— should his plans prove successful— before the elopement took place. He even taunted and tortured his unhappy wife, whom he had driven into sin, by a reference to the sale of the mummy before he left to keep the seven o'clock appointment "I wonder why Vale sold me his mummy after all?" he said artfully.

"Perhaps he wants money," suggested Lucy, faintly.

"No doubt," said Carberry, grimly. "Do you know why?"

"I! no— no! how— how should I know?"

"Oh nothing! Only I thought that Vale told you everything. Well, I must go," added the Professor, going to the door. "It'll be back in an hour, mummy and all."

"In— in an hour?" murmured Lucy,

"Yes. I want you to see the mummy, my— my love. It is a wonderful example of embalming, and will probably surprise you."

Grinning like a monkey, yet with an undercurrent of ferocity, Carberry took his departure, leaving his wife in a half-fainting condition. She could not understand his endearing expressions, his gentle voice and significant smiles; they all seemed to be so many signals of danger. Of old she knew them as precursors to shameful treatment, and she shuddered to think of what she might undergo before she fled to the shelter of Vale's broad breast. Yet no idea of Carberry's intentions crossed her mind, and she was perfectly unaware that he was employed in checkmating Vale's plans. When she gained a knowledge of the truth, it was too late.

Outside it was raining heavily, and Mrs. Carberry walked restlessly about the room, listening to the downpour. Occasionally a flicker of blue lightening flared through the room, and a sullen roll of thunder passed over the house. The disturbance of the elements, the ominous behaviour of her tyrant, the expectation of the change in her life— all made Lucy uneasy, and she wished again and again that the morrow, with its hope of release, would come.

"Oh, John, John!" she whispered, with hands clasped to a beating heart, "I wish you were here— I wish we were away. I am afraid— afraid!— terribly afraid!"

She would have gone to bed had she dared, but the fear of punishment lay heavily upon her; so she sat by a dying fire, listening for the sound of footsteps through the storm. At nine she heard the door open, the trampling of many feet, and the bumping of a heavy case being dragged into Carberry's study. With a sudden start she woke to the fact that the mummy had arrived, that her vigil was over; and she went out to speak with her husband as he was paying and dismissing the men who had brought the case. Then they departed, the sound of wheels died heavily away, and Carberry looked steadily at his pale-faced wife. There was danger in his regard.

"May I go to bed now?" asked Lucy, submissively, keeping her eyes fixed on the floor.

"No. I wish you to see my new treasure," Something in his voice, hoarse and broken, made her look up, and she started back with a low cry.

The light of the candle he was holding revealed a white and distorted countenance; there was a frown on the forehead and a look of menace in the eyes, while the cruel expression lurking about the line of his thin lips terrified her into a shriek. At her ejaculation he gripped her savagely by the hand, and smiled grimly. It was not a pleasant smile.

"Why do you look so?" he demanded quietly. "Why do you cry out?"

"Your— your face!"

"Never mind my face, woman; mind your actions. If I wasn't in the best of tempers at getting that mummy I'd—" He raised his fist, but as she shrank away terrified, he dropped it again, and continued his speech. "I have paid a long price for what is in that case. Come and look at it!"

"The mummy! I don't like looking on such horrors."

"All the same, you must look," growled Carberry, pushing her into the study. "You'd rather look upon Vale, I suppose."

Lucy made no reply to this taunt, lest she should betray herself, but sat down and stared nervously at the rough deal case which leaned against the wall. Carberry was already unscrewing it, and the poor woman braced herself up to see the remains of the ancient Princess who had lived, and loved and sinned so many years ago. To get a good working light the Professor had placed a lamp on the near table, adjusting the shade so that the glare should fall directly upon the square face of the case. The rest of the room was in semi-darkness, and Lucy's emotions — which were those of nervous dread— were veiled by shadow. There was something grim and gruesome and terrible about the scene.

Suddenly the loosened lid of the case fell outward Carberry's feet; and the glare of the lamp revealed what lay within. It was not the mummy. Lucy rose slowly to her feet; and like a bird fascinated by a snake she moved slowly across the room. She looked at her husband, and again at the contents of the case. Then a whisper issued softly from out her pale lips.

"Dead?"

"Dead!" assented Carberry, cruelly. "Your lover John Vale. Dead!"

"You— you—"

"Yes I killed him. Ah! you jade, you and he thought to trick me. You laid your plans well, but I laid mine better. I knew that the money for which the mummy was sold was to be used for your flight. Do you think I took a cheque, or gold or notes in my pocket when I went to see John Vale this evening? No! I took a knife; and that knife," he pointed a lean finger at the wound in the dead man's breast, "that knife," he repeated, "found his false heart. There is no flight for him or you. To him a dishonoured grave; to me revenge; to you—"

He paused in his furious speech to listen to the laughter which was rippling from Lucy's lips. She smiled and laughed, and bent forward to kiss the cold lips of dead John Vale. At the repetition of this ghastly merriment Carberry laughed also.

"So!" said he, grimly, "your punishment has begun already. Your lover will go to the cemetery, you to an asylum. I'm sorry, my dear, I can't stay to take you there, but I must provide for my own safety. In half an hour I leave Camford station for London, and then— the world is before me. As for you," he added brutally, "Stay with your lover!"

Lucy again kissed the dead man, and when Carberry, leaving the room, cast a backward glance she was again laughing. Next morning the servants found Carberry absent; in the study a corpse, and a madwoman.

_____

4: The Scented Poppies

Dion Fortune
Violet Mary Firth, 1890-1946
The Royal Magazine September 1922
Collected in: *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner*, 1926

The author was an occultist and spiritualist, and her stories refledct that. Dr Taverner is an occult detective, and his "Dr Watson" is Dr Rhodes, a medical man.

"MR. GREGORY Polson," said Taverner, reading the card that had been brought to him. "Evidently a junior member of the firm. Lincoln's Inn is where they have their abode, so they are probably solicitors. Let us have a look at him."

A man's work generally puts its mark on him, and our visitor, although a comparatively young man, already showed the stamp of the legal profession.

"I want to consult you," he began, "about a very curious matter— I cannot call it a case. It seems to me, however, that you are the only man who can deal with it and therefore— although it may not be strictly in your line— I should be exceedingly grateful to you if you would look into it."

Taverner nodded his acquiescence, and our visitor took up the burden of his story.

"I daresay you have heard of old Benjamin Burmister, who made such an enormous fortune during the War? We— that is, my father's firm— are his solicitors and are also personal friends of the family, or, to be exact, his brothers' families, for old Mr. Burmister is unmarried. My sister and I have grown up with the two sets of Burmister cousins as if we were all one big household; in fact, my sister is at present engaged to one of David Burmister's boys— an awfully nice chap, my particular friend, in fact. We are very pleased about the engagement, for the Burmisters are nice people, although the other two brothers were not wealthy. Well, to make a long story short, after Edith and Tim had been engaged about six months, my people were a lot more pleased about the engagement (but I can't say that I am, however), for old Benjamin Burmister made a new will leaving his money to Tim."

"Why should you regard this as a disadvantage?"

"Because the people he has left his money to have an unfortunate knack of committing suicide."

"Indeed?"

"Yes," said our visitor, "it has happened upon no fewer than three occasions. The will I have just completed in favour of Tim is his fourth. Murray, Tim's eldest brother, who was the last one Mr. Burmister had chosen to be his heir, jumped off a cliff near Brighton about a month ago."

"You say that each time Mr. Burmister makes a will, the principal beneficiary commits suicide?" said Taverner. "Can you tell me the conditions of the will?"

"They are rather unfair in my opinion," said Gregory Polson. "Instead of dividing the money among his nephews and nieces, who are none too well off, he insists upon leaving the bulk of it to one nephew. His idea seems to be that he will found a kind of dynasty— he has already purchased the country seat— and that he will make one Burmister an influential man, instead of making about a dozen of them comfortable."

"I see," said Taverner, "and as soon as the will is made the principal beneficiary commits suicide."

"That is it," said Polson; "they have had three suicides in two years."

"Tut, tut," said Taverner, "as many as that? It certainly does not look like chance. Now who has benefited by these deaths?"

"Only the next heir, who speedily commits suicide himself."

"What determines your client in his choice of an heir?"

"He picks the nephew whom he thinks is most likely to do him credit."

"He does not follow any rule of birth?"

"None whatever. He chooses according to his estimate of their character, picking the more forceful natures first. Tim is a much quieter, more retiring kind of fellow than his cousins— I was rather surprised to see old Burmister's selection fall on him— but there is not much choice now; there are only three boys left after these ghastly tragedies."

"Then it is one of these three men who will ultimately benefit if another suicide takes place?"

"That is so. But one can hardly conceive a criminal cold blooded enough to kill off an entire family on the off-chance that the final choice might fall upon himself!"

"What manner of men are these three remaining cousins?"

"Henry is an engineer, doing quite well and engaged to be married. He will never set the Thames on fire, but he is a decent chap. He is Tim's younger brother. Bob, Tim's cousin, is a bit of a ne'er-do-well. We have had to extricate him from a breach of promise and one or two other unpleasantness, but I should say he was a good-hearted, irresponsible lad, his own worst enemy. The last of the family is Irving, Bob's brother, a harmless enough chap, but not fond of honest work. Joseph Burmister's boys never did as well as David's; they inclined to the artistic rather than the practical, and that type never makes money.

"Joseph's wife, however, had a fair amount, and each of her children has about a hundred and fifty a year of his own; not affluence, but it keeps them out of the workhouse. Bob does odds and ends to supplement his means; he is secretary of a Golf Club at present, but Irving is the family genius and has set out

to be an artist, though I don't think he has ever produced anything. His sole occupation, so far as I know, is to write a monthly art criticism for a paper that thinks publicity is sufficient payment."

"He will not get very fat at that rate," said Taverner. "How does he manage to exist on his hundred and fifty?"

"He lives in a single room studio and eats out of a frying pan. It is not so unattractive as it sounds, however; he has extraordinarily good taste, and has got his little place quite charming."

"So these are the people who might possibly benefit under the will— a steady-going engineer, a good-natured scatterbrain, and an artistic Bohemian."

"There were originally seven possible beneficiaries, providing old Benjamin adhered to his policy. Three are dead by their own hand, one is at present under sentence of death— "

"What do you mean by that?" interrupted Taverner quickly.

"Ah!" said Polson, "that is the thing that gave me a nasty turn, and made me come to you. The three men who are dead all committed suicide in the same way by flinging themselves from a height. Tim was in my office yesterday; our chambers are at the top of the building, a considerable height up. He leant out of the window for quite a while, and when I asked him what he was looking at he said: `I wonder what it would feel like to take a header on to the pavement.' I told him to come in and not play the fool but it gave me a nasty shock, coming on top of the other suicides, so I came to you."

"Why to me?" asked Taverner.

"I have read something of occultism and something of psychology and heard how you work the two systems in combination," said Polson, "and it seemed to me that this was a case for you"

"There is more in this than you have told me," said Taverner. "What is it that you suspect?"

"I have no evidence whatever; in fact, it is the lack of evidence that has made me seek an explanation outside the normal. Why should these men, perfectly healthy average individuals, take their own lives for no reason whatsoever? One cannot account for it on any of the accepted theories, but if one admits the feasibility of thought transference, and pretty nearly everybody does nowadays, then it seems to me that it would be possible to give mental suggestion to these men to commit suicide."

"It is not only possible," said Taverner, "but in less extreme forms this exercise of secret pressure is exceedingly common. I could tell you some curious stories in connection with the Great War in this line. Not all the men who were 'got at' were reached through their pockets; many were approached by the channel of their subconscious minds. But continue. There is someone whom you are watching, subconsciously, if not consciously?"

"I have given you all the facts that could possibly be admitted as evidence. I haven't got a clue that would hang a cat, but I suspect Irving."

"On what grounds?"

"On none whatever; chiefly on the principle of 'I do not like you, Dr. Fell.'"

"Give me your unbowdlerized impressions of him."

"He is not straight, sir. I have never once caught him out, but I should never trust him. Then he is in with a set I don't like the look of: they play about with hashish and cocaine and each other's wives. They are not wholesome. I prefer Bob's wildcat company promoters to Irving's longhaired soul-mates.

"Thirdly, Irving is the last one old Benjamin would be likely to leave his money to. I think he would leave it to Irving before he left it outside the family, for he is terribly proud of the Burmister name, but he is not at all fond of the fellow. They never got on together; Benjamin is a rough, downright old chap, and Irving is a bit of an old maid. Fourthly, if you knew Bob and Henry, you would know that it was out of the question that they should do such a thing, but Irving might— when a man fools with drugs he may do anything. Besides, he has read along the same lines as I have; in fact it was he who first put me on to them."

"Have you any reason to believe that Irving is a trained occultist?"

"He is interested in occultism, but I should not imagine that he would ever train in anything; he is nothing but a dabbler."

"Then he is not very likely to be able to perform a mental assassination. Thought transference requires more effort than swinging a sledge hammer. If you are ever offered your choice between being an occultist and a blacksmith, choose the lighter job and enter the forge rather than the Lodge.

"Well, you suspect Irving? As you say, there is no evidence to hang a cat, but we will put him through the sieve and see what he yields Did he become very intimate with old Mr. Burmister's heirs after the wills became known?"

"No more so than usual, they are a united family and always saw a lot of each other The only thing that Irving ever did that was out of the ordinary was to decorate their rooms for them— he has a wonderful taste in colouring— but then he did that for a good many of us, and designed the girl's dresses, too. He is an extraordinary chap, who makes a hobby of that sort of thing; he knows all the out-of-the-way shops where you can get queer brands of coffee and cigarettes, and restaurants where you can get weird food. It has always seemed to me the sort of thing for a woman rather than a man to be interested in."

"Ah!" said Taverner, "he designed their rooms. Now that is a peculiarly intimate thing to do— the man who designs the place you live in can exercise a great influence over your life if he knows how to make use of his opportunities. But before we go any further afield, try and think if there was anything of any sort that the dead men had in common and the living ones have not got, any

mode of life, possession, peculiarity— anything in fact, that differentiated them."

Polson racked his brains for several minutes

"The only thing I can possibly think of," he said at length, "is a particular kind of scent that Irving manages to get hold of and gives to his particular friends He makes a great mystery of it, but then he loves making mysteries about nothing in particular; it makes him feel important."

"Come now," said Taverner, "we have struck a warm trail at last. The psychological effect of scents is very great; what has our friend been playing at with his mysterious smells?"

"I don't know," said Polson; "he probably gets it at the Stores. He had some wonderful tea once that was supposed to come direct from Lhassa, and we found a Lyons' label round it. He is that sort of chap."

"But what about this scent? Did he give it to each of the dead men and to none other?"

"He used to give it to his particular pals as a special favour. His great wheeze was to get those big poppy heads the chemists sell for making poultices, paint them all sorts of Futurist colours, stuff them with potpourri and fix them on the end of strips of pliable cane. They really look very well in a vase, like great gaudy flowers. He gave me a bunch once, but I wasn't honoured with the sacred perfume that he has in his own quarters; but Percy (one of the boys who was dead) had some, and he has given Tim a bunch. I am not sure whether they are scented or not."

"Then the best thing you can do is to go round to your cousin, get hold of those poppy heads, and bring them to me to have a look at."

Polson sallied forth on his mission, and as the door closed behind him, Taverner turned to me.

"You see," he said, "the advantage of intuition. Poison had nothing whatever to go on, but he instinctively distrusted Irving; when he begins to suspect foul play, he proceeds to countercheck his intuitions by observation, which is a peculiarly effective method of work, for you will see how the use of the intuition is able to point out a profitable line of observation and, by means of the subtlest and most elusive of subjective clues, lead us to what promises to be solid ground. We must see what evidence the poppy heads yield, however, before we begin to theorize. There is nothing so misleading as a preconceived opinion; one is very apt to twist the facts to fit it."

We went on to other cases, and had got to the end of our appointments when the butler informed us that Mr. Polson had returned and would like to see us again. He was ushered in, bearing a long parcel in his hand, his eyes bright with excitement.

"Tim has been given the special scent," he cried as soon as he was inside the door.

"How did you manage to obtain possession of the poppy heads? Did you tell him why you wanted them?"

"I told him I wanted to show them to a friend. It was no use worrying him until we have something definite to go on, or he might commit suicide by sheer autosuggestion."

"Wise man!" said Taverner. "You have read to some purpose."

Poison unrolled his parcel, and laid half-a-dozen gorgeously-colored poppy heads on the desk. They looked like wonderful tropical fruit, and certainly formed an acceptable present. Taverner examined them one by one. Five of them yielded nothing to his probing save a shower of fine black seeds, but the sixth exhaled a curious heavy perfume, and rattled when shaken.

This poppy head," said Taverner, "is going to meet with an accident," and he crashed a paper weight down on it. Out on the blotter rolled three or four objects that looked like dried raisins, and most curious of all— a fair sized moonstone.

At the sight of this we exclaimed as one man. Why should anyone place a gem worth several pounds in the inside of a poppyhead where it was never likely to be seen? Taverner turned over the black objects with his pencil.

"Scented seeds of some sort," he remarked and handed them to me. "Smell them, Rhodes."

I took them in my hand and sniffed them gingerly. "Not bad," I said, "but they are slightly irritating to the mucous membrane; they make me feel as if I were going to sneeze, only instead of the sneeze coming to anything, the irritation seems to run up into my head and cause a peculiar sensation as if a draught of cold air was blowing on my forehead."

"So they stir up the pineal gland, do they?" said Taverner. "I think I can see some method in the gentleman's madness. Now take the moonstone in your other hand, go on sniffing the seeds, look at the moonstone, and tell me the thoughts that come into your head, just as if you were being psychoanalysed."

I did as I was instructed.

"I think of soapy water," I began. "I think my hands would be improved by a wash. I think of a necklace of my mother's. I think this stone would be very hard to find if I dropped it out of the window. I wonder what it would be like to be thrown out of the window. I wonder what it would feel like to be thrown from a height? Does one—?"

"That will do," said Taverner, and took the moonstone away from me. I looked up in surprise, and saw that Polson had buried his face in his hands.

"My God!" he said. "And I used to play with that boy!" I looked from one to the other of my companions in surprise.

"What does it all mean?" I asked.

"It means this," said Taverner. "Someone has hit upon a singularly ingenious way of bottling psychism. A man who is incapable, by reason of his lack of development, of doing mental work on his own account, has found a way of buying occultism by the ounce. There must be a factory where they are turning out this precious product, and where an unscrupulous scoundrel like Irving can go and buy two-penn'orth and bring it away in a paper bag."

I had always understood that occult work could only be done by men of unusual natural gifts who had devoted long years to their development, and this idea of taking your turn at the counter and buying the hidden powers like acid drops tickled my fancy. It was only the expression on Polson's face that prevented me from bursting out laughing. But I saw what deadly possibilities were latent in the plan that Taverner had outlined so grotesquely.

"There is nothing original in this scheme," said Taverner. "It is simply the commercial application of certain natural laws that are known to occultists. I have always told you that there is nothing supernatural about occult science; it is merely a branch of knowledge that has not been generally taken up, and which has this peculiarity, that its professors do not hasten to publish their results. This exceedingly clever trick of the moonstone and the scented seeds is simply an application of certain occult knowledge for the purpose of crime."

"Do you mean," said Poison, "that there is some sort of mental poison inside that poppy head? I can understand that the smell of those seeds might affect the brain, but what part does the moonstone play?"

"The moonstone is tuned to a keynote, and that keynote is suicide," said Taverner. "Someone— not Irving, he hasn't got the brains— has made a very clear mental picture of committing suicide by flinging oneself from a height, and has impressed that picture (I won't tell you how) on that moonstone, so that anyone who is in close contact with it finds the same image rise into his mind, just as a depressed person can infect others with depression without speaking one single word to them."

"But how can an inanimate object be capable of feeling emotion?" I inquired.

"It couldn't," said Taverner, "but is there such a thing as an inanimate object? Occult science teaches that there is not. It is one of our maxims that mind is entranced in the mineral, sleeps in the plant, dreams in the animal and wakes in the man. You have only to watch a sweet-pea tendril reach out for a support to realize that the movements of plants are anything but purposeless, and the work connected with the fatigue of metals is well known Ask your barber if his razors ever get tired, and he will tell you that he rests them regularly, because fatigued steel will not take a fine edge."

"Granted," I said. "But do you mean to tell me that there is sufficient consciousness in that bit of stone to be capable of taking in an idea and transmitting it to someone's subconscious mind?"

"I do," said Taverner. "A crystal is the highest development of the mineral kingdom, and there is quite enough mind in that stone on the table to take on a certain amount of character if a sufficiently strong influence be brought to bear upon it. Remember the history of the Hope diamond and various other well-known gems whose records are known to collectors. It is this mental development of crystals which is taken advantage of in the making of talismans and amulets for which the precious stones, and next to them the precious metals, have been used from time immemorial. This moonstone is simply an amulet of evil."

"Taverner," I said, "you don't mean to tell me that you believe in charms?"

"Certainly! Don't you?"

"Good Heavens, no, not in this enlightened age!"

"My dear boy, if you find a belief universally held throughout all ages by races that have had no communication with each other, then you may be sure that there is something in it."

"Then to put it crudely," said Polson, who had hitherto stared at Taverner in silence, "you believe that someone has taught this moonstone how to give hypnotic suggestion?"

"Crudely, yes," replied Taverner, "just as middle C struck on a piano will cause the C string of another piano to vibrate in sympathy."

"How does the moonstone manage the hypnosis?" I inquired, not without malice, I am afraid.

"Ah, it has to have help with that," said Taverner. "That is where those scented seeds come in, and a more diabolically ingenious device it would be hard to find.

"Everybody is not psychic, so some means had to be devised of inducing at least temporary sensitiveness in the stolid, matter-of-fact Burmisters against whom this device was directed. As even you will admit, Rhodes, there are certain drugs that are capable of changing the condition and state of consciousness— alcohol for one, chloroform for another.

"In the East, where they know a great deal more about these things than we do, a careful study has been made of the drugs that will induce the change, and they are acquainted with many substances which the British Pharmacopoedia knows nothing about. There is a considerable number of drugs which are capable of producing, at least temporarily, a state of clairvoyance, and those black seeds are among the number. I don't know what they are— they are unfamiliar to me— but I shall try and find out, as they cannot be common, and

we may then be able to trace their origin and get this devil's workshop shut down."

"Then," said Polson, "you think someone has imprinted an idea on the soul of that moonstone so that anyone who was sensitive would be influenced by it, and then added the seeds to his fiendish potpourri so as to drug an ordinary person into abnormal sensitiveness and make him susceptible to the influences of the moonstone?"

"Exactly!"

"And some devil manufactures these things and then sells them to dangerous fools like Irving?"

"That is my opinion."

"Then he ought to be hanged!"

"I disagree with you."

"You would let such a cold-blooded brute go unpunished?"

"No, I would not, but I would make the punishment fit the crime. Occult offences are always dealt with by occult means. There are more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream."

"It has not taken you long to dispose of that case," I remarked to Taverner as Polson withdrew, profuse in his thanks.

"If you think that is the end," said my colleague, "you are very much mistaken; Irving will certainly have another try, and equally certainly, I shall not let the matter rest."

"You will only get abused if you go to the police station" I told him. "If you think that twelve British grocers in a jury box would hang Irving you are very much mistaken; they would probably ask the court missionary to visit you and see if he couldn't get your family to do something for you."

"I know all that," said Taverner. "It is quite useless to go to law in a case of occult attack, but there is such a thing as the psychic police, you know. The members of all regularly organized Lodges are bound by their oath either to take up themselves or report to their fraternity any case of mental malpractice that comes within their knowledge, and we have our own way of doing justice."

"Do you intend to give Irving a dose of counter-suggestion"

"No, I won't do that. We are not absolutely certain that he is guilty, though it looks suspiciously like it. I shall deal with him by another method, which, if he is innocent, will leave him scatheless, and if he is guilty will be singularly appropriate to his crime. The first thing, however, is to get in touch with our man without arousing his suspicions. How would you go to work, Rhodes?"

"Get Poison to introduce me," I said.

"Poison and Irving are not on any too good terms; moreover, I have the misfortune to have a certain amount of fame, and Irving will smell a rat the minute I appear in the case. Try again."

I hazarded several suggestions, from giving him a commission to paint poppyheads to falling in a fit at his feet as he issued from his studio. All of these Taverner vetoed as leaving too much to chance and likely to rouse his suspicions and prevent the possibility of a second attempt to corner him if the first failed.

"You must work along the line of his interests, and then he will fall into your hand like a ripe pear. What is the use of reading psychology if you never use it? I will bet you that before a week is out I shall have Irving begging me, as an enormous favour, to execute justice on him."

"How do you propose to go to work?" I asked.

Taverner rolled the seeds over thoughtfully with a pencil. "These things cannot be too common; I will find out first what they are and where he got them. Come along with me to Bond Street; there is a man in a perfumer's there who will probably be able to tell me what I want to know."

We were not long in arriving at our destination, and then I saw that curious little by-play that I had often witnessed when Taverner was in need of assistance. A man in a dirty white laboratory coat, who obviously did not know Taverner from Adam, was summoned from the back of the shop, my companion made a sign with his left hand that would have passed unobserved if one had not known what to look for, and immediately the attitude of our new acquaintance changed. We were led behind the counter into a room that was half laboratory, half store room, and there, amid a litter of chemical appliances, gaudy wrappers, hampers of herbs smelling up to high heaven, and the remains of a meal, the mysterious seeds were spread out for investigation.

"It is one of the Dipteryx," said the man in the white coat, "the same family as the Tonquin Bean; Dipteryx Irritans is its name. It is sometimes used for adulterating the true Tonquin bean when imported in powder form. Of course a small amount cannot be detected by any chemical tests, but you would not care to have a sachet of it among your handkerchiefs; it would give you a form of hay fever, and affect your eyesight."

"Is it imported into this country much?"

"Never, save as an adulterant, and then only in powder form. It has no commercial value— you could not buy it here if you tried, in fact you could not buy it in Madagascar (where it comes from), because no scent merchant would own to having any on his premises. You would have to collect it yourself from the wild vines."

"What trade paper do you scent-makers affect?"

"We have not got one of our own, but you could get at the scent trade through the druggists' journals."

Taverner thanked him for his information, and we returned to Harley Street, where Taverner busied himself in drawing up an advertisement to the effect

that a Mr. Trotter had a parcel of Dipteryx Irritans to dispose of and solicited offers.

About a week later we received, via the journal's office, a letter to say that a Mr. Minski, of Chelsea, was prepared to do business with us if we would furnish him with a sample and state our lowest price. Taverner chuckled when he received this epistle.

"The fish bites, Rhodes," he said. "We will proceed to call upon Mr. Minski forthwith."

I nodded my acquiescence and reached for my hat.

"Not in these clothes, Rhodes," said my colleague. "Mr. Minski would put up the shutters if he saw a top hat approaching. Let me see what I can find in my vanity bag."

His "vanity bag" was the name by which Taverner designated an old suit case that held certain disreputable garments that served him as disguise when he did not wish to obtrude his Harley Street personality upon an unappreciative world. In a few minutes I was denuded of my usual panoply, and was invested in a seedy brown suit of pseudo-smart cut; black boots that had once been brown, and a Trilby hat completed my discomfort, and Taverner, resplendent in a greenish frock coat and moth-eaten top hat, informed me that if it were not for my ruby tie-pin (which came out of a cracker) he would not altogether care to be seen out with me!

We took a bus to Victoria Station, and thence, via the King's Road, to our destination in an obscure side street. Mr. Minski's shop proved to be something of a surprise— we had thought to interview a man of the "old do" dealer type, but we found that the shop we sought had some pretensions. A collection of Ruskin pottery and Futurist draperies graced the window, studio-made jewelry of the semiprecious persuasion hung in a case by the door, and Mr. Minski, in a brown velvet coat and tie like a miniature sash, made Taverner look as if he had called for the washing!

My colleague placed a forefinger, carefully begrimed at the consulting room grate, upon the velveteen coat of the owner of the shop. "You are the gentleman who wants to buy the Tonquin beans?" he inquired.

"I don't want any Tonquin beans, my good man," said that worthy impatiently. "I understood your advertisement to say that you had a parcel of Dipteryx Irritans to dispose of. The Tonquin bean belongs to a different genus, Dipteryx Odorata. I can get that anywhere, but if you are able to obtain the Irritans bean for me, we may be able to do business."

Taverner closed one eye in a revolting wink. "You know what you are talking about, young fellow," he informed the velveteen individual. "Now, are you buyin' these beans for yourself, or on commish?"

"What has that got to do with you?" demanded Mr. Minski haughtily.

"Oh, nothing," said Taverner, looking more rag-and-bony than ever, "only I prefer to do business with principals, and I always give ten per cent for introduction."

Minski opened his eyes at this, and I saw that what Taverner had guessed was probably true— Minski was buying on behalf of someone else, who might or might not be Irving. I also saw that he would not be above accepting a commission from both parties to the transaction. He had evidently been bidden to conceal the identity of his client, however, and was wondering how far he dared exceed his instructions. Finally he said: "Since you refuse to deal with me, I will communicate with my customer and see whether he is prepared to buy from you direct. Come back on Wednesday at the same time, and I will let you know."

We returned to civilization and put off the garments of our humiliation until the appointed time came round, when, dressed once more in the uniform of the shabby genteel, we returned to the shop of Mr. Minski. As we entered, we saw a man seated on a kind of divan in the corner, smoking a scented cigarette. He was, I should say, thirty-one or two years of age, sallow and unwholesome of complexion, with the pupils of his eyes unnaturally dilated; the way in which he lay back among the cushions showed that his vitality was low, and the slight tremor of the nicotine-stained fingers pointed to the cause.

Taverner, even in his shabby garments, was an imposing figure, and the man on the divan stared at him in astonishment. "You wish to purchase the Irritans variety of the Tonquin bean?" said my companion.

The man nodded, without removing the cigarette from his lips, continuing to stare at Taverner, who was adopting quite a different tone towards him from that which he had used towards Minski.

"The Irritans bean is not generally used in commerce," Taverner went on. "May I inquire for what purpose you require it?"

"That is no concern of yours," replied the man with the cigarette.

"I ask your pardon," said Taverner, "but this bean possesses certain properties not generally known outside the East, where it is raised at its true value, and I wondered whether you wished to avail yourself of these properties, for some of the beans which I hold were prepared with that end in view."

"I should very much like to!" The unnaturally bright eyes became even brighter with the speaker's eagerness.

"Are you by any chance one of us?" Taverner dropped his voice to a conspirator's whisper.

The bright eyes glowed like lamps. "I am exceedingly interested in these matters."

"They are subjects worthy of interest," said Taverner; "but this is a child's way of development." And he carelessly opened his hand, showing the black

seeds which had come from the poppy, which served him as his pretended sample.

The cigarette came out of the languid mouth now. "Do you mean that you know something about Kundalini?"

"The Sacred Serpent Fire?" said Taverner. "Of course I am acquainted with its properties, but I do not make use of it personally. I regard its action as too drastic; it is apt to unhinge the mind that is not prepared for it. I always use the ritual method myself."

"Do you— er— undertake the training of students?" cried our new acquaintance, nearly beside himself with eagerness.

"I do occasionally, if I find a suitable type," said Taverner, absent-mindedly playing catch with the black seeds.

"I am exceedingly interested in this matter," said the man on the divan. "Would you consider me a suitable type? I am certain that I am psychic. I often see the most peculiar things."

Taverner considered him for a long moment, while he hung upon the verdict.

"It would be a small matter to put you in possession of astral vision."

Our new acquaintance sprang to his feet. "Come round to my studio." he cried; "we can talk things over quietly there. You have, I presume, a fee? I am not a rich man, but the labourer is worthy of his hire, and I would be quite willing to remunerate you for your trouble."

"My fee is five guineas," said Taverner, with an expression worthy of Uriah Heep.

The man with the scented cigarette gave a little gasp of relief; I am sure that if Taverner had added on a nought he would have paid it. We adjourned to his studio— a large, well-lit room decorated with a most bizarre mixture of colours. A couch, which probably served as a bed by night, stood at an angle in front of the fireplace; from the far corner of the room issued that indescribable odour which cannot be avoided where food is stored— a blend of bacon rind and coffee floated towards us, and the drip of some hidden tap proclaimed our host's washing accommodation.

Taverner bade him lie down on the couch, and producing a packet of dark powder from his pocket, shook some grains into a brass incense burner which stood on the mantelpiece. The heavy fumes drifted across the studio, overwhelming the domestic odours from the corner, and made me think of joss-houses and the strange rituals that propitiated hideous gods.

Except for the incense, Taverner was proceeding as in ordinary hypnotic treatment, a process with which my medical experience had rendered me familiar, and I watched the man on the couch pass rapidly into a state of deep hypnosis, and thence into a relaxed condition with almost complete cessation of

the vital functions, a level to which very few hypnotists either can or dare reduce a subject. Then Taverner set to work upon one of the great centres of the body where a network of nerves converge. What his method was I could not clearly see, for his back was towards me, but it did not take many minutes, and then, with a series of swift hypnotic passes, he drew his victim back to normal consciousness.

Half dazed, the man sat up on the couch, blinking stupidly at the light; the whole process had occupied some twenty minutes, and he showed pretty plainly that he did not consider he had had his money's worth, counting out the notes to Taverner without any too good a grace.

Taverner, however, showed no disposition to go, lingering in talk, and as I noticed, watching his man closely. The latter seemed fidgety and, as we made no move, he finally said: "Excuse me, I believe there is someone at the door," and crossing the studio, quickly opened it and looked outside. Nothing but an empty passage rewarded his gaze. He returned and renewed his conversation with Taverner, but with a divided attention, from time to time glancing over his shoulder uneasily.

Then suddenly interrupting my colleague in the middle of a sentence, he said: "I am certain there is someone in the room; I have a most peculiar feeling, as if I were being watched," and he whipped aside a heavy curtain that hung across an alcove— but there was nothing but brooms and brushes behind it. Across he went to the other corner and opened a cupboard, then looked under the bed and proceeded to a systematic search of the whole studio, looking into hiding places that could barely have concealed a child. Finally, he returned to us, whose presence he seemed to have forgotten, so absorbed was he in his search.

"It is most peculiar," he said. "But I cannot get away from the feeling that I am being watched, as if some evil presence were lurking in the room waiting for my back to be turned."

Suddenly he looked upward. "What are those extraordinary balls of light moving about the ceiling?" he exclaimed.

Taverner plucked me by the sleeve. "Come along," he said, "it is time for us to be going. Irving's little friends won't be pleasant company."

We left him stock still in the centre of the room, following with his eyes the invisible object that was slowly working its way down the wall. What would happen when it reached the floor I did not inquire.

Out in the street I heaved a sigh of relief. There was something about that studio which was distinctly unpleasant. "What in the world have you done to the man?" I asked my companion.

"What I agreed to do— give him clairvoyance," replied Taverner.

"How is that going to punish him for the atrocities he has committed?"

"We don't know that he has committed any atrocities," said Taverner blandly.

"Then what are you driving at?"

"Just this. When a man gets the Sight, one of the first things he sees is his naked soul, and if that man was the one we think he is, it will probably be the last, for the soul that perpetrated those cold-blooded murders will not bear looking at. If, on the other hand, he is just an ordinary individual, neither strikingly good nor bad, then he will be the richer for an interesting experience."

Suddenly, from somewhere over our heads, a bloodcurdling yell rang out into the gathering dusk. It had that quality of terror which infects with panic all those who hear it, for other passers-by as well as ourselves stopped dead at the sound. A door slammed somewhere in the great echoing building we had just vacated, and then running footsteps passed rapidly down the road in the direction of the river.

"Good Lord!" I said, "he will go over the Embankment," and was startled into pursuit when Taverner laid a restraining hand on my arm.

"That is his affair, not ours," he said. "And any way, I doubt if he will face death when it comes to the point; death can be singularly nasty, you know."

He was right, for the running footsteps returned down the street, and the man we had just left passed us, flying blindly towards the flaring lights and human herd of the roaring Fulham Road.

"What is it he saw?" I demanded of Taverner, cold shivers chasing each other down my spine. I am not easily scared by anything I can see, but I frankly admit I fear the thing I cannot.

"He has met the Guardian of the Threshold," said Taverner, and his mouth snapped shut. But I had no wish to press the inquiry further; I had seen Irving's face as he passed us, and it told me all I needed to know of the nature of that strange Dweller in outer darkness.

Taverner paused to push the wad of notes in his hand into the collecting box of the Cancer Hospital.

"Rhodes," he said, "would you prefer to die and be done with, or to spend all your life in fear of death?"

"I would sooner die ten times over," I replied.

"So would I," said Taverner. "A life sentence is worse than a death sentence."

_____

5: The Burgomaster in a Bottle

Erckmann-Chatrian

É. Erckmann, 1822–1899, & A. Chatrian, 1826–1890

The Aldine 1 Sept 1873

The Aldine was a monthly arts magazine published in New York from 1868-1879

I HAVE ALWAYS PROFESSED a high esteem and even a sort of veneration for the noble wine of the Rhine: it sparkles like Champagne; it warms like Burgundy; it assuages the throat like Bordeaux; it inflames the imagination like the liqueurs of Spain; it renders us terfder like Lachryma-Christi; in fine, more than any wine, it makes us dream, it unrolls before our eyes the vast field of fancy.

In 1846, toward the end of autumn, I decided to make a pilgrimage to Johannisberg. Mounted upon a poor jade, with hollow flanks, I had disposed two tin jugs in his vast intercostal cavities, and I traveled by short day's journeys.

What a charming sight is the vintage! One of my jugs was always empty, the other always full; when I quitted one side, there was always another in perspective. My sole grief was at not being able to partake this pleasure with a true appreciator.

One evening, at night-fall, the sun had just disappeared, but he still darted some wandering rays among the large vine leaves. I heard a horse's trot behind me. I backed gently to the left to give him room to pass, and to my great surprise, I recognized my friend Hippel, who made a joyful exclamation as soon as he perceived me.

You know Hippel, his fleshy nose, his peculiar mouth for tasting, his triple paunch. He resembles the good Silenus pursuing the god Bacchus. We embraced each other with delight.

Hippel was traveling for the same purpose as myself: a distinguished amateur, he wished to fix his opinion upon the shade of certain slopes, about which he had always been somewhat doubtful. We went on in company.

Hippel was very merry; he traced our itinerary in the vineyards of the Rhingau. Sometimes we made a halt to give the accolade to our jugs and to listen to the silence which reigned far and near.

Night was quite advanced when we arrived before a little inn, squatted on the declivity of a hill. We alighted. Hippel cast a glance through a little window nearly on a level with the ground. Upon a table a lamp burned; by the side of the lamp an old woman slept.

"Hullo! " cried my comrade; "open the door."

The old woman started up, rose, and approaching the window, she glued her shriveled face against one of the panes. You would have said she was one of those old Flemish portraits where ochre and bistre dispute for precedence.

When the old sibyl had distinguished us, she grimaced a smile and opened the door for us.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," said she in a quavering voice; "I'll go and wake my son; you are welcome."

"A peck for our horses, a good supper for us," cried Hippel.

"Yes, yes," said the old woman, eagerly.

She went out with short steps, and we heard her going up a staircase steeper than Jacob's ladder.

We rested a few minutes in a low, smoky room. Hippel ran into the kitchen, and came back to tell me that he had proved the presence of several sides of bacon in the chimney.

"We shall sup," said he, "we shall sup."

The boards over our heads creaked, and almost immediately a vigorous fellow, dressed in trowsers simply, his chest bare, his hair disordered, opened the door, made four steps, and went out without saying one word to us.

The old woman lighted the fire, and soon the butter began to sputter in the frying-pan.

The supper was served. They put upon the table a ham flanked with two bottles, one of white wine, the other of red.

"Which do you prefer?" asked the hostess.

"I must see," replied Hippel, presenting his glass to the old woman, who poured him out some red wine.

She filled mine also. We tasted: it was a rough and strong wine. It had, I scarcely know what particular taste, a perfume of vervain, of cypress! I drank a few drops of it, and a deep sadness over spread my soul. Hippel, on the contrary, smacked his lips with a satisfied air.

"Famous! " said he, "famous! Where do you get this, good mother?"

"From a neighboring slope," said the old woman, with a strange smile.

"Famous slope," replied Hippel, pouring down a new bumper.

It seemed to me he was drinking blood.

"What a devil of a face you are making, Ludwig," said he to me. "Is anything the matter with you?"

"No," replied I, "but I don't like the red wine."

"There is no good in disputing tastes," observed Hippel, emptying the bottle and striking it on the table.

"The same," cried he, "always the same, and above all, no mixture, lovely hostess! I am acquainted with it now. *Morbleu*! this wine reanimates me; it is a generous wine."

Hippel threw himself back in his chair. His face appeared to me changing. In one single draught I emptied the bottle of white wine, and then joy returned to

my heart. My friend's preference for the red wine appeared ridiculous to me, but excusable.

We continued to drink until one o'clock in the morning; he the red, I the white.

One o'clock in the morning! It is Madame Fancy's audience hour! The caprices of imagination spread out their diaphanous robes, embroidered with crystal and azure, like those of the fly, the beetle, the lady of the sleeping waters.

One o'clock! Then the celestial music tickles the ear of the dreamer and breathes in his soul the harmony of invisible spheres. Then the mouse runs, then the screech-owl unfolds his downy wings and passes silently over our heads.

"One o'clock," said I to my comrade; "we must take some repose, if we wish to go to-morrow."

Hippel arose unsteadily.

The old woman conducted us to a room with two beds and wished us a good sleep.

We undressed; I remained the last to put out the light. I had scarcely got into bed when Hippel slept profoundly; his respiration resembled the blast of the tempest.

I could not close my eyes; a thousand bizarre faces were hopping around me; the gnomes, the imps, the sorcerers of Walptirgis executed their cabalistic dance on the ceiling. Singular effect of the white wine!

I got up, I lit my lamp, and, attracted by an invincible curiosity, I approached Hippel's bed. His face was red, his mouth half open, the blood was beating in his temples, his lips moved as though he wished to speak. I stayed a long time motionless by him; I would have wished to look into the depths of his soul, but sleep is an impenetrable mystery; like death, it guards its secrets.

Sometimes Hippel's face expressed terror, sometimes sadness, sometimes melancholy; at times it contracted; you would have said he was going to weep.

This good face, made for bursts of laughter, had a strange character under the impression of grief.

What was passing in the depth of this abyss? I saw some waves coming to the surface, but whence came these profound commotions? Suddenly the sleeper rose, his eyelids were open, and I saw that his eyes were blank; all the muscles of his face started, his mouth seemed to wish to utter a cry of horror—then he fell back again, and I heard a sob.

"Hippel! Hippel! " I cried, pouring a jug of water over his head.

He awoke.

"Ah!" said he, "God be praised, it was a dream! My dear Ludwig, I thank you for having waked me."

"That is all right, but you are going to tell me what you were dreaming."

"Yes — to-morrow — let me sleep — I am sleepy."

"Hippel, you are ungrateful; to-morrow you will have forgotten all."

"*Cordieu*! " replied he, "I am sleepy — I can't keep awake — leave me — leave me! "

I would not loose my hold.

"Hippel, you will fall back into your dream, and this time I shall abandon you without mercy."

These words produced an admirable effect.

"Fall into my dream again!" cried he, jumping out of the bed. "My clothes, quick! my horse! I go! This house is cursed. You are right, Ludwig; the devil lives between these walls — let us go now."

He dressed himself with precipitation. When he had finished, I stopped him.

"Hippel," said I to him, "why go away? It is only three o'clock in the morning — let us rest."

I opened a window, and the fresh night air, penetrating the chamber, dissipated all his fears.

Leaning on the edge of the casement, he recounted to me what follows:

"We spoke yesterday of the most famous vineyards of the Rhingau," said he to me. "Although I have never gone over this country, my mind is preoccupied with it, doubtless, and the coarse wine which we drank has given a sombre color to my ideas. The most astonishing thing is, that I imagined in my dream that I was the burgomaster of Welche (a neighboring village), and I identified myself so with this person, that I could give you a description of him as of myself. This burgomaster was a man of medium size and nearly as fat as I am. He wore a coat with large skirts and brass buttons; there was another row of small buttons with nail-heads the whole length of his legs. A three-cornered hat ornamented his bald head; in fine, he was a man of stupid gravity, drinking nothing but water, esteeming nothing but money, and thinking only of extending his property.

"As I had taken the burgomaster's coat, I had also taken his character. I should have despised myself, I, Hippel, if I could have been acquainted with myself. Animal of a burgomaster that I was! Is it not better worth while to live gayly and to laugh at the future than to heap crowns upon crowns and distill bile? But never mind— I am burgomaster.

