

**PAST
MASTERS**

246

**H. de Vere Stacpoole
Elisabeth Sanxay Holding
J. Jefferson Farjeon
William Crawford Honeyman
Anthony Hope
Jacques Futrelle
Arnold Bennett
Robert E. Howard**

and more

Past Masters 246

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

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Contents

1: The Menace from Andromeda / <i>Nat Schachner & Arthur L. Zagat</i>	3
2: The Man Who Shot At Cats / <i>J. Jefferson Farjeon</i>	28
3: The Ten-Franc Counter / <i>H. de Vere Stacpoole</i>	33
4: The Golden Idol / <i>J. Jefferson Farjeon</i>	44
5: Grins and Bitters / <i>Mark Hellinger</i>	54
6: Road to Fame / <i>Mark Hellinger</i>	57
7: Echo / <i>Mark Hellinger</i>	60
8: A Patriotic Short / <i>F. Scott Fitzgerald</i>	62
9: A Romance of Wookey Hole / <i>J. S. Fletcher</i>	66
10: The Marquis of Carabas / <i>Elisabeth Sanxay Holding</i>	72
11: A Little Essay on Boarders / <i>Ernest O'Ferrall</i>	85
12: Morning Glory / <i>Randolph Bedford</i>	88
13: Fatal Obstacle / <i>Anthony Hope</i>	100
14: Waiting for the Police / <i>J. Jefferson Farjeon</i>	104
15: A Corner in Oils / <i>Edward Dyson</i>	110
16: The Vengeance of Dungarvan / <i>Edwin L. Arnold</i>	118
17: The Hills of the Dead / <i>Robert E. Howard</i>	138
18: The Haunted Bell / <i>Jacques Futrelle</i>	154
19: The Greek God / <i>Jacques Futrelle</i>	182
20: The River of Hate / <i>Achmed Abdullah</i>	194
21: The Police Station / <i>Arnold Bennett</i>	207
22: The Berwick Burr / <i>William Crawford Honeyman</i>	217

1: The Menace from Andromeda

Nat Schachner & Arthur L. Zagat

1895-1955 & 1895-1949

Amazing Stories, April 