"I rise from my bed, and the first thing which troubles me is to know whether the workmen are at work in my vineyard. I take a crust of bread for breakfast. A crust of bread!— he must be a hunks, a miser!— I, who eat my cutlet and who drink my bottle every morning. Well, all the same, I take, that is to say, the burgomaster takes, a crust of bread and puts it in his pocket. He recommends to his old housekeeper to sweep the room and to prepare the

dinner at eleven o'clock: some soup and potatoes, I believe. A poor dinner! No matter— he goes out.

"I could describe the road to you, the mountain," said Hippel, " I have them all before my eyes.

"Is it possible that a man, in his dreams, can imagine a landscape to himself so? I saw fields, gardens, meadows, vineyards. I thought: 'This is Peter's; that other is Jacques'; that one is Henri's;' and I stopped before some of these parcels, saying to myself: '*Diable*, Jacob's trefoil is superb;' and farther on, '*Diable*, this acre of vineyard ought to belong to me.' But, during this time, I felt a sort of giddiness, an indefinable trouble in my head. I hastened my steps. As it was early, suddenly the sun rose, and the heat became excessive. I followed a little path which went up through the vines, on the declivity of the hill. This path ended behind the rubbish of an old chateau, and I saw, farther on, my four acres; I hastened to get there. I was quite breathless in penetrating to the midst of the ruins; I stopped to get breath; the blood buzzed in my ears, and my heart beat in my chest as the hammer strikes the anvil. The sun was like fire. I wished to regain my road; but suddenly I was hit as if by a club; I rolled behind a piece of wall, and I understood that I was struck with apoplexy.

"Then a dark despair surrounded me. 'I am dead,' I said to myself; 'the money which I have amassed with so much trouble; the trees I have cultivated, with so much care; the house which I have built— all are lost; everything passes to my heirs. These wretches, to whom I don't wish to give a *kreutzer*, will be rich at my expense. Oh! traitors, you will be happy at my misfortune— you will take the keys out of my pocket; you will divide my goods; you will spend my gold— and I— I— I shall assist at this pillage! What a frightful punishment!'

"I felt my soul leaving my dead body; but it remained standing by the side.

"This soul of the burgomaster saw that his corpse had a purple face, and the hands were yellow.

"As it was very warm, and the death-sweat trickled from the forehead, great flies came to settle on the face; there was one which entered the nose— the body did not move! Soon the whole face was covered with them, and the desolate soul could not chase them away!

"He was there— there for moments, which he counted like centuries. His hell was beginning.

"An hour passed: the heat constantly augmented. Not a breath in the air, not a cloud in the sky!

"A goat appeared along the ruins; she browsed the ivy, the wild grasses which grow amongst this rubbish. In passing near my poor body, she made a jump to one side, then came back, opened her great eyes with uneasiness, smelled around the environs, and pursued her capricious course on the cornice of a tower. A young goat-herd, who saw her there, ran to lead her back; but,

seeing the corpse, he screamed, and began to run toward the village with all his might.

"Another hour, slow as eternity, passed. At last, a whispering; some steps were audible behind the inclosure, and my soul saw, climbing slowly— slowly, M——, the judge, followed by his recorder and several other persons— I ecognized them all. They exclaimed, at the sight of me—

" 'It is our burgomaster!'

"The doctor approached my body, and drove the flies away, which flew and whirled about in a swarm. He looked, raised an arm already stiff, then he said with indifference: 'Our burgomaster died from a flaming stroke of apoplexy; he must have been there since this morning. They can take him away from here, and it will be well to bury him as soon as possible, for this heat hastens decomposition.'

" 'My faith,' said the recorder, 'between us, the commune loses no great things. He was a miser, an idiot; he understood nothing at all.'

" 'Yes,' added the judge; 'and he always seemed to be criticising every one.'

" 'That is not astonishing,' said another; 'fools always believe themselves full of mind.'

" 'There must be some porters sent,' said the doctor; 'their burden will be heavy, this man had more belly than brains.'

" 'I will go and draw up the act of decease. At what hour shall we fix it?' demanded the recorder.

" 'Put it boldly that he died at four o'clock.'

" 'The miser,' said a peasant; 'he was going to spy on his workmen, so as to have a pretext to cut off a few sous from them at the end of the week.'

"Then, crossing his arms over his breast, and looking on the body: 'Well, burgomaster,' said he, 'what does it serve you, now, for having squeezed poor folks? Death has mowed you down just the same!'

" 'What is that in his pocket? ' said another. He drew out my crust of bread.

" ' Look at his breakfast.'

"All burst out into laughter.

"Talking in this way, these gentlemen went toward the outlet of the ruins. My poor soul heard them some minutes longer; the noise ceased gradually. I remained in solitude and silence.

"The flies came back by thousands.

"I cannot say how much time passed," said Hippel, "for in my dream the minutes had no end.

"However, the porters came; they cursed the burgomaster in raising my body. The soul of the poor man followed them, plunged in an inexpressible grief. I descended again the road by which I came up; but, this time, I saw my body carried before me on a litter.

"When we arrived in front of my house, I found many people who were waiting for me; I recognized my male and female cousins up to the fourth generation!

"They set down the bier; they all passed me in review.

" 'It is really he,' said one.

" 'He is really dead,' said another.

"My housekeeper soon came, and clasped her hands with a pathetic air: 'Who could have foreseen this misfortune?' cried she. 'A large, fat man, in good health! What poor creatures we are!'

"This was all my funeral oration.

"They carried me to a room, and they extended me on a straw bed.

"When one of my cousins took the keys out of my pocket, I wished to utter a cry of rage. Unfortunately, souls have no voice; in short, my dear Ludwig, I saw my secretary opened, my money counted, my credits valued; I saw seals put on; I saw my housekeeper steal my handsomest clothes; and, although death had freed me from all needs, I could not help regretting even the farthings I saw carried off.

"They undressed me, they dressed me again in a shirt; they nailed me between four boards, and I assisted at my own funeral obsequies.

"When they lowered me in the grave, despair overspread my soul; all was lost! It was then you awoke me, Ludwig; and I still seem to hear the earth rolling on my coffin."

Hippel was silent, and I saw a shiver run over his body.

We remained meditative a long time, without ex changing a word; a cock's crowing warned us that the night was drawing to its end; the stars were being effaced by the approach of day. Other cocks launched their piercing voices into space, and replied to each other from one farm to another. A watchdog came out of his niche to make his matutinal round; then a lark, still half asleep, warbled a few notes of his joyful song.

"Hippel," said I to my comrade, "it is time to go, if we wish to profit by this freshness."

"It's true," said he, "but before all, we must put something between our teeth."

We went down; the innkeeper was dressing himself; when he had put on his blouse, he served us the *débris* of our repast; he filled one of my jugs .with white wine, the other with red wine; he saddled our two jades and wished us a bon voyage.

We were not more than half a league from the inn when my friend Hippel, always devoured by thirst, took a swallow of red wine.

"P-r-r-r! " said he, as though he was seized with vertigo. "My dream! my dream of last night."

He put his horse to a trot, in order to escape this vision, which was painted in strange characters in his physiognomy. I followed him at a distance, my poor Rosinante claiming all my management.

The sun rose; a pale, rosy tint invaded the dark blue of the sky; the stars were lost in the midst of this dazzling light, like pearls in the deeps of the sea.

At the first morning rays, Hippel stopped his horse and waited for me.

"I do not know," said he, "what sombre thoughts are taking possession of me. This red wine must have some singular virtue; it flatters my taste, but it attacks my brain."

"Hippel," I replied, "it cannot be denied that certain liquors contain the principles of fantasy, and even of phantasmagoria. I have seen lively men become sad, sad men become gay, men of mind become stupid, and reciprocally, with a few glasses of wine in the stomach. It is a profound mystery; what senseless being dares doubt this magic power of the bottle? Is it not the sceptre of a superior force, incomprehensible, before which we must bow, since we all submit, through it, to some divine or infernal influence?"

Hippel recognized the force of my arguments, and rested silent, as though lost in an immense reverie.

We went by a narrow path, which wound along the borders of the Zurich. The birds were warbling, the partridge sounded his guttural cry, concealing himself under the large leaves of the vines. The landscape was magnificent, the river murmured while running through the little ravines. To the right and the left unrolled slopes covered with superb crops. Our route formed an elbow at the declivity of a hill. Suddenly my friend Hippel stopped motionless, his mouth open, his hands extended with an air of stupor; then, quick as an arrow, he turned to fly, but I seized his horse's bridle.

"Hippel, what ails you?" I cried. "Is Satan in ambush before you? Has Balaam's angel made his sword gleam in your eyes?"

"Let me alone," said he, struggling; "my dream! it's my dream! "

"Come, come; quiet yourself, Hippel; that red wine contains some noxious properties, without doubt; take a swallow of this; 'tis a generous juice, which will scare away all dark imaginings from the brain of man."

He drank greedily; and this beneficent liquor reestablished the equilibrium between his faculties.

We poured out on the road the red wine, which had become as black as ink; it formed great bubbles in penetrating into the earth, and it seemed to me I heard something like dull roarings, confused voices, sighs, but so weak, that you would have said they came from a far-off country, and that our ear of flesh could not seize them, but only the most intimate fibres of the heart. It was the last sigh of Abel, when his brother felled him on the grass, and the earth drank his blood.

Hippel was too excited to pay attention to this phenomenon, but I was profoundly struck by it. At the same time, I saw a black bird as large as the fist, come out of a bush, and make his escape with a little frightened cry.

Hippel then said to me: "I feel that two contrary principles are struggling in my being, the black and the white, the principles of good and of evil; let us go on! "

We pursued our route.

Very soon, again, my comrade said to me:

"Ludwig, such strange things pass in this world, that the mind is humiliated and trembles at them. You know that I have never been over this part of the country. Well, yesterday I dream; and to-day I see the fancy of my dream rising before me; look at this landscape, it's the same I saw in my sleep. Here are the ruins of the old castle, where I was struck with apoplexy. Here is the path by which I came, and down there are my four acres of vineyard. There is not a tree, not a brook, not a bush, which I do not recognize as though I had seen them a hundred times. When we shall have turned the corner of the road, we shall see the village of Welche, down in the valley; the second house to the right is the burgomaster's; it has five upper windows in front, four below and the door. At the left of my house, that is to say, the burgomaster's house, you will see a barn, a stable. There is where I keep my cattle. Behind, in a small court, under a large stall, is a two-horse press. In short, my dear Ludwig, such as I am, I am resuscitated. The poor burgomaster looks at you out of my eyes; he speaks to you by my mouth; and, if I did not remember that, before being a burgomaster, sordid, a miser, a rich proprietor, I have been Hippel, the *bon vivant*, I should hesitate to say who I am; for what I see recalls another existence to me, other habits, other ideas."

Everything passed as Hippel had predicted to me; we saw the village at a distance, lying in a superb valley, between two rich hills— the houses scattered on the banks of the river; the second at the right was the burgomaster's.

Hippel had a vague recollection of having known all the persons whom we met; several among them appeared so familiar to him, that he was upon the point of calling them by name; but the word remained on his tongue, he could not separate them from his other recollections. Besides, in seeing the indifferent curiosity with which they looked at us, Hippel felt well that he was unknown, and that his face entirely masked the soul of the defunct burgomaster.

We alighted at an inn, which my friend assured me was the best in the village; he had known it for a long time.

New surprise— the hostess of the inn was a fat gossip, a widow for several years, whom the burgomaster had already coveted to marry.

Hippel was tempted to spring to her neck, all his old sympathies awaking at once. However, he managed to moderate them; the true Hippel was combating

in himself the matrimonial tendencies of the burgomaster. Fie limited himself, then, to asking, in his most amiable manner, a good breakfast and the best wine of the place.

When we were sitting at the table, a very natural curiosity induced Hippel to inform himself as to what had passed in the village since his death.

"Madame," said he, to our hostess, with a flattering smile, "you, doubtless, knew the former burgomaster of Welche?"

"The one who died of a stroke of apoplexy three years ago?" she asked.

"Precisely," replied my comrade, fixing a curious look on the lady.

"Ah! did I know him!" cried the gossip; "that original— that old miser, who wanted to marry me. If I had known that he would die so soon, I would have accepted him. He proposed to me a mutual donation to the last survivor."

This response disconcerted my dear friend Hippel a little; the self-love of the burgomaster was horribly bruised in him. However, he contained himself.

"So, you did not love him, madame?" said he.

"How is it possible to love a man who is ugly, dirty, repulsive, stingy and miserly?"

Hippel got up to look at himself in the glass. Seeing his cheeks full and plump, he smiled at his face, and came back to seat himself before a chicken, which he began to carve.

"In fact," said he, "the burgomaster may have been ugly, filthy; that proves nothing against me."

"Are you a relative of his?" asked the hostess, surprised.

"I! I never knew him. I say, only, that some are homely, others handsome; because one has a nose placed in the middle of his face, like your burgomaster, that doesn't prove that one resembles him."

"Oh, no! " said the gossip; "you haven't a single feature of his family."

"Besides," answered my comrade; "I am not a miser, which shows that I am not your burgomaster. Bring two more bottles of your best wine."

The dame went out, and I seized this occasion to advise Hippel not to launch into any conversations which might betray his incognito.

"For whom do you take me, Ludwig?" he cried out, furious. " Know that I am no more a burgomaster than you; and that my papers are all right."

He took out his passport; the hostess re-entered.

"Madame," said he, "did your burgomaster resemble this description?"

He read: "Forehead, medium; nose, large; lips, thick; eyes, gray; form, stout; hair, brown.

"Pretty near," said the dame; "except that he was bald."

Hippel ran his hand through his hair, crying: "No one dares to maintain that I am bald."

The hostess thought my friend was crazy; but as he rose and paid her, she said nothing.

Arrived at the threshold, Hippel turned to me, saying, in a brusque voice, "Let's go!"

" One moment, my dear friend," I replied; "you will first conduct me to the cemetery where the burgomaster rests."

"No!" he cried; "no! never! You wish, then, to precipitate me into Satan's claws?— I! stand over my own tomb! But that would be contrary to all the laws of nature— you don't think of it, Ludwig?"

"Calm yourself, Hippel," said I to him. "You are at this moment under the control of invisible powers. They extend over you a network so fine, so transparent, that no one can perceive them. An effort must be made to dissolve them, the burgomaster's soul must be restored, and that is only possible above his tomb. Would you be the thief of this poor soul? It would be a manifest theft. I know your delicacy too well, to suppose you capable of such an infamy."

These invincible arguments decided him.

"Well, yes," said he, "I will have the courage to tread under foot these remains, of which I bear the heaviest part. God forbid that such a larceny should be imputed to me. Follow me, Ludwig, I will lead you."

He walked with rapid, headlong steps, holding his hat in his hand.

We traversed first several little lanes, then the bridge of a mill; then we followed a path which ran through a meadow, and we came at last, behind' the village, to quite a high wall, clothed in moss and clematis. It was the cemetery.

At one of the angles rose the ossuary, at the other a little house surrounded by a small garden.

Hippel darted into the room. There he found the grave-digger; all along the walls there were crowns of immortelles. The grave-digger was sculpturing a cross, and his work absorbed him so that he rose, frightened, when Hippel appeared. The eyes which my comrade fixed on him must have frightened him; for, during some seconds, he remained speechless.

"My brave man," said I to him, "conduct us to the burgomaster's tomb."

"It is useless," cried Hippel, "I know it." And without waiting a response, he opened a door which led into the cemetery, and commenced to run like a madman, jumping over the tombs and crying out:

"There it is! there! Here we are!"

The grave-digger and I followed him at a distance.

The cemetery was very large. Coarse, thick grass, of a sombre green, grew three feet high from the soil. The cypresses dragged their long locks on the ground, but what struck me at first, was a trellis leaning against the wall, covered with a magnificent vine, heavily laden with grapes.

While walking, I said to the grave-digger: "You have a vine, then, which ought to be worth a good deal to you."

"Oh! sir," said he, with a doleful air, "this vine brings me no great things. No one wants my grapes. What comes from the dead, returns to the dead."

I settled this man. He had a false look; a diabolical smile contracted his lips and his cheeks. I did not believe what he told me.

We arrived before the burgomaster's tomb, which was near the wall. In front, there was an enormous vine, swelled with juice, and which seemed gorged like a boa. Without doubt its roots penetrated to the depth of the coffins and disputed their prey with the worms. And further, its grapes were of a red-dish-purple, while those of others were white, lightly tinted.

Hippel, leaning against the vine, appeared a little calmer.

"You do not eat these grapes," said I to the digger, "but you sell them."

He grew pale and made a negative gesture.

"You sell them at the village of Welche, and I can name to you the inn where your wine is drank," I cried. " It is the Fleur-de-Lis inn."

The grave-digger trembled in every limb. Hippel wanted to throw himself at the wretch's throat; my intervention was necessary to prevent him from tearing him in pieces.

"Scoundrel," cried he, "you have made me drink the quintessence of the burgomaster. I have lost my personality!"

He turned toward the wall, and the torrent of his misery poured forth unrestrained.

"Thank God! " said he, with a sigh of relief, "I have rendered the burgomaster's soul to earth. I am lightened of an enormous weight."

ONE HOUR afterward we were pursuing our route, and my friend Hippel had recovered I his natural gayety.

_____

6: The Crows Requiem

("Le requiem du corbeau")

Erckmann-Chatrian

The Aldine (New York), 8 Jan 1873

MY UNCLE ZACHARIAS is about the most curious original whom I have ever met. Figure to yourself a little man, thick, short, plump, ruddy complexion, big-bellied and a flowery nose: that is the portrait of my uncle Zacharias. The worthy man was as bald as a knee. He wore habitually great round spectacles, and coiffed his head with a little black silk cap, which scarcely covered the top and the nape of it.

This dear uncle loved to laugh; he loved also stuffed turkey, *pâté-de-foie-gras*, and old Johannisberg; but what he preferred to everything else in the world, was music. Zacharias Miiller was born a musician by the grace of God, as others are born French or Russians; he played on all instruments with a marvelous facility. You could not understand, to see his air of naive simplicity, how so much gayety, rapture, and impulse, could animate such a personage.

Thus God made the nightingale: a gourmand, curious, and a singer. My uncle was a nightingale.

They invited him to all the weddings, to all the *fêtes*, to all the baptisms, to all the funerals; Master Zacharias, said they to him, we must have a *hopser*, a hallelujah, a requiem for such a day; and he replied simply: "You shall have it." Then he set himself to work, he whistled before his desk, he smoked some pipes, all the while showering a rain of notes on his paper, and beating time with his left foot.

Uncle Zacharias and I lived in an old house in the street of the minne-singers at Tubingen; he occupied the ground floor, a true bric-a-brac shop, encumbered with old furniture and musical instruments; I slept in the chamber above, and all the other rooms remained unoccupied.

Just opposite our house, Doctor Hâselnoss lived. In the evening, when it was night in my little chamber, and the doctor's windows were illuminated, it seemed to me, by looking intently, that his lamp advanced— advanced— and finally touched my eyes. And, at the same time, I saw the silhouette of Hâselnoss moving on the wall in a curious manner, with his rat-shaped head coiffed with a three-cornered hat, his little queue hopping to right and left, his great coat with large skirts, and his slender person planted on two thin legs. I distinguished also, in the depths of the chamber, glass jars full of strange animals, glittering stones, and, in profile, the backs of his books, shining by their gilding and ranged in battle order on the shelves of a book-case.

Doctor Hâselnoss was, after my uncle Zacharias, the most original person of the city. His servant Orchel boasted of not doing his washing except once in six

months, and I would willingly believe it, for the doctor's shirts were marked with yellow spots, which proved the quantity of linen shut up in his wardrobes; but the most interesting peculiarity in Hâselnoss's character was, that neither dog nor cat which crossed his threshold ever appeared again. God knows what he did with them. Public rumor even accused him of carrying a piece of fat in one of his hind-pockets to attract these poor beasts; so when he went out in the morning to go to see his patients, and passed before my uncle's house on a small trot, I could not help considering with a vague terror the great skirts of his coat, flying right and left.

Such are the liveliest impressions of my childhood; but what charms me the most in these far-off recollections, that which, above everything else, is retraced in my mind when I dream of that dear little city of Tubingen, is Hans, the crow, hopping in the streets, pillaging the butchers' stalls, seizing all the papers flying about, penetrating the houses, and whom every one admired, pampered, called: "Hans!" here—"Hans!" there.

Singular animal, truly; one day he came into the city with his wing broken; Doctor Hâselnoss had set it, and every one had adopted him. One gave him meat, another cheese. Hans belonged to the whole city— Hans was under the protection of the public faith.

How I loved this Hans, in spite of his great strokes with his bill!I can see him now hopping with his two feet in the snow, turning his head slightly, and looking at you out of the corner of his black eye, with a mocking air. Did anything fall from your pocket— a *kreutzer*, a key, no matter what— Hans seized it, and carried it up to the church roof. There he had established his magazine, there he concealed the fruits of his rapine; for, unfortunately, Hans was a thieving bird. Nevertheless, Uncle Zacharias could not endure this Hans; he considered the inhabitants of Tubingen imbeciles, for attaching themselves to such an animal, and this man, so calm, so gentle, would lose any sort of time, if by chance his eyes encountered the crow hovering in front of our windows.

Now, on a beautiful evening in October, Uncle Zacharias appeared much gayer than usual; he had not seen Hans the whole day. The windows were open, the gay sunlight penetrated into the chamber; in the distance, autumn spread its lovely russet tints, which were thrown out with much splendor upon the dark green of the pines. Uncle Zacharias, leaning back in his large easy chair, was tranquilly smoking his pipe, and I was looking at him, asking myself what made him smile to himself— for his good, fat face was beaming with an indescribable satisfaction.

"Dear Toby," said he to me, blowing a long spiral of smoke up to the ceiling, "you would hardly believe what a sweet quiet I feel now. For many years I have not felt so well disposed to undertake a great work— a work like 'The Creation,' of Haydn's. Heaven seems to open before me; I hear the angels and the

seraphim intoning their celestial hymn; I can note all their voices. O!the lovely composition, Toby— the lovely composition! If you could only hear the bass of the twelve apostles!— it is magnificent— magnificent! Little Raphael's soprano pierces the clouds, like the trumpet of the last judgment; the little angels flutter their wings and laugh, and the saints weep in a truly harmonious manner. Hush!here comes the Veni Creator; the colossal bass advances; the earth is shaken; God is going to appear!"

And Master Zacharias hung his head; he seemed to be listening with his whole soul; great tears rolled from his eyes. "*Bene*, Raphael, *bene*!" he murmured. But as my uncle was thus plunged in an ecstacy, while his face, his look, his attitude— everything in him expressed a celestial ravishment— behold Hans, who suddenly fell down on our window, uttering a frightful couac. I saw Uncle Zacharias grow pale; he looked toward the window with a terrified glance— mouth open— hand extended— in the attitude of stupor.

The crow was resting on the cross-piece of the window. No; I don't believe I ever saw a more jeering physiognomy: his large beak turned slightly one side, and his eye shining like a peafl. He gave utterance to a second ironical couac, and began to comb his wing with two or three strokes of his beak.

My uncle did not breathe a word; he was as if petrified. Hans took flight again, and Master Zacharias, turning to me, looked at me a few seconds.

"Did you recognize him?" said he to me.

"Who, then?"

"The devil!"

"The devil!You are making fun."

But Uncle Zacharias did not deign to reply to me, and fell into a profound meditation

The night came; the sun disappeared behind the pines of the Black Forest.

From this day, Master Zacharias lost all his good humor. He tried first to write his great symphony of the "Seraphim," but not having succeeded, he became very melancholy; he extended himself at length in his chair, his eyes on the ceiling, and did nothing but dream of the celestial harmonies. When I represented to him that we were at the end of our money, and that it would not be bad if he should write a waltz, a hopser, or something else, to keep us afloat, "A waltz! a *hopser*!" he cried; "what is that? If you spoke to me about my great symphony, all right; but a waltz! Hold, Toby; you are losing your head; you don't know what you are saying." Then he took a calmer tone:

"Toby, believe me, as soon as I shall have terminated my great work, we can cross our arms and sleep upon our two ears. It is the alpha and the omega of harmony. Our reputation will be made. I should have finished this work long ago; only one thing prevents me— it's the crow!"

"The crow! but, dear uncle, how can the crow hinder you from writing, I want to know? Isn't he a bird, like all others ? "

"A bird like all others!" murmured my uncle, indignantly; "Toby, I see it, you are conspiring with my enemies!— and yet what have I not done for you ? Have I not brought you up as my own child? Have I not replaced your father and your mother? Have I not taught you to play on the clarionet? Ah! Toby, Toby, it is wrong!"

He said this in such a convinced tone, that I finished by believing him, and in my heart I cursed this Hans, who troubled my uncle's inspiration. "If it were not for him," said I to myself, "our fortune would be made!"— and I began to doubt whether the crow was not the devil in person, as my uncle thought.

Sometimes Uncle Zacharias tried to write; but, through a curious and almost incredible fatality, Hans always showed himself at the best moment, or else his harsh cry was heard. Then the poor man threw down his pen in despair; and if he had had any hairs, he would have torn them out by handfuls, his exasperation was so great. Things came to such a point, that Master Zacharias borrowed a gun of Razer the baker, an old thing, all rusty, and placed himself in ambush behind the door, to lie in wait for the cursed animal. But then Hans, as cunning as the devil, appeared no more; and as soon as my uncle, shivering with cold, for it was in winter— as soon as my uncle came to warm his hands, directly Hans uttered his cry before the house. Master Zacharias would run quickly into the street— Hans had disappeared!

It was a real comedy, and the whole city was talking of it. My school-mates teased me about my uncle, which forced me to engage in more than one battle on the little square. I defended him to the death, and I came home every evening with an eye black and blue, or my nose bloody. Then he looked at me much troubled, and would say:

"Dear child, take courage— soon you will have no need to take so much trouble!"

And then he would begin to paint to me, most enthusiastically, the great work which he meditated. It was really superb; it was all arranged; first, the overture of the apostles; then the chorus of seraphim in B flat; then the Veni Creator growling in the midst of lightnings and thunder! "But," added my uncle, "the crow must die. It's the crow who causes all the trouble, do you see, Toby. If it had not been for him, my great symphony would have been done long ago, and we would be living now on our income."

One evening, when coming back from school alone, I met Hans. It had snowed; the moon shone above the roofs, and a sort of vague restlessness spread over my heart at the sight of the crow. Coming to the door of our house, I was astonished to find it open; a few gleams were playing over the windows, like the reflections of a fire which was dying out. I went in; I called; no reply! But,

figure to yourself my surprise when, by the reflection of the flame, I saw my uncle, his nose blue, his ears purple, stretched out at full length in his arm-chair, our neighbor's old gun between his legs, and his shoes loaded with snow. The poor man had been crow hunting.

"Uncle Zacharias," cried I, "are you asleep?"

He half opened his eyes.'and fixing a drowsy look on me, "Toby,", said he, "I have taken aim at him more than twenty times, and he always disappears like a shadow, at the very moment I am going to fire."

Having said these words, he fell back into a deep torpor. I shook him, but he did not stir. Then, seized with fear, I ran to find Dr. Hâselnoss. In raising the door-knocker, my heart beat with terrible force, and when the blow resounded through the vestibule, my knees' bent under me. The street was deserted. Some flakes of snow fluttered around me; I shivered. At the third knock the doctor's window opened, and Hâselnoss's head, in a cotton cap, leaned out.

"Who is there?" said he, in a shrill voice.

"Monsieur Doctor, come quick to Master Zacharias; he is very sick."

"Ha!" said Hâselnoss, "time to put on a coat, and I come."

The window was closed. I waited yet a good quarter of an hour, looking at the deserted street, hearing the weathercocks creak on their rusty needles, and in the distance a farm-dog barking at the moon. At last a step was heard, and slowly, slowly, some one came down the staircase. A key was put in the lock, and Hâselnoss, enveloped in a gray great-coat, a small lantern in the form of a candlestick in his hand, appeared on the threshold.

"P-r-r-r!" said he, "how cold!I did well to wrap up."

"Yes," I replied, "I have been quaking for twenty minutes."

"I made haste, so as not to keep you waiting."

A moment later, we entered my uncle's room. "Ha! good evening, Master Zacharias," said Doctor Hâselnoss, as tranquilly as possible, blowing out his lantern, "how do you do? It appears that we have a little cold in the head."

Uncle Zacharias seemed to awake at this voice.

"Monsieur Doctor," said he, "I will relate the thing to you from the very commencement."

"It is useless," said Hâselnoss, sitting down in front of him on an old trunk. "I know that better than you; I know the principle and the consequences, the cause and its effects; you detest Hans, and Hans detests you— you pursue him with a gun, and Hans comes and perches on your window, to mock at you. He! he! he! it's very simple, the crow doesn't love the song of the nightingale, and the nightingale cannot suffer the cry of the crow."

So spoke Hâselnoss, taking a pinch from his little snuff-box; then he crossed his legs, shook out the folds of his shirt-frill, and began to smile, fixing his small, malicious eyes on Master Zacharias. My uncle was astonished.

"Listen," said Hâselnoss, "that ought not to surprise you; one sees such things every day. Sympathies and antipathies govern our poor world. You enter a tavern, a brewery, no matter where, you remark two players at a table, and without knowing them, you soon make wishes for one or the other. What reasons have you for preferring one to the other? None— he! he! he!— thereupon, savants build systems farther than one can see, instead of saying honestly: 'Here is a cat; here is a mouse. I make wishes for the mouse, because we belong to the same family; because before being Hâselnoss, doctor of medicine, I have been a rat, squirrel, or field-mouse, and that, consequently—' "

But he did not finish his phrase, for at that instant my uncle's cat happened to pass by him. The doctor seized him like an old wig, and made him disappear in his great pocket with the quickness of lightning. Uncle Zacharias and I looked at each other stupefied.

"What will you do with my cat?" said uncle, at last.

But Hâselnoss, instead of replying, smiled with a constrained air, and stammered:

"Master Zacharias, I am going to cure you."

"Give me back my cat first."

"If you oblige me to give up this cat," said Hâselnoss, "I abandon you to your sad fate; you shall not have another minute's rest, you can no longer write a note, and you will grow thin every day."

"But, in the name of heaven!" answered my uncle, "what has this poor animal done to you ? "

"What has he done to me?" replied the doctor, whose features contracted, "what has he done to me! Know that we have been at war since the origin of the centuries! Know that this cat resumes in himself the quintessence of a thistle which stifled me when I was a violet, of a holly which shaded me when I was a bush, of a pike which ate me when I was a carp, and of a sparrow-hawk which devoured me when I was a mouse."

I thought Hâselnoss was crazy; but Uncle Zacharias, shutting his eyes, answered after a long silence:

"I understand you, Doctor Hâselnoss, I understand you— you are not wrong!— cure me, and I give you my cat."

The doctor's eyes scintillated.

"Very well!" cried he; "now I will cure you."

He drew a knife from his case, and took a bit of wood from the hearth, which he split with dexterity. My uncle and I looked at him while he was doing it. After splitting his bit of wood, he began to hollow it. Then he separated a little strap of parchment, very thin, from his portfolio, and having adjusted it between the two blades of wood, he applied it against his lips, smiling.

My uncle's face brightened.

"Doctor Hâselnoss," he cried, "you are a rare man— a really superior man— a man—"

"I know it," interrupted Hâselnoss, "I know it. But put out the light, so that not a coal shall shine in the shadow!"

And while I was executing this order, he opened the window wide. The night was freezing cold. Above the roofs the moon appeared calm and limpid. The dazzling brightness of the snow, and the obscurity of the room, formed a strange contrast. I saw the shadow of my uncle, and that of Hâselnoss, cut out against the front of the window; a thousand confused impressions agitated me at once. Uncle Zacharias sneezed; Hâselnoss extended his hand with impatience to command him to be quiet; then the silence became solemn.

Suddenly a sharp whistling traversed space. "Pie wite! pie-wite!" After this cry, all became still once more. I heard my heart galloping. At the end of a minute, the same whistling was heard: "Pie-wite! pie-wite!" I perceived, then, that it was the doctor who produced it with his bird-call. Remarking this gave me a little courage, and I paid attention to the least circumstance which was passing around me.

Uncle Zacharias, half-stooping, looked at the moon. Hâselnoss kept motionless, one hand on the window, and in the other the whistle.

So passed two or three minutes; then, all at once, a bird's flight cleft the air.

"Oh!" murmured my uncle,

"Hush!" said Hâselnoss, and the "pie-wite" was repeated several times with strange and precipitate modulations. Twice the bird grazed the window in his rapid, restless flight. Uncle Zacharias made a movement to take his gun, but Hâselnoss seized him by the wrist, murmuring, "Are you crazy?" Then my uncle was quiet, and the doctor redoubled his whistlings with so much art, imitating the cry of the speckled magpie when taken in the net, that Hans, whirling to the right and left, ended by entering our room, drawn, doubtless, by a singular curiosity which troubled his brain. I heard his two feet fall heavily on the floor. Uncle Zacharias shouted, and darted on the bird, who escaped from his hands.

"Clumsy!" cried Hâselnoss, shutting the window.

It was time; Hans was hovering about the beams in the ceiling. After making five or six tours, he knocked himself against a pane with so much force, that, stunned, he slid the whole length of the window, trying to fasten his claws in the cross-pieces. Hâselnoss lit the candle quickly, and then I saw poor Hans between my uncle's hands, who was squeezing him by the neck with a frantic enthusiasm, saying: "Ha! ha! ha! I've got you, I've got you!"

Hâselnoss accompanied him with bursts of laughter: "He! he! he! are you content, Master Zacharias, are you content?"

I never saw a more frightful scene. My uncle's face was crimson. The poor crow stretched out his claws, beat his wings like a great night-butterfly, and the death-shiver ruffled his feathers.

This sight horrified me so, that I ran to hide myself at the end of the room.

The first moment of indignation past, Uncle Zacharias became himself again. "Toby," he cried, "the devil has paid his accounts; I pardon him. Hold this Hans before my eyes. Ah! I feel myself live once more! Now, silence! Listen!"

And Master Zacharias, with an inspired face, sat down gravely to the harpsichord. I was in front of him, and I held the crow by the beak. Behind, Hâselnoss held up the candle, and a more bizarre picture was never seen than these three figures, Hans, Uncle Zacharias, and Hâselnoss, under the high and worm-eaten beams of the ceiling. I can see them now, lighted by the trembling light, as well as our old furniture, whose shadows vacillated against the decrepit wall. At the first chords, my uncle seemed to be transformed; his large blue eyes sparkled with enthusiasm; he was not playing before us, but in a cathedral, before an immense assembly— for God himself!

What a sublime chant! Turn by turn sombre, pathetic, heart-rending, and resigned; then suddenly, in the midst of sobs, hope displayed its wings of gold and azure. Oh, heaven!how is it possible to conceive such great things!

It was a requiem, and for an hour inspiration did not abandon Uncle Zacharias for a single second.

Hâselnoss laughed no more. Insensibly his bantering face had taken on an undefinable expression. I thought he was much affected; but soon I saw him make nervous movements, tighten his fist, and I perceived that something was struggling in the skirts of his coat.

When my uncle, exhausted by so many emotions, leaned his forehead on the edge of the harpsichord, the doctor drew from his pocket the cat, which he had strangled.

"He! he! he!" said he; "good evening, Master Zacharias; good evening. We each have our game, he! he! he! You've made a requiem for the crow Hans; now you must make a hallelujah for your cat. Good evening!"

My uncle was so faint, that he contented himself with saluting the doctor with a movement of his head, and signed to me to conduct him to the door.

Now, this same night died the Grand Duke, Yeri-Peter, second of the name; and as Hâselnoss crossed the street, I heard the cathedral bells set a-going slowly. Entering the room again, I saw Uncle Zacharias standing up.

"Toby," said he to me, with a grave voice, "go to bed, my child, go to bed; I am restored; I must write all that to-night, for fear of forgetting it."

I hastened to obey him, and I never slept better. The next day, toward nine o'clock, I was awakened by a great tumult. The whole city was out; they talked of nothing but the death of the Grand Duke.

Master Zacharias was called to the castle. They ordered from him the requiem of Yeri-Peter II., a work which was finally worth the place of chapel-master to him, which he had long been ambitious for. This requiem was no other than that of Hans. So Uncle Zacharias became a great personage, since he had a thousand thalers a year to spend, and often said, in my ear:

"Ha, nephew, if they knew that I composed my famous requiem for the crow, we might still be playing on the clarionet at the village *fêtes*. Ha! ha! ha!" and my uncle's big paunch shook.

So go things in this world.

_____

7: The Coolest of Criminals

Val Jameson

fl. 1890s-1930s

Star (Sydney) 4 Sep 1909

Most of this elusive author's stories are set in the West Australian gold fields, where she and her husband lived in the late 19th century. Her output of short stories came to a stop in 1921, and for several years after that she wrote and promoted all-Australian children's song books. This story was written when she is known to have been living in New South Wales.

BY THE MEREST CHANCE we discovered two birds in one nest. Chudkins, alias Brown, alias Watkin, and other aliases innumerable, was at last run to earth. A little conversation with the landlady of No. 32a Victor-street convinced us the quarry was ours. He had given us a vast amount of trouble in his perpetual raids and hairbreadth escapes from our clutches. It is exceedingly aggravating to have your man, as it were, under the palm of your hand, or, so he appeared to be, like the watch in the magician's hat, and with all the mystification of a vigilant audience to find your palm as vacant as the magical hat.

Chudkins, to use the first of his aliases, had hurt our feelings in this way on various occasions, and we, as experienced detectives, naturally resented it. We suspected this man to be the organiser of a daring city gang.

"Many visitors call on Mr. Chudklns?" I inquired of the garrulous landlady.

"Never a soul savin' his wife."

"His wife!" echoed Wylie, my companion. "Does she come often?"

"No, poor soul! He don't seem to earn enough to support 'er, so she's out at service somewheres, an' just walks in when she likes an' goes up to 'is room. He told me to take no notice when she came, but let 'er come an' go as she would. So's of course I did, bein' his legal wife. Mor'n that, was no business of mine! Of all the good-for-nothin' husban's women gets hold of nowadays, why Sydney's full of 'em! There's—"

A thought of mine checked the woman’s garrulous tongue.

“Did you ever see them together?”

She screwed her face into a considering knot, and, after a space, replied: “Well, no, now I come to think of it I never did see 'em together. He was allus alone— so was she."

"For the best of reasons;" I said, with a significant look at Wylie. "He's a double, this chap. Is he in his room now?"

"He may be. I never knows when 'e's in or out."

"No. 6 first landing: thanks. Don't trouble to climb the stairs. We'll find him."

But we didn't 'find him. We found a note characteristic of Chudklns pinned to the counterpane.

Sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen.

A matter of extreme urgency prevents my receiving you in this humble apartment. Cold cheer, gentlemen, but better luck next time. You will observe I have affixed my seal to the foot of this note, which may bo useful to you for purposes of identification.

Yours cordially

Chudkins.

I might mention that I am not returning to 32a— as my wife needs a change of air and landlady. — C. C.

The seal mentioned in the note was a broad print of a thumb previously smeared in ink. Finger-prints are useful in tracing criminals, but Chudkins was far too wideawake to provide us with his own tracks.

A series of suburban robberies were reported shortly before this, the tactics of the robber varying in each instance.

A woman respectably clad would present herself at the front door, her object being to rent a furnished house or room. Sometimes the apology was to adjust her skirt that had slipped its fastenings. Once indoors she would be overtaken with faintness, and beg for a glass of water. The sympathetic householder would run away on her mission of mercy, while the disguised thief mado good use of the interval. Very valuable possessions had been lost in this way, and, so far we had failed to trace the thief. Now the mystery was solved. Chudkins, in female disguise, was Chudkins's wife.

There are, as everybody knows, various grades of criminals, but in Chudkins we recognised a combination of powers that raised him to an isolated pinnacle of efficiency. He practised criminology, apparently, for sheer love of it. As yet his hands were guiltless of the supreme offence, but we know he would not baulk at that if his plans were thwarted. He was a lightning-change artist, a versatile actor of parts, and seemed possessed of supernatural powers. He informed us frequently, in typed, impertinent epistles, that he was cognisant of our secret moves to trap him. How he obtained this knowledge might be satisfactorily explained by exponents of the prohibited black arts; it is beyond our comprehension.

Summoned by telephone to a mansion at after midnight we found the household in a condition of panic. Twenty guests assembled in the drawing-room, a staff of five servants on duty, yet a burglar of diminutive stature had looted the house single-handed. Twenty-seven able-bodied people, yet no resistance. At last we got from one of the panic-stricken guests an intelligible account of how it was done.

"A short, wiry-looking man, wearing a mask, presented himself at the door there as cool as a cucumber. He covered us with a revolver while he spoke.

" 'Don't let me disturb your revels, ladies and gentlemen. I've just a little business to transact, then I'll leave you in peace. Mean while, I must have this door locked on the outside. Now, don't, I beg of you, urge me to press this trigger. Keep the peace and I'll keep the bullets. Don't faint, ladies; there's really no occasion!' Several of the ladies were indeed fainting. The men stepped out to grapple with him, but the infernal revolver clicked and we fell back, afraid that the ladles might be injured in a scuffle.

" 'I would advise you to keep well back from the windows,' the villain said. 'I've a man and a squirt in command of each. A bullet in the chest is a trifle worse than indigestion, gentlemen. Take my word for it!' He then closed and locked the door. The servants fled before his revolver like leaves before the wind. He's got away with £200 worth of jewellery and cash."

We knew by the description of this desperado and the courteous style of address he affected, it was our much-wanted Chudkins. Another crime was tacked to the already long list awaiting his capture.

Knowing we took a warm interest in his career the rascal sent a glowing account of each act of vandalism.

Such a soft snap last night, Good fun, too! But rather tame. Only twenty-seven lambs looking for slaughter. Like to have seen a couple of your chaps along to give it a swing. Hear you've got a set of my finger prints. I'll come and test 'em one of these days when I'm tired.

So long, boys,
Yours (but not till death),
Chudkins.

His successful impersonation of a fascinating woman was proved by the following incident. A prominent public official was the selected victim.

"Look here," he said, and his face colored up like a schoolboy caught in a forbidden orchard, "I don't want this thing to reach the public, but I'm in the douce of a mess! A young woman called at my office requesting a private interview. It was a trivial matter, but she wanted advice and so forth. After some conversation sho complained of faintness, and asked for a drink of water. Of course, as any gentleman would under the circumstances, I procured a glass of water. She thanked me, recovered quickly, and left. Five minutes after I missed some valuable documonts from my desk, which, in my anxiety to relieve the swooning stranger, I had left unlocked."

"You left this person alone in the office while you went out for water?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"About two minutes."

"Why not have sent the clerk?"

The visitor shrugged his shoulders.

The utter absence of motive puzzled us in this instance. The stolen documents were invaluable to the owner, but of no financial value to anyone else. Application for reward would lead to arrest, so it was impossible to tell what the mysterious woman hoped to gain by the confiscation.

The mystery was explained by a note from Chudkins two weeks later, accompanied by the missing documents.

No further use. Returned, with thanks. Nice old gentleman. Sorry to disappoint.
Yours with compliments,
Chudklns.

What actual use he had made of the documents remained one of the many mysteries surrounding the rascal's achievements.

Then came a gap. For three months our bird was silent. We concluded he was dead. Indeed, we would have cheerfully yielded the laurels of his capture to the prince of detectives. But this supposition was shattered after three months by a letter, post-marked Melbourne:

Dear old pals,

I know you aro just perishing for news of me. I'm in the diamond trade now, just swimming In diamonds. A man who has reached the top-notch of his profession as I have done can afford to leave the rest to lower craftsmen.

I'm not a criminal, as you know. I am an artist. Poised on my superior plane of vantage I can watch your brilliant manoeuvres. I watch you weaving the web that is to entangle my foot, I see the elaborate plans, the contracting circles, the spies and super numeraries, the intricate calculations that are the despair of the ordinary criminal. But me you cannot touch; I am winged. I am, when the purpose suits me, duplicate. I can send my mind here, there, and everywhere independent of my body.

"By Jove!" interjected Wylie. "Is that headed *Kew Asylum*?"

"No such luck!" I groaned, and continued reading:

"Now, although, as a point of etiquette, I would not split on a member of my profession, I have, out of sheer conceit, decided to clear up the fog in your minds concerning the mysterious murder of the diamond merchant.

To put it briefly, I hold the diamonds. But I am guiltless of the actual crime, or any connivance in it. The woman who killed him was not actuated by a desire for plunder. Prior to the murder I interviewed the victim, candidly speaking, with the object of getting possession of the sparklers on some future occasion. On quitting the office I concealed myself in a dark corridor close by. A fow moments afterwards I heard the *frou frou* of a woman's skirts passing. Then I heard voices, low-pitched but angry. The woman seemed to be pressing some request, the man refusing. Then came the voice of a squirt, the sharp syllable that spells finale to any argument, and the woman rushed out of the room. I could have gripped her arm, she passed so close. But that would have been poor gratitude. I hesitated a moment. No one

seemed attracted by the shot. I seized my opportunity. My usual luck at tended me, and I got securely away with the diamonds.

You will, no doubt, be immensely gratified to get this information; also to hear that I am returning to dear old Sydney. There is not sufficient scope for my talents here.

As ever,

Your devoted chum, Chudkins.

"If he really is making a speciality of diamond hunting," said Wylie, "we'll corner him sure enough. A sporting criminal escapes through the absence of method or motive. He is governed by caprice. But the man who makes a trade of criminology is easily overtaken in his tracks."

We dropped the subject then. The phenomenal Chudkins as an unconquerable quantity was becoming a bore. But never in the records of the department was the hunting down of a criminal more romantically ended.

The ends of the skein that involved the real Chudkins were almost all gathered up when victory was wrested from us. So meekly, the note was worded:

Come and take me. I am tired.
Chudkins.

Suspecting some veiled maneouvre, Wylie and I visited the house where, the enemy was safely shadowed. Immediately we stopped inside tho landlady said, "Are you the gentlemen Miss expected?"

As Chudkins adopted either sex to suit his moods we allowed that we were the "expected," and without further parley the woman led us upstairs to a small back-room and knocked on the closed door.

There was no response.

Requesting the woman to step aside, I opened the door.

The room seemed crammed with flowers. Walls, table, fireplace were decorated like a florist's shop. Wreaths and crosses, all white and fragrant. The narrow bed was literally shrouded with pure white blossoms, from the centre of which shone out a woman's pale, dead face.

Aghast at this unexpected sight I turned to remonstrate with the landlady for Intruding us upon such a scene. But her shriek of horror proved that she was ignorant of this death.

Wylie, my companion, staggered back against the wall as if stricken by a clenched fist.

"My God, Agatha!" he muttered. A card in the rigid fingers of the suicide convoyed a message:

I surrender.

Agatha— alias Chudkins.

What had been between the dead and the living only one now knows— and Wylie kept his secret.

_____

8: The Coach

Violet Hunt
1862-1942
The English Review March 1909
Collected in: *Tales of the Uneasy*, 1911

IT WAS A LONELY part of the country, far north, where the summer nights are pale and light and scant of shade. This summer night there was no moon, and yet it was not dark. For hours the flat, deprecating earth had lain prone under a storm of wind and rain. Its patient surface was drenched, blanched, smitten into blindness. The tumbled waters of the Firth splashed on the edges of the plain, their wild commotion dwarfed by the noise of the wind-driven showers, whose gloomy drops tapped the waters into sullen acquiescence. Half a mile inland the road to the north was laid. Clear and straight it ran, with never a house or homestead to break it, viscous with clay here, shining with quartz there, uncompromising, exact, like the lists of old, dressed for a tourney. Its sides were bare, scantily garnished with grass. This was nearly a hedgeless country. In places the undeviating line of it passed through a little coppice or clump of gnarled, ill-conditioned, nameless trees. They seemed to lean forward vindictively on either side, snapping their horny fingers at each other, waving their cantankerous branches as the gusts took them, broke them, and whirled the fragments of their ruin far away and out of ken, like a flapping, unruly kite which a child has allowed to pass beyond his control. The broad white surface of the road was not suffered to be blotted for a single moment. Nothing could rest for the play of the intriguing air-currents, surging backwards and forwards, blind, stupid and swelled with pride, till they had got completely out of hand and defied the archers of the middle sky. They staggered hither and thither like ineffectual giants; they buffeted all impartially; they instigated the hapless branches at their mercy to wild lashings of each other, to useless accesses of the spirit of self-destruction. Bending slavishly under the heavy gusts, each shabby blade of grass by the roadside rose again and was on the *qui vive* after the rustling tyrant had passed.

It was then, in the succeeding moments of comparative peace, when the directors of the passionate aerial revolt had managed to call their panting rabble off for the time, that great perpendicular sheets of rain, like stage films slung evenly from heavenly temples, descended and began moving continuously sideways, like a wall, across the level track. A sheet of whole water, blotting out the tangled borders of herbage that grew sparsely round the heaps of stones with which the margin was set at intervals, placed there ready for breaking. When the slab of rain had moved on again, the broad road, shining out sturdily with its embedded quartz and milky kneaded clay, lay clear once more. Calm,

ordered and tranquil in the midst of tumult and discord, it pursued its appointed course, edging off from its evenly bevelled sides the noisy moorland streams, that had come jostling each other in their haste to reach it, only to be relegated, noisily complaining, to the swollen, unrecognizable gutter.

At a certain point on the line of way, a tall, spare, respectable-looking man in a well-fitting grey frock coat stood waiting. The rain ran down the back of his coat collar, and dripped off the rim of his tall hat. His attitude suggested some weary foredone clerk waiting at the corner of the city street for the omnibus that was to carry him home to his slippered comfort and sober pipe of peace. He wore no muffler, but then it was summer— St. John's Eve, He leaned on an ivory-headed ebony stick of which he seemed fond, and peered, not very eagerly, along the road, which now lay in dazzling rain-washed clarity under the struggling moon. There was a lull in the storm. He had no luggage, no umbrella, yet his grey coat looked neat, and his hat shiny.

Far in the distance, from the south, a black clumsy object appeared, labouring slowly along. It was a coach, of heavy and antique pattern. As soon as he had sighted it, the passenger's faint interest seemed diminished. With a bored air of fulfilment, he dropped his eyes and looked down disapprovingly at the clayey mud at his feet, although, indeed, the sticky substance did not appear to have marred the exquisite polish of his shoes. His palm settled composedly on the ivory knob of his trusty stick, as though it were the hand of an old friend.

With all the signs of difficult going, but no noise of straining or grinding, the coach at last drew up in front of the expectant passenger. He looked up quietly, and recognized it as the vehicle wherein it was appointed that he should travel in this unsuitable weather for a stage or two, maybe. All was correct, the coachman, grave, business-like, headless as of usage, the horses long-tailed, black, conventional....

The door opened noiselessly, and the step was let down. The passenger shook his head as he delicately put his foot on to it, and observed for the benefit, doubtless, of the person or persons inside—

"I see old Joe on the box in his official trim. Rather unnecessary, all this ceremony, I venture to think! A few yokels and old women to impress, if indeed, any one not positively obliged is abroad on a night like this! For form's sake, I suppose!"

He took his seat next the window. There were four occupants of the coach beside himself. They all nodded formally, but not unkindly. He returned their salutations with old-fashioned courtesy, though unacquainted seemingly with any of them.

Sitting next to him was a woman evidently of fashion. Her heavy and valuable furs were negligently cast on one side, to show a plastron covered with jewels. She wore at least two enamelled and jewel-encrusted watches pinned to

her bosom as a mark for thieves to covet. It was foolish of her. So at least thought the man in the grey frock coat. Her yellow wig was much awry. Her eyes were weak, strained, and fearful, and she aided their vision with a diamond-beset pince-nez. Now and again she glanced over her left shoulder as if in some alarm, and at such times she always grasped her gold-net reticule feverishly. She was obviously a rich woman in the world, a first-class train-de-luxe passenger.

The woman opposite her belonged as unmistakably to the people. She was hard-featured, worn with a life of sordid toil and calculation, but withal stout and motherly, a figure to inspire the fullest confidence. She wore a black bonnet with strings, and black silk gloves heavily darned. Round her sunken white collar, a golden gleam of watch-chain was now and then discernible.

At the other end of the coach, squeezed up into the corner where the vacillating light of the lamp hung from the roof least penetrated, a neat, sharp-featured man nestled and hid. His forehead retreated, and his bowler hat was set unnecessarily far back, lending him an air of folly and congenital weakness which his long, cold, clever nose could not dissipate. He was white as old enamel.

But the man whom the gentleman in the frock coat took to among his casual fellow-travellers was the one sitting directly opposite him, a rough, hearty creature, who alone of all the taciturn coachful seemed dis- posed to enter into a casual conversation, which might go some way to enliven the dreariness entailed by this somewhat old-fashioned mode of travelling. Gay talk might help to drown the dashing of the waters of the Firth lying close on the right hand of the section of road they were even now traversing, and the ugly roar of the wind and rain against the windows. This— by comparison— cheerful fellow was dressed like a working man, in a shabby suit of corduroys. He wore no collar, but a twisted red cotton handkerchief was wound tightly round his thick squat neck. His little mean eyes, swinish, but twinkling good-humouredly, stared enviously at the neat gentleman's stiff collar and the delicate grey tones of his suiting. Crossing and uncrossing his creasy legs, in the unusual effort of an attempt at conviviality, the man in corduroys addressed the man in the frock coat awkwardly enough, but still civilly.

"Well, mate! They've chosen a rare rough night to shift us on! Orders from headquarters, I suppose? I've been here nigh on a year and never set eyes on my boss!"

"We used to call him God the Father," said the elder man slowly.... "But whoever it is that orders our ways here, there is no earthly sense in questioning His arrangements, we can only fall in with them. As you admit, you are fairly new, and perhaps you do not as yet conceive fully of the silent impelling force that sways us. It is the same in the world we have left, only that there we were only concerned with the titles and standing of our 'boss,' as you call Him, and

obeyed His laws not a whit. I must say I consider this particular system of soul transference that we have to submit to, very unsettling and productive of restlessness among us— a mere survival and tiresome superstition, to my mind. It has one merit; one sees something of the under world, travelling about as we do, and meeting chance, perhaps kindred spirits on the road. One realizes, too, that Hades is not quite as grey, shall I say, as it is painted! But perhaps," he added, with a slight touch of class hauteur, "you do not quite follow me?"

"Oh yes, Master, I do," eagerly replied the fellow-traveller to whom he chose to address his monologue. "Since I've been dead, I have learned the meaning of many things. I turn up my nose at nothing these days. I always neglected my schooling, but now I tell you I try to make up for lost time. From a rough sort of fellow that I was, with not an idea in my head beyond my beer and my prog, I have come to take my part in the whole of knowledge. It was all mine before, so to speak, but I didn't trouble to put my hand out for it. Didn't care, didn't listen to Miss that taught me, or to Parson, either. He had some good ideas too, as Pve come to know, though Vice isn't Vice exactly with us here, now, in a manner of speaking. If God Almighty made us, why did He make us, even in parts, bad? That's what I want to know, and I'll know that when I've been dead a bit longer. Why did He give me rotten teeth so that I couldn't chew properly and didn't care for my food and liked drink better? It's dirt and digestion makes drinking and devilry, I say."

The smart woman interrupted him with a kind of languid eagerness, exclaiming—

"I must say I agree with you. Since the pestle fell on my shoulder in that lonely villa at Monte, I have realized what the dreadful gambling fever may lead to. It had made those two who treated me so ill, quite inhuman! They had become wild beasts. I ought never to have accepted their treacherous invitation to luncheon, never tempted them with my outrageous display of jewels! And look here, I was tarred with the same stick, I gambled too "

She rummaged in her reticule and fished out a ticket for the rooms at Monte Carlo.

"I always call that the ticket for my execution. Though my executioners were rather unnecessarily brutal. They will attain unto this place more easily than I did. Hardly any pain. The hand of the law is gentle, compared with the methods of "

The man in the grey frock coat raised his finger warningly. "No names, I beg. One of our conventions ...! "

"Have a drop?" said the calm motherly woman to the excited fine lady. "Your wound is recent, isn't it? Yours was a very severe case! A bloody murder, I call it, if ever there was one, and clumsy at that! And you only passive, which is always so much harder, they say! I can't tell, for I was what you may call an active party.

They don't seem to mind mixing, they that look after us herel They lump us all together— travelling, at any rate! Though when I think of what I was actually turned off for l well— the way I look at it, what I did was a positive benefit to Society, and some sections of Society knew it, too, and would have liked to preserve my life."

"But what, Madam, if I may ask, was your little difficulty?"

"It is called, I believe, Baby Farming," she replied off-handedly, receiving her flask back from the smart woman and stowing it away in a capacious pocket. As she spoke, a shudder like a transitory ripple on a rain-swept stream passed over her hearers, with the exception of the thin man in the far corner, who preserved his serenity. Raising his sunken chin, he observed the last speaker with some slight show of interest.

The man in grey apologized.

"Excuse us, Madam. A remnant of old-world squeamishness, uncontrollable by us for the moment. Though perhaps, if you will, you might a little dissipate our preconceived motions of your profession, by explaining clearly your point of view."

"Delighted, I'm sure," she answered. "Funny, though, how seriously you all take it, even here! The feeling against my profession seems absurdly strong below as well as above. I was hooted as I left the court, I recollect. It annoyed me then considerably. I thought that those that hooted had more need to be grateful to me if all was known and paid for. I saved their pockets for them and their lovely honour too. They knew they owed all that to me. For the rest, they did not care. They went on, bless 'em, raising up seed for me to mow down as soon as its head came above ground, and welcome! Sly dogs, no thanks from them! But those shivering, shrinking women that came to me, some of them hardly out of their teens, some of them so delicate they had no right to have a baby at all!— Ah, if only I hadn't let myself take their money it would have been a work of pure philanthropy. But I had to live, then! Now that that tax has been taken off, one has time to think it out all round. But Lord!— Society, to cry shame on me for it I They might as well hang any other useful public servant, like dustmen, rat-catchers, and such-like ridders of pests. Good old Herod, that I used to hear about at school, knew what he was doing when he cleared off all those useless Innocents! He was the first baby farmer, I guess."

"You take large ground, Madam," said the man in the frock coat, a trifle huffily.

"And I have the right," said she, her large determined chin emerging from its rolls of fat in her eagerness. "You men ought to know it, and you do well enough, when you're honest. I was only the scapegoat, and took on me the little sins of the race. It's an easy job enough, what I did, but there's few have the

stomach for it, even then. You couldn't call it dirty work either. You just stand by and leave 'em alone— to girn and bleat and squinny and die."

"No blood, eh?" the man in the corner said suddenly. "I like blood."

"What a fine night it has turned! " said the man in the grey frock coat, raising the sash and putting his head out of the window.... "Something rather uncanny, eh, about that man?" he remarked under his breath, half to himself, half to the man in brown corduroys.

"Take your head in," said the latter, almost affectionately, "or you'll be catching cold, and you've a nasty scar on your neck that I could see as you leaned forward, and which you oughtn't to go getting the cold into."

"Oh, that!" said the other complacently, sitting down again, but averting his gaze carefully from the man in the corner, for whom he seemed to feel a repulsion as marked as was his preference for his cheerful vis-a-vis. "That! That's actually the scar of the blow that killed me. A fearful gash! He was a powerful man that dealt it. He got me, of course, from behind. I never even saw him. I was drafted off here at once, his hand had been so sure." He felt nervously in his pockets. "I have a foulard somewhere, but I am apt to mislay it."

"You should do like me, have a good strong handkercher and knot it round your neck firm. I've got a mark of sorts on my neck too, but it isn't an open wound— never was," the bluff man sniggered. "It is sheer vanity with me, but I don't care to have it seen. It goes well all round, mine does— done by a rope, eh!"

He paused and nodded slyly. "For killing a toff. Nice old gentleman he seemed, too, but I hadn't much time to look at him. Had to get to work "

He was rudely interrupted by a screech from the baby farmer.

"Lord!" she cried, "do I see another conveyance coming on this lonely road? I do 'ope so. I'm one for seeing plenty of people. I always like a crowd, and I must tell you, this sort of humdrum jogging along was beginning to get on my nerves."

They all jerked themselves round, and peered through the glass panes behind them. The taciturn man alone reserved his attention.

Sure enough, a dark object, plainly outlined in the strong moonlight which now lit up the heavens, where heavy masses of cloud had until now obscured its effulgence, was plainly visible. It blotted the ribbon of white that lay in front of them.... Nearer and nearer it came. All heads were at the windows of the coach... Now it was seen to be a high-hung dog-cart, of the most modern pattern, drawn by a smart little mettled pony, and containing two slight young girls.... The one that drove held the ribbons in hands that were covered with white dog-skin gloves, and which looked immense in the pallid moonshine.

"What an excitement!" said the stout woman. "We shall pass them. Some member of one of the country families abput here, I suppose."

"I hope— for all things considering, I'm not a blood-thirsty man," the man in corduroys muttered anxiously under his breath, "that we're not a-going to give them a shock! Bound to, when we meet them plumb like this! 'Orses can't abide the sight of us, mostly, no more than they could those nasty motors when they first came in. And we're worse than motors— they seem to smell us out at once for what we are!"

"If you do really think that pony is likely to swerve," said the man in the grey suit, anxiously, "would it be of any use our asking old Diggory to drive more slowly and humour them?"

"Couldn't go no slower than we are!" replied the man in corduroys. " Besides, it's not the pace that kills! I'll bet you that pony's all of a sweat already!"

The dog-cart approached. The faces of the two young women were discernible. They were white— blanched with fear, or it may have been the effect of the strong moonlight. There was no doubt that they were disturbed, and that the girl who was driving fully realized the necessity of controlling the horse, whose nostrils were quivering, and on whose sides foam was already appearing in white swathes. ...

"It won't pass us!" said the man in the corner, speaking suddenly. He rubbed his hands slowly one over the other. "There will be blood!"

"For goodness' sake stop gloating like that!" said the stout woman. "It turns my stomach to hear you. Wherever can you have come from, I wonder? 'Tisn't manners. ... I say, can't we hail them?" she inquired of the man in grey. "All give them one big shout?"

"They wouldn't be able to hear us," he replied, shaking his head sadly. " You must not forget that we are ghosts. We are not really here."

"Ay, and that's what the beasts know!" cried the man in corduroys. He jumped about. "That 'oss won't be able to stand it. The kid'll not be able to hold him in."

"They're on us!" screamed the smart woman. "Oh, my God! Do we have to sit still and see it?" She covered her eyes with her hand.

"Yes, Missus, I reckon you have, and what's more, run away after like any shoffer that's killed his man and left him lying in the roadside. Old Diggory's got his orders."

The snorting of the pony was now audible. The coachful of ghosts distinctly saw the lather of foam dropping from its jaws. They were able, some of them, to realize the agonized tension of one girl's hands, pulling for all she was worth, and the scared sideways twist of her forcedly inactive companion. Alone the face of the yellow carriage-lamp glared, immovable....

Then it flew down, and was extinguished. There was a crash, a convulsion— and the great road to the north lay clear again.

The Coach of Death rolled on remorselessly past a black heap that filled the ditch on one side. It lay quite still, after that almost human leap and heave....

The smart woman fainted, or appeared to do so. The baby farmer sat silent.

"It's iniquitous! " exclaimed the man in grey, turning

round from the window— his eyes wet, "to leave them behind like that without a word of inquiry, when it's our conveyance has done all the mischief!"

He groaned and fidgeted....

The man in corduroys tried to soothe him. "We ain't to blame, Sir, don't you think it!" he repeated. "As you said before to the lady, we aren't really here!"

"That is little consolation to a man of honour," the old man said sadly. " Still, as you say, we are but tools—"

He devoted himself to the smart woman, who revived a little under his civil ministrations.

"After all," she said, "aren't we somehow or other all in the same boat? I shouldn't be surprised if those two nice girls didn't join us at the next stage. If they do, we'll make them tell us how they felt, when they first saw the coachful of ghosts coming down on them. They're certainly dead, for they were both pitched into the ditch with the cart and horse on top of them. Did anybody see what became of the horse? No.... Well, we must settle down to dulness again, I am afraid, or, suppose, to while away the time we all started to tell each other the story of how we came to be here? A lively tale might cheer us all up, after the accident."

"Agreed, Madam, heartily for my part," said the man in grey, "though my own story is very humdrum, and not in the least amusing. You want, of course, an account of the particular accident that sent me here. Very well! But, ladies first I Will not you begin, Madam?"

She tossed her head, with an affected air.

"My story, perhaps," she insinuated with modesty, "might not be very new to you. It was in all the papers so recently."

"That will not affect me," he answered, "for if, as I presume, it was a murder case, I never read them."

"I read yours then, Missus, I expect," said the man in corduroys. "I generally get the wife to read them out to me— anything spicy."

"And yet the people that did it are not hanged yet, if, indeed, they ever are, poor souls! I am quite anxious," said the smart woman, "to see how it goes. If the pair are really sent here, I suppose I shall be running up against them some night or other, on one of these transference parties. It will be very interesting. But"— she leaned across to the baby farmer— "could we not persuade you to give us some of your— nursery experiences, Madam?"

"There's not much story about the drowning of a litter of squalling puppies or whining kittens," said that lady shortly, "we want something livelier— more

personal, if I may say so. From a remark that gentleman in the corner let drop a while ago, I fancy his reminis- cences would be quite worth hearing, as good as a shilling shocker."

"My story," replied the individual thus pointedly addressed, "is impossible, frankly impossible."

"Indecent, do you mean?" The smart woman's eyes shone. "Oh, let us have it. You can veil it, can't you? "

"Have you ever heard of mental degenerates?" he asked her ompassionately. "I was one. I was called mad— a simple way of expressing it. I was a chemist. I dissected neatly enough, too, like a regular butcher. They did quite right to exterminate me."

His head dropped. He seemed disinclined to say more. Still the smart woman persisted.

"But the details?"

"Are purely medical, Ma'am. Not without a physiological interest, I may say. Interesting to men of science, pathologically. The"— he named a daily paper much in vogue at that time, "made a good deal of the strong sense of artistry— of contrast— the morbid warp inherent in the executant "

His head sank again on his chest.

"I do believe," said the baby farmer, nudging the smart woman, "that we shall find he's the man who killed his sweetheart and then carefully tied her poor inside all into true lover's knots with sky-blue ribbon. Artist, indeed! They're quite common colours— blue and red "

"Disgusting!" The delicate lady from Monte Carlo shuddered, and turning coldly away, joined in the petition proffered by the other ghosts to the breezy man in corduroys, to relate his experiences.

"Oh, I'll tell you how I came to join you and welcome! " he said, rolling his huge neck about in its setting of red cotton. "Well, to begin with, I was drunk. Equally, of course, I was hard up. My missus— she's married again, by the way, blast her!— was always nagging me to do something for her and the kids. I did. Nation's taking care of them now, along of what I did. Work, she meant, but that was only by the way. I did choose to take on a job, though, on a rich man's estate, building some kind of Folly, lots of glass and that, working away day and night by naphtha flares, you know. He was one of those men, you know the sort, that has more money than a man can properly spend, and feels quite sick about it, and says so, in interviews and so on, in the papers a working man reads. That's the mischief. He was always giving away chunks of money to charities and libraries and that sort of useless lumber, but none of it ever seemed to come the way of those that were in real need of it. They said the money had got on his nerves, and would not let him sleep o' nights, and that he was afraid by day and went about with a loaded stick and I don't know what all. And he was looked

after by detectives, at one time, so the papers said— again the papers, putting things in people's heads, as it's their way. So one blessed evening I was very low— funds and all, and my missus and the kids hollering and complaining as they always do when luck's bad. Lord bless them, they never thought as they were 'citing their man to murder. Women never do think. And going out with their snivelling in my ears, I passed the station where he landed every evening after his day in town, and I happened to see him come out of the train and send away his motor that was a-waiting for him all regular, and start out to walk 'ome alone by a short cut across a little plantation there was, very thick and dark, just the place for a murder. Well— I told you I was half drunk— I raced home and got something to do it with— a meat chopper— to be particular "

The old man opposite put his hand nervously to the back of his neck.

"Ay, Mister, it takes you just there, does it? You look a regular bundle of nerves, you do. Well, as I was saying, I went round by a short cut that I happened to know of, and got in front of him and hid in the hedge. Ten mortal minutes I waited for my man to come by. Lord, how my hand did tremble! I'd have knocked off for two pence. I was as nervous as a cat, but all the same, it didn't prevent me from striking out for wife and children with a will when my chance came. I caught him behind with my chopper, and he fell like a log. Never lifted a hand to defend himself— hadn't got any grit. Ladies, I don't suppose I hurt him much, for he never even cried out when I struck or groaned when it was done. Then I looked him over, turned out his pockets and collared his watch and season ticket and seals and money. Money— hah!— I had been fairly done over that. Would you believe it of a rich fellow like him, he hadn't got more than the change of a sovereign on him."

"Shame! " ejaculated the taciturn man in the corner.

"I admit it was hard on you," the man in grey observed kindly. "Very hard, for I believe the retribution came all too quickly. You foolishly left your chopper about to identify you, and were apprehended at once by our excellent rural police. Yet the law is so dilatory that you lay in gaol a whole year before you were free to join your victim here?"

"Right you are, mate. Yes, I swung for it, sure enough. Short and sweet it was once I stood on the drop, but it still makes my poor old throat ache to think of it."

He wriggled and twisted his neck in its ruddy cincture. ...

"Now, governor, I'm done, and if you've no objection we'd all like to hear how you came by that ugly gash of yours? It wasn't no rope did that. Common or garden murder, I'll be bound."

"Certainly, my man, it was a murder— a murder most apropos. The circumstances were peculiar. I have often longed to get the ear of the jury who tried a man for relieving me of my light purse and intolerably heavy life, and tell

them— the whole hard-working, conscientious twelve of them, trying their best to bring in an honest verdict and avenge my wrongs— my own proper feelings, surely no negligible factor in the case! They could not guess, these ignorant living men, whose eyes had not yet been opened by death to a due sense of the proportions of things— that I bore the poor creature no malice, but instead was actually grateful for his skilful surgery that had severed the life-cord that bored me, so neatly and completely."

"It isn't every one would take it like that! " remarked the smart woman. "Yet that is, more or less, how I feel about these things myself. Only in my case it is impossible to speak of skilful surgery! I was disgracefully cut up. I couldn't possibly have worn a low dress again! "

"Have you ever heard? " said the man in grey thought fully, "of the Greek story of the Gold of Rhampsinitos, and the inviolable cellar he built to store it in? According to the modern system, my gold was hoarded in my brain, where fat assets and sordid securities bred and bred all day long. The laws that govern wealth are hard. You must give it, devise it, you must not allow it to be taken. But for my part I would have welcomed the two sons of the master builder who broke into the Greek King's Treasure House. In the strong-room of my brain it lodged. With one careless calculation, one stroke of a pen, I could make money breed money there to madden me. I was lonely, too. I had no wife to divide my responsibilities. She might even have enjoyed them. But I dared approach no woman in the way of love— I did not choose to be loved for my cheque-signing powers. I was not loved at all. I was hated. Unrighteous things were done in my name, by the greedy husbandmen of my load of money. Then I was told that I went in danger of my life, and I condescended to take care of that— for a time— only for a time!

"One dark winter evening— I forget what had happened during the day, what fresh instance of turpitude or greed had come before me— I was so revolted that I kicked away all the puling safeguards by which my agents guarded their best asset of all, and gave the rein to my instinct. I disregarded precautions of every sort— with the exception of my faithful loaded stick, and the carrying of that had come to be a mere matter of habit with me— and I walked home from the station alone and unattended, up to my big house and good dinner which I hoped— nay, I almost knew— that I should not be alive to eat; And indeed, as luck would have it, on that night of all nights the trap was set for me. The appointed death-dealer was waiting— he took me on at once. I got my desire— kind, speedy, merciful, violent death. I never even saw the face of my deliverer."

"By George!" softly swore the man in corduroys. "This beats all. Are you sure you aren't kidding us?"

"No indeed, that is exactly how I felt about it, and if I had known of knowledge, as I knew of instinct, what was going to happen, I would have thought to realize some of my wealth before setting out to walk through that wood, and made it more worth the honest fellow's while. But as you are aware, a millionaire does not carry portable gold about with him, and my cheque-book which I had on me would, of course, be of no use to him. Alas, all the poor devil got for his pains was exactly nineteen shillings and eleven pence. I had changed a sovereign at the book-stall to buy a paper, and out of habit, had waited for the change."

The man in corduroys was by this time in a considerable state of excitement. He had rent the red handkerchief fiercely from his neck, and now made as if to tear it across his knee....

"Why, governor!" he exclaimed passionately, "do you mean to say it was through you that I got this here"— he put both hands behind his head and interlocked them, " in return for giving you that there cut at the back of your neck? Well, how things do come about, to be sure!"

"Gently, gently! my man," the elder soothed him. "Don't be so melodramatic about a very ordinary coincidence. See, the ladies are quite upset. It doesn't do to allow Oneself to get excited here— it's not in the rules. If I had made the little discovery you have done, I don't think— no, I really don't think I would have made it public. This undue exhibition of emotion of yours strikes me as belonging to the vulgar world we have all left. But since you have allowed it to come out, and every one is now aware of the peculiar relation in which we stand to each other, you must let me tender you my best thanks, as to a most skilful and firm operator, and believe me to be truly grateful to you for your services in the past."

"Quite the old school!" said the smart woman.

"I must say, Sir,— I consider you the real gentleman," said the baby farmer.

"I *am* a gentleman."

"And a fairly accommodating one!" said the rough man, wiping his brow where, however, no sweat was. "It isn't every man as would give thanks for being scragged! "

"Every man isn't a millionaire," said his victim calmly.

The smart woman, leaning forward, tapped the old gentleman amiably with her jewelled pince-nez.

"But we belong to the same world, I perceive," she said, "and I am quite able to understand your refined feeling. It is as I said in my own case. Indeed if those two good people, who shall be nameless, had only dealt with me a little more gently, I don't know that I should not forgive them absolutely. I shall at any rate be perfectly civil when I do meet them— only perhaps a little distant. But that Monte Carlo existence I was leading when they interrupted it, was really

becoming intolerable! No one who hasn't done it, thoroughly can realize what it is. Glare, noise, glitter, fever— that heartless, blue, laughing sea they talk of in the railway advertisements—"

The baby farmer, left out in this elegant discussion, obviously took no pleasure in it, but staring straight before her, muttered sulkily—

"Cote d'Azur and Pentonville! There's some little difference, isn't there, between one life and the other? Yet I enjoyed my life, I did, and as for gratitude, I can't say as I see all those blessed infants a-coming up to me, and slobbering me for what I did for 'em. I may meet them, but they'll not notice me. It isn't in human nature. Their mothers' thanks was all I got, and they thanked me beforehand in hard cash for what I was a-going to do. Lord, what's a ricketty baby more or less? I say, we're slowing up! Going to stop perhaps, and a good thing too!"

"Yes," said the man in the grey frock coat, still enouncing his curt sentences to the unheeding listeners, "I am able to cordially thank the man who rid me with one clean scientific blow of my wretched life and all its tedious accessories. A skilled workman is worthy of his hire—"

"Mercy!" muttered the baby farmer. "Is he never going to stop? If it was for nothing else, he ought to have got scragged for being a bore!"

But being fully wound up, though in the excitement of arriving at the depót no one was attending, the man in grey continued, "Suicide I had thought of, but abhorred, though on my soul I had nearly come to that, and then it was merely a question of courage— you spoke truly, Sir. Mine was a thin, pusillanimous nature, as you said. You came by, a kind Samaritan, and sacrificed your own good life freely to rid me of my wretched one. I think I told you that when you were being tried, I followed urgently all the details of the trial, and made interest with the authorities here to allow me to appear to the judge in his sleep, say, and instil into his mind some inkling of the true state of my feelings towards you. I do not know, however, if you would have thanked me, for life may have been no sweeter to you than it was to me— you spoke of an uncongenial helpmate, I think? Still one never knows. I might have been the means of procuring you some good years yet, in the full exercise of your undeniable vigour and remarkable decision of character. But it was apparently not to be. You followed me here, after a long interval of waiting, and now we have met, face to face. The introduction on that dark night was worth nothing. I like your face. We shall probably never meet again— their ways are dark and devious here, so I am the more glad of this opportunity of opening my mind to you on a delicate subject, perhaps, but one that has always been very near my heart. By the way "— he lifted his stick with its shining ivory crown into view. "Did you notice this? You read the papers, you said, and they told you it was heavily weighted and that I carried it always as a precaution. Well, on that

eventful night for both of us— perhaps you were too hurried to notice?— but I never used it. Accept it now, will you not, as a memento?... I think, from sundry truly unearthly bumpings, that we seem to have come at last to our journey's end... I am right, the coachman has got down from his perch and taken his head under his arm.... We part. Mesdames, I salute you. Again, Sir—" He addressed himself more particularly to the shamefaced man in corduroys— "Farewell. Very pleased to have met you!"

One by one, the passengers faded away into the distance. The polite old man paused in the semblance of an inn yard where the coach had drawn up. A pale proud woman's face, shining up by the step, had touched him. She was an intending passenger, and she was alone. She wore white dog-skin gloves, but no hat. Unusual, he fancied, in a woman of her class. On looking closer, he saw that she had a hat, but that it hung disregarded over her shoulder by an elastic, and was much battered and destroyed. He decided to speak to her.

"You are the lady we killed, I think?" he asked gently.

She acknowledged with a bow that it was so.

"We could none of us do anything," he apologized, "or I hope you will believe—"

"Certainly, Sir, it was no fault of yours, or indeed of the company's, I am sure. The accident was inevitable!" so she assured him, smiling faintly. He looked at her kindly. There was blood on the hair, he was able to convince himself.... "But Rory— our pony— never can pass things, at the best of times, and the look of your conveyance was certainly rather unusual. And at that time of night we rarely meet anything at all on the Great North Road. We choose that time on purpose, my sister and I— we had been staying away for a week with friends,and we were going home. When we saw you coming, Lucy said, half in jest— she is older than I— 'Suppose that thing in front were the Coach of Death the foolish country people talk about? They say it travels this way once a year, with its cargo of souls, on St. John's Eve.' I bade her not be superstitious, but I confess I thought the vehicle looked odd myself, and I did wonder how Rory would stand it. When it came nearer I saw distinctly that the coachman was headless, and I laughingly told my sister so. She bade me not disturb her, for death coach or live coach, she meant to do her best to get Rory past it. She failed—"

The man in grey looked nervously around. He was alone with the young lady in the dull inn yard. The headless coachman was preparing to ascend to the box seat again....

"Where is your sister now?" he inquired.

"She lies at the bottom of the ditch. Rory has galloped home. She fell on her head, but she is alive still. When they find her in the morning, she will be dead, I

know that. For now I know all things. I am at peace... you need have no care for me...."

"Let me at least put you into the coach," he begged. "And you will prefer the corner seat?"

She took it; he went on—

"It looks, however, as if you were going to have all the accommodation to yourself, for this stage at all events."

He raised his hat; she bowed.

"I am grieved that I cannot have the pleasure— that I cannot offer to accompany you, but I have my marching orders...."

He raised his hat again.... The coach moved on out of the yard. Soon it was lost in the mists.... The summer dawn was just breaking.

9: How The Baby Found the Clue

Headon Hill

Francis Edward Grainger, 1854-1927

Collected in: *The Divinations of Kala Persad and Other Stories*, 1895

NO TRAVELLER passing along the main road that runs from Chalons to Epernay in the fair champagne country will fail to notice the hoary turrets and grim boundary walls of the old Chateau d'Yvol, standing half a mile back from the highway amid the luscious vines, and proudly asserting an uncontested right to be considered the heart and centre of the district. Though mail-clad knights no longer clatter across the drawbridge, eager for fray or tourney; though a century has passed since the last grand seigneur of the soil gave his life with a good heart for expiring monarchy; yet even in these later days the Chateau d'Yvol is something more than a memory of the past.

The peasants still look to it as the mainstay of their existence, and the ancient walls still play an important part in the prosperity of the Department. For the Chateau d'Yvol is the headquarters of the celebrated brandy of sparkling wine that bears its name; here the produce of the sunny vineyards is bottled and stored; and here, too, the vast business arrangements of the proprietors are conducted.

Two men were seated over their dessert in a comfortable apartment on the first floor of the chateau. This was the private dining-room of M. de Goncourt, at that time sole owner of the business. Attired in evening dress of the latest Parisian fashion, and chatting airily of trifles, he was apparently laying himself out for the entertainment of his guest and largest customer— M. Alphonse Laroche, of Laroche Freres et Cle, wine shippers, of Marseilles.

The two gentlemen had turned their chairs to the window which looked down across the vineyards to the beautiful valley of the Marne, beyond which the sun was just setting brilliantly in a cloudless sky.

'And now, my dear friend,' said M. de Goncourt at last, after he had sent his guest into fits of laughter with a broader sally than usual, 'it is time that we ceased this frivolity and got to business if, as you say, you must leave here to-night. Do I understand you to desire to order, on behalf of your most excellent firm, the whole of the grande cuvee of last year's vintage?'

'That is so,' said Laroche. 'We are prepared to take every bottle or it. Only, when I put it that way I do not make it strong enough. "Prepared to take" sounds as if we were doing you a favor in giving you this order, whereas I assure you, my friend, that if you consent to execute it it is Laroche & Cie who will be under the obligation.'

De Goncourt pondered a moment, and before replying, cast a sidelong look at his customer.

'I do not see how it can be managed,' he said. 'I have half promised a large portion of that special vintage to another firm.'

Laroche waved his hands in earnest entreaty.

'I ask it of you as a favor,' he repeated; 'as a favor to customers who have done business with you for years.'

De Goncourt gave his chair a half turn, and looked Laroche steadily in the face as he answered.

'My friend, in business there are no obligations that need deserve the name long, for the very good reason that when they are repaid they cease to come under that category. You have it in your power to repay this favor, if I grant it, at once. Will you do so?'

'Only tell me how,' said the wine shipper, 'and I will meet you if I can.'

'Listen to me, then, and accept what I say in strictest confidence,' said Goncourt, lowering his voice and laying his hand impressively on his companion's knee. 'I have had great expenses lately, and I am temporarily pressed for money. If you are prepared to pay cash with the order for the *grande cuvée* of last year's wine, it is yours, every drop of it; if not, why then I must sell it in the best market for ready money— that is all. A mutual obligation, you see, my friend, the matter lies in a nutshell.'

Laroche seized De Goncourt's hand.

'It is a bargain, then!' he cried effusively. 'You shall have cash by all means; we will waive our usual six months' credit with pleasure. But, my friend, you astound me. The wealthy De Goncourt pressed for ready money!'

'It is only temporary— the result of an unfortunate speculation— and will quickly pass away,' answered the other. 'When, then, may I expect—?'

'Say not another word,' replied Laroche; 'as luck would have it, I have enough money by me in notes on the Bank of France to complete the arrangement, here as we at now.'

Drawing a bundle of notes from his pocket, he proceeded: 'Here is a hundred thousand francs which I have been fortunate enough to win at Monte Carlo, whence I came to you. I will recoup my private purse from the coffers of the firm when I return to Marseilles. The amount is somewhere near what the amount of your invoice will be. It can be correctly adjusted afterwards. Take the money, my friend, and write me out a receipt which shall show that the special vintage is now the property of Laroche Freres.'

De Goncourt took the bundle of notes, tied up as they were with the tape, and, after quickly verifying them, transferred them to his breast-pocket With a few words of easy thanks he rose and went to a table in the corner for the purpose of writing a receipt.

When he had finished writing he sat for over a minute wrapped in deep thought, with his eyes fixed on Laroche, who was gazing contentedly over the

landscape, happy at having gained his point. Suddenly the fixed expression on De Goncourt's face relaxed into a smile of determination. Throwing down his pen, he took up the receipt and went back to the window.

'There you are, Laroche,' he said, handing the document to his guest. 'You willl see that this is made out in proper form. And now,' he went on, 'if you will excuse me for a few moments, I will send for one of my foremen. It will be more satisfactory if I give instructions in your presence to have the grande cuvee held at your disposal.'

As he reached the door of the apartment, De Goncourt paused with his hand on the lock and looked round. 'Move your chair over to this side of the window, Laroche,' he said. 'There, that's right— against the curtain. You get a better view of the valley from that point. It is beautiful in the twilight.'

He quitted the room, leaving the door slightly ajar, and his guest sat on, lazily comfortable, watching the deepening shadows as they crept higher and higher up the valley.

THERE WAS a porter's lodge hard by the main entrance to the Chateau d'Yvol, in which dwelt Jacques Roublot, the foreman, with his daughter Lucille, her husband Pierre Desanges, and their infant son— a fine boy just two months old.

While the gentlemen were busy over their bargain the dining-room of the chateau, the foreman and his family were seated at supper. The old man was a fine specimen of the French workman of the better class, strong in fidelity to his master and attached to the traditions of the house he served, holding both only second in his affections to his beautiful daughter Lucille— the pride and solace of his declining years. It had been a proud day for old Jacques when, little more than twelve months before, his favorite assistant, Pierre Desanges, had joined the family as his son-in-law, and very quickly was it settled that bride and bridegroom should take up their abode under his roof. But even in this united household there was a skeleton, whose grisly bones had always been kept a jealously guarded secret from Jacques Rou-blot.

Pierre and Lucille did not care to endanger their father's peace of mind by telling him that previous to her marriage M. de Goncourt had pestered Lucille with attentions which were odious to her. Since the wedding had given her a stalwart lawful protector in her husband, these attentions had been less marked; but even now Lucille found it necessary to avoid meeting the proprietor of the chateau, so offensive were his demonstrations of mock politeness. As for Pierre, he registered a vow to break every bone in M. de Goncourt's body, employer or no employer, if the latter annoyed his young wife, and then he put the matter from him with the lightheartedness of youth till such time should come.

Such was the state of affairs in the porter's lodge on the evening when M. Laroche visited the chateau. The trio made a merry party round the frugal board, while the baby slept quietly in its cradle close to its mother's chair. Suddenly there was a knocking at the door, and being bidden, one of the house servants entered.

'You are to go up to the chateau at once, Pierre,' the woman said. 'Monsieur desires to speak with you about the stock. I was to tell you to go straight upstairs to the dining-room; you will find the gentlemen there.'

Pierre made a wry face; he was only half way through his potage, and the rest would be cold before he could return.

'Very well, Marie,' he said; 'I will follow you directly,' and, as the maid disappeared, he laughingly twitted his father-in-law on his growing importance.

'See, *mon pere*,' he said, 'it is young Pierre who is sent for nowadays, not the venerable Jacques.'

'Ah, my son, monsieur was always considerate; he would not drag my old bones out so late. It is only to book an order for Laroche et Cie, I expect.' The young foreman chucked his pretty wife under the chin, stooped down and kissed the sleeping child, and went out.

The porter's lodge was barely a hundred yards from the door of the chateau, and Pierre quickly reached his destination. The ground floor of the ancient mansion was used as store rooms and offices, with kit-chen and servants' quarters far away at the back, so Pierre made straight for the grand staircase by which his employer's private suite of rooms was reached. At the top of the staircase was a long corridor with rooms on either side. The dining-room was at the far end, and as Pierre approached the door he saw that it was slightly ajar. He gave a knock with his knuckles on the panel, and, as was his custom when summoned by his employer, entered without waiting for a reply.

For a moment Pierre thought that the room was unoccupied, and that the gentlemen, must have gone elsewhere. The room was nearly in darkness now, except for a few expiring gleams of daylight that made the window more conspicuous than the rest of the apartment. It was in this direction that the young man's eyes naturally strayed, and then he saw that his first supposition was a mistake. The room was not unoccupied. There was some one sitting in an armchair facing the window, half hidden by the curtain. Pierre supposed that the gentlemen, having dined well, were indulging in a nap, and advanced into the room with the object of making his presence known. But still the figure did not move.

Nearer and nearer drew the young foreman, but it was not till he was close up to the window that he was able to discern a sight which froze the marrow in his bones. The man in the armchair was lying back dead, stabbed to the heart!

Pierre raised the sunken head from the breast, and a glance told him that the pale features were those of M. Laroche, his master's guest. He could only have been dead a few minutes, for the blood was still spurting from the wound. Horror-struck, Pierre turned to summon aid, and found himself confronted by De Goncourt.

'Villain! murderer! so I have caught you in the act,' cried the proprietor of the chateau. 'You have killed my poor friend Laroche to commit some paltry robbery. Your head shall answer for it, dastard. Move from this spot if you dare,' and he rang the bell violently, supplementing the summons with loud cries of 'Help! Murder!'

'I am not guilty,' said Pierre doggedly. 'I know less than you do of the crime — perhaps not so much. I have no weapon; I could not have done it—'

'Bah!' said De Goncourt, 'you have thrown it through the window into the fish-pond beneath.'

Two or three servants entered hurriedly.

'Bring lights, and send for the gendarmes, and two of you see that this man does not escape. He has murdered my dear, dear friend Laroche,' said De Goncourt to the astonished attendants, who, in a state of wild excitement, proceeded to execute his orders.

That night Pierre Desanges was taken to Chalon Gaol on a charge of murder, and the whole of the way thither five little words were ringing in his ears—words which had been spoken by his master as he was given into the custody of the gendarmes. The words were, 'I saw him do it.'

WEARILY DRAGGED the ensuing days for the inhabitants of the porter's lodge. Poor old Jacques Roublot was well-nigh broken down by the misfortune which had overtaken his son-in-law. He did not believe the young man guilty; but if he was not, who could be? Such was the burden of his oft-repeated plaint as he sat in the sun outside the lodge, utterly unfitted for work. As for Lucille, she was dazed, heart-broken, and defiant by turns. If it had not been for her baby, she would have gone mad during the terrible time after Pierre's arrest. All she could do for her accused husband was done, but that was not much as yet. The time had not yet come for the services of an advocate to be needed; for according to French law, the early days of his imprisonment were spent in private examinations before a *juge 'd'instruction*, whose duty it was to try to worry a confession from the prisoner.

The only news that reached the stricken father and daughter from the gaol was that Pierre stood firm and maintained his innocence.

e Goncourt's evidence was naturally that which told most heavily against the prisoner. He had entered the dining-room after a short absence, he said, and had seen Pierre Desangses stab M. Laroche over the back of the chair, before he

himself had been able to interfere. Surprised in the act, the man hard thrown a knife through the window into the fishpond. The chair in which the deceased was sitting was placed in such a manner that anyone could have approached from the door of the room without being noticed.

M. Laroche had not, up to the time of his death, broached any business matters; he had neither paid any money nor given any orders, though he, M. de Goncourt, thought it likely he might have intended to do business before his departure. The dead man's brother and partner could throw no light on the murder. To the best of his knowledge his brother only had a few hundred francs with him for travelling purposes when he left home, and these, together with his jewellery, were found untouched on his person. Doubtless this would be accounted for by the murderer having been interrupted in his work.

The fishpond was dragged by the au thorities, and a knife was found; but this knife rather added to the mystery than otherwise. It was a blunt-edged dessert-knife, and the surgeons were unanimous in doubting if it could have inflicted the wound of which M. La roche died. The police, however, held an opposite theory, and thus it was that Pierre was finally committed to take his trial at the Assize Court at Chalons.

The day before the trial came at last, and Lucille, tearless in her blank despair, carried her baby to a sunny corner of the courtyard where she could brood alone. The spot she chose was close to an old lean-to shed, built against the high boundary wall, and used, when used at all, for the storage of empty bottles. Here she placed the cradle, and seating herself on a low stool at its side, half unconsciously watched the infantile gambols of her child. Ah, but it was a merry youngster, and a brave— so like the light-hearted father whose love it would never know, slain as he would be in a few short weeks for a crime he had never committed.

How strong and well-formed the baby's limbs were too; with what vigor he kicked his little legs and laughed with childish glee! Ah, that was a higher kick than usual! Why, the young rascal was almost as agile, the poor stricken mother thought with pride, as the strolling acrobats Pierre had taken her to see on a happy saints day during their courtship, now, alas! so many, many weary days ago.

Suddenly a tremendous effort on the part of the baby, which nearly upset the cradle, called Lucille's attention once more.

'Why,' she exclaimed to herself, 'the boy actually takes notice of things, and he so young, too! He has an object in his kicking. It is the piece of tape he wants, and he shall have it, the cherished one, before he sprains his pretty legs.'

It was true enough; the baby's kicks were directed at a piece of colored tape which was flattering on a bit of broken cask hooping that had beenthrown aside as lumber against the wall. The hooping projected over the cradle, making a kind

of archway, and the youngster had set his heart on dislodging the tape, which had caught in the top. Lucille had detached the tape in order to gratify the boy with the coveted possession when she noticed some letters in black impressed with a rubber stamp on the yellow tape. Glancing at the words, first with, idle curiosity— to be turned in a moment to intense excitement, hope, joy, and expectation— this as what she read:

'Laroche Freres et Cie, Marseilles.'

Was it, could it be, a clue to the murder? At any rate it should be no fault of hers if the discovery led to nothing. That tape could not have come there by any ordinary means, and at least in clearing up the mystery she would feel that she was doing something.

Lucille carried the baby back to the lodge, and within two hours was telling her story in the police bureau at Chalons.

The officer listened with interest, and agreed that there might be something in it. He did not say what he then suspected, that the clue would probably fix the crime more closely than before on Pierre Desanges, but he gave prompt orders to several of his subordinates—

'Go with madame here, and tho roughly search the spot where this tape was found. Stay, on second thoughts, I wall accompany you myself. It is the unexpected that often happens, and it may be necessary to act.'

Arrived at the chateau, Lucille led the way to the courtyard and pointed out the place where the tape had been found. The police officers at once turned their attention to the old shed close by, and rummaged the place from top to bottom, peering among the empty bottles, and even looking inside them, without success.

At length, just as Lucille was beginning to despair, one of the men called to the officer: 'See, on the ground there, between those two stacks of bottles; the earth appears to have been disturbed.'

'Fetch a spade, then, and dig,' was the prompt reply.

The implement was procured, and a sturdy gendarme set to work. At the depth of a foot the spade struck against a hard substance, and aminute later a long, japanned iron cashbox was brought to light. It was the work of an instant to prize it open, when the contents proved to be a hundred thousand-franc notes on the Bank of France, a business document, and a cruel-looking dagger stained with blood.

The written paper was the receipt which De Goncourt gave for the money handed him by Laroche, duly acknowledging that the whole of the valuable vintage was the property of Laroche Freres. On the handle of the dagger was engraved the inscription, 'Gaston de Goncourt'.

The mystery of the murder was solved. As Lucille fell fainting to the ground, the last words she heard spoken were: 'To the chateau, and arrest the murderer!'

There is little more to be told. De Goncourt, once in the hands of the examining magistrate, made but a poor fight of it, unbuoyed as he was by the innocence which had sustained Pierre. He confessed that he had killed Laroche with the object of recovering the receipt which he had given, so that he might sell the valuable vintage over again, and possess, as clear gain, the money which his victim had paid for it.

The notes, having been won at the gaming-table, would not be likely to be traced, but as a precaution he hid them for a while, together with the dagger which had laid his victim low, and the receipt which, in his hurry on that fatal night he had no means of destroying.

When hiding the box containing the proofs of his crime, he had removed the tape to make the notes fit closer, and on leaving the shed had thrown the tape aside in ignorance that it bore Laroche's name. To lend color to his accusation of Pierre, he had, after the murder, seized a knife from the dinner table and flung it into the fishpond without noticing that he had selected a dessert knife for the purpose. But in his confession the wretched man made no allusion to the double crime he had attempted— the fearful vengeance he had so nearly wreaked on Pierre for winning the prize he himself coveted. It was only Lucille and her husband who knew that De Goncourt's accusation was something more than a suddenly conceived idea for shielding himself.

_____

10: The Voices

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

The Sunday Strand June 1906

Express and Telegraph (Adelaide) 21 July 1906

And I never shall pass through the woodlands again,
And I never shall walk by the sea,
But I'll hear the voice of my baby again—
My little boy calling to me.
Calling to me in the winds' low sigh
And the sound of each tiny wave,
for the wood was his playground in days gone by.
And— the sea is my hair's grave.
Bereaved.

THE DINGY gentleman in the shabby silk hat delicately edged into the farmhouse kitchen and waxed confidential, what time his eyes roved hungrily round to the big oven. There was an odor of roasting poultry in the air, and the dingy gentleman sniffed appreciately. Carefully, and with tenderness that was almost touching, he laid his passé hat upon the corner of the table.

"Yes, madam," he repeated, with the sauve fluency of the commercial traveller who has seen better days, "I think I may confidently say that you will be astonished. Science, madam, has produced very many wonderful nventions, but I am convinced that the graphophone surpasses— exceeds— annihilates— all others. We hear much, madam, of Marconi— the wireless man, y'know— but— as a man of the world—a man, madam, who has seen cities— I have no hesitation in saying that. besides the graphopbone the lustre of the wireless telegram grows dim— er—has a blight cast upon its brilliance, and becomes— er— enveloped in darkness. That, madam, is actually the case. In these days of progress— there!"

The dingy gentleman suddenly became silent as his fingers moved the brown paper from a graphophone and laid bare its polished beauty. He seemed to lose his breath at the sight: to become entranced and incapable of speech.

The lady to whom he had been speaking— she was a pleasant-looking little woman of about thirty years— smiled slightly.

"It looks very nice," she said.

Something in her voice made the dingy gentleman look at her. For she spoke very kindly, and perhaps he was not used to people who spoke kindly to him.

"But, really, I don't think I want it."

There was a faint note of apology in her voice, for she had noticed the frayed cuffs of the man and his thin cheeks. Some of his jauntiness fell away from him,

and that which took its place might, have been anxiety. He produced from his dingy bag a round cardboard box.

"Pardon me, madam, but if you will be be kind as to permit me to place a record on the machine— a band record, madam, made by the band of the Columbia Phonograph Company of Noo Yawk, Parse, and London"—this last very glibly— "I feel certain that you will be delighted with it. You lift the Catch?-7S0— slide it along— so"— his fingers flew nimbly about the machine— "and start it so."

He stood back with the air of a man calling upon the spirits of all the dead masters of harmony.

"There was a faint whirr from the yawning trumpet-mouth of the talking machine; then a voice— a snappy American voice— announced the title.

"H-i-iz-z-z— *The Star-Spangled Banner*, by the band of the Columbia Phonograph Company of Noo Yawk, Parse, and London," and instantly thereafter the farmhouse kitchen was filled with the brisk music of the National Anthem dear to the hearts of all true Americans. A little servant-maid crept in the from scullery and listened, frankly delighted; and the eyes of the. kindly mistress brightened. Unconsciously she swayed slightly, as though about to begin dancing. The dingy gentleman stood with his head on one side, smiling upon the machine as a father smiles upon his first-born when he thing no one is looking. Every now and then he shot a furtive look at the prospective purchaser.

Presently he leaned forward and deftly shut off the instrument as the last chord fell. Then he turned victoriously to the mistress of the house.

"There, madam," he said.

"It was very, fine," she admitted, "but— I— I am afraid I do not need one today." There was a touch of nervousness in her voice— as there is in every kindhearted woman's when she is refusing charity from a sense of duty. And the dingy gentleman obviously needed charity. His next speech made that abundantly clear.

"Madam," he said, with a fleeting phantom of dignity about him, "I ask you to buy that machine as a favor to a man who needs it— sorely— bitterly. A man who is down, madam, and whom the world means to keep I down," he gulped. "I dunno w'y—" He seemed to lapse suddenly into some slough of illetracy from which—as in his more cheerful moments he showed— he had long ago raised himself. Then he pulled himself up, speaking frankly.

"You see, madam, I haven't the luck to be an ordinary traveller. I'm a hawker. I buy one machine and hawk it about from one house to tbe other until I sell it, and it's only ten shillings profit when I do sell it. And I want the money— no one knows how I want the money. Y's I'm— well, I expect you know what youngsters are to anybody, and it's— well, it's a bit rough. I've only sold—"

his glance wandered round, almost against his will, to the oven. The maid had opened it and was basting the chickens. It was probably the first time the mistress of the house had seen hunger with a capital "H," and she turned crimson, like, a woman bitterly ashamed.

"I— I think, after all, I would like the machine, and perhaps you will stop to dinner with us and see my children," she said, hurriedly.

She was not redder than the man as he thanked her, and the sweet clumsiness of her speech was not greater than the brusqueness of the man as he turned suddenly to the window and looked upon a landscape which he could not see.

He made friends with all the children when they came in to dinner— Phyllis, the flaxen-haired grave little body, who watched him with serious blue eyes all the time; Jimmy, who asked the very maddest questions im all the world about the works of the machine; Jack, scratchy-legged and brown and tousle-haired, who displayed a surpassing, interest in a very far place called 'Frisco' which the dingy gentleman, described for the benefit of Jack's father; and, lastly, Evelyn, the littlest of them all, whose wondering eyes never left the stranger's face.

It was during dinner when the dingy gentleman suggested the idea which made the eyes of the mother brighten.

"I've got two blank records in my bag," he said, "and if I were you I would put them on the machine—I'll show you how— and let the children speak into the trumpet and make a record. Let them say anything— doesn't matter what— recitation, anything. Then you can lock the record away for as long as you like— oh, it'll keep all right— and in about ten— twenty— thirty years' titne you'll be able to put the record on a machine and hear the little ones talk. "When they're grown up, mind you— when they're grown up. Ah," he he smiled as the mother made a movement to get up. It was as though she wanted to do it at once.

And after, dinner they made the recqrds. The dingy gentleman announced crisp'y ihto the machine that this was a "record of the voices of Phyllis, Jimmy, Jack, and Evelyn Bannister, made upon a machine supplied by the Columbia Phonograph Company of Noo Yawk Parse and London."

Of the children, Jack, of course, spoke first. Not because he was the eldest— Phyllis was that— but just because he happened to be Jack.

He said what the Jacks of every family have said from the flood— and probably before. Of course, they were all babies— just babies—

"Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes, sir, yes, sir, three bags full.
One for my master, one for my dame,
And one for the little boy that lives down the lane."

Despite the intervals for shrieks of laughter, he managed, to get it all on half a record.

Then came Phyllis— a shrill little voice, reciting that very old item—

"Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating some curds an' whey, there cume a big spider an' sat down beside her, 'n' frightened Miss Muffet away."

Afterwards Jimmy spoke. He insisted on gravely describing an island. "An island is a place of land s'rounded by water," announced Jimmy. Also the graphophone registered in Jimmy's serious treble the following useful information—

"Willum the Conker, ten sixt'y sis."

And that used up Jimmy's half record.

Evelyn had to he lifted to speak into the rumpet, and, because she was so little, he aid not know anything to say except 'God bless." So the record took note of Dvelyn as follows:—

"Go' bress daddy an' mamma an' Phyllis an' Jimmy an' Jack, an' make me a good girl Jes' Chris' sake, Amen!"

All the children wondered why their nother locked away the records so jealously and quickly. They wanted to hear them over and over again.

But a month later they had forgotten the the dingy gentleman and the records.

IT WAS twenty years later when, one night, the mother and the father sat alone by the fire. They were very strange this night; for five minutes they would sit perfectly still, perfectly silent, staring into the fire; for the nexr live minutes they would talk hurriedly, nervously, carefully avoiding each other's eyes. There was an uneasiness upon them. Occasionally the father— he was grey-headed now and stooped a little— would put a log on the fire. At times he would glance under his brows at his wife. But invariably she was looking at something else.

And presently it came to 11 o'clock, and they realised that they had been sitting thus for three hours. Then the mother spoke, and this time she looked straight at her husband with' shining eyes. "What is the date?" she said.

The man got up. "The twenty-sixth of April, my dear—the date we decided on twenty years ago. Shall I?"

She nodded.

From a corner the old man brought to the table a new phonograph, wound it, and fixed the trumpet. The eyes of his wife followed his every movement. She was trembling very much. When it was ail arranged he turned to her.

Without a word she handed him a key, and he unlocked a little corner cupboard and took therefrom two cylindrical cardboard boxes. The woman caught her breath as she saw them. "Be very careful, dear!" she whispered shakily.

He took a record from one of the boxes, slipped it on the machine, and pushed the starting lever aside. The voice of the poor, long-ago, hungry, dingy gentleman filled the room—

R-i-zz-z-z— record of the voices of Phyllis, Jimmy, Jack, and Evelyn Bannister, made upon a machine supplied by the Columbia Phonograph Company of Noo Yak Parse and London.

Twenty years fell from the shoulders of the father and mother. then, for all suddenly they found themselves back in the past— the past that was so young and sweet and happy. They sat listening, white-faced and trembling.

Then came another voice, clear, treble, and shaking, with child laughter— the voice of Jack, the unruly one:—

Baa baa black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes, sir, yes, sir, three bags full.
One for my master, one for my name.
And one for the little boy that lives down the lane.

The voice of Jack! But Jack's mother put her hands to her face, bending her head low and weeping— for Jack's ship had been lost at sea with all hands many, years ago. Nothing remained of Jack now but that record. Long she had cherished a memory of a brown-faced, laughing stripling of seventeen, wearing blue clothes and a jaunty peaked cap, but now she lost that memory and went far and far beyond—beyond it to a little boy with bare, scratched legs, who was never still— her "black sheep" then.

Remorsely the trumpet went on, in a shrill little voice— very seriously:—

Little Miss Mutfett sat on a tuffet,
Eating some curds an' whey,
There came a big spider
an' sat down beside her,
An' frightened Miss Muffet away.

Phyllis— that was Phyllis. Less poignant was the yearning for the flown years that the earnest little voice of Phyllis brought the old people— for Phyllis was happy now with children of her own. Only it was very wonderful and sweet to hear her speak again as she had been wont to speak twenty years before.

The father slipped on the second record with eager fingers, and— "An island is a place of land s'rounded by water," said the trumpet, gravely, in a voice that was quaintly like the voice of the present-day Jimmy. "Wilium the Conker, ten six'y sis."

If Jimmy had been the only one to speak the mother would have smiled a little, for Jimmy was a famous man now— a scholar. But she had heard the voice of Jack, and now waited the baby prayer of Evelyn. So she could do nothing but cry.

Then— and it seemed to them both that even the brazen-throated trumpet hesitated and was distressed. "Go' bress daddy an' mamma." came the slow voice of the baby, "an' Phyllis an' Jimmy an' Jack, an' make me a good girl. Jes Chris' sake. Amen!"

The father turned away suddenly with a strange sound that was worse than a sob, and stood at the lattice window as though he were looking out at the night. But his poor, bent shoulders shook, and presently his hands went to his-face. For, of them all, he had loved, Evelyn, the baby, best. Evelyn, who had gone away when she was only eighteen and never returned— but whose trunks had been sent from Paris by a stranger, who said that she had died in his hotel. That was when she was twenty.

The old man stood at the window, crying. The phonograph whirred on the table, but the father did not turn from the window. So presently it ran itself out and was still. But the old mau stood at the window, until at long last he heard the rustle of a dress behind him. He felt a touch on his arms, and so he turned.

He could not see his wife, and she, too, was blind with tears, hut somehow he found his arms round her and felt her cheeks wet against his, and heard her whisper all brokenly, "Don't cry."

———————————

11: The Golden Ball of the Argonauts

Charles E. Van Loan
1876-1919
Munsey's Magazine, Sept 1909
Weekly Times (Melbourne) 21 Aug 1915

OLD Tom Carson, the proprietor of the Golden Eagle Hotel, stretched himself and arose from his nap behind the cigar counter. The 'bus from the afternoon train drew up at the door, and the arrivals marched solemnly across the threshold.

"Not even a fresh drummer!" sighed Mr Carson, who was a thrifty soul. "Looks like a had night."

A few persons of no importance signed timidly, and were hurried away in the wake of Casey, head porter, bellboy and assistant barkeeper. Last of all came a withered little man, staggering under the weight of a large, old-fashioned carpet-sack valise. As he reached for the pen Mr Carson noticed that the stranger's right hand was strangely twisted and the joints of his fingers enlarged.

Many years behind a desk in a country hotel had taught Tom Carson the trick of reading a signature upside down. The little old man wrote laboriously, Carson idly following the crawling pen with his eyes. As the newcomer stopped to cross a "t" the proprietor snorted and bent over the register. Then he turned the book around and studied the signature.

"Marcus Tettleback!" he ejaculated. "Say! If you ain't little Mark Tettleback, shortstop of the old Argonaut team, who are ye?"

The little old man had picked up his carpet-sack. It dropped with a crash.

"If I ain't him I ain't anybody!" he said simply. "But who is it that remembers the Argonauts?"

Tom Carson reached across the narrow counter and seized the old man by the shoulders, rocking him back and forth to emphasise his words.

"Why, you old rascal! Don't you recognise Tom Carson, that played first base for the Eurekas?"

"Seein' as you give me this broken finger," said the old man, exhibiting a crooked digit, "I oughtn't to forget ye entirely!"

The faithful Casey returned in time to see the old men slapping shoulders and exploding in shrill cackles of laughter.

"Somethin' doin' this evenin' " said that wise youth. "The old boy never warmed up that way before! Wonder who's with the young trunk?"

"Just think!" panted Carson, "After all these years! You an' me meetin' in New York State! Come on over here! I got a million questions to ast ye "

Casey hovered near, his eye on the bag.

"I'll take care of that," said Carson. "Now, then, you old muskrat, what you been doin' with yourself all these years? I swear I never expected to see one of them Argonauts again! Mark, I've talked myself black in the face tryin' to tell these farmers around Collinsville what kind of ball players California turned out in the early days, Honest, they won't believe that we played a tournament for a gold ball. They say a ball of solid gold, that size, would cost too much money, an' no town would put it up. They didn't know San Francisco back in the '60's, did they? That was some town— eh, Mark?"

"Yes indeed," said the aged Tettleback. "I've done some travelin' since I left there, but I ain't never seen none to compare with it, no way."

"An' the men!" said Carson enthusiastically. "What a rip-snortin' bunch' them Argonauts was! No sofy-pillows for them! They was ball players, they was! Where did they all go to?"

Old Tettleback slowly spread his hands, and shook his head.

"Not all of 'em?" persisted Carson. Tettleback nodded.

"Some of us got in on that last call they issued for troops," said he "I'm the only one that's left out of that team, Tom."

"The only one!" said Carson slowly,

Then a silence fell between the two old men. They were back in the days when blood was hot and life rioted over the sandhills of the metropolis of the West.

"San Francisco's changed, Tom." said the old shortstop. "I don't reckoh there's many left that remember the old Argonauts."

"Well, they ought to!" stormed Carson. "They ought to remember that gold ball series. You know I ain't heard a word about that ball since you Argonauts went East. You took it along with you then. Did you melt it up, or what?"

"No," said Tettleback slowly. "It was never melted up, or anything like that."

"But—" snorted Carson.

"I'm tellin' you, Tom," said the old man gently. "You see, the ball belonged to the whole team, an' the majority was to rule. Some of 'em was for cuttin' it up an' givin' each man his part to spend as he pleased; an then again there was some of us couldn't stand to see the ball destroyed, I was one of them. After the war was over there was only three of us left: Tim Gleeson an' Archie Patterson an me. Tim was crazier than ever to get his share— wanted a third of the ball, but Archie wouldn't have it cut up, an neither would I. We kept it in a safe deposit vault, an' once a year we'd have a little dinner, an' get it out an' put it on the table. Tim went down South somewhere on business, an' the fever got him. After that there was only Archie an' me, an' Archie died a few months ago— just slipped off suddenly."

Old Tom Carson put his hands on tho arms of his chair and leaned forward eagerly.

"The ball!" he whispered. "What did you do with it? Did you sell it, or cut it up, or what?"

Marcus Tettleback dropped one knotted hand on the carpet-bag valise.

"What?" gasped the landlord of the Golden Eagle. "You got it here?"

"The eye-dentical gold ball, Tom," said the aged one.

Carson rose and laid eager hands on the carpet-bag.

"Come on into my office," he said.

ii

AN HOUR LATER, over the cigars, CarBon made a proposition.

"See here, Mark, you say you ain't got any folks except those nephews of yours that you ain't seen since they was bahies. "What's the matter with your stayin' here a while and malcln' me a visit? We could have a bully good time together, an' I'd let you have No. 10— that's the room with a bath— an' make you the cheapest commercial rate there is. Couldn't live cheaper anywheres, Mark, an' it'd be a pleasure just to have you round the place. How 'bout it?"

The old ball player was deeply touched by this magnanimous proposal, and said he would think about it,

A little later the young reporter for *The Morning Bee*, dropping in to get some material for his "Visiting Strangers" column, was button-holed by Mr. Carson and led into the inner office, where he shook Mr. Tettleback by the hand, viewed the golden ball, and went away with his head whirling.

The publication of that article marked the beginning of the era of Marcus Tettleback and his golden ball.

iii

THE OLD BALL PLAYER was the star attraction of the town. Farmers drove 80 miles to see him; drummers invited him to dinner. Mr. Tettleback fully realised his position as a public idol. He insisted that his friends should have the best of everything, and Tom Carson had a bill a foot long in the third lower drawer. He used to take it out and look at it occasionally. It never grew any shorter. Joe Bates went about his work with his nose in the air.

One morning the old man did not leave his room. He said he was not feeling well. The next day Tom Carson sent for the doctor, who came, made a careful examination, and then stepped out into the hall, where Carson was waiting.

"Why, no," said the man of medicine; "nothing special the matter with him. Old age, and all that sort of thing, you know. You've got to expect it at his time of life. He may live a week, or a month, or a year— it just depends. The machinery runs down, my dear sir, and there comes a time when it stops. Keep

him cheerful, and see that he has everything he wants. Has he— ah— any relations?"

Carson shook his head.

"Ah! Quite so." The doctor had seen the ball.

"Give him the best of everything, doc," said Carson anxiously. "He's a friend of mine, an' I'm responsible."

"I shall give him every attention," said the doctor. "Leave that to me."

FOR three weeks the old man lingered.

One evening, just at dusk, he sent for Carson.

"No use trying to fool me any more, Tom," said the old man wearily. His voice trailed away into silence, and his thin cheeks were white against the pillow, "It's getting dark," panted the old man. "Have to call the game soon! Tom, do you think they score all our errors?"

"Don't talk about it, Mark," said Carson. "You'll outlive a dozen younger men."

The old head moved slightly from side to side.

"No use!" he panted. "No use! Tom, when I'm gone there's something I want you to do for me— something about the ball. Are you listening, Tom!"

Carson gripped the edge of the bed until his knuckles were white.

"Yes, Mark" said Carson.

The little old man closed his eyes. For a long time there was no sound in the room. The doctor, who had been sent for entered hastily, picked up the limp wrist, and watched the dying man's face as he counted. Then he turned to Carson.

"Tom, are you there?" The eyes were open again, and the lips were barely moving. "I want you to know—that—' A quiver passed through the shrunken frame; the dying eyes opened wide. The little old man half raised himself in bed. Stretching out his left arm, with palm down and one finger pointing before him, he cried in a clear, ringing voice:

"How is it, umpire? Safe?"

The doctor eased the old man back among the pillows, bent over him for a few seconds, and then straightened up, nodding at Tom Carson. The short stop of the Argonauts had gone to Join his team.

iv

IT WAS A VERY impressive funeral. The business houses closed their doors, and the town attended in a body. The Collinsville Baseball Club sent a floral pillow, on which appeared in violet letters:

"He Has Made His Last Home Run."

The day after the funeral Tom Carson took the morning train for New York. He carried a new valise. That afternoon he stood in the back room of a manufacturing jeweller's establishment on Maiden Lane.

"Whew!" whistled the proprietor. "Quite a ball, isn't it? What? Solid— gold? Of course, as a matter of form. Have a chair, sir."

The jeweller held the ball between his knees; a tiny drill whirred for a few seconds, and was laid aside. He picked up a small bottle, and poured a few drops into the hole. Then his eyes met Carson's.

"Did you buy this?" he asked pointedly.

"No," said Carson, shifting uneasily. "I took it for a debt."

"Hm-m-m-m-ml" said the jeweller, as with his thumb he wiped away a "greenlsh froth which had bubbled to the surface.

"Well," said he cheerfully, 'I've seen many a gold brick in my time, but this is the first round one I ever— hello! What's the matter with you?"

WHEN the evening 'bus unloaded its passengers at the Golden Eagle that night Tom Carson was among them. He walked like a very old man. As he passed his mail box two letters caught his eye. One was from the doctor; the other was from the undertaker.

Mr Carson passed into his private office and locked the door behind him.

———————

12: The Watchers

Mary Simpson, as by "Weeroona"

1884-1952

Gadfly (Adelaide) 18 Dec 1907

AN HOUR TO MIDNIGHT and New Year's Eve. The neighbourhood of Grinter's Lane wears a festal air. Doors stand ajar, and, regardless of the drizzling rain, the mean verandahs are alight with strings of two-penny Chinese lanterns. The neighbours exchange quips and repartee. A few, a very few— those of an earnest disposition— hurry away to the Christian Chapel round the corner. They recognise the solemnity of the occasion, and will "see it in" in prayer.

Not so gran'fer. The innuendoes and open reproaches of the daughter, which might mar the occasion for some, fall upon him harmlessly. Sitting before the kitchen fire, his great-coat lying handy, he waits impatiently for the time of departure.

He has "first-footed" at old McNab's, and any other dwelling where it has been possible to beat an entry, for more years than he can remember. Is it likely then that a drop of rain or Robbie's measles will stop him now? His daughter can hint as she will. He refutes with scorn the base innuendo that he is in his second childhood, a fit companion and nurse for sickly babes. He tries to straighten his back; and still the senile moving of his jaw.

"No, no, my girl. God forbid that I interfere 'twixt a mother and ' 'er sacred responsibilities. The child is ill, and the doctor, though to my mind a self-opiniated young fool, says he wants watchin', and who like a mother for the job?— who like a mother?"

He blows his nose fiercely as a full stop to the discussion, and, turning again to the fire, communes silently. Do him out of his footing indeed " — his whisky, bought from his pension— too be like— he— McDonald.

He sets his jaw stubbornly. It is his intention to see the New Year in, rain or no rain, measles or no measles. Besides is it not the anniversary of his late wife's birth, or is it her death? It is immaterial to gran'fer, so that he *gets out*.

His daughter meanwhile takes up the thread once more.

"The doctor come this mornin'. 'Good mornin', Mrs. McDonald,' he ses. 'Good momin', doctor;' I ses. ' 'Ow's the boy ?' 'e ses. Then 'e 'as a look at Robbie. ' 'E's doin' well,' e ses. 'E only wants curful nursin' and guardin' from the cold, an' 'is medicine reglar,' 'e says. 'Yes, doctor,' I ses,' an' was going on to say as to-morrer bein' an 'oliday 'e needn't come w'en 'e shuts me up that 'uffy. 'Kin I rely on you to guard 'im from cold— a sudden chill will undo all I done,' 'e says. 'You needn't be hunder no fears doctor,' I ses. 'I 'ope I know my' duty as a mother,' I ses, as 'aughty as you like. 'An' if I don't sit by 'is bedside, night an' day, gran'fer will,' I ses. 'Orlright,' 'e says. 'I won't call to-morrer, 'aving an urgent

case,' 'e says. 'E little thinks I know what that is. 'E's engaged for Mrs. Parkins's first—it's doo to-morrer, Noo Year's Day. Now 'ow much o' this powder did 'e say Robbie was to 'ave agin? Was it a teaspoon, or—"

At this junction Robbie's father raises a blurred visage from the sofa. On the face of gran'fer's refusal to broach the whisky earlier he has had, perforce, to sample many other brands at "The Ship", hence his temper is uncertain.

Having, with some force, pointed his wife her duty— the bedside of the of the heir of all the Macdonalds— he assists gran'fer to his palsied legs with great solicitude and, collecting the ancient's impedimenta, he offers to carry the whisky also; but gran'fer has that already, concealed about his person, and, delaying only long enough to rub up his Scotch accent (now sadly tarnished by Grinter's slang), he grasps the arm of his prop and stay, and they lurch into the teeming darkness.

Rob's mother sits apathetically, her face sullen with disappointment. She had relied on gran'fer having "a bit of common." *His* should have been the watcher's part, *her's* the merrymaker's.

"Such fun as they'll be 'avin' at mother's, an' Sal there with her baby and all"; She vaguely feels that the hand of Fate has dealt heavily with her. Her luck is out.

"Poor lamb, 'ow sound 'e do sleep, to be sure," she says, bending over the swollen face of little Rob. "I only hope the row don't wake 'im. If it don't I kin' 'ave a look out from the door. There she goes."

The clock strikes the hour. Immediately the silence is broken by the blowing of factory whistles, clanging of bells, screeching of catcalls, and beating of tin cans. She listens with growing excitement.

"What fun they'll be 'avin'," she sighs enviously. "Mother, an' Sal, an' all. Poor lamb, 'e 'asn't turned a finger. I wonder if it would be safe leavin' 'im fer ten minutes? An' I could call at McNab's for gran'fer," she adds, in eager justification; " 'e's not fit to be out in sich weather, so old an' feeble— 'e'll be a case for the 'orsepital to-morrer, an' who'll look after Robbie then, with me trapsin' in with gran'fer. I'll just arst Mrs. Jones to give an ear to 'im," she mutters, after a moment's thought. " She'll 'ear 'im if 'e wakes."

She knocks at the dividing fence but Mrs. Jones makes no reply. Plunged in Cimmerian darkness within her fastnesses she sleeps the sleep of the weary charwoman.

Little Rob's mother looks at him again, and drawing up the blankets "against the cold," though the room is like an oven, decides to "chance it".

"I'll be back in ten minutes at most," she assures herself, " an' I'll leave the door ajar. If 'e wakes I could a'most 'ear 'im call at ' mother's."

She had been gone, but a short time when a dripping reveller pushes open the door, plays a tattoo upon a dipper, which he carries, and in a shrill falsetto

calls upon all within the house to come forth and join in the uproar then taking place at the back of Grinter's. With a final rattle of his instrument he rushes away to other thresholds.

Rob's mother's stolen visit is almost pure joy, the only unpleasant ingredient being a passing twinge of conscience. A " nip" or two effectually silences that, and, diverting the company with racy anecdotes, interlarded plentifully by "he ses," and "I ses," and " 'is mother ses," earns for herself the reputation of a raconteur of no mean order.

Granfer's celebrations have been a huge success also, and though so far gone in the legs as to necessitate a bodyguard of carriers from house to house, he still has strength to clutch his bottle tightly.

His daughter belatedly tracks him down, and turning the hilarious procession carrying gran'fer (now kicking wildly under the impression that he is a colt) headed by McNab, in the direction of Grinter's Lane, gives herself up to self-reproaches.

"My Gord!" she ejaculates, as the thought of Robbie smites her, "My Gord, if 'e should be awake an' cryin'!"

As a matter of fact, he is both. He is awaiting them at their gate and toddles to meet them, his bare cold feet pattering on the gleaming flags, his saturated nightgown flapping round his little legs, and his measle-spotted face convulsed with terrified grief.

"You was such a long whiles, mumma," he sobs.

"My Gord!" cries his mother, as she strains him to her dripping breast— "My Gord!"

THE YEAR is four days' old. The house is crammed with mourners and gossipers. Little Rob is in his coffin. His mother, crouching beside him, with tear-sodden face, relates between sobs how it came to pass.

" 'Twas them wretches of Maguire's, They come 'ere with their penny trumpet, an' woke my pore lamb from 'is sleep. No; 'e wouldn't a stirred otherwise, 'e slep' that sound, pore lamb."

In the kitchen Gran'fer dispenses hospitality—

"The doctor orders 'ot ampresses at once," he says thickly. "But the whisky was all gorn, an' the pubs shut. Yes, we did put on the ampress without the whisky, but 'twas no use. An' anyway," he adds, "them lodge doctors is no damn good. What dy'er think he 'ad the impidence to say— 'The child 'as died through negleck.' We'll go off 'is book next week."

Sh! sh! All hats are removed. There is a screaming in the bedroom. The hearse has come.

———————

13: Innocents of Broadway

O. Henry
1862-1910
Collected in: *The Gentle Grafter*, 1908

"I HOPE some day to retire from business," said Jeff Peters; "and when I do I don't want anybody to be able to say that I ever got a dollar of any man's money without giving him a quid pro rata for it. I've always managed to leave a customer some little gewgaw to paste in his scrapbook or stick between his Seth Thomas clock and the wall after we are through trading.

"There was one time I came near having to break this rule of mine and do a profligate and illaudable action, but I was saved from it by the laws and statutes of our great and profitable country.

"One summer me and Andy Tucker, my partner, went to New York to lay in our annual assortment of clothes and gents' furnishings. We was always pompous and regardless dressers, finding that looks went further than anything else in our business, except maybe our knowledge of railroad schedules and an autograph photo of the President that Loeb sent us, probably by mistake. Andy wrote a nature letter once and sent it in about animals that he had seen caught in a trap lots of times. Loeb must have read it 'triplets,' instead of 'trap lots,' and sent the photo. Anyhow, it was useful to us to show people as a guarantee of good faith.

"Me and Andy never cared much to do business in New York. It was too much like pothunting. Catching suckers in that town is like dynamiting a Texas lake for bass. All you have to do anywhere between the North and East rivers is to stand in the street with an open bag marked, 'Drop packages of money here. No checks or loose bills taken.' You have a cop handy to club pikers who try to chip in post office orders and Canadian money, and that's all there is to New York for a hunter who loves his profession. So me and Andy used to just nature fake the town. We'd get out our spyglasses and watch the woodcocks along the Broadway swamps putting plaster casts on their broken legs, and then we'd sneak away without firing a shot.

"One day in the papier mâché palm room of a chloral hydrate and hops agency in a side street about eight inches off Broadway me and Andy had thrust upon us the acquaintance of a New Yorker. We had beer together until we discovered that each of us knew a man named Hellsmith, traveling for a stove factory in Duluth. This caused us to remark that the world was a very small place, and then this New Yorker busts his string and takes off his tin foil and excelsior packing and starts in giving us his Ellen Terris, beginning with the time he used to sell shoelaces to the Indians on the spot where Tammany Hall now stands.

"This New Yorker had made his money keeping a cigar store in Beekman street, and he hadn't been above Fourteenth street in ten years. Moreover, he had whiskers, and the time had gone by when a true sport will do anything to a man with whiskers. No grafter except a boy who is soliciting subscribers to an illustrated weekly to win the prize air rifle, or a widow, would have the heart to tamper with the man behind with the razor. He was a typical city Reub— I'd bet the man hadn't been out of sight of a skyscraper in twenty-five years.

"Well, presently this metropolitan backwoodsman pulls out a roll of bills with an old blue sleeve elastic fitting tight around it and opens it up.

" 'There's $5,000, Mr. Peters,' says he, shoving it over the table to me, 'saved during my fifteen years of business. Put that in your pocket and keep it for me, Mr. Peters. I'm glad to meet you gentlemen from the West, and I may take a drop too much. I want you to take care of my money for me. Now, let's have another beer.'

" 'You'd better keep this yourself,' says I. 'We are strangers to you, and you can't trust everybody you meet. Put your roll back in your pocket,' says I. 'And you'd better run along home before some farm-hand from the Kaw River bottoms strolls in here and sells you a copper mine.'

" 'Oh, I don't know,' says Whiskers. 'I guess Little Old New York can take care of herself. I guess I know a man that's on the square when I see him. I've always found the Western people all right. I ask you as a favor, Mr. Peters,' says he, 'to keep that roll in your pocket for me. I know a gentleman when I see him. And now let's have some more beer.'

"In about ten minutes this fall of manna leans back in his chair and snores. Andy looks at me and says: 'I reckon I'd better stay with him for five minutes or so, in case the waiter comes in.'

"I went out the side door and walked half a block up the street. And then I came back and sat down at the table.

" 'Andy,' says I, 'I can't do it. It's too much like swearing off taxes. I can't go off with this man's money without doing something to earn it like taking advantage of the Bankrupt act or leaving a bottle of eczema lotion in his pocket to make it look more like a square deal.'

" 'Well,' says Andy, 'it does seem kind of hard on one's professional pride to lope off with a bearded pard's competency, especially after he has nominated you custodian of his bundle in the sappy insouciance of his urban indiscrimination. Suppose we wake him up and see if we can formulate some commercial sophistry by which he will be enabled to give us both his money and a good excuse.'

"We wakes up Whiskers. He stretches himself and yawns out the hypothesis that he must have dropped off for a minute. And then he says he wouldn't mind sitting in at a little gentleman's game of poker. He used to play some when he

attended high school in Brooklyn; and as he was out for a good time, why— and so forth.

"Andy brights up a little at that, for it looks like it might be a solution to our financial troubles. So we all three go to our hotel further down Broadway and have the cards and chips brought up to Andy's room. I tried once more to make this Babe in the Horticultural Gardens take his five thousand. But no.

" 'Keep that little roll for me, Mr. Peters,' says he, 'and oblige. I'll ask you fer it when I want it. I guess I know when I'm among friends. A man that's done business on Beekman street for twenty years, right in the heart of the wisest old village on earth, ought to know what he's about. I guess I can tell a gentleman from a con man or a flimflammer when I meet him. I've got some odd change in my clothes— enough to start the game with, I guess.'

"He goes through his pockets and rains $20 gold certificates on the table till it looked like a $10,000 'Autumn Day in a Lemon Grove' picture by Turner in the salons. Andy almost smiled.

"The first round that was dealt, this boulevardier slaps down his hand, claims low and jack and big casino and rakes in the pot.

"Andy always took a pride in his poker playing. He got up from the table and looked sadly out of the window at the street cars.

" 'Well, gentlemen,' says the cigar man, 'I don't blame you for not wanting to play. I've forgotten the fine points of the game, I guess, it's been so long since I indulged. Now, how long are you gentlemen going to be in the city?'

"I told him about a week longer. He says that'll suit him fine. His cousin is coming over from Brooklyn that evening and they are going to see the sights of New York. His cousin, he says, is in the artificial limb and lead casket business, and hasn't crossed the bridge in eight years. They expect to have the time of their lives, and he winds up by asking me to keep his roll of money for him till next day. I tried to make him take it, but it only insulted him to mention it.

" 'I'll use what I've got in loose change,' says he. 'You keep the rest for me. I'll drop in on you and Mr. Tucker to-morrow afternoon about 6 or 7,' says he, 'and we'll have dinner together. Be good.'

"After Whiskers had gone Andy looked at me curious and doubtful.

" 'Well, Jeff,' says he, 'it looks like the ravens are trying to feed us two Elijahs so hard that if we turned 'em down again we ought to have the Audubon Society after us. It won't do to put the crown aside too often. I know this is something like paternalism, but don't you think Opportunity has skinned its knuckles about enough knocking at our door?'

"I put my feet up on the table and my hands in my pockets, which is an attitude unfavorable to frivolous thoughts.

" 'Andy,' says I, 'this man with the hirsute whiskers has got us in a predicament. We can't move hand or foot with his money. You and me have got

a gentleman's agreement with Fortune that we can't break. We've done business in the West where it's more of a fair game. Out there the people we skin are trying to skin us, even the farmers and the remittance men that the magazines send out to write up Goldfields. But there's little sport in New York city for rod, reel or gun. They hunt here with either one of two things— a slungshot or a letter of introduction. The town has been stocked so full of carp that the game fish are all gone. If you spread a net here, do you catch legitimate suckers in it, such as the Lord intended to be caught— fresh guys who know it all, sports with a little coin and the nerve to play another man's game, street crowds out for the fun of dropping a dollar or two and village smarties who know just where the little pea is? No, sir,' says I. 'What the grafters live on here is widows and orphans, and foreigners who save up a bag of money and hand it out over the first counter they see with an iron railing to it, and factory girls and little shopkeepers that never leave the block they do business on. That's what they call suckers here. They're nothing but canned sardines, and all the bait you need to catch 'em is a pocketknife and a soda cracker.

" 'Now, this cigar man,' I went on, 'is one of the types. He's lived twenty years on one street without learning as much as you would in getting a once-over shave from a lockjawed barber in a Kansas crossroads town. But he's a New Yorker, and he'll brag about that all the time when he isn't picking up live wires or getting in front of street cars or paying out money to wire-tappers or standing under a safe that's being hoisted into a skyscraper. When a New Yorker does loosen up,' says I, 'it's like the spring decomposition of the ice jam in the Allegheny River. He'll swamp you with cracked ice and back-water if you don't get out of the way.

" 'It's mighty lucky for us, Andy,' says I, 'that this cigar exponent with the parsley dressing saw fit to bedeck us with his childlike trust and altruism. For,' says I, 'this money of his is an eyesore to my sense of rectitude and ethics. We can't take it, Andy; you know we can't,' says I, 'for we haven't a shadow of a title to it— not a shadow. If there was the least bit of a way we could put in a claim to it I'd be willing to see him start in for another twenty years and make another $5,000 for himself, but we haven't sold him anything, we haven't been embroiled in a trade or anything commercial. He approached us friendly,' says I, 'and with blind and beautiful idiocy laid the stuff in our hands. We'll have to give it back to him when he wants it.'

" 'Your arguments,' says Andy, 'are past criticism or comprehension. No, we can't walk off with the money— as things now stand. I admire your conscious way of doing business, Jeff,' says Andy, 'and I wouldn't propose anything that wasn't square in line with your theories of morality and initiative.

" 'But I'll be away to-night and most of to-morrow Jeff,' says Andy. 'I've got some business affairs that I want to attend to. When this free greenbacks party

comes in to-morrow afternoon hold him here till I arrive. We've all got an engagement for dinner, you know.'

"Well, sir, about 5 the next afternoon in trips the cigar man, with his eyes half open.

" 'Been having a glorious time, Mr. Peters,' says he. 'Took in all the sights. I tell you New York is the onliest only. Now if you don't mind,' says he, 'I'll lie down on that couch and doze off for about nine minutes before Mr. Tucker comes. I'm not used to being up all night. And to-morrow, if you don't mind, Mr. Peters, I'll take that five thousand. I met a man last night that's got a sure winner at the racetrack to-morrow. Excuse me for being so impolite as to go to sleep, Mr. Peters.'

"And so this inhabitant of the second city in the world reposes himself and begins to snore, while I sit there musing over things and wishing I was back in the West, where you could always depend on a customer fighting to keep his money hard enough to let your conscience take it from him.

"At half-past 5 Andy comes in and sees the sleeping form.

" 'I've been over to Trenton,' says Andy, pulling a document out of his pocket. 'I think I've got this matter fixed up all right, Jeff. Look at that.'

"I open the paper and see that it is a corporation charter issued by the State of New Jersey to 'The Peters & Tucker Consolidated and Amalgamated Aerial Franchise Development Company, Limited.'

" 'It's to buy up rights of way for airship lines,' explained Andy. 'The Legislature wasn't in session, but I found a man at a postcard stand in the lobby that kept a stock of charters on hand. There are 100,000 shares,' says Andy, 'expected to reach a par value of $1. I had one blank certificate of stock printed.'

"Andy takes out the blank and begins to fill it in with a fountain pen.

" 'The whole bunch,' says he, 'goes to our friend in dreamland for $5,000. Did you learn his name?'

" 'Make it out to bearer,' says I.

"We put the certificate of stock in the cigar man's hand and went out to pack our suit cases.

"On the ferryboat Andy says to me: 'Is your conscience easy about taking the money now, Jeff?'

" 'Why shouldn't it be?' says I. 'Are we any better than any other Holding Corporation?' "

14: The Indiscretions of Lord Tamworth

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Hearst's Magazine, Apr 1913

As well as writing countless novels, Oppenheim wrote vast numbers of short stories. He created numerous series characters, wrote a dozen or more stories about each for the well-paying "slick" magazines, and then collected the stories and published them in book form. This is the opening story of a series later collected in 1920 as "The Hon. Algernon Knox, Detective." Other series characters were Peter Ruff, Nicholas Goade, Miss Mott, General Besserley, Slane, Mannister, Ernest Bliss, and many more.

THE Honourable Algernon Knox strolled from his uncle's house in Grosvenor Square to Piccadilly, and entered his club in a very bad temper. He summoned one of his friends to join him at the small luncheon-table which he had selected, with a gesture which was almost peremptory.

"Hullo, Algy!" his friend remarked, as he seated himself. "What's wrong? I perceive a cloud upon your seraphic countenance."

The Honourable Algernon laid down the menu which he had been studying. "Everything is wrong," he declared firmly. "Look at me."

His friend obeyed him literally. An expression of gentle sympathy overspread his features. "I am doing it, old chap," he said. "Tell me when I can leave off. What is it you want to know?"

"Do I or do I not look like a fool?" the Honourable Algernon Knox demanded portentously.

His vis-à-vis sighed. "Without going so far as to make a definite statement, Algy," he said, "I would yet feel inclined to swear upon my oath— that you're not such a fool as you look."

Algernon Knox rose deliberately to his feet and walked to a mirror at the further end of the room, where he stood for a moment as though his object were to rearrange his tie. He was a young man of not uncommon type— tall, inclined to be pale, with rather large, blue eyes, a budding brown mustache, and a forehead which certainly did recede a little, an effect which was perhaps heightened by his carefully brushed-back hair. His features might have been called pleasant, but they might also have been called vapid. There was nothing about him which denoted intellectuality.

He returned to his seat.

"Sammy," he announced, "I am about sick of it!"

His friend, who was hungry and whose mouth was full, nodded sympathetically.

"We all feel like that sometimes," he remarked, as soon as circumstances permitted him.

"Every one of my asinine relatives," Algernon Knox continued, "seems to have his knife into me. I begin to think that it must be my unfortunate appearance. I have been down, as you know, into Staffordshire. Tried to get into Parliament. Not an earthly chance! Got the knock from the first start."

"Had to read a newspaper one day in the train," Sammy Forde confessed. "I read you weren't exactly a hit there."

"Nature," Algernon Knox insisted firmly, "never meant me to stand up and address a lot of yokels and tradespeople. It never gave me the knack of explaining to them things I don't understand myself, nor any other fellow. I suppose I made a mull of it. But what knocked me was that the newspapers on the other side, instead of attacking my politics, all the time made fun of me. They ridiculed my clothes, although I tried them in everything except my pyjamas and evening kit. They ridiculed my speeches, although I never said a word that the agent hadn't written out for me. Then when I came back, my venerated uncle goes for me. I've just had it out with him. 'In our younger days,' he said pompously, 'the fool of the family entered the Church. Nowadays, we can't even get him into Parliament!'"

"Oh, that was nasty!" his friend admitted, shaking his head. "Cheerful old bluffer, your uncle."

"I have made up my mind," Algernon Knox declared firmly, "to treat my family— for the present, at any rate— coolly. I will take no more advice from any of them. I will not enter Parliament; I shall think no more of the diplomatic service, and if I am a fool, I am not bally fool enough to go among the sharks on the stock exchange. I will not sell wine or cigarettes, nor will I engage myself out as a gentleman chauffeur."

Sammy Forde nodded sympathetically.

"Quite right to take a firm stand, Algy," he agreed, "but what about your allowance? Isn't that in your uncle's hands until you are twenty-five?"

"It is," Algernon Knox assented. "Furthermore, the silly old ass declared his intention this morning of reducing it by half."

"Then what will you do?" Sammy Forde asked.

"If we should happen to meet this evening," Algernon Knox replied, "I may tell you. I am going a little way into the country, and I am going to think."

Samuel Forde whistled softly.

"Milan Grill-Room for supper, I suppose?"

"I am not sure," Algernon Knox answered. "Some of these habits of ours become almost a tyranny. I may go to Imano's."

His friend stared at him blankly. "By Jove, Algy," he remarked, "you are in earnest! New leaf altogether, eh?"

"You wait!" was the significant reply.

HALF an hour later, in his small one-seated motor-car, shaped like a torpedo, grey, and close-hung to the ground, Algernon Knox sped off into the country. Mile after mile the machine seemed to eat up, and all the time he sat with the steering-wheel in his hand, thinking.

"Damned hard luck on anyone," he muttered more than once, "to have all these silly professions shoved down one's throat because one happens to have an uncle who's an earl and a cabinet minister, and a father who led the House of Lords! I hate politics, anyway."

The remainder of his reflections were obscured by an incident for which he was scarcely to blame. It was on his homeward way, when he was still about thirty-five miles from London and the light was beginning to fail, that he crashed into a motor-car emerging from an avenue on the wrong side of the road. His next recollection was of coming to himself in a most charmingly furnished sitting-room, with the strangest-looking woman he had ever seen in his life bending over the easy-chair in which he was reclining.

"You are better?" she asked anxiously, speaking very slowly and with a distinctly foreign accent.

He sat up and looked around him in dazed fashion.

"You ran into my motor-car," she explained. "My man admits that he was on the wrong side. Please do not worry. Sit here quietly for a little time. If you would like to let your friends know, there is the telephone."

"Awfully good of you," he said. "I don't think I'm hurt at all."

"I do not think that you are," she agreed. "Perhaps— do you think that in half an hour you would be well enough to go? Your car is uninjured."

It was not only her words but a strange sort of anxiety, traces of which he seemed to see in her face, which puzzled him. He looked at her more closely. She was intensely pale, with eyes which at first had seemed black, but which now he saw to be blue. Her eyelashes were very long, her eyebrows black and silky. Her hair was arranged in an unusual manner. At first he had thought her too thin. Now, as she bent over the easy-chair a little, he found her figure perfection. But her face puzzled him. It was like a painting he had seen somewhere.

"I'm awfully sorry if I'm in the way at all," he faltered. "I am quite sure I'll be able to leave in half an hour."

She seemed a little troubled.

"It isn't that I don't want you to stop," she murmured softly. "It's really only for your own sake. I have some people coming down shortly. The house will be full— they might make a noise. You ought to be quiet."

"Say the word," he begged, "and I'll go. Queer thing how my head buzzes. Could I have a brandy and soda, do you think?"

She pointed to a table. "You see, I had heaps of things brought in. I will mix one for you."

He watched her at her task. Her fingers were slim and white, but, to his mind, overmanicured and overloaded with rings. As she handed him the tumbler, he suddenly changed his mind about her, as many others in the world had done before him. She was beautiful. Her lips, even if they were thin, were scarlet and shapely. Yet he knew that she was no ordinary woman. She was either very cruel or— she caught him looking at her and smiled. He decided that she was not cruel at all, and rose to his feet.

"You would like to telephone?" she asked, pointing to the instrument.

He shook his head. "May I ask your name?" he suggested.

She hesitated. "Tell me yours first?" she suggested.

"Knox— Algernon Knox. By the bye," he added suddenly, "do you think that I look like a fool?"

She was a little startled. Then she laughed at him. When she laughed, she was charming. "Why do you ask me so foolish a question?"

"It's like this," he explained, sitting up. "My uncle's got some clever sons and he's awfully proud of them— bar, army, and Parliament, you know— all doing well. I've just tried to get into Parliament, and failed. They said I couldn't speak and that I lacked intelligence. When I tried for the diplomatic service, it was about the same. They told me my appearance was against me. Seems to me there's nothing you can do in this world unless you've got what they call a thoughtful face and piercing eyes."

She laughed heartily.

"If only you had brains," she remarked, "you could certainly make your fortune as a diplomatist. Those beautiful eyes of yours, and that gently inquiring expression...."

"Then you do think I look a fool?" he interrupted.

"To be candid," she declared, "you do not look as though you were over-burdened with brains. You look as though you could ride and shoot, and make love to theatrical young ladies like a great many other young English gentlemen. But— "

"You needn't go on," he interrupted again, this time a little huffily. "By the bye, I've told you my name. What about yours?"

She had drawn a little back. She raised her hands suddenly above her head, her lips parted. Her poise seemed suddenly familiar. She glanced at him expectantly.

"Vera Custeneiff!" he exclaimed.

"The Princess Vera Custeneiff," she corrected.

He made her a little bow. "Madame," he said, "I have worshiped from a distance for a long time. I offer you my homage. Every opera-goer in London is your slave."

She smiled. "For a foolish young man," she murmured, "you express yourself rather well. Hush!"

Her fingers had suddenly gripped his arm. There was the sound of a motor-horn in the avenue. Something very much like fear blanched her face.

"It is my uncle, Baron Ernstoff!" she exclaimed. "He is bringing a friend down with him."

"You wish me to go?" he suggested.

"Do you mind?" she begged. "My uncle is very sensitive about my being on the stage. He visits here only occasionally. He would dislike very much to be seen here."

"Tell me exactly what you would like me to do and I will do it," he promised.

There was a loud ringing at the front-door bell. Her fingers tightened upon his arm. Her agitation was unmistakable.

"Wait here, please," she begged. "Wait here until you hear us all in the next room. Then leave the house by the front door. You will find your car in the stable-yard. And farewell!"

"It is permitted, then, never to return?" he asked, a little ruefully.

She shook her head. "I do not receive visitors, sir!"

She flashed a farewell glance at him from the door. Then she passed out into the hall. The young man steadied himself for a moment against a piece of furniture. He was still feeling a little shaken and giddy. He heard a deep voice welcoming Vera Custeneiff, a few words in a language which was strange to him, and then some reference, apparently, to a Mr. Smith, who seemed also to be present. Knox was scarcely conscious of listening. It was simply that standing there, waiting for his opportunity to depart, it was almost impossible to avoid having his attention attracted by the voices in the hall. Then suddenly he received what was certainly one of the greatest surprises he had ever had in his life. Mr. Smith spoke, and his voice was the voice of the Earl of Tamworth, cabinet minister, who, among many other social and religious distinctions, enjoyed also the privilege of being the uncle and guardian of the Honourable Algernon Knox! He was for a moment stupefied. The sense of the words he heard failed to reach him. And then, only a few feet away, the telephone bell began to ring. Almost unconsciously he took off the receiver. He had scarcely raised it to his ear, however, before the door was hastily pushed open and Vera Custeneiff entered. She reached his side with what seemed to be a single movement. She snatched the receiver from his hand.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, her eyes flashing. "How dare you!"

Knox felt the back of his head. He was still a little dizzy.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, "if I've done wrong. The beastly thing was ringing, and I was just going to answer it as though I were a servant— say I'd fetch you and that sort of thing."

She looked at him fixedly, and her face relaxed. She smiled— he seemed so like a frightened boy.

"Close the door," she directed. "I was an idiot."

He obeyed promptly. It was quite impossible to avoid overhearing her conversation. After the first sentence she spoke in French, but although his accomplishments were few indeed. French had always been one of the necessities of his existence.

"Ah, yes!... At Dover, then.... Yes, I understand. You are at Dover.... No, you must not come! It is impossible.... To-night? Dear friend, how could I?"

She was silent for a moment.

"But, dear," she said, "this is not Paris. Whom could I ask? Whom, indeed, could I trust to perform such a service? There is no one— "

She broke off in the middle of her sentence. Her eyes were fixed upon the young man, who was vainly endeavouring to appear unconscious. She looked at him fixedly, her lips parted, her eyes bright. Compared with the men whom she had in her mind, he represented the typical nincompoop. Perhaps, after all, heaven had been kind to her!

"Supposing I can," she went on, "supposing it were possible— how could you reach Paris?... Yes?... Ah!"

She nodded several times. Once more she looked at Knox as though fascinated by something in his expression.

"Very well," she said at last, "I will do my best.... Yes, I understand. Not the Lord Warden; the George the Third, High Street.... Very well. If it can be done, it shall be."

She replaced the receiver. Then she turned to Knox. "Do you understand French?" she asked.

He sighed. "Jolly little," he replied. "Queer thing, I never seemed to be any good at languages at school, and they're no use afterwards, nowadays. One never speaks anything but English abroad."

She laughed softly. Then she stood, for a moment, listening. She moved across the room and held open the door. From the other side of the hall came the sound of a piano.

"I have sent them into the music-room," she whispered. "Mr. Knox, I am going to ask you a great thing. Dare I, I wonder? She looked at him strangely. Knox was conscious that her demeanor toward him had changed. She was leaning a little forward. It was the alluring Vera Custeneiff, *première danseuse* in the great ballet, who smiled upon him. He played swiftly up to her altered attitude.

"Dear lady," he declared, "there isn't anything— upon my word, there isn't anything in the world I wouldn't do for you. I have admired you since the first moment— "

"Yes, yes!" she interrupted. "But listen. Are you just one of these empty-headed young men who admire a woman because she has gifts; because, perhaps, she is beautiful; because she is, in her way, a personage? Or have you more character? Would you do something? Would you really do something— not easy, not pleasant— for my sake?"

"Try me," he begged.

Once more she held open the door, for a moment, and listened. The music was still audible. "I have a friend at Dover," she continued quickly, "a friend who, not for criminal but for political reasons, is in hiding. There is a package I want to send to him. I want him to get it to-night— or rather during the night— before morning. I want a messenger."

"I'm your man," he declared.

"But are you strong enough? I want some one to go quite independently, some one to go alone."

"If my car's all right," he assured her, "I'll do it."

She held out her hands. "You mean it?"

"Upon my honour," he promised. "When shall I start?"

"Not yet," she whispered. "It isn't ready yet. You must stay here and rest— not in this room. Hush!"

Once more she held open the door. The piano was silent. They could hear distinctly the voices of two men talking.

"Perhaps you had better stay here," she decided, a little reluctantly. "There are all sorts of things to drink on the table, and cigarettes. Before you start, I will give you some dinner."

"Couldn't be getting along now, could I?" he suggested.

"Impossible!" she declared. "The packet isn't ready. I want you to stay here. If you don't mind, I want to lock the door."

"The deuce!" he exclaimed uneasily.

"Simply that I don't want either of my visitors to discover you unexpectedly," she explained. "My uncle is very suspicious, and the friend he has brought with him pays me many attentions. He does me the honour to be jealous! If either of them found you here, they would think— they would think— "

Once more she was Vera Custeneiff, the great actress. Her eyes laughed understandingly into his.

She passed out, and he heard the key turn on the outside of the lock. Her last look was not for him. It was directed toward a little curtained alcove at the corner of the room. Knox stretched himself out. He was feeling a little dazed.

"Seems to me," he murmured, "I'm in for a bit of an adventure. I wonder!"

He walked round the room— a very pleasant morning-room, with water-colours on the wall, a cottage piano in the corner, many easy-chairs, photographs of very distinguished people, quaint knick-knacks and ornaments, great bowls of flowers. The little recess in the corner he left till the last. He listened at the door— there was no one crossing the hall. Then he hesitated.

"I think," he said to himself, "that in a house where my uncle poses as Mr. Smith, a little latitude is allowable."

He pushed the screen of the recess to one side. A little mahogany instrument, with a mouthpiece which seemed to disappear through the wall into the next room stood there. He looked at it, for a moment, puzzled. Then he replaced the screen.

"Queer place, this," he sighed, mixing a mild brandy and soda. "My head's still buzzy. I'll sit down for a bit."

He threw himself into an easy-chair. Soon he heard the sound of footsteps crossing the hall. The door of the adjoining room was opened. A slight grin came into his face as he recognized Mr. Smith's impressive voice. The words themselves were inaudible, but the tone and pitch were everything.

"Old Nunky's going it strong!" he muttered to himself.

The voices died away and then became more distinct. Vera Custeneiff's uncle was taking his departure. Knox heard some brief farewells. Then the great danseuse and his uncle entered the room on the other side of the folding doors. They seemed to have seated themselves close to the screened recess. Presently Knox started. A queer little purring noise, just faintly audible, reached him from behind the screen. He whistled softly. Half an hour passed, most of which time Knox spent studying the illustrated papers which he found on the table. Then he heard the opening of the door in the next room, footsteps in the hall. Almost immediately afterward, the key was turned in the door of his room. Vera Custeneiff entered quickly.

"It has seemed a long time?" she asked, with a glance toward the screen.

"Naturally," he replied. "Do you know, I am dying of curiosity."

"Curiosity?"

"Queer sort of noise now and then from behind that screen," he remarked— "sort of little purr. I couldn't make out what it was."

She laughed. "It's a little electric massage affair," she explained carelessly. "It's connected with the electric wires, and very often when the lights are lit in the next room, it starts. Do you mean to tell me," she added, "that you really were not sufficiently curious to look behind and discover for yourself what it was?"

"So jolly comfortable here," he told her. "I was feeling a bit chippy, and with a brandy and soda and a cigarette and a paper— well, I thought I'd wait till you came."

She smiled. "I don't believe you're a bit enterprising," she declared. "You are the most typical young Englishman I ever knew."

"Suppose we are slow starters," he confessed, sighing.

She came over to his side. "I am not going to admit anything that isn't nice about you," she asserted. "As a matter of fact, I am really a little sick of clever men. Now I want you to come with me I am going to give you some dinner. Afterwards, I must start for London, and you, if you really mean it— "

"I for Dover," he interrupted cheerfully. She led him across the hall into a small room on the other side, where a dinner-table was laid for one. A dark-faced man-servant was standing by the sideboard.

"You do not dine yourself?" Knox asked.

She shook her head. "How can one? I never eat for five hours before I dance. I have supper served in my room before I come down here. While you have your dinner, I am going to prepare the packet and change myself for town. *Au revoir*!"

She glided away. Knox was served with a very excellent dinner and some very wonderful wine. He was just sipping his coffee when his hostess reappeared. She was dressed from head to foot now in sables. She carried in her hand a small brown paper parcel about a foot long, tied up with string and sealed. She had become paler again. The servant, at a sign from her, disappeared.

"Mr. Knox," she said, "I have been so uneasy. I do not know why I trust you with this."

He looked at the parcel. "Of course," he began, "if it's anything frightfully valuable, or anything that goes off— "

She shook her head impatiently. "No, it isn't that!" she interrupted. "Only, so much depends upon whether it reaches the hands of the person for whom it is intended, safely."

"Oh, he'll get it all right," Knox declared cheerfully. "Don't you be nervous about that."

Again she looked at him, and as she looked she seemed to be reassured. "Believe me," she said, "it is nothing which will get you into trouble, nothing in any way compromising. I shall trust you. Now I leave. You will follow me?"

He rose to his feet. "Had the dinner of my life," he assured her. "I am feeling fit for a hundred-mile ride, if necessary."

She held out her hands. Suddenly she paused to listen. The front-door bell was ringing. She held up her finger. They heard the butler's leisurely footsteps across the hall, heard the door open and the sound of voices. She gave a little exclamation.

"Wait!" she cried. She hurried out, leaving the door open. Knox remained with the brown paper parcel a few feet away from him. In the hall he could hear

the voices of the newcomers— there seemed to be two of them— excited, explanatory, amicable. All three were talking together in French. Presently Vera Custeneiff swept into the room. Her eyes were sparkling.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Dear friend, I shall no longer require from you that service. Two of my trusted friends are here. They feared that it might embarrass me to send the packet. They will see to it. It is finished."

She picked up the brown paper parcel from the table before him. Knox's face was expressionless. His eyes, however, followed it, rested upon it still as she stood there with it under her arm.

"They came down in a taxicab from town," she explained. "My dear friend, you must come and see me at the theater some day. I will write to you. And now, good-by! Your car is at the door. I am so thankful that your accident was not more serious."

Knox was helped into his coat by the butler. His small torpedo-shaped car was waiting outside. In front of it was Vera Custeneiff's huge limousine, the electric lights lit inside and out, piled with white cushions, a bowl of flowers upon the table, a little temple of luxury. A few yards away was a taxicab. Vera Custeneiff had paused to speak to her two visitors.

"It is best," Knox heard her say, "that you do not come with me. Mr. Smith is not in the least suspicious, but one never knows. One need chance nothing."

"Best, without a doubt, dear Vera," one of the two men replied. "You are sure— you are quite sure that there is no mistake this time about our little enterprise?"

Her reply was in a distinctly lower tone. Knox could only just catch the words. "He was absolutely unsuspicious," she assured them. "I have always professed to take no interest at all in these matters. It was he himself who provided the opening. He believes, even now, that I am taking an interest in the situation chiefly because I read his speeches and follow his policy."

One of the men laughed softly. "You women," he exclaimed; "you find your way through the chinks somehow! In Paris and St. Petersburg they believe in the man— an astute and great diplomatist!"

"Hush!" she whispered. "I must go back to him now. He is impatient to start."

Knox took his place in his car and drove very slowly down the avenue. A moment or two later, Vera Custeneiff, with his uncle by her side, shot past him and turned into the London Road, traveling at a great speed. Knox followed in her wake for a little over a mile. Then he slowed down and finally came to a standstill at the cross-roads. Straight on was the main road to London; on the left, the Canterbury and Dover Road. He carefully extinguished all his lights, and leaving his car, with the engine still going, on the extreme left-hand side of the road, stood for a moment and listened. There was no sound of any approaching

vehicle. It seemed curious to him afterwards that without any conscious making up his mind, without any definite idea, even, as to his ultimate object, he was completely obsessed with one idea— the brown paper packet was to be obtained at all costs. There seemed to be no room in his mind for any other thought. The fact that he was about to commit a highway robbery never occurred to him. He walked slowly a few yards down the Dover Road and deliberately turned his short fur coat inside out. With an electric torch in his hand, which he carried always in the tool-box of his car, he stood waiting. Even in those few moments when he had nothing to do but think; it never occurred to him that his action was in any way preposterous.

The sound of the approaching taxicab became audible at last. The driver blew his horn as he reached the cross-roads. Knox stood in the middle of the road, about twenty paces down, his electric torch blazing.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Stop!"

With an exclamation from the driver and a grinding of the brakes, the taxicab came to a standstill. Knox sprang lightly to the side of the vehicle. The window was hastily pulled down. One of the two men leaned out.

"What is the matter?" he asked sharply. "What has happened? Why do you stop us like this?"

"My car's broken down," Knox replied. "Sorry, but I want some help."

The man who had spoken stepped at once out on to the road. His manner was courteous but peremptory. "We are sorry," he declared, "but it is quite impossible for us to offer you any assistance. Get on at once, driver. We will take you to Canterbury or anywhere upon the Dover Road, if you like to sit outside with the driver, but we are in a hurry."

"So am I," Knox replied, "so here goes!"

He tripped the man up, who had been on the point of re-entering the taxicab, and threw him rather heavily. Then, as he thrust his head and shoulders into the cab, he felt his cheek suddenly scorched and his eardrum almost broken as the fire from a pistol flashed past him. His right hand reached the throat of his assailant, however, while with his left he knocked the pistol up. In that moment of absolute confusion, he saw the brown paper packet upon the vacant seat. With a sudden movement he seized it and sprang back, just as the chauffeur, who had tumbled down from his box, intervened.

"Don't let him get away with that!" the man called from the road, as he staggered up. "Do you hear?"

The chauffeur did his best, but he was heavy on his feet, and Knox, who had been considered a dodgy forward in his not too far distant football days, shot past him and leaped into his car. All three men were now in pursuit of him. He slipped in his second speed, and his car glided off down the hill. His pursuers gained at first. The taller man was almost within reach. He seized the back of the

car. Knox, turning around, dealt his fingers a tremendous blow with the electric torch. A bullet whistled past him in the darkness, and he was more than ever thankful that he was running without lights. Another struck the back of the car, which by this time was gathering speed, and a moment later a perfect volley whizzed past him. Then, apparently, they abandoned the pursuit and returned to the taxicab. He heard the shout of one of the men.

"Fifty pounds, driver, if you catch that car!"

Knox smiled as he slipped in his fourth speed. The idea of catching him was absurd. His only trouble was that before very long he absolutely must stop to light his lamps. He slipped through the first village, which was fairly empty, surprising only one or two wayfarers by his noiseless approach. At the top of the hill on the other side he paused and sprang out. He lit his lamps with trembling fingers. In the distance he could hear the beating of the engine from the taxicab, and behind he could see it coming down the hill, the twin lights swaying from side to side of the road in dangerous fashion. He breathed a satisfied smile as he climbed once more into the driving seat. His flaring headlights showed him the road clean and bright before him. He glided smoothly off, and slackened speed only when he reached the suburbs of London.

He drove straight to the lordly mansion of his uncle, the Earl of Tamworth.

"His lordship is not in at present," the butler told him.

Knox nodded. "I'll wait," he said. Knox was ushered into the library and, drawing an easy-chair up to the fire, opened the evening paper. As soon as the man had departed, however, he threw it down and undid the parcel. Its contents were soon disclosed— a brown tube of some hard, waxen material. Knox held it in his hands for a moment, a very slight smile upon his lips. Then he made his way to a corner of the study, where stood his uncle's latest toy, a phonograph. After some time he succeeded in starting the instrument. He slipped on the cylinder he had brought, adjusted the reproducer, and waited. At first there was only a slight buzzing. Then he gave a little start. The conversation which began to unfold itself was almost uncanny in its distinctness. His uncle's voice was quite unmistakable.

"My dear young lady— my dear Vera, since you permit it— I am glad, believe me I am glad to find that you are beginning to take some interest in my work and the problems with which we are associated day by day. In a general way, nothing gives me greater pleasure than to discuss these with you, but there are things which in my official position it is better for me to discuss with no one."

Her little laugh was amazingly natural.

"You are so wise, so cautious. All great statesmen are like that, I know. Yet with me, how different it is. It is so little I ask. It is you who have made me curious."

There was an inaudible sentence, and her soft laugh, then Lord Tamworth's voice again, a trifle reluctant.

"It is true, my dear child, as you say, that we are alone, and that within a week the whole world will know the policy upon which we decided last night. Very well, I will give you its outline. Then you can follow everything which happens. You will understand my speech to-morrow night. The policy of the cabinet is to prevent France, at all costs, from joining with Russia if the latter should move against Austria. France is bound to her ally, but she is also, in a sense, dependent upon England. Our understanding with Russia is apparently a cordial one, but it is not the policy of the government to allow France to be drawn into this war, or to be drawn in herself. The reply to be given to the French ambassador on Thursday— "

Knox stopped the machine and leaned back in his chair. He heard his uncle's ponderous footsteps outside. A moment or two later, Lord Tamworth came in, frowning slightly.

"What, here again, Algernon?" he exclaimed. "May I ask what business you can have of sufficient importance to keep you waiting around here for me? I am due at Westminster almost at once."

Algernon Knox surveyed his uncle through his eyeglass with mild intentness. Without doubt, Lord Tamworth was a very intelligent-looking man. His nephew sighed.

"My dear uncle," he said, "I have called round to know if you will be good enough to give me a brief exposition of our political attitude toward Russia, apropos of the threatened war between Austria and Russia?"

Lord Tamworth was for a moment dumbfounded. "Have you lost your senses?" he demanded roughly.

Knox shook his head. "Not entirely. Just listen to this. I was amusing myself with it when you came in."

"What the dickens are you doing with my phonograph?" Lord Tamworth exclaimed.

Knox calmly started the instrument. He held up his finger. "Just listen," he begged, soothingly. "I never before appreciated how delightfully supplicating a woman's voice could be. Listen."

There was a little pause, a click, and once more the conversation commenced. At the end of the first sentence, Lord Tamworth's face was a most amazing study.

"What the— " he began frantically.

"Hush!" Knox interrupted. "Better hear it all."

The conversation unfolded itself. With every word Lord Tamworth's condition seemed to approach a little nearer to imbecility. Incredulity, anger,

and terror in turn distorted his features. When at last Knox, with, a little cough, stopped the instrument abruptly, his uncle was incoherent.

"Now if you will just compose yourself," the former said calmly, leaning back in the easy-chair and tapping a cigarette upon the case from which he had just withdrawn it, "I will explain. I was in the back room at Vera Custeneiff's this afternoon. I was there entirely by accident— I've never seen her in my life off the stage. Got pitched out of my car at the bottom of her drive. She was very decent, but I could see that she was worrying all the time to get me out of the way. While I was there, some one rang her up on the telephone about something she was to send to Dover. A special messenger was wanted to motor down there. Well, to cut a long story short, she made up her mind that I should take on the job. Just as she was explaining it, all very mysterious and terrifically important and all that sort of thing, she was called away. I heard her talking in the next room, and I heard you both come and sit down in the corner. There was a little curtained recess, and the moment you began to talk I heard a slight buzzing. I knew the sound at once— a phonograph. Seemed queer, didn't it?"

Lord Tamworth wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "My God!" he exclaimed. "That woman— what a fiend! She has always pretended that she hated politics— wouldn't even discuss them at all. Yes, she would have me sit in that particular corner. There was a blue curtain with large black dots. One of them might easily have been the mouth of the phonograph. She wouldn't let me wear my glasses. Go on— go on, Algernon."

"Presently," Knox continued, "I was given the chuck. Two other chaps turned up to fetch that precious parcel. I couldn't make head nor tail of it. but I had an idea. That phonograph wasn't ticking there for nothing, and I felt pretty certain you'd been giving yourself away. Anyway, I played the stand-and-deliver game, sneaked the cylinder from the two men who were taking it down to Dover, and pretty nearly got a bullet through my head for my pains. Now let's hear the end, shall we?" he added, turning toward the instrument. "There was something about a little sup-"

Lord Tamworth's fist struck the table.

"Hush!" he cried out hoarsely. "Your aunt is in the next room! Give me the cylinder, Algernon. Give it me at once."

Knox shook his head. He laid his hand upon the instrument. "I'll spare your blushes, uncle," he said, "but you know I am, as you admitted this afternoon, too big a fool to earn my own living. You docked my allowance to-day to five hundred a year until I come in for my own tin in four years' time. Sit down, please, and write me a note. Say you've reconsidered the matter and that I am to have a thousand until my twenty-sixth birthday."

"You are bribing me!" Lord Tamworth spluttered. "It is an imposition!"

"Dash it all," Knox sighed, "it's the cheapest get-out you ever had in your life!"

Lord Tamworth sat down and wrote the letter. His nephew glanced it through and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'll leave you the cylinder, uncle," he remarked, stepping on one side.

Lord Tamworth was already busy at the machine. Wrenching the cylinder from the bar, he held it high over his head and dashed it on to the hearthstone. Not till he saw it there in a thousand pieces did his face lose that expression of tense anxiety. Then he turned once more to his nephew.

"So long as I've got to give you the thousand a year, Algernon," he said resignedly, "for heaven's sake find something to do with yourself!"

The young man nodded. "I have discovered," he announced, "the one profession in which I feel sure that I shall shine. I am such a fool myself that I am going to devote my days to helping people who are bigger fools— people who get into trouble with blackmailers, dancing ladies, and other dangerous persons."

Algernon took up his hat.

"I mean it, uncle," he continued pleasantly. "I sha'n't put a brass plate up, but there are always ways of butting in. It takes a fool to help a fool, you know. Which reminds me— I think that little supper party— "

Lord Tamworth rang the bell. "If at any time I discover that I have been mistaken in you, Algernon," he said stiffly, "I shall admit it. For the present— " He nodded meaningly toward the door.

The young man smiled. "By all means," he said. "My love to aunt."

———————————

15: Reverend Pendlebury's Past

Richard Connell
1893-1949
The Sunday Star, Washington, D.C., 29 July 1923

THE STORY about the Reverend Pendlebury had already gained considerable headway when it first came to my ears. One day as I sat in my kitchen trimming the lamp wicks, my antique neighbor, Cephas Bonner, bustled in, stamping the snow from his felt boots

"Wall, what do you think about him?" he greeted me as he pulled off his mittens.

"Him? Who?"

"About the Reverend Pendlebury. Ain't you heard—"

"Heard what?"

"Of course," he began. "I myself personally don't believe it, and I guess none of the folks does But bein' you're an elder, I thought you oughta know what they're sayin'. They're sayin' that he's had a past!"

"Past? Of course. Most man near sixty-five have had one."

He shot ma a quick, cunning look.

"I reckon you know the sort of past I mean, elder," he said.

I snorted.

"I don't know what bit of scandal you've heard, but if it reflects on the Reverend Daniel Pendlebury. I'll say right here and now, I don't believe It."

"Well, elder," Cephas began again, "they're sayin' that Pendlebury isn't his real name at all— and that before he came east to our church— "Cephas whispered the last words— "he was an out-and-out bad 'un!"

"Exactly what do they charge Reverend Pendlebury with having been?" I demanded. Cephas Bonner. I knew, was a fair-dealing man, an important member of our church; and if he placed any credence in the rumor, it was worth investigating. As an elder, jealous of my church's reputation, I couldn't ignore it.

"What's the rumor? A woman?"

"No."

"Was he a drunkard?"

"No, they don't say that."

"A convict?"

"He might better have been."

"Then what was he?"

Cephas Bonner came close to me.

"They say he was a common, professional gambler!"

"Rot!" I said. "Pure rot!"

"Well, that's what they're sayin'."

"Any facts. Cephas?"

"Well, not exactly. But you know Matt Cobb. Luke Cobb's brother that was visitin' him last week?"

"Yes; ths brother that went to the Klondike in the gold rush."

"Well. Matt said to Luke that he'd seen Reverend Pendlebury before, out west. Matt said it was the way the reverend has of pinching his moustache when he's a bit excited that brought it all back to him. And the little queer limp the Reverend has— that made Matt sure."

"Sure? Of what?"

"That he'd seen the Reverend Pendlebury out on the Klondike In the old days."

"What of that?"

"But," Cephas was growing excited, "the Reverend Pendlebury wasn't a clergyman in those days, Matt said. No, sir. He was the biggest, smartest gambler in Alaska, and he ran the largest gambling outfit on the Klondike."

"Bosh! Utter bosh!"

"Mebbe it is. I'm Just tallin' you what Matt Cobb said," answered Cephas.

"Well, go on. What else."

"Matt said that the Reverend was known as Diamond Steve Paige out there, because he always wore a big diamond stud plumb in the center of his shirt. And he always wore a loud checked suit, Matt Cobb said—"

"CEPHAS," I broke in, "checked suits may be a weakness but they are hardly a sin."

"But he was a gambler, elder— and that limp— well, Matt Cobb said he got that from being shot by a miner he'd won $16,000 from in one night playin' poker!"

"Bah, Cephas. Matt Cobb is a loose-tongued old fool. Because a minister with a limp has a habit of pinching his moustache he reminds Matt of some gambler Matt saw twenty-live years ago. Then a lot of folks take up the yarn and spread around town that the man who has done so much for them was a card sharp and a crook. That sort of thing makes me sick."

"Matt Cobb didn't exactly say he was a crook," admitted Cephas. "He sald Diamond Steve Paige was known all over the west coast as a square gambler. I don't believe there's no such thing as a square gambler."

"Cephas," I said to him, in my most serious, elders'-meeting manner. "I don't believe a word of this story. Neither should you. We know that Reverend Pendlebury has worked for us night and day for ten years; we know him to be a gentle, good soul, and a real man. Only mighty mean people would believe that story. I'm sure the elders and the deacons won't."

Cephas stroked his unshaved chin dubiously.

“I ain't so sure about that, elder," he said. "You’re a younger man than men like Luke Cobb and Joe Sanderson— they’re of the old school. They're mighty strict; you know how they feel about a gambler. Well," Cephas drew on his mittens, "this ain't getting' to the post-office, I guess."

As the black of Cephas' buffalo fur coat became speck on the vast whiteness of the hills I returned to my lamps. My heart was a little sick as I thought of old Mr. Pendlebury. The story was a lie, of course. But lies can make trouble, can hurt.

The people up here around Willowton deem a gambler the most scarlst of all sinners. We're extremely, almost unbelievably, careful of our money. We have to be. We respect our dollars because they represent our hard and unremitting toll; they are the trophies of our unending slugging match with a tough and stubborn Nature. When we do get hold of an extra dollar our roughened fingers close tightly on its green throat, and we bear it off to the savings bank or invest it in solid first mortgage. Gambling—the risking of money— is a heinous sin. So, if that story about the Reverend Pendlebury did prove to have even a vestige of truth in it— but, of course it couldn't have.

AN added reason why we around Willowton particularly hated gamblers was the presence in our community of Jesse Hornbeck. We were a little afraid of Jesse Hornbeck. He was so shrewd, and he had an inconvenient habit of foreclosing mortgages and taking up notes. We kept out of his clutches if we could; he was a vindictive man.

Jesse Hornbeck was a gambler. He owned and operated Bald Eagle Inn, up on Black Mountain, outside Willowton. and it was an open secret what sort of place Bald Eagle Inn really was. We tried to pretend that Bald Eagle Inn didn't exist, but we were unpleasantly aware that It did. Rich summer people motored there at night, and. obviously, they did not go there for the view or the bracing mountain air. In winter the Inn advertised "winter sports," but that was a blind; its real w iter sport was conducted Indoors.

We felt that the Bald Eagle Inn was a blot and a disgrace. But there was nothing we could do about It. Jesse Hornbeck, and his lieutenant and Jackal, Roy Siller, were too powerful and too canny. But we resented the place, and we resented Jesse. His fat right hand was adorned by a remarkable ring made of an obese gold snake with ruby eyes in the act of being choked to death by a diamond in its mouth the size of a hazel nut. No one doubted the rumor that he had won this ring playing poker with a Chicago traveling man who, on an unlucky evening, had ventured into Bald Eagle Inn.

Jesse Hornbeck’s automobile, with its screaming red paint and its silverized trimmings, he had brought back from Boston where he won it from a jockey— so the story ran. It was a selfish car, a roadster with but one seat. It was a high-

powered car, that roared and coughed like a hundred asthmatic devils, as he drove it careening along the roads, quite heedless of the safety of any of us.

It followed that when any of us heard the word "gambler we saw the puffed and poisoned visage of Jesse Hornbeck.

NO two men could have been more unlike, physically, than Jesse and the Rev. Pendlebury. Our minister was such a mild-seeming, small man, slender and erect; he always wore cheap suits of black serge, well brushed. His voice was quiet, and eo were his gray eyes. And yet he did not give the Impression that he was a meek man or one who could be imposed on with impunity.

He had come to us from the west when we were sorely in need of a minister. His hair was iron gray then— that was ten years ago— and it had grown white in our fervice.

It wasn't much that we did for Reverend Pendlebury, but It was the best we could do. You see, our church was in a bad hole, financially. Two years before the building had been burned to the ground. There had been no insurance and on Reverend Pendlebury's shoulders had fallen the Job of building a new church with nothing but the ashes of the old one to start with. He worked with the carpenters himself, although his hands were as delioate as a woman's and blistered easily, as If he were not accustomed to rough work. He raised the necessary funds for the material by a species of miracle.

The miracle was this: He persuaded Simon Middlemass, octogenarian president of the First National Bank and not a church member, to loan from his own private funds $14,000 on a note. Of course, that note meant that the ladies of the church had to give suppers, entertainments and bazaars at a furious rate to pay back old Simon, who, after the first glow had cooled, had begun to worry about his money. We appeased him somewhat by paying the interest and $900 in less than a year—a colossal sum for a community as poor as ours.

I was running these things over in my mind as I trimmed the wicks and filled the lamps. But, well— If he'd ever even touched a card, it might be enough to damn him. Men like Luke Cobb and Job Sanderson were as rigid as granite shafts; they were Just men, but they were hard men. Suppose he did have to leave our church? At his age and with that charge against him, who would take him? What would become of him?

I went to the window and looked out. Very faintly I could see the snow'-whitened steeple of the church down the valley—his church—that he had built for us. Then, on the road, I saw a moving smudge. It came nearer; it was Cephas Bonner in his cutter, his old mare plodding homeward.

I saw him clamber from his sleigh and stump up my path. He exploded Into my kitchen, breathless.

"Elder—"

"What is it, Cephas?"

"Bad news! Old Simon Middlemass is going to move to Florida and is selling all his holdings here."

“Well, what of that?"

"Plenty. Last night he sold the church’s note for $18,000 to Jesse Hornbeck.”

"He didn't do that?"

"What?"

"Job Sanderson asked me to tell you that there will be a special meeting of the elders and deacons at the minister’s house tonight at 8. That rumor has got too strong, I reckon.”

WE gathered a little before 8 in the threadbare study of the Reverend Pendlebury. There were six of us. three elders and three deacons. At the head of the table sat Job Sanderson. first elder, a huge, grizzled man, who’d never owed any man a penny or cheated a man out of a penny. Next to him sat Luke Cobb, second elder, bald and bearded and austere.

I sat at Job’s left hand, the youngest of the elders, Deacon Bogardus over-flowed one of the horsehair chairs; then came Deacon Fuller, a patriarch of a man and, finally, Deacon Peck, even more grave than when he read the ritual at lodge meetings. We were distinctly not a jolly gathering.

"Gentlemen," said Job Sanderson, "he’s upstairs in his bedroom, waiting for us to send for him. Some folks around this town, appear to believe this story. We’ve got to do something about it— give him a clean bill of health or a vote of confidence or something—”

"We might ask him if it’s true first," put in Luke Cobb, dryly.

I stood up.

"I’m ashamed to be here.” I said. "Our presence on such a mission is an insult to that good man upstairs. Rev. Daniel Pendlebury was never any more a gambler than you were, Job Sanderson, or you, Luke Cebb. We’ve got enough on our hands as it is, I guess. Do you know that today Is the fifteenth of the month and the note falls due? Simon Middleman agreed that he would renew it. But the note isn't his property now. It belongs to Jesse Hornbeck. Do you think he'll renew it?"

"He hasn't made a move not to," said Deacon Peck.

"But suppose he won’t, what then?” I asked. "At the end of today— at twelve midnight— he has a right to take over the church property. I asked Judge Easterly on the way down. Do any of you happen to have thirteen thousand dollars on you?"

Job Sanderson refletively rasped his thumb along his stubbled jaw.

"I reckon we all know about that note," he said, slowly, "and I reckon we all know what we can expect from Jesse Hornbeck. But,” he went on, "I reckon It

would be almost better to have no church at all, than to have one whose minister is accused of being an ex-gambler."

"Job Sanderson." I said, "now you're calling names. What proof—"

"Easy, elder, easy." he said "I'm not the man to Judge any man without a fair trial. I'm confident Reverend Pendlebury can clear himself of this charge "

"Then why go any further with this miserable business?" I asked. "What grounds have we for even suggesting Reverend Pendlebury had a past?"

"My brother Matt," said Luke Cobb in his high, nasal tenor, "ain't exactly a fool. I admit he started the story, before he went back to Nome. He says he remembers his Klondike days like they was yesterday and he says he remembers Diamond Steve Paige, too. I admit Reverend Pendlebury don't conduct himself like no gambler, but— did you ever notice the way he picks up the little cards with the announcements on them?"

"No."

"Well, he shuffles 'em and than fans 'em out exactly like they was a hand at cards!" Luke said this with a triumphant air.

"By thunder, that's so," admitted Deacon Peck.

"I've noticed it myself." said Deacon Bogardus. "He looks down at the 'nouncement cards sort of excited like, as if he expected to see three aces 'stead of 'Ladies' Aid Society will meet at three.'"

"And when he lays 'em down." pursued Luke Cobb, "he don't Just lay 'em down, all at once, like you or I would. No. sirree. He deals 'em down, one at a time."

"You re gabbling like a bunch of school-kids," I said warmly. "I don't believe he knows an ace— from a— now—Jack."

"Neither do I,'' said Deacon Fuller. "Well," said Job Sanderson in his deep, presiding voice, "that's neither here, there nor elsewhere. I reckon the best thing for us to do is call him down, tell him what we've heard, then tell him we don't believe it, and see what he has to say."

BEFORE any one could object he had moved to the door, and called up the stairs.

"Oh, Mr. Pendlebury, would you mind stepping down here a minute?"

On the stairs we heard the brisk, uneven tap of his limp and the Reverend Pendlebury came in smiling. I felt like a dog. I think the others did, too.

"At your service, gentlemen," he said. Job Sanderson blushed and he fumbled about with his words.

"Well, you see, now Reverend," he began, "we've been sort of hearing things lately; of course we don't take any stock In them, but we feel that something ought to be done to— to put the kibosh on them, as the boys say— so—" He stopped and traced patterns with his thumb nail on the study table.

Still smiling, the Reverend Pendlebury spoke.

"There, there. Job, you've no reason to be flustered. You're doing your duty. Don't think I haven't heard the talk that's been going round about me. But before I say anything further about this story you've heard. I really think we'd better talk about that note. I've worried about It all day. It's more pressing than the other thing.'"

A series of loud raps on the front door made him stop. Deacon Peck opened the door. Into the, room came a lanky, long-nosed, youngish man. Roy Siller, doer of odd and dirty Jobs for Jesse Hornbeck. We all stiffened hastily In our chairs.

"Well?" said Job Sanderson, curtly.

ROY SILLER lit a cigarette, discharged blue smoke from long nose and smiled.

"Evenin', gents. I called about a little matter of a note owed by the church as party of the first part, to Mr. Jesse Hornbeck, party of the second part. Of course. I'm a bit early. You've got till 12, if you want to stand on your legal rights. But I thought you'd be glad to pay now so we can all go home. I'll trouble you to hand over, thirteen thousand in cash, and then I'll give you the note and the deed to the church property you executed when you made the note."

He tapped a long envelope in his coat pocket.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Siller," the Rev. Pendlebury said in his level tone. "Of course, if we don't happen to have the money at this time, Mr. Hornbeck will be kind enough to extend the note, I'm sure."

"Oh, are you?" My fingers itched to choke the gloat out of Siller's voice. "Well, you've got another think cornin', dominie. My orders were to get the money."

"And if you do not get it?"

"Pay up or close up."

"Don't you think if I saw Mr. Hornbeck and had a talk with him—"

"Not a chance, dominie," cut in Siller. "It'd be a waste of breath. Jesse Hornbeck means business. He ain't forgot the cracks that have been made about him by some people in this town—" he looked pointedly round the table— "and now that he's in the saddle, he's going' to ride. He said to tell you you could bet your bottom dollar on that."

"But," said the Rev. Pendlebury, "In time we could pay. What possible good would it do him to take over the property? What use could he make of a church?"

Roy Siller spat peevishly. His smile was sour. "Guess I can wait, too," he drawled. "You might as well enjoy this place as long as you can." He sprawled himself with a proprietary air In the Rev. Pendlebury's chair by the fire.

ROY SILLER took a seat, surveyed our gloom-ridden faces with great deliberation. then drawled;

“I guess you ain’t heard,” he said, "that Jesse Hornbeck bought a franchise in the Marcus-Gruber burlesque circuit when he found he was probably goin' to have a swell site for a theater."

Job Sanderson rose up from his chair, his body and voice quivering with wrath.

"You damnable Jackal!" he cried. "Do you mean to say that Hornbeck is going to turn our church into a burlesque show?”

Siller shrugged his shoulders.

"It will he his property, I reckon," he said, "and I guess he can do what he pleases with it.”

Job Sanderson seemed about to throttle him. but the Rev. Pendlebury stepped between them and laid his hand on Job’s thick arm.

"It’s no use, Job," he said. "The law is on his side. I signed the note in the name of the church with the consent of all of you. Mr. Middlemass insisted that it be a time note and promised to renew it. He’s gone back on us. There’s nothing we can do but pay. And where are we to get $13,000?”

He turned to Roy Stiller.

"Couldn’t you give us, say, three days? In three days we could perhaps raise the money.”

Siller spat into the grate.

"Nothing doing, dominie. Jesse Hornbeck’s last words were 'Get the dough.' I don’t mind tollin' you that there's a big game runnin’ at the inn tonight and Jesse could use the money very handily there. Well,” his voice hardened, "do I get the money?”

I saw the beginning of a glitter in the Rev. Pendlebury’s gray eyes, as he consulted his watch.

"Eight thirty,” he said. "Your money is not due until midnight. Will you wait here, or will you come back at 12 for it?"

"I’ll wait here, right here." said Roy Siller, staring at him, suspiciously.

"Gentlemen," the Rev. Pendlebury turned to us, "We were discussing another matter when Mr. Siller came in. We’ll take it up again, if you wish.”

"Just a minute, reverend,” said Job Sanderson. He bent over and whispered something to Luke Cobb. I saw Luke nod. Then Job spoke.

“I guess the rest will agree with me," said Job. "when I say that we don’t want to go any further with that other matter. I reckon we were fools to listen for a second to such a wild yarn, and we’re sorry, reverend. The matter is closed. We’ll forget it."

We all nodded to show we were behind him.

THE Rev. Pendlebury's eyes were glistening and for the first time his voice faltered.

"Thank you, gentlemen, from the bottom of my heart," he said. "It means everything to me to have your confidence in my work for the church. Our church—" Then his eye fell on the striped back of Roy Siller lolling in his chair. "Our church—" he began again, but be couldn't go on. Roy Siller spat into the fire. Then I saw the Rev. Pendlebury's small hands go up to his face and pinch the ends of his white mustache; I saw the glitter In his gray eyes grow pace to the door and back. Then I saw the glitter In his gray eyes grow sharper. Suddenly he walked to the ancient desk in the corner of the room, sat down, grasped a pen and began to write. He finished a short note, sealed It and handed It to Job Sanderson.

"Elder Sanderson," he said, all business. "I am going out. You are not to open this note till I have been gone five minutes. Then do me one favor; stay here till midnight and do not deliver the keys of the church to Siller until then. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Good night, gentlemen."

He closed the door behind him, and we heard him go upstairs; then we heard him moving around in his bedroom; then, after about ten minutes, we heard the tap, tap tap of hie limp as he came down the stairs; then we heard the front door slam as he went out.

At last Job Sanderson's stiff, hurried fingers tore open the envelope. His lips read the words to himself; then, louder, to us.

Elders and deacons of Willowton Church:
I herewith resign as your minister.
DANIEL PENDLEBURY.

We looked at each other blankly.

"I don't understand," began Luke Cobb.

"What can he mean?" said Deacon Pack.

"What's he going to do?" said Deacon Fuller.

"Was he insured?" asked Deacon Bogardus.

"It's too late to atop him now, anyhow," said Job Sanderson.

Roy Siller broke in upon our speculations.

"You might as well hand over the keys," he said, "If you haven't the cash. Then we could all go home."

I saw the cords stand out on the backs of Job Sanderson's knotted fists.

"You'll wait till 12, Siller," he said.

WE SAT ABOUT in heavy silence, as If we were watching at a bier. The clock on the mantel ticked off the minutes. At 11:30 Roy Siller stood up, yawned and said:

"Aw, what's the use of waitin'? The dominie's probably lit out for Boston on the 10:20 train. Let's have the keys. I wanta get back to the Inn."

Luke Cobb looked questioningly at the rest of us.

"I reckon mebbe Siller's right," he said sadly. "Eleven-thirty's the same as 12, so far as we're concerned—"

We were beaten. Luke Cobb began to struggle into his shaggy ulster; Deacon Peck began to hunt around for his mittens. The big, bass voice of Job Sanderson stopped them.

"Wait a bit," he boomed. "We promised the reverend we'd stay till 12, and we're going to."

WE watched the minute hand of the clock climb up to the arc toward twelve. Five minute to twelve. Roy Siller stood up and began to wind a gaudy muffler around his pale neck. Deacon Peck began again the search for his mitten under the table. Job Sanderson slowly, gainfully, straightening out his big body; his lips were shut tight; his hands ploughed down into the deep cave of pocket in his corduroy trousers, and I heard the jingle of the church keys. Then we all heard another sound— a roaring, coughing noise— and we all recognized it. It was the sound that heralded the approach of Jesse Hornbeck and his red car.

The jingle of keys in Job's pocket stopped, and I knew that his big hand had closed on them vise-like, and stilled them. Hate wrinkles converged round his eyes. There was a war-like spark behind the spectacles of Deacon Fuller; I saw Luke Cobb biting his lip.

Deacon Peck had gone to the window.

"It's Jesse Hornbeck's car, right enough," he said. "He's coming up the path."

We heard the sound of feet on the porch, and unconsciously we moved together, shoulder to shoulder. Roy Siller took a step forward to greet his employer; he was smiling widely. Then the door opened.

A man stepped into the yellow light. It was not Jesse Hornbeck. It was a stranger, with the face of our minister. He was dressed in a checked suit of old fashioned cut, a flamboyant, ribald sort of suit. The vest, cut low, revealed an expanse of stiff white shirt bosom and in the center of the bosom was a big diamond stud that caught the rays of the oil lamp and shot them back into our amazed eyes. A black string bow tie fitted into an old-time collar. On the man's head was a wide-brimmed black slouch hat, tilted back at an angle. The face underneath the hat was the face of the Rev. Pendlebury. It was pale, but it was calm, and there was a slight smile on it. We stood there, gawking at him. We saw him walk, with that slight, hitching limp of his, to the table. We saw his thin

right hand go into a pocket of the checked suit. When he drew it out there was a large roll of bills in it; he laid the money on the table— big bills, yellow hundreds.

"Mr. Siller," he said, clearly. "I'll trouble you to hand me that deed and note."

On the second finger of the Rev. Pendlebury's right hand, as he reached for the note, I saw the glint of an unwonted ring; a fat gold snake with ruby eyes. in whose mouth was a diamond as big as a hazel nut.

Roy Siller automatically fingered the money on the table.

"Thirteen thousand," he muttered. "Here's your note."

He handed the Rev. Pendlebury the long envelope. The Rev. Pendlebury stepped to the fireplace and tossed the note among the blazing pine logs. Then he walked briskly to the front door, held it open, and said pleasantly,

"Now, good night, Mr. Siller."

Jesse Hornbeck's lieutenant stumbled out into the snowy night and the Rev. Pendlebury closed the door after him. We still stood there in a group; no one spoke. The Rev. Pendlebury was smiling.

"I hope you gentlemen will excuse me," he said. "I am going to bed. I'm a bit tired. Good night."

Job Sanderson plucked from the table the sheet of paper on which the Rev. Pendlebury had written his resignation, and moved swiftly toward the fireplace. Then, suddenly, the room grew very much brighter.

———————

16: Sredni Vashtar

"Saki"

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

The Westminster Gazette 28 May 1910,
Collected in: The Chronicles of Clovis, 1911

CONRADIN was ten years old, and the doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years. The doctor was silky and effete, and counted for little, but his opinion was endorsed by Mrs. de Ropp, who counted for nearly everything. Mrs. De Ropp was Conradin's cousin and guardian, and in his eyes she represented those three-fifths of the world that are necessary and disagreeable and real; the other two-fifths, in perpetual antagonism to the foregoing, were summed up in himself and his imagination. One of these days Conradin supposed he would succumb to the mastering pressure of wearisome necessary things— such as illnesses and coddling restrictions and drawn-out dullness. Without his imagination, which was rampant under the spur of loneliness, he would have succumbed long ago.

Mrs. de Ropp would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin, though she might have been dimly aware that thwarting him "for his good" was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. Conradin hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask. Such few pleasures as he could contrive for himself gained an added relish from the likelihood that they would be displeasing to his guardian, and from the realm of his imagination she was locked out— an unclean thing, which should find no entrance.

In the dull, cheerless garden, overlooked by so many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that, or a reminder that medicines were due, he found little attraction. The few fruit-trees that it contained were set jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste; it would probably have been difficult to find a market-gardener who would have offered ten shillings for their entire yearly produce. In a forgotten corner, however, almost hidden behind a dismal shrubbery, was a disused tool-shed of respectable proportions, and within its walls Conradin found a haven, something that took on the varying aspects of a playroom and a cathedral. He had peopled it with a legion of familiar phantoms, evoked partly from fragments of history and partly from his own brain, but it also boasted two inmates of flesh and blood. In one corner lived a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen, on which the boy lavished an affection that had scarcely another outlet. Further back in the gloom stood a large hutch, divided into two compartments, one of which was fronted with close iron bars. This was the abode of a large polecat-ferret, which a friendly butcher-boy had

once smuggled, cage and all, into its present quarters, in exchange for a long-secreted hoard of small silver. Conradin was dreadfully afraid of the lithe, sharp-fanged beast, but it was his most treasured possession. Its very presence in the tool-shed was a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin. And one day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion. The Woman indulged in religion once a week at a church near by, and took Conradin with her, but to him the church service was an alien rite in the House of Rimmon. Every Thursday, in the dim and musty silence of the tool-shed, he worshipped with mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch where dwelt Sredni Vashtar, the great ferret. Red flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the winter-time were offered at his shrine, for he was a god who laid some special stress on the fierce impatient side of things, as opposed to the Woman's religion, which, as far as Conradin could observe, went to great lengths in the contrary direction. And on great festivals powdered nutmeg was strewn in front of his hutch, an important feature of the offering being that the nutmeg had to be stolen. These festivals were of irregular occurrence, and were chiefly appointed to celebrate some passing event. On one occasion, when Mrs. de Ropp suffered from acute toothache for three days, Conradin kept up the festival during the entire three days, and almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache. If the malady had lasted for another day the supply of nutmeg would have given out.

The Houdan hen was never drawn into the cult of Sredni Vashtar. Conradin had long ago settled that she was an Anabaptist. He did not pretend to have the remotest knowledge as to what an Anabaptist was, but he privately hoped that it was dashing and not very respectable. Mrs. de Ropp was the ground plan on which he based and detested all respectability.

After a while Conradin's absorption in the tool-shed began to attract the notice of his guardian. "It is not good for him to be pottering down there in all weathers," she promptly decided, and at breakfast one morning she announced that the Houdan hen had been sold and taken away overnight. With her short-sighted eyes she peered at Conradin, waiting for an outbreak of rage and sorrow, which she was ready to rebuke with a flow of excellent precepts and reasoning. But Conradin said nothing: there was nothing to be said. Something perhaps in his white set face gave her a momentary qualm, for at tea that afternoon there was toast on the table, a delicacy which she usually banned on the ground that it was bad for him; also because the making of it "gave trouble," a deadly offence in the middle-class feminine eye.

"I thought you liked toast," she exclaimed, with an injured air, observing that he did not touch it.

"Sometimes," said Conradin.

In the shed that evening there was an innovation in the worship of the hutch-god. Conradin had been wont to chant his praises, to-night he asked a boon.

"Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar."

The thing was not specified. As Sredni Vashtar was a god he must be supposed to know. And choking back a sob as he looked at that other empty corner, Conradin went back to the world he so hated.

And every night, in the welcome darkness of his bedroom, and every evening in the dusk of the tool-shed, Conradin's bitter litany went up: "Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar."

Mrs. de Ropp noticed that the visits to the shed did not cease, and one day she made a further journey of inspection.

"What are you keeping in that locked hutch?" she asked. "I believe it's guinea-pigs. I'll have them all cleared away."

Conradin shut his lips tight, but the Woman ransacked his bedroom till she found the carefully hidden key, and forthwith marched down to the shed to complete her discovery. It was a cold afternoon, and Conradin had been bidden to keep to the house. From the furthest window of the dining-room the door of the shed could just be seen beyond the corner of the shrubbery, and there Conradin stationed himself. He saw the Woman enter, and then he imagined her opening the door of the sacred hutch and peering down with her short-sighted eyes into the thick straw bed where his god lay hidden. Perhaps she would prod at the straw in her clumsy impatience. And Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time. But he knew as he prayed that he did not believe. He knew that the Woman would come out presently with that pursed smile he loathed so well on her face, and that in an hour or two the gardener would carry away his wonderful god, a god no longer, but a simple brown ferret in a hutch. And he knew that the Woman would triumph always as she triumphed now, and that he would grow ever more sickly under her pestering and domineering and superior wisdom, till one day nothing would matter much more with him, and the doctor would be proved right. And in the sting and misery of his defeat, he began to chant loudly and defiantly the hymn of his threatened idol:

Sredni Vashtar went forth,
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white.
His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful.

AND THEN of a sudden he stopped his chanting and drew closer to the window-pane. The door of the shed still stood ajar as it had been left, and the

minutes were slipping by. They were long minutes, but they slipped by nevertheless. He watched the starlings running and flying in little parties across the lawn; he counted them over and over again, with one eye always on that swinging door. A sour-faced maid came in to lay the table for tea, and still Conradin stood and waited and watched. Hope had crept by inches into his heart, and now a look of triumph began to blaze in his eyes that had only known the wistful patience of defeat. Under his breath, with a furtive exultation, he began once again the paean of victory and devastation. And presently his eyes were rewarded: out through that doorway came a long, low, yellow-and-brown beast, with eyes a-blink at the waning daylight, and dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat. Conradin dropped on his knees. The great polecat-ferret made its way down to a small brook at the foot of the garden, drank for a moment, then crossed a little plank bridge and was lost to sight in the bushes. Such was the passing of Sredni Vashtar.

"Tea is ready," said the sour-faced maid; "where is the mistress?"

"She went down to the shed some time ago," said Conradin.

And while the maid went to summon her mistress to tea, Conradin fished a toasting-fork out of the sideboard drawer and proceeded to toast himself a piece of bread. And during the toasting of it and the buttering of it with much butter and the slow enjoyment of eating it, Conradin listened to the noises and silences which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining-room door. The loud foolish screaming of the maid, the answering chorus of wondering ejaculations from the kitchen region, the scuttering footsteps and hurried embassies for outside help, and then, after a lull, the scared sobbings and the shuffling tread of those who bore a heavy burden into the house.

"Whoever will break it to the poor child? I couldn't for the life of me!" exclaimed a shrill voice. And while they debated the matter among themselves, Conradin made himself another piece of toast.

17: The Haunted Dolls' House

M. R. James

1862-1936

The Empire Review Feb 1923

"I SUPPOSE you get stuff of that kind through your hands pretty often?" said Mr. Dillet, as he pointed with his stick to an object which shall be described when the time comes: and when he said it, he lied in his throat, and knew that he lied. Not once in twenty years— perhaps not once in a lifetime— could Mr. Chittenden, skilled as he was in ferreting out the forgotten treasures of half a dozen counties, expect to handle such a specimen. It was collectors' palaver, and Mr. Chittenden recognized it as such.

"Stuff of that kind, Mr. Dillet! It's a museum piece, that is."

"Well, I suppose there are museums that'll take anything."

"I've seen one, not as good as that, years back," said Mr. Chittenden thoughtfully. "But that's not likely to come into the market: and I'm told they 'ave some fine ones of the period over the water. No: I'm only telling you the truth, Mr. Dillet, when I say that if you was to place an unlimited order with me for the very best that could be got— and you know I 'ave facilities for getting to know of such things, and a reputation to maintain— well, all I can say is, I should lead you straight up to that one and say, 'I can't do no better for you than that, sir.'"

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Dillet, applauding ironically with the end of his stick on the floor of the shop. "How much are you sticking the innocent American buyer for it, eh?"

"Oh, I shan't be over hard on the buyer, American or otherwise. You see, it stands this way, Mr. Dillet— if I knew just a bit more about the pedigree—"

"Or just a bit less," Mr. Dillet put in.

"Ha, ha! you will have your joke, sir. No, but as I was saying, if I knew just a little more than what I do about the piece— though anyone can see for themselves it's a genuine thing, every last corner of it, and there's not been one of my men allowed to so much as touch it since it came into the shop— there'd be another figure in the price I'm asking."

"And what's that: five and twenty?"

"Multiply that by three and you've got it, sir. Seventy-five's my price."

"And fifty's mine," said Mr. Dillet.

The point of agreement was, of course, somewhere between the two, it does not matter exactly where— I think sixty guineas. But half an hour later the object was being packed, and within an hour Mr. Dillet had called for it in his car and driven away. Mr. Chittenden, holding the cheque in his hand, saw him off

from the door with smiles, and returned, still smiling, into the parlour where his wife was making the tea. He stopped at the door.

"It's gone," he said.

"Thank God for that!" said Mrs. Chittenden, putting down the teapot. "Mr. Dillet, was it?"

"Yes, it was."

"Well, I'd sooner it was him than another."

"Oh, I don't know; he ain't a bad feller, my dear."

"Maybe not, but in my opinion he'd be none the worse for a bit of a shake up."

"Well, if that's your opinion, it's my opinion he's put himself into the way of getting one. Anyhow, *we* shan't have no more of it, and that's something to be thankful for."

And so Mr. and Mrs. Chittenden sat down to tea.

And what of Mr. Dillet and of his new acquisition? What it was, the title of this story will have told you. What it was like, I shall have to indicate as well as I can.

There was only just room enough for it in the car, and Mr. Dillet had to sit with the driver: he had also to go slow, for though the rooms of the Dolls' House had all been stuffed carefully with soft cotton-wool, jolting was to be avoided, in view of the immense number of small objects which thronged them; and the ten-mile drive was an anxious time for him, in spite of all the precautions he insisted upon. At last his front door was reached, and Collins, the butler, came out.

"Look here, Collins, you must help me with this thing— it's a delicate job. We must get it out upright, see? It's full of little things that mustn't be displaced more than we can help. Let's see, where shall we have it? (After a pause for consideration.) Really, I think I shall have to put it in my own room, to begin with at any rate. On the big table— that's it."

It was conveyed— with much talking— to Mr. Dillet's spacious room on the first floor, looking out on the drive. The sheeting was unwound from it, and the front thrown open, and for the next hour or two Mr. Dillet was fully occupied in extracting the padding and setting in order the contents of the rooms.

When this thoroughly congenial task was finished, I must say that it would have been difficult to find a more perfect and attractive specimen of a Dolls' House in Strawberry Hill Gothic than that which now stood on Mr. Dillet's large kneehole table, lighted up by the evening sun which came slanting through three tall sash-windows.

It was quite six feet long, including the Chapel or Oratory which flanked the front on the left as you faced it, and the stable on the right. The main block of the house was, as I have said, in the Gothic manner: that is to say, the windows

had pointed arches and were surmounted by what are called ogival hoods, with crockets and finials such as we see on the canopies of tombs built into church walls. At the angles were absurd turrets covered with arched panels. The Chapel had pinnacles and buttresses, and a bell in the turret and coloured glass in the windows. When the front of the house was open you saw four large rooms, bedroom, dining-room, drawing-room and kitchen, each with its appropriate furniture in a very complete state.

The stable on the right was in two storeys, with its proper complement of horses, coaches and grooms, and with its clock and Gothic cupola for the clock bell.

Pages, of course, might be written on the outfit of the mansion— how many frying-pans, how many gilt chairs, what pictures, carpets, chandeliers, four-posters, table linen, glass, crockery and plate it possessed; but all this must be left to the imagination. I will only say that the base or plinth on which the house stood (for it was fitted with one of some depth which allowed of a flight of steps to the front door and a terrace, partly balustraded) contained a shallow drawer or drawers in which were neatly stored sets of embroidered curtains, changes of raiment for the inmates, and, in short, all the materials for an infinite series of variations and refittings of the most absorbing and delightful kind.

"Quintessence of Horace Walpole, that's what it is: he must have had something to do with the making of it." Such was Mr. Dillet's murmured reflection as he knelt before it in a reverent ecstasy. "Simply wonderful! this is my day and no mistake. Five hundred pound coming in this morning for that cabinet which I never cared about, and now this tumbling into my hands for a tenth, at the very most, of what it would fetch in town. Well, well! It almost makes one afraid something'll happen to counter it. Let's have a look at the population, anyhow."

Accordingly, he set them before him in a row. Again, here is an opportunity, which some would snatch at, of making an inventory of costume: I am incapable of it.

There were a gentleman and lady, in blue satin and brocade respectively. There were two children, a boy and a girl. There was a cook, a nurse, a footman, and there were the stable servants, two postilions, a coachman, two grooms.

"Anyone else? Yes, possibly."

The curtains of the four-poster in the bedroom were closely drawn round all four sides of it, and he put his finger in between them and felt in the bed. He drew the finger back hastily, for it almost seemed to him as if something had— not stirred, perhaps, but yielded— in an odd live way as he pressed it. Then he put back the curtains, which ran on rods in the proper manner, and extracted from the bed a white-haired old gentleman in a long linen night-dress and cap, and laid him down by the rest. The tale was complete.

Dinner-time was now near, so Mr. Dillet spent but five minutes in putting the lady and children into the drawing-room, the gentleman into the dining-room, the servants into the kitchen and stables, and the old man back into his bed. He retired into his dressing-room next door, and we see and hear no more of him until something like eleven o'clock at night.

His whim was to sleep surrounded by some of the gems of his collection. The big room in which we have seen him contained his bed: bath, wardrobe, and all the appliances of dressing were in a commodious room adjoining: but his four-poster, which itself was a valued treasure, stood in the large room where he sometimes wrote, and often sat, and even received visitors. To-night he repaired to it in a highly complacent frame of mind.

There was no striking clock within earshot— none on the staircase, none in the stable, none in the distant church tower. Yet it is indubitable that Mr. Dillet was startled out of a very pleasant slumber by a bell tolling One.

He was so much startled that he did not merely lie breathless with wide-open eyes, but actually sat up in his bed.

He never asked himself, till the morning hours, how it was that, though there was no light at all in the room, the Dolls' House on the kneehole table stood out with complete clearness. But it was so. The effect was that of a bright harvest moon shining full on the front of a big white stone mansion— a quarter of a mile away it might be, and yet every detail was photographically sharp. There were trees about it, too— trees rising behind the chapel and the house. He seemed to be conscious of the scent of a cool still September night. He thought he could hear an occasional stamp and clink from the stables, as of horses stirring. And with another shock he realized that, above the house, he was looking, not at the wall of his room with its pictures, but into the profound blue of a night sky.

There were lights, more than one, in the windows, and he quickly saw that this was no four-roomed house with a movable front, but one of many rooms, and staircases— a real house, but seen as if through the wrong end of a telescope. "You mean to show me something," he muttered to himself, and he gazed earnestly on the lighted windows. They would in real life have been shuttered or curtained, no doubt, he thought; but, as it was, there was nothing to intercept his view of what was being transacted inside the rooms.

Two rooms were lighted— one on the ground floor to the right of the door, one upstairs, on the left— the first brightly enough, the other rather dimly. The lower room was the dining-room: a table was laid, but the meal was over, and only wine and glasses were left on the table. The man of the blue satin and the woman of the brocade were alone in the room, and they were talking very earnestly, seated close together at the table, their elbows on it: every now and again stopping to listen, as it seemed. Once *he* rose, came to the window and

opened it and put his head out and his hand to his ear. There was a lighted taper in a silver candlestick on a sideboard. When the man left the window he seemed to leave the room also; and the lady, taper in hand, remained standing and listening. The expression on her face was that of one striving her utmost to keep down a fear that threatened to master her— and succeeding. It was a hateful face, too; broad, flat and sly. Now the man came back and she took some small thing from him and hurried out of the room. He, too, disappeared, but only for a moment or two. The front door slowly opened and he stepped out and stood on the top of the *perron*, looking this way and that; then turned towards the upper window that was lighted, and shook his fist.

It was time to look at that upper window. Through it was seen a four-post bed: a nurse or other servant in an arm-chair, evidently sound asleep; in the bed an old man lying: awake, and, one would say, anxious, from the way in which he shifted about and moved his fingers, beating tunes on the coverlet. Beyond the bed a door opened. Light was seen on the ceiling, and the lady came in: she set down her candle on a table, came to the fireside and roused the nurse. In her hand she had an old-fashioned wine bottle, ready uncorked. The nurse took it, poured some of the contents into a little silver saucepan, added some spice and sugar from casters on the table, and set it to warm on the fire. Meanwhile the old man in the bed beckoned feebly to the lady, who came to him, smiling, took his wrist as if to feel his pulse, and bit her lip as if in consternation. He looked at her anxiously, and then pointed to the window, and spoke. She nodded, and did as the man below had done; opened the casement and listened— perhaps rather ostentatiously: then drew in her head and shook it, looking at the old man, who seemed to sigh.

By this time the posset on the fire was steaming, and the nurse poured it into a small two-handled silver bowl and brought it to the bedside. The old man seemed disinclined for it and was waving it away, but the lady and the nurse together bent over him and evidently pressed it upon him. He must have yielded, for they supported him into a sitting position, and put it to his lips. He drank most of it, in several draughts, and they laid him down. The lady left the room, smiling good night to him, and took the bowl, the bottle and the silver saucepan with her. The nurse returned to the chair, and there was an interval of complete quiet.

Suddenly the old man started up in his bed— and he must have uttered some cry, for the nurse started out of her chair and made but one step of it to the bedside. He was a sad and terrible sight— flushed in the face, almost to blackness, the eyes glaring whitely, both hands clutching at his heart, foam at his lips.

For a moment the nurse left him, ran to the door, flung it wide open, and, one supposes, screamed aloud for help, then darted back to the bed and

seemed to try feverishly to soothe him— to lay him down— anything. But as the lady, her husband, and several servants, rushed into the room with horrified faces, the old man collapsed under the nurse's hands and lay back, and the features, contorted with agony and rage, relaxed slowly into calm.

A few moments later, lights showed out to the left of the house, and a coach with flambeaux drove up to the door. A white-wigged man in black got nimbly out and ran up the steps, carrying a small leather trunk-shaped box. He was met in the doorway by the man and his wife, she with her handkerchief clutched between her hands, he with a tragic face, but retaining his self-control. They led the new-comer into the dining-room, where he set his box of papers on the table, and, turning to them, listened with a face of consternation at what they had to tell. He nodded his head again and again, threw out his hands slightly, declined, it seemed, offers of refreshment and lodging for the night, and within a few minutes came slowly down the steps, entering the coach and driving off the way he had come. As the man in blue watched him from the top of the steps, a smile not pleasant to see stole slowly over his fat white face. Darkness fell over the whole scene as the lights of the coach disappeared.

But Mr. Dillet remained sitting up in the bed: he had rightly guessed that there would be a sequel. The house front glimmered out again before long. But now there was a difference. The lights were in other windows, one at the top of the house, the other illuminating the range of coloured windows of the chapel. How he saw through these is not quite obvious, but he did. The interior was as carefully furnished as the rest of the establishment, with its minute red cushions on the desks, its Gothic stall-canopies, and its western gallery and pinnacled organ with gold pipes. On the centre of the black and white pavement was a bier: four tall candles burned at the corners. On the bier was a coffin covered with a pall of black velvet.

As he looked the folds of the pall stirred. It seemed to rise at one end: it slid downwards: it fell away, exposing the black coffin with its silver handles and name-plate. One of the tall candlesticks swayed and toppled over. Ask no more, but turn, as Mr. Dillet hastily did, and look in at the lighted window at the top of the house, where a boy and girl lay in two truckle-beds, and a four-poster for the nurse rose above them. The nurse was not visible for the moment; but the father and mother were there, dressed now in mourning, but with very little sign of mourning in their demeanour. Indeed, they were laughing and talking with a good deal of animation, sometimes to each other, and sometimes throwing a remark to one or other of the children, and again laughing at the answers. Then the father was seen to go on tiptoe out of the room, taking with him as he went a white garment that hung on a peg near the door. He shut the door after him. A minute or two later it was slowly opened again, and a muffled head poked round it. A bent form of sinister shape stepped across to the

truckle-beds, and suddenly stopped, threw up its arms and revealed, of course, the father, laughing. The children were in agonies of terror, the boy with the bed-clothes over his head, the girl throwing herself out of bed into her mother's arms. Attempts at consolation followed— the parents took the children on their laps, patted them, picked up the white gown and showed there was no harm in it, and so forth; and at last putting the children back into bed, left the room with encouraging waves of the hand. As they left it, the nurse came in, and soon the light died down.

Still Mr. Dillet watched immovable.

A new sort of light— not of lamp or candle— a pale ugly light, began to dawn around the door-case at the back of the room. The door was opening again. The seer does not like to dwell upon what he saw entering the room: he says it might be described as a frog— the size of a man— but it had scanty white hair about its head. It was busy about the truckle-beds, but not for long. The sound of cries— faint, as if coming out of a vast distance— but, even so, infinitely appalling, reached the ear.

There were signs of a hideous commotion all over the house: lights moved along and up, and doors opened and shut, and running figures passed within the windows. The clock in the stable turret tolled one, and darkness fell again.

It was only dispelled once more, to show the house front. At the bottom of the steps dark figures were drawn up in two lines, holding flaming torches. More dark figures came down the steps, bearing, first one, then another small coffin. And the lines of torch-bearers with the coffins between them moved silently onward to the left.

The hours of night passed on— never so slowly, Mr. Dillet thought. Gradually he sank down from sitting to lying in his bed— but he did not close an eye: and early next morning he sent for the doctor.

The doctor found him in a disquieting state of nerves, and recommended sea-air. To a quiet place on the East Coast he accordingly repaired by easy stages in his car.

One of the first people he met on the sea front was Mr. Chittenden, who, it appeared, had likewise been advised to take his wife away for a bit of a change.

Mr. Chittenden looked somewhat askance upon him when they met: and not without cause.

"Well, I don't wonder at you being a bit upset, Mr. Dillet. What? yes, well, I might say 'orrible upset, to be sure, seeing what me and my poor wife went through ourselves. But I put it to you, Mr. Dillet, one of two things: was I going to scrap a lovely piece like that on the one 'and, or was I going to tell customers: 'I'm selling you a regular picture-palace-dramar in reel life of the olden time, billed to perform regular at one o'clock a.m.'? Why, what would you 'ave said yourself? And next thing you know, two Justices of the Peace in the back

parlour, and pore Mr. and Mrs. Chittenden off in a spring cart to the County Asylum and everyone in the street saying, 'Ah, I thought it 'ud come to that. Look at the way the man drank!'— and me next door, or next door but one, to a total abstainer, as you know. Well, there was my position. What? Me 'ave it back in the shop? Well, what do *you* think? No, but I'll tell you what I will do. You shall have your money back, bar the ten pound I paid for it, and you make what you can."

Later in the day, in what is offensively called the "smoke-room" of the hotel, a murmured conversation between the two went on for some time.

"How much do you really know about that thing, and where it came from?"

"Honest, Mr. Dillet, I don't know the 'ouse. Of course, it came out of the lumber room of a country 'ouse— that anyone could guess. But I'll go as far as say this, that I believe it's not a hundred miles from this place. Which direction and how far I've no notion. I'm only judging by guess-work. The man as I actually paid the cheque to ain't one of my regular men, and I've lost sight of him; but I 'ave the idea that this part of the country was his beat, and that's every word I can tell you. But now, Mr. Dillet, there's one thing that rather physicks me. That old chap,— I suppose you saw him drive up to the door— I thought so: now, would he have been the medical man, do you take it? My wife would have it so, but I stuck to it that was the lawyer, because he had papers with him, and one he took out was folded up."

"I agree," said Mr. Dillet. "Thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that was the old man's will, ready to be signed."

"Just what I thought," said Mr. Chittenden, "and I took it that will would have cut out the young people, eh? Well, well! It's been a lesson to me, I know that. I shan't buy no more dolls' houses, nor waste no more money on the pictures— and as to this business of poisonin' grandpa, well, if I know myself, I never 'ad much of a turn for that. Live and let live: that's bin my motto throughout life, and I ain't found it a bad one."

Filled with these elevated sentiments, Mr. Chittenden retired to his lodgings. Mr. Dillet next day repaired to the local Institute, where he hoped to find some clue to the riddle that absorbed him. He gazed in despair at a long file of the Canterbury and York Society's publications of the Parish Registers of the district. No print resembling the house of his nightmare was among those that hung on the staircase and in the passages. Disconsolate, he found himself at last in a derelict room, staring at a dusty model of a church in a dusty glass case: *Model of St. Stephen's Church, Coxham. Presented by J. Merewether, Esq., of Ilbridge House*, 1877. *The work of his ancestor James Merewether, d.* 1786. There was something in the fashion of it that reminded him dimly of his horror. He retraced his steps to a wall map he had noticed, and made out that Ilbridge House was in Coxham Parish. Coxham was, as it happened, one of the parishes of which he

had retained the name when he glanced over the file of printed registers, and it was not long before he found in them the record of the burial of Roger Milford, aged 76, on the 11th of September, 1757, and of Roger and Elizabeth Merewether, aged 9 and 7, on the 19th of the same month. It seemed worth while to follow up this clue, frail as it was; and in the afternoon he drove out to Coxham. The east end of the north aisle of the church is a Milford chapel, and on its north wall are tablets to the same persons; Roger, the elder, it seems, was distinguished by all the qualities which adorn "the Father, the Magistrate, and the Man": the memorial was erected by his attached daughter Elizabeth, "who did not long survive the loss of a parent ever solicitous for her welfare, and of two amiable children." The last sentence was plainly an addition to the original inscription.

A yet later slab told of James Merewether, husband of Elizabeth, "who in the dawn of life practised, not without success, those arts which, had he continued their exercise, might in the opinion of the most competent judges have earned for him the name of the British Vitruvius: but who, overwhelmed by the visitation which deprived him of an affectionate partner and a blooming offspring, passed his Prime and Age in a secluded yet elegant Retirement: his grateful Nephew and Heir indulges a pious sorrow by this too brief recital of his excellences."

The children were more simply commemorated. Both died on the night of the 12th of September.

Mr. Dillet felt sure that in Ilbridge House he had found the scene of his drama. In some old sketchbook, possibly in some old print, he may yet find convincing evidence that he is right. But the Ilbridge House of to-day is not that which he sought; it is an Elizabethan erection of the forties, in red brick with stone quoins and dressings. A quarter of a mile from it, in a low part of the park, backed by ancient, stag-horned, ivy-strangled trees and thick undergrowth, are marks of a terraced platform overgrown with rough grass. A few stone balusters lie here and there, and a heap or two, covered with nettles and ivy, of wrought stones with badly-carved crockets. This, someone told Mr. Dillet, was the site of an older house.

As he drove out of the village, the hall clock struck four, and Mr. Dillet started up and clapped his hands to his ears. It was not the first time he had heard that bell.

Awaiting an offer from the other side of the Atlantic, the dolls' house still reposes, carefully sheeted, in a loft over Mr. Dillet's stables, whither Collins conveyed it on the day when Mr. Dillet started for the sea coast.

[It will be said, perhaps, and not unjustly, that this is no more than a variation on a former story of mine called "The Mezzotint". I can only hope that there is enough of variation in the setting to make the repetition of the motif *tolerable.]*

18: Footprints on the Seashore

Nathaniel Hawthorne
1804-1864
United States Magazine and Democratic Review Jan 1838
Collected in: *Twice-Told Tales*, 1889

IT MUST BE a spirit much unlike my own which can keep itself in health and vigor without sometimes stealing from the sultry sunshine of the world to plunge into the cool bath of solitude. At intervals, and not infrequent ones, the forest and the ocean summon me— one with the roar of its waves, the other with the murmur of its boughs— forth from the haunts of men. But I must wander many a mile ere I could stand beneath the shadow of even one primeval tree, much less be lost among the multitude of hoary trunks and hidden from the earth and sky by the mystery of darksome foliage. Nothing is within my daily reach more like a forest than the acre or two of woodland near some suburban farmhouse. When, therefore, the yearning for seclusion becomes a necessity within me, I am drawn to the seashore which extends its line of rude rocks and seldom-trodden sands for leagues around our bay. Setting forth at my last ramble on a September morning, I bound myself with a hermit's vow to interchange no thoughts with man or woman, to share no social pleasure, but to derive all that day's enjoyment from shore and sea and sky, from my soul's communion with these, and from fantasies and recollections or anticipated realities. Surely here is enough to feed a human spirit for a single day.— Farewell, then, busy world! Till your evening lights shall shine along the street— till they gleam upon my sea-flushed face as I tread homeward— free me from your ties and let me be a peaceful outlaw.

Highways and cross-paths are hastily traversed, and, clambering down a crag, I find myself at the extremity of a long beach. How gladly does the spirit leap forth and suddenly enlarge its sense of being to the full extent of the broad blue, sunny deep! A greeting and a homage to the sea! I descend over its margin and dip my hand into the wave that meets me, and bathe my brow. That far-resounding roar is Ocean's voice of welcome. His salt breath brings a blessing along with it. Now let us pace together— the reader's fancy arm in arm with mine— this noble beach, which extends a mile or more from that craggy promontory to yonder rampart of broken rocks. In front, the sea; in the rear, a precipitous bank the grassy verge of which is breaking away year after year, and flings down its tufts of verdure upon the barrenness below. The beach itself is a broad space of sand, brown and sparkling, with hardly any pebbles intermixed. Near the water's edge there is a wet margin which glistens brightly in the sunshine and reflects objects like a mirror, and as we tread along the glistening border a dry spot flashes around each footstep, but grows moist again as we lift

our feet. In some spots the sand receives a complete impression of the sole, square toe and all; elsewhere it is of such marble firmness that we must stamp heavily to leave a print even of the iron-shod heel. Along the whole of this extensive beach gambols the surf-wave. Now it makes a feint of dashing onward in a fury, yet dies away with a meek murmur and does but kiss the strand; now, after many such abortive efforts, it rears itself up in an unbroken line, heightening as it advances, without a speck of foam on its green crest. With how fierce a roar it flings itself forward and rushes far up the beach!

As I threw my eyes along the edge of the surf I remember that I was startled, as Robinson Crusoe might have been, by the sense that human life was within the magic circle of my solitude. Afar off in the remote distance of the beach, appearing like sea-nymphs, or some airier things such as might tread upon the feathery spray, was a group of girls. Hardly had I beheld them, when they passed into the shadow of the rocks and vanished. To comfort myself— for truly I would fain have gazed a while longer— I made acquaintance with a flock of beach-birds. These little citizens of the sea and air preceded me by about a stone's-throw along the strand, seeking, I suppose, for food upon its margin. Yet, with a philosophy which mankind would do well to imitate, they drew a continual pleasure from their toil for a subsistence. The sea was each little bird's great playmate. They chased it downward as it swept back, and again ran up swiftly before the impending wave, which sometimes overtook them and bore them off their feet. But they floated as lightly as one of their own feathers on the breaking crest. In their airy flutterings they seemed to rest on the evanescent spray. Their images— long-legged little figures with gray backs and snowy bosoms— were seen as distinctly as the realities in the mirror of the glistening strand. As I advanced they flew a score or two of yards, and, again alighting, recommenced their dalliance with the surf-wave; and thus they bore me company along the beach, the types of pleasant fantasies, till at its extremity they took wing over the ocean and were gone. After forming a friendship with these small surf-spirits, it is really worth a sigh to find no memorial of them save their multitudinous little tracks in the sand.

When we have paced the length of the beach, it is pleasant and not unprofitable to retrace our steps and recall the whole mood and occupation of the mind during the former passage. Our tracks, being all discernible, will guide us with an observing consciousness through every unconscious wandering of thought and fancy. Here we followed the surf in its reflux to pick up a shell which the sea seemed loth to relinquish. Here we found a seaweed with an immense brown leaf, and trailed it behind us by its long snake-like stalk. Here we seized a live horseshoe by the tail, and counted the many claws of that queer monster. Here we dug into the sand for pebbles, and skipped them upon the surface of the water. Here we wet our feet while examining a jelly-fish which the

waves, having just tossed it up, now sought to snatch away again. Here we trod along the brink of a fresh-water brooklet which flows across the beach, becoming shallower and more shallow, till at last it sinks into the sand and perishes in the effort to bear its little tribute to the main. Here some vagary appears to have bewildered us, for our tracks go round and round and are confusedly intermingled, as if we had found a labyrinth upon the level beach. And here amid our idle pastime we sat down upon almost the only stone that breaks the surface of the sand, and were lost in an unlooked-for and overpowering conception of the majesty and awfulness of the great deep. Thus by tracking our footprints in the sand we track our own nature in its wayward course, and steal a glance upon it when it never dreams of being so observed. Such glances always make us wiser.

This extensive beach affords room for another pleasant pastime. With your staff you may write verses— love-verses if they please you best— and consecrate them with a woman's name. Here, too, may be inscribed thoughts, feelings, desires, warm outgushings from the heart's secret places, which you would not pour upon the sand without the certainty that almost ere the sky has looked upon them the sea will wash them out. Stir not hence till the record be effaced. Now (for there is room enough on your canvas) draw huge faces— huge as that of the Sphynx on Egyptian sands— and fit them with bodies of corresponding immensity and legs which might stride halfway to yonder island. Child's-play becomes magnificent on so grand a scale. But, after all, the most fascinating employment is simply to write your name in the sand. Draw the letters gigantic, so that two strides may barely measure them, and three for the long strokes; cut deep, that the record may be permanent. Statesmen and warriors and poets have spent their strength in no better cause than this. Is it accomplished? Return, then, in an hour or two, and seek for this mighty record of a name. The sea will have swept over it, even as time rolls its effacing waves over the names of statesmen and warriors and poets. Hark! the surf-wave laughs at you.

Passing from the beach, I begin to clamber over the crags, making my difficult way among the ruins of a rampart shattered and broken by the assaults of a fierce enemy. The rocks rise in every variety of attitude. Some of them have their feet in the foam and are shagged halfway upward with seaweed; some have been hollowed almost into caverns by the unwearied toil of the sea, which can afford to spend centuries in wearing away a rock, or even polishing a pebble. One huge rock ascends in monumental shape, with a face like a giant's tombstone, on which the veins resemble inscriptions, but in an unknown tongue. We will fancy them the forgotten characters of an antediluvian race, or else that Nature's own hand has here recorded a mystery which, could I read her language, would make mankind the wiser and the happier. How many a

thing has troubled me with that same idea! Pass on and leave it unexplained. Here is a narrow avenue which might seem to have been hewn through the very heart of an enormous crag, affording passage for the rising sea to thunder back and forth, filling it with tumultuous foam and then leaving its floor of black pebbles bare and glistening. In this chasm there was once an intersecting vein of softer stone, which the waves have gnawed away piecemeal, while the granite walls remain entire on either side. How sharply and with what harsh clamor does the sea rake back the pebbles as it momentarily withdraws into its own depths! At intervals the floor of the chasm is left nearly dry, but anon, at the outlet, two or three great waves are seen struggling to get in at once; two hit the walls athwart, while one rushes straight through, and all three thunder as if with rage and triumph. They heap the chasm with a snow-drift of foam and spray. While watching this scene I can never rid myself of the idea that a monster endowed with life and fierce energy is striving to burst his way through the narrow pass. And what a contrast to look through the stormy chasm and catch a glimpse of the calm bright sea beyond!

Many interesting discoveries may be made among these broken cliffs. Once, for example, I found a dead seal which a recent tempest had tossed into the nook of the rocks, where his shaggy carcase lay rolled in a heap of eel-grass as if the sea-monster sought to hide himself from my eye. Another time a shark seemed on the point of leaping from the surf to swallow me, nor did I wholly without dread approach near enough to ascertain that the man-eater had already met his own death from some fisherman in the bay. In the same ramble I encountered a bird— a large gray bird— but whether a loon or a wild goose or the identical albatross of the Ancient Mariner was beyond my ornithology to decide. It reposed so naturally on a bed of dry seaweed, with its head beside its wing, that I almost fancied it alive, and trod softly lest it should suddenly spread its wings skyward. But the sea-bird would soar among the clouds no more, nor ride upon its native waves; so I drew near and pulled out one of its mottled tail-feathers for a remembrance. Another day I discovered an immense bone wedged into a chasm of the rocks; it was at least ten feet long, curved like a scymitar, bejewelled with barnacles and small shellfish and partly covered with a growth of seaweed. Some leviathan of former ages had used this ponderous mass as a jaw-bone. Curiosities of a minuter order may be observed in a deep reservoir which is replenished with water at every tide, but becomes a lake among the crags save when the sea is at its height. At the bottom of this rocky basin grow marine plants, some of which tower high beneath the water and cast a shadow in the sunshine. Small fishes dart to and fro and hide themselves among the seaweed; there is also a solitary crab who appears to lead the life of a hermit, communing with none of the other denizens of the place, and likewise several five-fingers; for I know no other name than that which children give

them. If your imagination be at all accustomed to such freaks, you may look down into the depths of this pool and fancy it the mysterious depth of ocean. But where are the hulks and scattered timbers of sunken ships? where the treasures that old Ocean hoards? where the corroded cannon? where the corpses and skeletons of seamen who went down in storm and battle?

On the day of my last ramble— it was a September day, yet as warm as summer— what should I behold as I approached the above-described basin but three girls sitting on its margin and— yes, it is veritably so— laving their snowy feet in the sunny water? These, these are the warm realities of those three visionary shapes that flitted from me on the beach. Hark their merry voices as they toss up the water with their feet! They have not seen me. I must shrink behind this rock and steal away again.

In honest truth, vowed to solitude as I am, there is something in this encounter that makes the heart flutter with a strangely pleasant sensation. I know these girls to be realities of flesh and blood, yet, glancing at them so briefly, they mingle like kindred creatures with the ideal beings of my mind. It is pleasant, likewise, to gaze down from some high crag and watch a group of children gathering pebbles and pearly shells and playing with the surf as with old Ocean's hoary beard. Nor does it infringe upon my seclusion to see yonder boat at anchor off the shore swinging dreamily to and fro and rising and sinking with the alternate swell, while the crew— four gentlemen in roundabout jackets— are busy with their fishing-lines. But with an inward antipathy and a headlong flight do I eschew the presence of any meditative stroller like myself, known by his pilgrim-staff, his sauntering step, his shy demeanor, his observant yet abstracted eye.

From such a man as if another self had scared me I scramble hastily over the rocks, and take refuge in a nook which many a secret hour has given me a right to call my own. I would do battle for it even with the churl that should produce the title-deeds. Have not my musings melted into its rocky walls and sandy floor and made them a portion of myself? It is a recess in the line of cliffs, walled round by a rough, high precipice which almost encircles and shuts in a little space of sand. In front the sea appears as between the pillars of a portal; in the rear the precipice is broken and intermixed with earth which gives nourishment not only to clinging and twining shrubs, but to trees that grip the rock with their naked roots and seem to struggle hard for footing and for soil enough to live upon. These are fir trees, but oaks hang their heavy branches from above, and throw down acorns on the beach, and shed their withering foliage upon the waves. At this autumnal season the precipice is decked with variegated splendor. Trailing wreaths of scarlet flaunt from the summit downward; tufts of yellow-flowering shrubs and rose-bushes, with their reddened leaves and glossy seed-berries, sprout from each crevice; at every glance I detect some new light

or shade of beauty, all contrasting with the stern gray rock. A rill of water trickles down the cliff and fills a little cistern near the base. I drain it at a draught, and find it fresh and pure. This recess shall be my dining-hall. And what the feast? A few biscuits made savory by soaking them in sea-water, a tuft of samphire gathered from the beach, and an apple for the dessert. By this time the little rill has filled its reservoir again, and as I quaff it I thank God more heartily than for a civic banquet that he gives me the healthful appetite to make a feast of bread and water.

Dinner being over, I throw myself at length upon the sand and, basking in the sunshine, let my mind disport itself at will. The walls of this my hermitage have no tongue to tell my follies, though I sometimes fancy that they have ears to hear them and a soul to sympathize. There is a magic in this spot. Dreams haunt its precincts and flit around me in broad sunlight, nor require that sleep shall blindfold me to real objects ere these be visible. Here can I frame a story of two lovers, and make their shadows live before me and be mirrored in the tranquil water as they tread along the sand, leaving no footprints. Here, should I will it, I can summon up a single shade and be myself her lover.— Yes, dreamer, but your lonely heart will be the colder for such fancies.— Sometimes, too, the Past comes back, and finds me here, and in her train come faces which were gladsome when I knew them, yet seem not gladsome now. Would that my hiding-place were lonelier, so that the Past might not find me!— Get ye all gone, old friends, and let me listen to the murmur of the sea— a melancholy voice, but less sad than yours. Of what mysteries is it telling? Of sunken ships and whereabouts they lie? Of islands afar and undiscovered whose tawny children are unconscious of other islands and of continents, and deem the stars of heaven their nearest neighbors? Nothing of all this. What, then? Has it talked for so many ages and meant nothing all the while? No; for those ages find utterance in the sea's unchanging voice, and warn the listener to withdraw his interest from mortal vicissitudes and let the infinite idea of eternity pervade his soul. This is wisdom, and therefore will I spend the next half-hour in shaping little boats of driftwood and launching them on voyages across the cove, with the feather of a sea-gull for a sail. If the voice of ages tell me true, this is as wise an occupation as to build ships of five hundred tons and launch them forth upon the main, bound to "Far Cathay." Yet how would the merchant sneer at me!

And, after all, can such philosophy be true? Methinks I could find a thousand arguments against it. Well, then, let yonder shaggy rock mid-deep in the surf— see! he is somewhat wrathful: he rages and roars and foams,— let that tall rock be my antagonist, and let me exercise my oratory like him of Athens who bandied words with an angry sea and got the victory. My maiden-speech is a triumphant one, for the gentleman in seaweed has nothing to offer in reply save an immitigable roaring. His voice, indeed, will be heard a long while after mine is

hushed. Once more I shout and the cliffs reverberate the sound. Oh what joy for a shy man to feel himself so solitary that he may lift his voice to its highest pitch without hazard of a listener!— But hush! Be silent, my good friend! Whence comes that stifled laughter? It was musical, but how should there be such music in my solitude? Looking upward, I catch a glimpse of three faces peeping from the summit of the cliff like angels between me and their native sky.— Ah, fair girls! you may make yourself merry at my eloquence, but it was my turn to smile when I saw your white feet in the pool. Let us keep each other's secrets.

The sunshine has now passed from my hermitage, except a gleam upon the sand just where it meets the sea. A crowd of gloomy fantasies will come and haunt me if I tarry longer here in the darkening twilight of these gray rocks. This is a dismal place in some moods of the mind. Climb we, therefore, the precipice, and pause a moment on the brink gazing down into that hollow chamber by the deep where we have been what few can be— sufficient to our own pastime. Yes, say the word outright: self-sufficient to our own happiness. How lonesome looks the recess now, and dreary too, like all other spots where happiness has been! There lies my shadow in the departing sunshine with its head upon the sea. I will pelt it with pebbles. A hit! a hit! I clap my hands in triumph, and see my shadow clapping its unreal hands and claiming the triumph for itself. What a simpleton must I have been all day, since my own shadow makes a mock of my fooleries!

Homeward! homeward! It is time to hasten home. It is time— it is time; for as the sun sinks over the western wave the sea grows melancholy and the surf has a saddened tone. The distant sails appear astray and not of earth in their remoteness amid the desolate waste. My spirit wanders forth afar, but finds no resting-place and comes shivering back. It is time that I were hence. But grudge me not the day that has been spent in seclusion which yet was not solitude, since the great sea has been my companion, and the little sea-birds my friends, and the wind has told me his secrets, and airy shapes have flitted around me in my hermitage. Such companionship works an effect upon a man's character as if he had been admitted to the society of creatures that are not mortal. And when, at noontide, I tread the crowded streets, the influence of this day will still be felt; so that I shall walk among men kindly and as a brother, with affection and sympathy, but yet shall not melt into the indistinguishable mass of humankind. I shall think my own thoughts and feel my own emotions and possess my individuality unviolated.

But it is good at the eve of such a day to feel and know that there are men and women in the world. That feeling and that knowledge are mine at this moment, for on the shore, far below me, the fishing-party have landed from their skiff and are cooking their scaly prey by a fire of driftwood kindled in the angle of two rude rocks. The three visionary girls are likewise there. In the

deepening twilight, while the surf is dashing near their hearth, the ruddy gleam of the fire throws a strange air of comfort over the wild cove, bestrewn as it is with pebbles and seaweed and exposed to the "melancholy main." Moreover, as the smoke climbs up the precipice, it brings with it a savory smell from a pan of fried fish and a black kettle of chowder, and reminds me that my dinner was nothing but bread and water and a tuft of samphire and an apple. Methinks the party might find room for another guest at that flat rock which serves them for a table; and if spoons be scarce, I could pick up a clam-shell on the beach. They see me now; and— the blessing of a hungry man upon him!— one of them sends up a hospitable shout: "Halloo, Sir Solitary! Come down and sup with us!" The ladies wave their handkerchiefs. Can I decline? No; and be it owned, after all my solitary joys, that this is the sweetest moment of a day by the seashore.

———————

19: How He Left the Hotel

Louisa Baldwin
1845-1925
The Argosy (UK) October 1894

I USED TO WORK the passenger lift in the Empire Hotel, that big block of building in lines of red and white brick like streaky bacon, that stands at the corner of Bath Street. I'd served my time in the army and got my discharge with good conduct stripes, and how I got the job was in this way.

The hotel was a big company affair, with a managing committee of retired officers and such like, gentlemen with a bit o' money in the concern and nothing to do but fidget about it, and my late Colonel was one of 'em. He was as good tempered a man as ever stepped when his will wasn't crossed, and when I asked him for a job, "Mole," says he, "you're the very man to work the lift at our big hotel. Soldiers are civil and business-like, and the public like 'em only second best to sailors. We've had to give our last man the sack, and you can take his place."

I liked my work well enough and my pay, and kept my place a year, and I should have been there still if it hadn't been for a circumstance— but more about that just now. Ours was a hydraulic lift. None o' them ricketty things swung up like a poll-parrot's cage in a well staircase, that I shouldn't care to trust my neck to. It ran as smooth as oil, a child might have worked it, and safe as standing on the ground. Instead of being stuck full of advertisements like a' omnibus, we'd mirrors in it, and the ladies would look at themselves, and pat their hair, and set their mouths when I was taking 'em downstairs dressed of an evening. It was a little sitting room with red velvet cushions to sit down on, and you'd nothing to do but get into it, and it 'ud float you up, or float you down, as light as a bird.

All the visitors used the lift one time or another, going up or coming down. Some of them was French, and they called the lift the "assenser," and good enough for them in their language no doubt, but why the Americans, that can speak English when they choose, and are always finding out ways o' doing things quicker than other folks, should waste time and breath calling a lift an "elevator," I can't make out.

I was in charge of the lift from noon till midnight. By that time the theatre and dining-out folks had come in, and any one returning later walked upstairs, for my day's work was done. One of the porters worked the lift till I came on duty in the morning, but before twelve there was nothing particular going on, and not much till after two o'clock. Then it was pretty hot work with visitors going up and down constant, and the electric bell ringing you from one floor to another like a house on fire. Then came a quiet spell while dinner was on, and

I'd sit down comfortable in the lift and read my paper, only I mightn't smoke. But nobody else might neither, and I had to ask furren gentlemen to please not to smoke in it, it was against the rule. I hadn't so often to tell English gentlemen. They're not like furreners, that seem as if their cigars was glued to their lips.

I always noticed faces as folks got into the lift, for I've sharp sight and a good memory, and none of the visitors needed to tell me twice where to take them. I knew them, and I knew their floor as well as they did themselves.

It was in November that Colonel Saxby came to the Empire Hotel. I noticed him particularly because you could see at once that he was a soldier. He was a tall, thin man about fifty, with a hawk nose, keen eves, and a grey moustache, and walked stiff from a gunshot wound in the knee.

But what I noticed most was the scar of a sabre cut across the right side of the face. As he got in the lift to go to his room on the fourth floor, I thought what a difference there is among officers.

Colonel Saxby put me in mind of a telegraph post for height and thinness, and my old Colonel.was like a barrel in uniform, but a brave soldier and a gentleman all the same. Colonel Saxby's room was number 210, just opposite the glass door leading to the lift, and every time I stopped on the fourth floor Number 210 stared me in the face.

The Colonel used to go up in the lift every day regular, though he never came down in it, till— but I'm coming to that presently. Sometimes, when we was alone in the lift, he'd speak to me.

He asked me in what regiment I'd served, and said he knew the officers in it. But I can't say he was comfortable to talk to. There was something stand off about him, and he always seemed deep in his own thoughts. He never sat down in the lift. Whether it was empty or full he stood bolt upright, under the lamp, where the light fell on his pale face and scarred cheek.

One day in February I didn't take the Colonel up in the lift, and as he was regular as clockwork, I noticed it, but I supposed he'd gone away for a few days, and I thought no more about it. Whenever I stopped on the fourth floor the door of Number 210 was shut, and as he often left it open, I made sure the Colonel was away. At the end of a week I heard a chambermaid say that Colonel Saxby was ill, so thinks I that's why he hadn't been in the lift lately.

It was a Tuesday night, and I'd had an uncommonly busy time of it. It was one stream of traffic up and down, and so it went on the whole evening. It was on the stroke of midnight, and I was about to put out the light in the lift, lock the door, and leave the key in the office for the man in the morning, when the electric bell rang out sharp. I looked at the dial, and saw I was wanted on the fourth floor. It struck twelve as I stept into the lift. As I past the second and third floors I wondered who it was that had rung so late, and thought it must be a stranger that didn't know the rule of the house. But when I stopped at the

fourth floor and flung open the door of the lift, Colonel Saxby was standing there wrapped in his military cloak. His room door was shut behind him, for I read the number on it. I thought he was ill in his bed, and ill enough he looked, but he had his hat on, and what could a man that had been in bed ten days want with going out on a winter midnight? I don't think he saw me, but when I'd set the lift in motion, I looked at him standing under the lamp, with the shadow of his hat hiding his eyes, and the light full on the lower part of his face that was deadly pale, the scar on his cheek showing still paler.

"Glad to see you're better, sir," but he said nothing, and I didn't like to look at him again. He stood like a statue with his cloak about him, and I was downright glad when I opened the door for him to step out in the hall. I saluted as he got out, and he went past me towards the door.

"The Colonel wants to go out," I said to the porter who stood staring. He opened the front door and Colonel Saxby walked out into the snow.

"That's a queer go," said the porter.

"It is," said I. "I don't like the Colonel's looks; he doesn't seem himself at all. He's ill enough to be in his bed, and there he is, gone out on a night like this."

"Anyhow he's got a famous cloak to keep him warm. I say, supposing he's gone to a fancy ball and got that cloak on to hide his dress," said the porter, laughing uneasily. For we both felt queerer than we cared to say, and as we spoke there came a loud ring at the door bell.

"No more passengers for me," I said, and I was really putting the light out this time, when Joe opened the door and two gentlemen entered that I knew at a glance were doctors. One was tall and the other short and stout, and they both came to the lift.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but it's against the rule for the lift to go up after midnight."

"Nonsense!" said the stout gentleman, "it's only just past twelve, and it's a matter of life and death. Take us up at once to the fourth floor," and they were in the lift like a shot.

When I opened the door, they went straight to Number 210. A nurse came out to meet them, and the stout doctor said, "No change for the worse, I hope." And I heard her reply, "The patient died five minutes ago, sir."

Though I'd no business to speak, that was more than I could stand. I followed the doctors to the door and said, "There's some mistake here, gentlemen; I took the Colonel down in the lift since the clock struck twelve, and he went out."

The stout doctor said sharply, "A case of mistaken identity. It was someone else you took for the Colonel."

"Begging your pardon, gentlemen, it was the Colonel himself, and the night porter that opened the door for him knew him as well as me. He was dressed for a night like this, with his military cloak wrapped round him."

"Step in and see for yourself," said the nurse. I followed the doctors into the room, and there lay Colonel Saxby looking just as I'd seen him a few minutes before. There he lay, dead as his forefathers, and the great cloak spread over the bed to keep him warm that would feel heat and cold no more. I never slept that night. I sat up with Joe, expecting every minute to hear the Colonel ring the front door bell. Next day every time the bell for the lift rang sharp and sudden, the sweat broke out on me and I shook again. I felt as bad as I did the first time I was in action.

Me and Joe told the manager all about it, and he said we'd been dreaming, but, said he, "Mind you, don't you talk about it, or the house'll be empty in a week."

The Colonel's coffin was smuggled into the house the next night. Me and the manager, and the undertaker's men, took it up in the lift, and it lay right across it, and not an inch to spare. They carried it into Number 210, and while I waited for them to come out again, a queer feeling came over me. Then the door opened softly, and six men carried out the long coffin straight across the passage, and set it down with its foot towards the door of the lift, and the manager looked round for me.

"I can't do it, sir," I said. "I can't take the Colonel down again, I took him down at midnight yesterday, and that was enough for me."

"Push it in!" said the manager, speaking short and sharp, and they ran the coffin into the lift without a sound. The manager got in last, and before he closed the door he said, "Mole, you've worked this lift for the last time, it strikes me." And I had, for I wouldn't have stayed on at the Empire Hotel after what had happened, not if they'd doubled my wages, and me and the night porter left together.

20: "Softy"

E. Clinch

Eileen Bertha Clinch, 1879-1930

Weekly Times (Melbourne), 17 June 1911

JUST WHERE a small belt of sun-baked trees broke the monotony of the desert, where the red dingo crouched among the yellow rushes, where the jackass shrieked its semi-human laughter, and where the magpie carolled with a note stolen from Arcadia, a group of four men were sitting.

Four horses and a pack-horse were hobbled out and trying to get a mouthful of the withered lance-wood scrub. There was not much fear of their straying. The sun had poured its blinding heat down all day, now the stars were out, and it was still hot, though a wandering breeze lazily stirred the fringe of scrub. The fire had been allowed to burn low; the blackened billy was empty. But the dull glow was sufficient to light up the men's faces.

They were sun-scorched and dusty, and three were dark, desperate faces, not evil, but hardened; all three had the same eager light in the eyes.

The fourth had just come back into the circle of light from rubbing down the horses. He was big, fair-haired, and his eyes were blue. A long flaxen moustache covered a boyish mouth. He threw himself down on some cut bushes, and as he glanced up at the stars in the purple heavens he smiled. That was strange in itself under the circumstances, and one of the men noted it.

"Softy's grinning, I say, you fellows!"

"Softy'd grin in the Devil's face," said one.

And then Softy, with the big, broad shoulders and happy eyes, laughed outright.

"I am glad Softy can raise a laugh anyhow, when the sun's been 110 on our heads for 14 hours."

The men settled themselves in easier positions, threw off their hats, and the breeze cooled them. They did not see the picture that called up the happy smile to Softy's lips.

He saw his sweetheart standing at her father's sliprails, and he seemed to hear on the breeze again her shy promise to be his wife. She was the only one who had not sneered at him for setting out on this wild goose chase.

"Well, we are certain to catch up with the beggars to-morrow," one man said, breaking the silence; "that is, going by their tracks, and then you fellows for the Eye of Mareka! It's been a Fata Morgana for 30 years. We've chased it off and on for 10, and it has cost some 11 men their lives. But ere another dawn dies the Eye of Mareka will be ours."

Softy lay smilingly upward. The "Eye of Mareka" would enable him to build and garnish a little home, and so draw the golden cords that would make his dream come to life.

He had earned his sobriquet by his tenderness and the softness of his boyish heart for all animals and human creatures weaker than himself.

The "Eye of Mareka" was a magnificent piece of gold, almost pure, that gleamed with almost a living fire; someone had called it "The Eye." It had been stolen in the first place from a couple of Celestials who had dug it out when prospecting. It had passed through several hands, and had come into the possession of a man who had been exceedingly kind and just in his dealings with the natives, bearing towards them brotherly love. When he was dying he gave it to the chief of the tribe, who was with him, with injunctions to give it to the first good (*budgeree*) white man (*Gween*) he met.

The tribe had jealously guarded it as a sacred trust, but it didn't speak well for the white men they met; for the Eye had been handed from chief to son, each chieftain bearing the name of "Mareka." The tribe possessing the Eye of Mareka had suffered much at the hands of the Gweens, and had fled at their approach, sneaked up to the huts at night, and in revenge speared several of the pursuers and seekers after the Eye of Mareka. Many others died from want of water in the desert, and so the "Eye" came at last to be considered to have evil power.

"It's queer how many fellows have gone under hunting this Eye," was the last observation heard in the camp that night.

THE SUN ROSE and scorched the sandy earth into sickening heat before two hours had sped. Noon came and passed. The horses were flagging and gasping, and the men were voiceless. A grim possibility rose over the red waste and faced them. Would they also be added to the list of victims of the Eye of Mareka?

Abruptly there came into their range of vision a wurley of roughly-constructed boughs.

The men urged the horses forward. Softy was leading his. They came to the wurley, and halting, looked in. An old black was lying on a bed of rushes, half blind and deaf and near to death's door. The blacks of this tribe never left their sick or feeble to die by the way. But they were evidently fleeing before the party of four, and had been compelled to leave her; they had constructed the wurley over her and would most certainly return for her during the night. They had left a clay dish of water beside her and in her half-blind movements she had knocked it over, and the thirsty sand had drained the water.

"I say," cried Softy, "the poor old thing has knocked over her water dish—we can't leave her like this. I'll go back to our last water-hole— my bottle's been leaking all the way, and it's empty."

"Three miles back in this heat when we're almost on the Mareka tribe! Don't be a fool, Softy."

"You don't mean to say you are going to fling away your chance when you're almost in sight of the goal— the black beggars can't be very far ahead."

"Don't act like a big mulish mule. Softy; the old gin'll be all right— they'll be back for her when it's dark."

The three had spoken. "I think she's dying," said Softy, "and she's famishing. Look at her feeling for the water dish."

"She's dying anyhow," rejoined one of the three carelessly. Softy had turned to retrace his steps.

"Let him go— you can't stop Softy when he's on the job," one of the men said. "Remember, Softy, the one who gets the Eye takes half and divides the other half into three thirds, and you might have been the lucky, one but for your fooling obstinacy over this gin, who is bound to die either way."

"She won't die craving for a drop of water if I can help it," returned Softy. His three mates were out of sight on his return. He had patched and filled his water bottle and held it to the old gin's parched lips. She could just discern him, as he knelt beside her. He was satisfied he had not left the forlorn old creature to die in torture for a drop of water.

He fell to thinking of his sweetheart and raised his hand to scare off a red dingo slut that crept past, with a glint of green fire in its eyes.

The old gin was fumbling with a rush mat that hung over her shrunken shoulders. She withdrew her hand holding something, and pushed it to Softy's feet, murmuring a word or two.

"*Gween*... good…"

A moment later she was dead.

Attracted by a halo of light on the red sand, Softy looked down at the thing she had given him. It was not only the play of the sunbeams, for there on the sand lay a scintillating mass of golden beauty, throwing off the sun's play with a thousand witching lights.

It was the "Eye of Mareka."

_____

21: "American, Sir!"

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews
1860-1936
In: *Short Stories of Various Types*, Ed. Laura F. Freck, 1920

"DEAR UNCLE BILL:" (And why he should have called me "Uncle Bill," Heaven only knows. I was not his uncle and almost never had I been addressed as "Bill." But he chose the name, without explanation, from the first.) "Dear Uncle Bill: Where am I going to in vacation? The fellows ask. Their fathers come to Commencement and take them home. I'm the only one out, because my father's dead. And I haven't anybody to belong to. It would be great if you'd come. Yours Sincerely— John."

I threw the letter in the scrap-basket and an hour later fished it out. I read it over. I— go to a school commencement! Not if I knew it! The cheek of the whippersnapper! I had not even seen him; he might be any sort of wild Indian; he might expect me to "take him home" afterwards. Rather *not*! I should give him to understand that I would pay his bills and— well, yes— I would send him to a proper place in vacations; but be bothered by him personally I would not. Fishing trips to Canada interrupted by a child! Unthinkable. I would write to that effect.

I sat down to my orderly desk and drew out paper. I began: "Dear John." Then I stopped. An unwelcome vision arose of a small boy who was "the only one out." "My father's dead." Thirty years rolled back, and I saw the charming boy, a cousin, who had come to be this lad's father. I turned my head at that thought, as long ago I had turned it every morning when I waked to look at him, the beautiful youngster of my adoration, sleeping across the room which we shared together. For a dozen years we shared that room and other things— ponies, trips abroad, many luxuries. For the father and mother who worshipped and pampered John, and who were casually kind to me, an uninteresting orphan— these were rich, then, and free-handed. Too free-handed, it was seen later, for when the two were killed at one moment in an accident, only debts were left for John. I was suddenly important, I, the gray satellite of the rainbow prince, for I had a moderate fortune. The two of us were just graduated from Yale; John with honors and prizes and hosts of friends, I with some prizes and honors. Yet I had not been "tapped" for "Bones" or "Scroll and Key" and I was a solitary pilgrim ever, with no intimates. We stood so together, facing out towards life.

I split my unimpressive patrimony in two and John took his part and wandered south on a mining adventure. For that, he was always keen about the south and his plan from seventeen on was to live in Italy. But it was I, after all, who went to Italy year after year, while John led Lord knows what thriftless life

in Florida. From the last morning when he had wheeled, in our old big room, and dashed across it and thrown his arms around me in his own impulsive, irresistible way— since that morning I had never seen him. Letters, plenty. More money was needed always. John always thought that the world owed him a living.

Then he did the thing which was incredible and I pulled him out and hushed up the story and repaid the money, but it made me ill, and I suppose I was a bit savage, for he barely answered my letters after, and shortly stopped writing altogether. John could not endure unpleasantness. I lost sight of him till years later when he— and I— were near forty and I had a note signed Margaret Donaldson, John's wife. John was dead. He had been on a shooting trip and a gun had gone off. Though it was not in words, yet through them I got a vague suggestion of suicide. Heavy-hearted, I wondered. The life so suddenly ended had once been dear to me.

"They did not bring John home," the note said. "He was so badly mutilated that they buried him near where he died. I believe he would have wanted you to know, and for that reason I am writing. I am an entirely capable bread-winner, so that John's boy and I will have no troubles as to money."

There was a child two years old. I liked the chill and the independence of the proud little note.

The next chapter opened ten years later with a letter saying that Margaret Donaldson's boy was left with her poor and elderly parents and that they did not want him. Would I, his mother being dead, take care of him? He was twelve, healthy and intelligent— which led directly to the evening when I sat, very cross, at my desk and fished young John's note out of the scrap-basket. I had got as far in answer as "Dear John"— when these visions of the past interrupted. I am not soft-hearted. I am crabbed and prejudiced and critical, and I dislike irregularity. Above all I am thoroughly selfish. But the sum of that is short of being brutal. Only sheer brutality could repel the lad's note and request. My answer went as follows:

"Dear John: I will come to your commencement and bring you back with me for a short time. I may take you on a fishing trip to Canada. Sincerely, Uncle Bill."

The youngster as he came into the school drawing-room was a thing to remember. He was a tall boy, and he looked like his father. Very olive he was— and is— and his blue eyes shone out of the dark face from under the same thickset and long lashes. His father's charm and beauty halted me, but I judged, before I let myself go, that he had also his mother's stability. I have seen no reason since to doubt my judgment. I never had so fine a fishing trip to Canada as that summer, in spite of the fact that John broke four good rods. He has been my most successful investment; and when the war broke out and he rushed to me clamoring to go, I felt indeed that I was giving humanity my best and my

own. Then one day he came, in his uniform of an ambulance driver, to tell me good-bye.

That was in 1914, and the boy, just about to enter Yale, was eighteen. He went through bad fighting, and in March, 1917, he was given a Croix de Guerre. Then America came in and he transferred to his own flag and continued ambulance work under our Red Cross. He drove one of the twenty ambulances hurried into Italy after the Caporetto disasterin October, the first grip of the hand of America to that brave hand of Italy.

I did not know for a time that my lad was in the ambulance section rushed to Italy, but I had a particular interest from the first in this drive for I had spent weeks, twice, up in Lombardy and Venetia. That was how I followed the Italian disaster— as a terrible blow to a number of old friends. Then after the Caporetto crisis came the stand behind the Tagliamento; the retreat still farther and the more hopeful stand behind the Piave. And with that I knew that the First Ambulance Section was racing to the Italian front and that my boy was driving one of the cars.

And behold it was now the year 1919 and the war was over and the cablegram from Bordeaux, which read: "Sailing 13th *Santa Angela* 12 day boat New York," was a week old.

Of course I met him. I left a director's meeting and vital engagements, with indecent firmness, to meet that ship. At crack of dawn on a raw morning in March I arose and drove miles to a freezing pier to meet it. And presently, as I stood muffled in a fur coat, an elderly, grizzled, small man, grim and unexhilarating— presently the soul of this monotonous person broke into song. For out of the early morning, out from behind a big anchored vessel near the pier, poked the nose of a troop ship and lumbered forward, and her decks were brown with three thousand soldiers— Americans of our victorious army coming home from overseas.

It was a sight which none of us will ever see again. Out in the harbor tugs were yelping, whistles blowing; the little fleet which had gone down the bay to meet the incoming troops was screaming itself mad in a last chorus of joyful welcome. And the good ship *Santa Angela*, blessed old tub, rolled nearer till the lads on her, shouting, waving, laughing, crying lads could be seen separately, and she had rounded the corner into the slip and was mere yards from the dock.

And then the boy came down the gangplank and I greeted him as is my ungracious way, as if he had been off on a sailing trip. But he knew, and he held to me, the tall fellow, with his arm around my shoulder unashamed, and from that moment to this in the den he had hardly let me out of his sight.

After dinner that night I settled back in deep satisfaction and lighted a fresh cigar. And the boy, standing before the blazing logs, which kept up a pleasant undertone to the music of his young voice, began.

"You know, Uncle Bill, we were blamed proud to be Red Cross when we knew what was doing about Italy. It was plumb great. You know it all of course. But I saw it. No worse fight ever— in all history. Towns turned into a rolling river of refugees. Hungry, filthy, rain-soaked, half-clad— old, babies, sick— a multitude pitiful beyond words— stumbling, racing down those mountain trails, anyhow— to get anywhere— away."

He dropped into a chair and went on.

"We didn't get there for the first, but it was plenty bad enough," and his eyes were seeing wordless sights. "The United States had declared war on Austria December 7th, and four days later Section One was rolling across the battlefield of Solferino.

"I was proud to be in that bunch. Talk about the flower of a country, Uncle Bill,— we grew 'em. Six wore the Croix de Guerre— well, of course that's often just luck." He reddened as he remembered who was one of that six. "All of them had gone through battles a-plenty. Whole shooting-match keen for service— no slackers and no greenhorns in that crowd.

"We started on the twelve hundred mile trip to Milan from Paris November 18th, and at Ventimiglia, just over the border, Italy welcomed us. Lord, Uncle Bill," the boy laughed out, and rubbed his eyes where tears stood. "They wouldn't look at our passports— no, sir! They opened the gate to Italy and we rolled in like visiting princes. They showered presents on us, those poor villagers— food, flowers— all they had. Often didn't keep any for themselves.

"We got there December 8th. Tuned up the cars and were off again in two or three days, to the job. They gave us a great send-off. Real party. Two parties. First a sort of reception in a big gray courtyard of an old palace, all dolled up with American and Italian flags. Big bugs and speeches— and they presented us to Italy. A bugle blew and a hundred of us in khaki— we'd been reinforced— stood at salute and an Italian general swept into the gates with his train of plumed Bersagliari— sent to take us over. Then we twenty drove our busses out with our own flags flying and pulled up again for Party Number Two in front of the Cathedral. Finally the Mayor bid us his prettiest good-bye, and off we drove again through the cheering crowds and the waving flags— this time out of the city gate— to the Piave front."

The boy rose from his chair, put on a fresh log, then turned and stood facing me, towering over me in his young magnificence.

It flashed to me that I'd never seen him look so like his father, yet so different. All John Donaldson's physical beauty, all his charm were repeated in his son, but underlaid with a manliness, a force which poor John never had.

"We were pitched into the offensive in the hottest of it," spoke the boy. "It was thick. We were hampered by lack of workers. We wanted Americans. Morgan had a thought.

" 'Italy's full of Americans,' he suggested. 'Living here. Over military age, but fit for a lot of our use. I miss my guess if bunches of 'em wouldn't jump at a chance to get busy under their own flag.'

"We sent out a call and they came. Down from hill-towns, out of cities, from villages we'd never heard of— it was amazing how they came. We didn't dream there was such a number. Every one middle-aged, American all, and gentlemen all. One morning, after brisk work the night before, I'd just turned out and was standing by my bus— I slept on a stretcher inside— I saw a big, athletic, grizzled chap, maybe fifty-five or over, shabby as to clothes, yet with an air like a duke, sauntering up. How he got in there I never thought to ask. He held out his hand as if we were old friends. 'Good morning,' he said. 'I hope I didn't wake you up. How do you like Italy?' There was something attractive about him, something suggestive of a gracious host whose flower garden was Italy— which he trusted was to my taste. I told him I worshipped Italy.

"Just then a shell— they were coming over off and on— struck two hundred yards down the road and we both turned to look. In thirty seconds, maybe, another— and another— placed middling close, half a minute apart maybe, till eight had plowed along that bit. When they stopped, he looked at me. 'That's the first time I ever saw shells light nearby,' he spoke. 'Eight, I made it. But two were duds, weren't they?'

"It didn't seem to occur to him that they might have hit him. About then he saw me wondering, I suppose, what a civilian was doing making conversation inside the lines before breakfast, and he explained.

" 'You need men for the Red Cross, I believe,' he explained. 'I came to offer my services.' He spoke English perfectly, yet with a foreign twist, and he was so very dark that I wondered about his nationality.

"'Are you Italian?' I asked, and at that he started and straightened his big shabby shoulders as if I'd hit him, and flushed through his brown skin.

"'American, sir,' he said proudly.

"And, Uncle Bill, something in the way he said it almost brought tears to my eyes. It was as if his right to being American was the last and most precious thing he owned, and as if I'd tried to take it from him.

"So I threw back 'That's great,' as heartily as I knew how, and shook hands with him over it.

"There was something about him which I couldn't place. He looked— natural. Especially his eyes.

"Well, I said we'd be delighted to use him, and told him where to report and then, though it wasn't my business, I asked his name. And what do you think he told me?"

I shook my head.

"He gave his name as John Donaldson," stated the boy.

"What!" I asked bewildered. "This man in Italy was called—"

"By my name," the boy said slowly. "John Donaldson."

I reasoned a bit. "John Donaldson" is a name not impossible to be duplicated. "It was devilish odd," I said, "to run into your own handle like that, wasn't it?"

The boy went on. "At that second Ted Frith ran along shouting, '7:30. Better hurry. Coffee's waiting.' So I threw the strange man a good-bye and bolted.

"That day we were going some. They were heaving eggs from the other side of the Piave and we were bringing back wounded to the dressing stations as fast as we could make it over that wrecked land; going back faster for more. When I stopped for chow at midday, I found Ted Frith near me, eating also.

" 'Remember the old boy you were talking to this morning?' asked Ted between two mouthfuls of dum-dums— that's beans, Uncle Bill. I 'lowed I remembered the old boy; in fact he'd stuck in my mind all day.

" 'Well,' Ted went on, 'he's a ring-tailed snorter. He's got an American uniform, tin derby and all, and he's up in the front trenches in the cold and mud with his chocolates and stuff, talking the lingo to the wops and putting heart into them something surprising. They're cheering up wherever he goes. Good work.'

"That afternoon I ran into the man under hot fire hurrying down the communication trench for more stuff. He looked as pleased as a boy with a new pony. 'Hello,' I yelled across the noise. 'How do you like our Italy? They tell me you're helping a lot.'

"He stopped and stared with those queerly homelike, big eyes. 'Do they?' he smiled. 'It's the best time I've had for years, sir.'

" 'Needn't *sir* me,' I explained. 'I'm not an officer.'

" 'Ah, but you are— my superior officer,' he argued in a courteous, lovely way. 'I'm a recruit— raw recruit. Certainly I must say *sir*, to you.'

" 'Duck there,' I shouted. 'You're on a rise— you'll be hit.'

"He glanced around. 'If you knew what a treat I'd consider it to be done for wearing this.' He looked down and slapped his big knee in its khaki. 'But if I'm helping, it's the game to keep whole. You see, sir,' and he laughed out loud— 'this is my good day. I'm American to-day, sir!'

"And as I let in the clutch and turned the wheel, I sniffled. The man's delight at being allowed to do a turn of any sort under the flag got me.

"The hideous day wore on; one of the worst I went through. We were rushing 'em steadily— four badly wounded in the back you know, and one who could sit up in the front seat with the driver, every trip. About 3:30 as I was going up to the front lines, I struck Ted Firth again coming down.

" 'That you, Johnny?' he shouted as we jammed together, and then: 'Your friend's got his,' he said. We were caught in a crowd and had to wait, so we could talk.

" 'Oh no!' I groaned. 'Gone west?'

"He shook his head. 'I think not yet. But I'm afraid he's finished. Had to leave him. Didn't see him till I was loaded up. He's been stretcher-bearer the last three hours.'

"'The devil he has. Why?'

"'A sudden attack— bearer was killed. He jumped in and grabbed the stretcher. Powerful old boy. Back and forth from the hurricane to the little dressing station, and at last he got it. Thick to-day, isn't it?'

" 'Stretcher-bearer!' I repeated. 'Nerve for a new bird.'

" 'Nerve!' echoed Teddy. 'He's been eating it up. The hotter it got, the better it suited. He's one of the heroes fast enough. If he lives, he's due a cross for his last stunt— out under fire twice in five minutes to bring in wounded. But he won't live. There— it's clearing. You run along and find the old boy, Johnny.'

"I found him. He was hurt too badly to talk about. As gently as we knew how, Joe Barron and I lifted him into the car and he recognized me.

" 'Why, good evening, sir,' he greeted me, smiling at the disputed title, charming and casual as ever. He identified me— 'The boy who adored Italy.' Then: 'Such luck!' he gasped. 'Killed— in our uniform— serving!' And as he felt my hand on his forehead: 'For God's sake don't be sorry, lad,' he begged. 'A great finish for me. I never hoped for luck like this.'

"There's a small village," the boy went on— "I never knew its name; it's back of the Piave; only a pile of broken stuff now anyhow. But the church was standing that night, a lovely old church with a tower pierced with windows. We stuck in a traffic jam in front of that church. The roads were one solid column going forward into the mess. Mile after mile of it in one stream— and every parallel road must have been the same.

"It got dark early and the ration truck was late coming up, being caught in the jam. It was night by the time the eats were ready and I left my bus in front of the church I spoke of. I'd wished myself on the officers of a battery having mess in trees back of a ruined house. When I went back to the bus, it was clean dark. But the sky was alight with gun flashes from everywhere, a continuous flicker like summer lightning with glares here and there like a sudden blaze from a factory chimney. The rumbling gun thunder was without a break, punctuated by heavier boomings; the near guns seemed an insane 4th of July. I looked in at my load and I saw that my namesake was worse. We were still trapped in the jam; no chance of breaking for hours maybe. I saw then that they'd turned the church into a dressing station. There was straw on the stone floors and two surgeons and some orderlies. Wounded were being carried in on stretchers. Joe Barron

and I lifted out John Donaldson and took him in and cared for him as well as possible until we could corral an overworked doctor. I thought I'd talk to him a bit to distract him, and he seemed glad to have me."

The lad stopped; his big fingers pulled at the collar of his uniform.

"Little by little," he went on, "John Donaldson of Italy told his story. He held tight to my hand as he told it." The boy halted again and bit at his lower lip with strong white teeth. "I like to remember that," he went on slowly. "He had lived nearly twenty years in Perugia. He had run away from America. Because— he— took money. Quite a lot of money. He— was supposed to be dead."

I sat forward, grasping the sides of my chair, pulling the thing out of the boy with straining gaze.

"Uncle Bill," he spoke, and his dear voice shook, "you know who it was. I found why his eyes looked familiar. They were exactly like my own. The man I was helping to die was my father."

I heard my throat make a queer sound, but I said no word. The voice flowed on, difficultly, determinedly.

"It's a strange thing to remember— a weird and unearthly bit of living— that war-ruined church, strewn with straw, the wounded wrapped like mummies in dark blankets, their white bandages making high spots in the wavering, irregular lights of lanterns and pocket flashes moving about. I sat on the pavement by his side, hand in hand. A big crucifix hung above, and the Christ seemed to be looking— at him."

The voice stopped. I heard my own as a sound from beyond me asking a question. "How did you find out?" I asked.

"Why, you see, Uncle Bill," he answered, as if my voice had helped him to normality a bit, "I started off by saying I'd write to anybody for him, and wasn't there somebody at home maybe? And he smiled out of his torture, and said 'Nobody.'

"Then I said how proud we were of such Americans as he had shown himself and how much he'd helped. I told him what Teddy Frith said of how he'd put heart into the men. And about the war cross. At that his face brightened.

" 'Did he really say I'd helped?' He was awfully pleased. Then he considered a moment and spoke: 'There's one lad I'd like to have know— if it's possible to find him— and if he ever knows anything about me— that I died decently.'

"I threw at him— little dreaming the truth, yet eagerly— 'I'll find him. I promise it. What's his name?'

"And he smiled again, an alluring, sidewise smile he had, and said: 'Why, the same name as mine— John Donaldson. He was my baby.'

"Then for the first time the truth came in sight, and my heart stood still. I couldn't speak. But I thought fast. I feared giving him a shock, yet I had to know— I had to tell him. I put my free hand over his that clung to me and I said:

'Do you know, Mr. Donaldson, it's queer, but that's my name too. I also am John Donaldson.'

"He turned his head with a start and his eyes got wide. 'You are?' he said, and he peered at me in the half light. 'I believe you look like me. God!' he said. His face seemed to sharpen and he shot words at me. 'Quick!' he said. 'I mayn't have time. What was your mother's name?'

"I told him.

"He was so still for a breath that I thought I'd killed him. Then his face lighted— quite angelically, Uncle Bill. And he whispered, two or three words at a time— you know the words, Uncle Bill— Tennyson:

" 'Sunset and evening star' he whispered:

" 'Sunset and evening star,

" 'And one clear call for me—'

"He patted the breast of his bloody, grimy uniform. 'Following the flag! Me! My son to hold my hand as I go out! I hadn't dreamed of such a passing.' Then he looked up at me, awfully interested. 'So you're my big son,' he said. 'My baby.'

"I knew that he was remembering the little shaver he'd left twenty years back. So I leaned over and kissed him, and he got his arm around my neck and held me pretty tight a minute, and nobody cared. All those dying, suffering, last-ditch men lying around, and the two worn-out doctors hurrying among 'em— they didn't care. No more did he and I. I'd found my father; I wasn't caring for anything else."

There was deep silence in the room again and a log of the fire crackled and fell apart and blazed up impersonally; the pleasant sound jarred not at all the tense, human atmosphere.

"And he—! Uncle Bill," went on the throbbing voice, "through the devilish pain he was radiant. He was, thank God! I wanted to hold up a doctor and get dope to quiet him— and he wouldn't.

" 'It might make me unconscious,' he objected. 'Would I lose a minute of you? Not if I know it! This is the happiest hour I've had for twenty years.'

"He told me, a bit at a time, about things. First how he'd arranged so that even my mother thought him dead. Then the bald facts of his downfall. He hated to tell that.

" 'Took money,' he said. 'Very unjustifiable. But I ought to have had plenty— life's most unreasonable. Then— I couldn't face— discovery— hate, unpleasantness.' He shuddered. 'Might have been— jailed.' It was shaking him so I tried to stop him, but he pointed to his coat and laughed— Uncle Bill, a pitiful laugh. It tore me. 'John Donaldson's making a good getaway,' he labored out. 'Must tell everything. I'll finish— clean. To— my son. Honor of— the uniform.' He was getting exhausted. 'That's all,' he ended, 'Dishonor.'

"And I flung at him: 'No— no. It's covered over— wiped out— with service and honor. You're dying for the flag, father— father!' I whispered with my arms around him and crying like a child with a feeling I'd never known before. 'Father, father!' I whispered, and he lifted a hand and patted my head.

" 'That sounds nice,' he said. Suddenly he looked amused. His nerve all through was the bulliest thing you ever saw, Uncle Bill. Not a whimper. 'You thought I was Italian,' he brought out. 'Years ago, this morning. But— I'm not. American, sir— I heard the call— the one clear call. American.'

"Then he closed his eyes and his breathing was so easy that I thought he might sleep, and live hours, maybe. I loosened his fingers and lifted his head on my coat that I'd folded for a pillow, for I thought I'd go outside and find Joe Barron and get him to take the bus down when the jam held up so I could start. Before I started, I bent over again and he opened his eyes, and I said very distinctly: 'I want you to know that I'll be prouder all my life than words can say that I've had you for a father,' and he brought out a long, perfectly contented sigh, and seemed to drop off.

"I began to pick my way through the clutter of men lying, some still as death, some writhing and gurgling horrid sounds. I had got about eight feet when across the hideous noises broke a laugh like a pleased kid. I whirled. He'd lifted his big shoulders up from the straw and was laughing after me from under those thick black lashes; his eyes were brilliant. He stretched out his arms to me.

" 'American, sir,' he said in a strong voice. And fell back dead."

I heard the clock tick and tick. And tick. Minutes went by. Then the boy got up in the throbbing silence and walked to the fire and stood, his back to me, looking down at the embers. His voice came over his square young shoulders, difficult but determined, as of a man who must say a thing which has dogged him to be said.

"God arranged it, Uncle Bill. I know that well enough. God forgave him enough to send him me and a happy day to go out on. So don't you believe— that things are all right with him now?"

It was hard to speak, but I had to— I had a message. "John," I said, "we two know the splendor of his going, and that other things count as nothing beside that redemption. Do you suppose a great God is more narrow-minded than we?"

And my boy turned, and came and sat on the broad side of the chair, and put his arm around my shoulder and his young head against mine. His cheek was hot and wet on my thin hair.

"American, sir," whispered my dear boy, softly.

———————

22: The Magic Casket

R. Austin Freeman

1862-1943

Pearson's Magazine Oct 1926

Collected in: *The Magic Casket and other stories*, 1927

IT WAS in the near neighbourhood of King's Road, Chelsea, that chance, aided by Thorndyke's sharp and observant eyes, introduced us to the dramatic story of the Magic Casket. Not that there was anything strikingly dramatic in the opening phase of the affair, nor even in the story of the casket itself. It was Thorndyke who added the dramatic touch, and most of the magic, too; and I record the affair principally as an illustration of his extraordinary capacity for producing odd items of out-of-the-way knowledge and instantly applying them in the most unexpected manner.

Eight o'clock had struck on a misty November night when we turned out of the main road, and, leaving behind the glare of the shop windows, plunged into the maze of dark and narrow streets to the north. The abrupt change impressed us both, and Thorndyke proceeded to moralise on it in his pleasant, reflective fashion.

"London is an inexhaustible place," he mused. "Its variety is infinite. A minute ago we walked in a glare of light, jostled by a multitude. And now look at this little street. It is as dim as a tunnel, and we have got it absolutely to ourselves. Anything might happen in a place like this."

Suddenly he stopped. We were, at the moment, passing a small church or chapel, the west door of which was enclosed in an open porch; and as my observant friend stepped into the latter and stooped, I perceived in the deep shadow against the wall, the object which had evidently caught his eye.

"What is it?" I asked, following him in.

"It is a handbag," he replied; "and the question is, what is it doing here?"

He tried the church door, which was obviously locked, and coming out, looked at the windows.

"There are no lights in the church." said he; "the place is locked up, and there is nobody in sight. Apparently the bag is derelict. Shall we have a look at it?"

Without waiting for an answer, he picked it up and brought it out into the mitigated darkness of the street, where we proceeded to inspect it. But at the first glance it told its own tale; for it had evidently been locked, and it bore unmistakable traces of having been forced open.

"It isn't empty," said Thorndyke. "I think we had better see what is in it. Just catch hold while I get a light."

He handed me the bag while he felt in his pocket for the tiny electric lamp which he made a habit of carrying, and an excellent habit it is. I held the mouth of the bag open while he illuminated the interior, which we then saw to be occupied by several objects neatly wrapped in brown paper. One of these Thorndyke lifted out, and untying the string and removing the paper, displayed a Chinese stoneware jar. Attached to it was a label, bearing the stamp of the Victoria and Albert Museum, on which was written:

Miss MABEL BONNET,
168 Willow Walk,
Fulham Road, W.

"That tells us all that we want to know," said Thorndyke, re-wrapping the jar and tenderly replacing it in the bag. "We can't do wrong in delivering the things to their owner, especially as the bag itself is evidently her property, too," and he pointed to the gilt initials, "M. B.," stamped on the morocco.

It took us but a few minutes to reach the Fulham Road, but we then had to walk nearly a mile along that thoroughfare before we arrived at Willow Walk— to which an obliging shopkeeper had directed us— and, naturally, No. 168 was at the farther end.

As we turned into the quiet street we almost collided with two men, who were walking at a rapid pace, but both looking back over their shoulders. I noticed that they were both Japanese— well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking men— but I gave them little attention, being interested, rather, in what they were looking at. This was a taxicab which was dimly visible by the light of a street lamp at the farther end of the "Walk," and from which four persons had just alighted. Two of these had hurried ahead to knock at a door, while the other two walked very slowly across the pavement and up the steps to the threshold. Almost immediately the door was opened; two of the shadowy figures entered, and the other two returned slowly to the cab and as we came nearer, I could see that these latter were policemen in uniform. I had just time to note this fact when they both got into the cab and were forthwith spirited away.

"Looks like a street accident of some kind," I remarked; and then, as I glanced at the number of the house we were passing, I added: "Now, I wonder ir that house happens to be— yes, by Jove! it is. It is 168! Things have been happening, and this bag of ours is one of the *dramatis personae*."

The response to our knock was by no means prompt. I was, in fact, in the act of raising my hand to the knocker to repeat the summons when the door opened and revealed an elderly servant-maid, who regarded us inquiringly, and, as I thought, with something approaching alarm.

"Does Miss Mabel Bonney live here?" Thorndyke asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "but I am afraid you can't see her just now, unless it is something urgent. She is rather upset, and particularly engaged at present."

"There is no occasion whatever to disturb her," said Thorndyke. "We have merely called to restore this bag, which seemed to have been lost;" and with this he held it out towards her. She grasped it eagerly with a cry of surprise, and as the mouth fell open, she peered into it.

"Why," she exclaimed, "they don't seem to have taken anything, after all, Where did you find it, sir?"

"In the porch of a church in Spelton Street," Thorndyke replied, and was turning away when the servant said earnestly: "Would you kindly give me your name and address, sir? Miss Bonney will wish to write and thank you."

"There is really no need," said he; but she interrupted anxiously: "If you would be so kind, sir. Miss Bonney will be so vexed if she is unable to thank you; and besides, she may want to ask you some questions about it."

"That is true," said Thorndyke (who was restrained only by good manners from asking one or two questions, himself). He produced his card-case, and having handed one of his cards to the maid, wished her "good-evening" and retired.

"That bag had evidently been pinched," I remarked, as we walked back towards the Fulham Road.

"Evidently," he agreed, and was about to enlarge on the matter when our attention was attracted to a taxi, which was approaching from the direction of the main road. A man's head was thrust out of the window, and as the vehicle passed a street lamp, I observed that the head appertained to an elderly gentleman with very white hair and a very fresh face.

"Did you see who that was?" Thorndyke asked.

"It looked like old Brodribb," I replied.

"It did; very much. I wonder where he is of to."

He turned and followed, with a speculative eye, the receding taxi, which presently swept alongside the kerb and stopped, apparently opposite the house from we had just come. As the vehicle came to rest, the door flew open and the passenger shot out like an elderly, but agile, Jack-in-the-box, and bounced up the steps.

"That is Brodribb's knock, sure enough," said I, as the old-fashioned flourish reverberated up the quiet street. "I have heard it too often on our own knocker to mistake it. But we had better not let him see us watching him."

As we went once more on our way, I took a sly glance, now and again, at my friend, noting with a certain malicious enjoyment his profoundly cogitative air. I knew quite well what was happening in his mind for his mind reacted to observed facts in an invariable manner. And here was a group of related facts: the bag, stolen, but deposited intact; the museum label; the injured or sick

person— probably Miss Bonney, herself— brought home under police escort; and the arrival, post-haste, of the old lawyer; a significant group of facts. And there was Thorndyke, under my amused and attentive observation, fitting them together in various combinations to see what general conclusion emerged. Apparently my own mental state was equally clear to him, for he remarked, presently, as if response to an unspoken comment: "Well, I expect we shall know all about it before many days have passed if Brodribb sees my card, as he most probably will. Here comes an omnibus that will suit us. Shall we hop on?"

He stood at the kerb and raised his stick; and as the accommodation on the omnibus was such that our seats were separated, there was no opportunity to pursue the subject further, even if there had been anything to discuss.

But Thorndyke's prediction was justified sooner than I had expected. For we had not long finished our supper, and had not yet closed the "oak," when there was heard a mighty flourish on the knocker of our inner door.

"Brodribb, by Jingo!" I exclaimed, and hurried across the room to let him in.

"No, Jervis," he said as I invited him to enter, "I am not coming in. Don't want to disturb you at this time of night. I've just called to make an appointment for to-morrow with a client."

"Is the client's name Bonney?" I asked.

He started and gazed at me in astonishment. "Gad, Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you are getting as bad as Thorndyke. How the deuce did you know that she was my client?"

"Never mind how I know. It is our business to know everything in these chambers. But if your appointment concerns Miss Mabel Bonney, for the Lord's sake come in and give Thorndyke a chance of a night's rest. At present, he is on broken bottles, as Mr. Bumble would express it."

On this persuasion, Mr. Brodribb entered, nothing loath— very much the reverse, in fact— and having bestowed a jovial greeting on Thorndyke, glanced approvingly round the room.

"Ha!" said he, "you look very cosy. If you are really sure I am not—"

I cut him short by propelling him gently towards the fire, beside which I deposited him in an easy chair, while Thorndyke pressed the electric bell which rang up in the laboratory.

"Well," said Brodribb, spreading himself out comfortably before the fire like a handsome old Tom-cat, "if you are going to let me give you a few particulars— but perhaps you would rather that I should not talk shop?"

"Now you know perfectly well, Brodribb," said Thorndyke, "that 'shop' is the breath of life to us all. Let us have those particulars."

Brodribb sighed contentedly and placed his toes on the fender (and at this moment the door opened softly and Polton looked into the room. He took a

single, understanding glance at our visitor, and withdrew, shutting the door without a sound).

"I am glad," pursued Brodribb, "to have this opportunity of a preliminary chat, because there are certain things that one can say better when the client is not present; and I am deeply interested in Bonney's affairs. The crisis in those affairs which has brought me here is of quite recent date— in fact, it dates from this evening. But I know your partiality for having events related in their proper sequence, so I will leave today's happenings for the moment and tell you the story— the whole of which is material to the case— from the beginning."

Here there was a slight interruption, due to Polton's noiseless entry with a tray on which was a decanter, a biscuit box, and three port glasses. This he deposited, on a small table, which he placed within convenient reach of our guest. Then, with a glance of altruistic satisfaction at our old friend, he stole out like a benevolent ghost.

Dear, dear!" exclaimed Brodribb, beaming on the decanter, "this is really too bad. You ought not to indulge me in this way."

"My dear Brodribb," replied Thorndyke, "you are a benefactor to us. You give us a pretext for taking a glass of port. We can't drink alone, you know."

"I should, if I had a cellar like yours," chuckled Brodribb, sniffing ecstatically at his glass. He took a sip, with his eyes closed, savoured it solemnly, shook his head, and set the glass down on the table.

"To return to our case," he resumed; "Miss Bonney is the daughter of a solicitor, Harold Bonney— you may remember him. He had offices in Bedford Row; and there, one morning, a client came to him and asked him to take care of some property while he, the said client, ran over to Paris, where he had some urgent business. The property in question was a collection of pearls of most unusual size and value, forming a great necklace, which had been unstrung for the sake of portability. It is not clear where they came from, but as the transaction occurred soon after the Russian Revolution, we may make a guess. At any rate, there they were, packed loosely in a leather bag, the string of which was sealed with the owner's seal.

"Bonney seems to have been rather casual about the affair. He gave the client a receipt for the bag, stating the nature of the contents, which he had not seen, and deposited it, in the client's presence, in the safe in his private office. Perhaps he intended to take it to the bank or transfer it to his strong-room, but it is evident that he did neither; for his managing clerk, who kept the second key of the strong-room— without which the room could not be opened— knew nothing of the transaction. When he went home at about seven o'clock, he left Bonney hard at work in his office, and there is no doubt that the pearls were still in the safe.

That night, at about a quarter to nine, it happened that a couple of C.I.D. officers were walking up Bedford Row when they saw three men come out of one of the houses. Two of them turned up towards Theobald's Road, but the third came south, towards them. As he passed them, they both recognised him as a Japanese named Uyenishi, who was believed to be a member of a cosmopolitan gang and whom the police were keeping under observation. Naturally, their suspicions were aroused. The first two men had hurried round the corner and were out of sight; and when they turned to look after Uyenishi, he had mended his pace considerably and was looking back at them. Thereupon one of the officers, named Barker, decided to follow the Jap, while the other, Holt, reconnoitred the premises.

"Now, as soon as Barker turned, the Japanese broke into a run. It was just such a night as this— dark and slightly foggy. In order to keep his man in sight, he had to run, too; and he found that he had a sprinter to deal with. From the bottom of Bedford Row, Uyenishi darted across and shot down Hand Court like a lamp-lighter. Barker followed, but at the Holborn end his man was nowhere to be seen. However, he presently learned from a man at a shop door that the fugitive had run past and turned up Brownlow Street, so off he went again in pursuit. But when he got to the top of the street, back in Bedford Row, he was done. There was no sign of the man, and no one about from whom he could make inquiries. All he could do was to cross the road and walk up Bedford Row to see if Holt had made any discoveries.

"As he was trying to identify the house, his colleague came out on to the doorstep and beckoned him in and this was the story that he told. He had recognised the house by the big lamp-standard; and as the place was all dark, he had gone into the entry and tried the office door. Finding it unlocked, he had entered the clerks' office, lit the gas, and tried the door of the private office, but found it locked. He knocked at it, but getting no answer, had a good look round the clerk's office; and there, presently, on the floor in a dark corner, he found a key. This he tried in the door of the private office, and finding that it fitted, turned it and opened the door. As he did so, the light from the outer office fell on the body of a man lying on the floor just inside.

"A moment's inspection showed that the man had been murdered— first knocked on the head and then finished with a knife. Examination of the pockets showed that the dead man was Harold Bonney, and also that no robbery from the person seemed to have been committed. Nor was there any sign of any other kind of robbery. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed, and the safe had not been broken into, though that was not very conclusive, as the safe key was in the dead man's pocket. However, a murder had been committed, and obviously Uyenishi was either the murderer or an accessory; so Holt had, at once, rung up Scotland Yard on the office telephone, giving all the particulars.

"I may say at once that Uyenishi disappeared completely and at once. He never went to his lodgings at Limehouse, for the police were there before he could have arrived. A lively hue and cry was kept up. Photographs of the wanted man were posted outside every police-station, and a watch was set at all the ports. But he was never found. He must have got away at once on some outward-bound tramp from the Thames. And there we will leave him for the moment.

"At first it was thought that nothing had been stolen, since the managing clerk could not discover that any thing was missing. But a few days later the client returned from Paris, and presenting his receipt, asked for his pearls. But the pearls had vanished. Clearly they had been the object of the crime. The robbers must have known about them and traced them to the office. Of course the safe had been opened with its own key, which was then replaced in the dead man's pocket.

"Now, I was poor Bonney's executor, and in that capacity I denied his liability in respect of the pearls on the ground that he was a gratuitous bailee— there being no evidence that any consideration had been demanded— and that being murdered cannot be construed as negligence. But Miss Mabel, who was practically the sole legatee, insisted on accepting liability. She said that the pearls could have been secured in the bank or the strong-room, and that she was morally, if not legally, liable for their loss; and she insisted on handing to the owner the full amount at which he valued them. It was a wildly foolish proceeding, for he would certainly have accepted half the sum. But still I take my hat off to a person— man or woman— who can accept poverty in preference to a broken covenant"; and here Brodribb, being in fact that sort of person himself, had to be consoled with a replenished glass.

"And mind you," he resumed, "when I speak of poverty, I wish to be taken literally. The estimated value of those pearls was fifty thousand pounds— if you can imagine anyone out of Bedlam giving such a sum for a parcel of trash like that; and when poor Mabel Bonney had paid it, she was left with the prospect of having to spread her butter mighty thin for the rest of her life. As a matter of fact, she has had to sell one after another of her little treasures to pay just her current expenses, and I'm hanged if I can see how she is going to carry on when she has sold the last of them. But there, I mustn't take up your time with her private troubles. Let us return to our muttons.

"First, as to the pearls. They were never traced, and it seems probable that they were never disposed of. For, you see, pearls are different from any other kind of gems. You can cut up a big diamond, but you can't cut up a big pearl. And the great value of this necklace was due not only to the size, the perfect shape and 'orient' of the separate pearls, but to the fact that the whole set was

perfectly matched. To break up the necklace was to destroy a good part of its value.

"And now as to our friend Uyenishi. He disappeared, as I have said; but he reappeared at Los Angeles, in custody of the police, charged with robbery and murder. He was taken red-handed and was duly convicted and sentenced to death; but for some reason— or more probably, for no reason, as we should think— the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life. Under these circumstances, the English police naturally took no action, especially as they really had no evidence against him.

"Now Uyenishi was, by trade, a metal-worker; a maker of those pretty trifles that are so dear to the artistic Japanese, and when he was in prison he was allowed to set up a little workshop and practise his trade on a small scale. Among other things that he made was a little casket in the form of a seated figure, which he said he wanted to give to his brother as a keepsake. I don't know whether any permission was granted for him to make this gift, but that is of no consequence; for Uyenishi got influenza and was carried off in a few days by pneumonia; and the prison authorities learned that his brother had been killed, a week or two previously, in a shooting affair at San Francisco. So the casket remained on their hands.

"About this time, Miss Bonney was invited to accompany an American lady on a visit to California, and accepted gratefully. While she was there she paid a visit to the prison to inquire whether Uyenishi had ever made any kind of statement concerning the missing pearls. Here she heard of Uyenishi's recent death; and the governor of the prison, as he could not give her any information, handed over to her the casket as a sort of memento. This transaction came to the knowledge of the press, and— well, you know what the Californian press is like. There were 'some comments,' as they would say, and quite an assortment of Japanese, of shady antecedents, applied to the prison to have the casket 'restored' to them as Uyenishi's heirs. Then Miss Bonney's rooms at the hotel were raided by burglars— but the casket was in the hotel strong-room— and Miss Bonney and her hostess were shadowed by various undesirables in such a disturbing fashion that the two ladies became alarmed and secretly made their way to New York. But there another burglary occurred, with the same unsuccessful result, and the shadowing began again. Finally, Miss Bonney, feeling that her presence was a danger to her friend, decided to return to England, and managed to get on board the ship without letting her departure be known in advance.

"But even in England she has not been left in peace. She has had an uncomfortable feeling of being watched and attended, and has seemed to be constantly meeting Japanese men in the streets, especially in the vicinity of her house. Of course, all the fuss is about this infernal casket; and when she told me

what was happening, I promptly popped the thing in my pocket and took it, to my office, where I stowed it in the strong-room. And there, of course, it ought to have remained. but it didn't. One day Miss Bonney told me that she was sending some small things to a loan exhibition of oriental works of art at the South Kensington Museum, and she wished to include the casket. I urged her strongly to do nothing of the kind, but she persisted; and the end of it was that we went to the museum together, with her pottery and stuff in a handbag and the casket in my pocket.

"It was a most imprudent thing to do, for there the beastly casket was, for several months, exposed in a glass case for anyone to see, with her name on the label; and what was worse, full particulars of the origin of the thing. However, nothing happened while it was there— the museum is not an easy place to steal from— and all went well until it was time to remove the things after the close of the exhibition. Now, to-day was the appointed day, and, as on the previous occasion, she and I went to the museum together. But the unfortunate thing is that we didn't come away together. Her other exhibits were all pottery, and these were dealt with first, so that she had her handbag packed and was ready to go before they had begun on the metal work cases. As we were not going the same way, it didn't seem necessary for her to wait; so she went off with her bag and I stayed behind until the casket was released, when I put it in my pocket and went home, where I locked the thing up again in the strong-room.

"It was about seven when I got home. A little after eight I heard the telephone ring down in the office, and down I went, cursing the untimely ringer, who turned out to be a policeman at St. George's Hospital. He said he had found Miss Bonney lying unconscious in the street and had taken her to the hospital, where she had been detained for a while, but she was now recovered and he was taking her home. She would like me, if possible, to go and see her at once. Well, of course, I set off forthwith and got to her house a few minutes after her arrival, and just after you had left.

"She was a good deal upset, so I didn't worry her with many questions, but she gave me a short account of her misadventure, which amounted to this: She had started to walk home from the museum along the Brompton Road, and she was passing down a quiet street between that and Fulham Road when she heard soft footsteps behind her. The next moment, a scarf or shawl was thrown over her head and drawn tightly round her neck. At the same moment, the bag was snatched from her hand. That is all that she remembers, for she was half suffocated and so terrified that she fainted, and knew no more until she found herself in a cab with two policemen who were taking her to the hospital.

"Now it is obvious that her assailants were in search of that damned casket, for the bag had been broken open and searched, but nothing taken or damaged; which suggests the Japanese again, for a British thief would have smashed the

crockery. I found your card there, and I put it to Miss Bonney that we had better ask you to help us— I told her all about you— and she agreed emphatically. So that is why I am here, drinking your port and robbing you of your night's rest."

"And what do you want me to do?" Thorndyke asked.

"Whatever you think best," was the cheerful reply. "In the first place, this nuisance must be put a stop to— this shadowing and hanging about. But apart from that, you must see that there is something queer about this accursed casket. The beastly thing is of no intrinsic value. The museum man turned up his nose at it. But it evidently has some extrinsic value, and no small value either. If it is good enough for these devils to follow it all the way from the States, as they seem to have done, it is good enough for us to try to find out what its value is. That is where you come in. I propose to bring Miss Bonney to see you to-morrow, and I will bring the infernal casket, too. Then you will ask her a few questions, take a look at the casket— through the microscope, if necessary— and tell us all about it in your usual necromantic way."

Thorndyke laughed as he refilled our friend's glass. "If faith will move mountains, Brodribb," said he, "you ought to have been a civil engineer. But it is certainly a rather intriguing problem."

"Ha!" exclaimed the old solicitor; "then it's all right. I've known you a good many years, but I've never known you to be stumped; and you are not going to be stumped now. What time shall I bring her? Afternoon or evening would suit her best."

"Very well," replied Thorndyke; "bring her to tea— say, five o'clock. How will that do?"

"Excellently; and here's good luck to the adventure." He drained his glass, and the decanter being now empty, he rose, shook our hands warmly, and took his departure in high spirits.

It was with a very lively interest that I looked for ward to the prospective visit. Like Thorndyke, I found the case rather intriguing. For it was quite clear, as our shrewd old friend had said, that there was something more than met the eye in the matter of this casket.

Hence, on the following afternoon, when, on the stroke of five, footsteps became audible on our stairs, I awaited the arrival of our new client with keen curiosity, both as to herself and her mysterious property.

To tell the truth, the lady was better worth looking at than the casket. At the first glance, I was strongly prepossessed in her favour, and so, I think, was Thorndyke. Not that she was a beauty, though comely enough. But she was an example of a type that seems to be growing rarer; quiet, gentle, soft-spoken, and a lady to her finger-tips; a little sad-faced and care worn, with a streak or two of white in her prettily-disposed black hair, though she could not have been much over thirty-five. Altogether a very gracious and winning personality.

When we had been presented to her by Brodribb— who treated her as if she had been a royal personage— and had enthroned her in the most comfortable easy-chair, we inquired as to her health, and were duly thanked for the salvage of the bag. Then Polton brought in the tray, with an air that seemed to demand an escort of choristers; the tea was poured out, and the informal proceedings began.

She had not, however, much to tell; for she had not seen her assailants, and the essential facts of the case had been fully presented in Brodribb's excellent summary. After a very few questions, therefore, we came to the next stage; which was introduced by Brodribb's taking from his pocket a small parcel which he proceeded to open.

"There," said he, "that is the *fons et origo mali*. Not much to look at, I think you will agree." He set the object down on the table and glared at it malevolently, while Thorndyke and I regarded it with a more impersonal interest. It was not much to look at. Just an ordinary Japanese casket in the form of a squat, shapeless figure with a silly little grinning face, of which the head and shoulders opened on a hinge; a pleasant enough object, with its quiet, warm colouring, but certainly not a masterpiece of art.

Thorndyke picked it up and turned it over slowly for preliminary inspection; then he went on to examine it detail by detail, watched closely, in his turn, by Brodribb and me. Slowly and methodically, his eye— fortified by a watchmaker's eyeglass— travelled over every part of the exterior. Then he opened it, and I having examined the inside of the lid, scrutinised the bottom from within, long and attentively. Finally, he turned the casket upside down and examined the bottom from without, giving to it the longest and most rigorous inspection of all— which puzzled me somewhat, for the bottom was absolutely plain At length, he passed the casket and the eyeglass to me without comment.

"Well," said Brodribb, "what is the verdict?"

"It is of no value as a work of art," replied Thorndyke. "The body and lid are just castings of common white metal— an antimony alloy, I should say. The bronze colour is lacquer."

"So the museum man remarked." said Brodribb.

"But," continued Thorndyke, "there is one very odd thing about it. The only piece of fine metal in it is in the part which matters least. The bottom is a separate plate of the alloy known to the Japanese as Shakudo— an alloy of copper and gold."

"Yes," said Brodribb, "the museum man noted that, too, and couldn't make out why it had been put there."

"Then," Thorndyke continued, "there is another anomalous feature; the inside of the bottom is covered with elaborate decoration— just the place where decoration is most inappropriate, since it would be covered up by the

contents of the casket. And, again, this decoration is etched; not engraved or chased. But etching is a very unusual process for this purpose, if it is ever used at all by Japanese metal-workers. My impression is that it is not; for it is most unsuitable for decorative purposes. That is all that I observe, so far."

"And what do you infer from your observations?" Brodribb asked.

I should like to think the matter over," was the reply. "There is an obvious anomaly, which must have some significance. But I won't embark on speculative opinions at this stage. I should like, however, to take one or two photographs of the casket, for reference; but that will occupy some time. You will hardly want to wait so long."

"No," said Brodribb. "But Miss Bonney is coming with me to my office to go over some documents and discuss a little business. When we have finished, I will come back and fetch the confounded thing."

"There is no need for that," replied Thorndyke. "As soon as I have done what is necessary, I will bring it up to your place."

To this arrangement Brodribb agreed readily, and he and his client prepared to depart. I rose, too, and as I happened to have a call to make in Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, I asked permission to walk with them.

As we came out into King's Bench Walk I noticed a smallish, gentlemanly-looking man who had just passed our entry and now turned in at the one next door; and by the light of the lamp in the entry he looked to me like a Japanese. I thought Miss Bonney had observed him, too, but she made no remark, and neither did I. But, passing up Inner Temple Lane, we nearly overtook two other men, who— though I got but a back view of them and the light was feeble enough— aroused my suspicions by their neat, small figures. As we approached, they quickened their pace, and one of them looked back over his shoulder; and then my suspicions were confirmed, for it was an unmistakable Japanese face that looked round at us. Miss Bonney saw that I had observed the men, for she remarked, as they turned sharply at the Cloisters and entered Pump Court: "You see, I am still haunted by Japanese."

"I noticed them," said Brodribb. "They are probably law students. But we may as well be cornpanionable"; and with this, he, too, headed for Pump Court.

We followed our oriental friends across the Lane into Fountain Court, and through that and Devereux Court out to Temple Bar, where we parted from them; they turning westward and we crossing to Bell Yard, up which we walked, entering New Square by the Carey Street gate. At Brodribb's doorway we halted and looked back, but no one was in sight. I accordingly went my way, promising to return anon to hear Thorndyke's report, and the lawyer and his client disappeared through the portal.

My business occupied me longer than I had expected, I but nevertheless, when I arrived at Brodribb's premises— where he lived in chambers over his

office— Thorndyke had not yet made his appearance. A quarter of an hour later, however, we heard his brisk step on the stairs, and as Brodribb threw the door open, he entered and produced the casket from his pocket.

"Well," said Brodribb, taking it from him and locking it, for the time being, in a drawer, "has the oracle Spoken; and if so, what did he say?"

"Oracles," replied Thorndyke, "have a way of being more concise than explicit. Before I attempt to interpret the message, I should like to view the scene of the escape; to see if there was any intelligible reason why this man Uyenishi should have returned up Brownlow Street into what must have been the danger zone. I think that is a material question."

"Then," said Brodribb, with evident eagerness, "let us all walk up and have a look at the confounded place. It is quite close by."

We all agreed instantly, two of us, at least, being on the tip-toe of expectation. For Thorndyke, who habitually understated his results, had virtually admitted that the casket had told him something; and as we walked up the Square to the gate in Lincoln's Inn Fields, I watched him furtively, trying to gather from his impassive face a hint as to what the something amounted to, and wondering how the movements of the fugitive bore on the solution of the mystery. Brodribb was similarly occupied, and as we crossed from Great Turnstile and took our way up Brownlow Street, I could see that his excitement was approaching bursting-point.

At the top of the street Thorndyke paused and looked up and down the rather dismal thoroughfare which forms a continuation of Bedford Row and bears its name. Then he crossed to the paved island surrounding the pump which stands in the middle of the road, and from thence surveyed the entrances to Brownlow Street and Hand Court; and then he turned and looked thoughtfully at the pump.

"A quaint old survivor, this," he remarked, tapping the iron shell with his knuckles. "There is a similar one, you may remember, in Queen Square, and another at Aldgate. But that is still in use."

"Yes," Brodribb assented, almost dancing with im patience and inwardly damning the pump, as I could see, "I've noticed it."

I suppose," Thorndyke proceeded, in a reflective tone, "they had to remove the handle. But it was rather a pity."

"Perhaps it was," growled Brodribb, whose complexion was rapidly developing affinities to that of a pickled cabbage, " but what the d— "

Here he broke off short and glared silently at Thorndyke, who had raised his arm and squeezed his hand into the opening once occupied by the handle. He groped in the interior with an expression of placid interest, and presently reported: "The barrel is still there, and so, apparently, is the plunger "— (Here I heard Brodribb mutter huskily, "Damn the barrel and the plunger too!") "but my

hand is rather large for the exploration. Would you, Miss Bonney, mind slipping your hand in and telling me if I am right?"

We all gazed at Thorndyke in dismay, but in a moment Miss Bonney recovered from her astonishment, and with a deprecating smile, half shy, half amused, she slipped off her glove, and reaching up— it was rather high for her— inserted her hand into the narrow slit. Brodribb glared at her and gobbled like a turkey-cock, and I watched her with a sudden suspicion that something was going to happen. Nor was I mistaken. For, as I looked, the shy, puzzled smile faded from her face and was succeeded by an expression of incredulous astonishment. Slowly she withdrew her hand, and as it came out of the slit it dragged something after it. I started forward, and by the light of the lamp above the pump I could see that the object was a leather bag secured by a string from which hung a broken seal.

"It can't be!" she gasped as, with trembling fingers, she untied the string. Then, as she peered into the open mouth, she uttered a little cry. "It is! It is! It is the necklace!"

Brodribb was speechless with amazement. So was I; and I was still gazing open-mouthed at the bag in Miss Bonney's hands when I felt Thorndyke touch my arm. I turned quickly and found him offering me an automatic pistol. "Stand by, Jervis," he said quietly, looking towards Gray's Inn.

I looked in the same direction, and then perceived three men stealing round the corner from Jockey' Fields. Brodribb saw them, too, and snatching the bag of pearls from his client's hands, buttoned it into his breast pocket and placed himself before its owner, grasping his stick with a war-like air. The three men filed along the pavement until they were opposite us, when they turned simultaneously and bore down on the pump, each man, as I noticed, holding his right hand behind him. In a moment, Thorndyke's hand, grasping a pistol, flew up— as did mine, also— and he called out sharply: "Stop! If any man moves a hand, I fire."

The challenge brought them up short, evidently unprepared for this kind of reception. What would have happened next it is impossible to guess. But at this moment a police whistle sounded and two constables ran out from Hand Court. The whistle was instantly echoed from the direction of Warwick Court, whence two more constabulary figures appeared through the postern gate of Gray's Inn. Our three attendants hesitated but for an instant. Then, with one accord, they turned tail and flew like the wind round into Jockey's Fields, with the whole posse of constables close on their heels.

"Remarkable coincidence," said Brodribb, "that those policemen should happen to be on the look-out. Or isn't it a coincidence?"

"I telephoned to the station superintendent before I started," replied Thorndyke, "warning him of a possible breach of the peace at this spot."

Brodribb chuckled. "You're a wonderful man, Thorndyke. You think of everything. I wonder if the police will catch those fellows."

"It is no concern of ours," replied Thorndyke. "We've got the pearls, and that finishes the business. There will be no more shadowing, in any case."

Miss Bonney heaved a comfortable little sigh and glanced gratefully at Thorndyke. "You can have no idea what a relief that is!" she exclaimed; "to say nothing of the treasure-trove."

We waited some time, but as neither the fugitives nor the constables reappeared, we presently made our way back down Brownlow Street. And there it was that Brodribb had an inspiration.

"I'll tell you what," said be. "I will just pop these things in my strong-room— they will be perfectly safe there until the bank opens to-morrow— and then we'll go and have a nice little dinner. I'll pay the piper."

"Indeed you won't!" exclaimed Miss Bonney. "This is my thanksgiving festival, and the benevolent wizard shall be the guest of the evening."

"Very well, my dear," agreed Brodribb. "I will pay and charge it to the estate. But I stipulate that the benevolent wizard shall tell us exactly what the oracle said. That is essential to the preservation of my sanity."

"You shall have his ipissima verba," Thorndyke promised; and the resolution was carried, nem. con.

An hour and a half later we were seated around a table in a private room of a café to which Mr. Brodribb had conducted us. I may not divulge its whereabouts, though I may, perhaps, hint that we approached it by way of Wardour Street. At any rate, we had dined, even to the fulfilment of Brodribb's ideal, and coffee and liqueurs furnished a sort of gastronomic doxology. Brodribb had lighted a cigar and Thorndyke had produced a vicious-looking little black cheroot, which he regarded fondly and then returned to its abiding-place as unsuited to the present company.

"Now," said Brodribb, watching Thorndyke fill his pipe (as understudy of the cheroot aforesaid), "we are waiting to hear the words of the oracle."

"You shall hear them," Thorndyke replied. "There were only five of them. But first, there are certain introductory matters to be disposed of. The solution of this problem is based on two well-known physical facts, one metallurgical and the other optical."

"Ha!" said Brodribb. "But you must temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know, Thorndyke. Miss Bonney and I are not scientists."

"I will put the matter quite simply, but you must have the facts. The first relates to the properties of malleable metals— excepting iron and steel— and especially of copper and its alloys. If a plate of such metal or alloy— say, bronze, for instance— is made red-hot and quenched in water, it becomes quite soft and flexible— the reverse of what happens in the case of iron. Now, if such a plate of

softened metal be placed on a steel anvil and hammered, it becomes extremely hard and brittle."

"I follow that," said Brodribb.

"Then see what follows. If, instead of hammering the soft plate, you put on it the edge of a blunt chisel and strike on that chisel a sharp blow, you produce an indented line. Now the plate remains soft; but the metal forming the indented line has been hammered and has become hard. There is now a line of hard metal on the soft plate. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," replied Brodribb; and Thorndyke accordingly continued: "The second fact is this: If a beam of light falls on a polished surface which reflects it, and if that surface is turned through a given angle, the beam of light is deflected through double that angle."

"H'm!" grunted Brodribb. "Yes. No doubt. I hope we are not going to get into any deeper waters, Thorndyke."

"We are not," replied the latter, smiling urbanely. "We are now going to consider the application of these facts. Have you ever seen a Japanese magic mirror?

"Never; nor even heard of such a thing."

"They are bronze mirrors, just like the ancient Greek or Etruscan mirrors— which are probably 'magic' mirrors, too. A typical specimen consists of a circular or oval plate of bronze, highly polished on the face and decorated on the back with chased ornament— commonly a dragon or some such device— and furnished with a handle. The ornament is, as I have said, chased; that is to say, it is executed in indented lines made with chasing tools, which are, in effect, small chisels, more or less blunt, which are struck with a chasing-hammer.

"Now these mirrors have a very singular property. Although the face is perfectly plain, as a mirror should be, yet, if a beam of sunlight is caught on it and reflected, say, on to a white wall, the round or oval patch of light on the wall is not a plain light patch. It shows quite clearly the ornament on the back of the mirror."

"But how extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Bonney.

"It sounds quite incredible." I said.

"It does," Thorndyke agreed. "And yet the explanation is quite simple. Professor Sylvanus Thompson pointed it out years ago. It is based on the facts which I have just stated to you. The artist who makes one of these mirrors begins, naturally, by annealing the metal until it is quite soft. Then he chases the design on the back, and this design then shows slightly on the face. But he now grinds the face perfectly flat with fine emery and water so that the traces of the design are complete obliterated. Finally, he polishes the face with rouge on a soft buff.

"But now observe that wherever the chasing-tool has made a line, the metal is hardened right through, so that the design is in hard metal on a soft matrix. But the hardened metal resists the wear of the polishing buffer more than the soft metal does. The result is that the act of polishing causes the design to appear in faint relief on the face. Its projection is infinitesimal— less than the hundred-thousandth of an inch— and totally invisible to the eye. But, minute as it is, owing to the optical law which I mentioned— which, in effect, doubles the projection— it is enough to influence the reflection of light. As a consequence, every chased line appears on the patch of light as a dark line with a bright border, and so the whole design is visible. I think that is quite clear."

"Perfectly clear," Miss Bonney and Brodribb agreed.

"But now," pursued Thorndyke, "before we come to the casket, there is a very curious corollary which I must mention. Supposing our artist, having finished the mirror, should proceed with a scraper to erase the design from the back; and on the blank, scraped surface to etch a new design. The process of etching does not harden the metal, so the new design does not appear on the reflection. But the old design would. For although it was invisible on the face and had been erased from the back, it would still exist in the substance of the metal and continue to influence the reflection. The odd result would be that the design which would be visible in the patch of light on the wall would be a different one from that on the back of the mirror.

"No doubt, you see what I am leading up to. But I will take the investigation of the casket as it actually occurred. It was obvious, at once, that the value of the thing was extrinsic. It had no intrinsic value, either in material or workmanship. What could that value be? The clear suggestion was that the casket was the vehicle of some secret message or information. It had been made by Uyenishi, who had almost certainly had possession of the missing pearls, and who had been so closely pursued that be never had an opportunity to communicate with his confederates. It was to be given to a man who was almost certainly one of those confederates; and, since the pearls had never been traced, there was a distinct probability that the (presumed) message referred to some hiding-place in which Uyenishi had concealed them during his flight, and where they were probably still hidden.

"With these considerations in my mind, I examined the casket, and this was what I found. The thing, itself, was a common white-metal casting, made presentable by means of lacquer. But the white metal bottom had been cut out and replaced by a plate of fine bronze— Shakudo. The inside of this was covered with an etched design, which immediately aroused my suspicions. Turning it over, I saw that the outside of the bottom was not only smooth and polished; it was a true mirror. It gave a perfectly undistorted reflection of my face. At once, I suspected that the mirror held the secret; that the message, whatever it was,

had been chased on the back, had then been scraped away and an etched design worked on it to hide the traces of the scraper.

"As soon as you were gone, I took the casket up to the laboratory and threw a strong beam of parallel light from a condenser on the bottom, catching the reflection on a sheet of white paper. The result was just what I had expected. On the bright oval patch on the paper could be seen the shadowy, but quite distinct, forms of five words in the Japanese character.

"I was in somewhat of a dilemma, for I have no knowledge of Japanese, whereas the circumstances were such as to make it rather unsafe to employ a translator. However, as I do just know the Japanese characters and possess a Japanese dictionary, I determined to make an attempt to fudge out the words myself. If I failed, I could then look for a discreet translator.

"However, it proved to be easier than I had expected, for the words were detached; they did not form a sentence, and so involved no questions of grammar. I spelt out the first word and then looked it up in the dictionary. The translation was 'pearls.' This looked hopeful, and I went on to the next, of which the translation was 'pump.' The third word floored me. It seemed to be 'jokkis,' or 'jokkish,' but there was no such word in the dictionary; so I turned to the next word, hoping that it would explain its predecessor. And it did. The fourth word was 'fields,' and the last word was evidently 'London.' So the entire group read 'Pearls, Pump, Jokkis, Fields, London.'

"Now, there is no pump, so far as I know, in Jockey Fields, but there is one in Bedford Row close to the corner of the Fields, and exactly opposite the end of Brownlow Street And by Mr. Brodribb's account, Uyenishi, in his flight, ran down Hand Court and re turned up Brownlow Street, as if he were making for the pump. As the latter is disused and the handle-hole is high up, well out of the way of children, it offers quite a good temporary hiding-place, and I had no doubt that the bag of pearls had been poked into it and was probably there still. I was tempted to go at once and explore; but I was anxious that the discovery should be made by Miss Bonney, herself, and I did not dare to make a preliminary exploration for fear of being shadowed. If I had found the treasure I should have had to take it and give it to her; which would have been a flat ending to the adventure. So I had to dissemble and be the occasion of much smothered objurgation on the part of my friend Brodribb. And that is the whole story of my interview with the oracle."

Our mantelpiece is becoming a veritable museum of trophies of victory, the gifts of grateful clients. Among them is a squat, shapeless figure of a Japanese gentleman of the old school, with a silly grinning little face— The Magic Casket.

But its possession is no longer a menace. Its sting has been drawn; its magic is exploded; its secret is exposed, and its glory departed.

———————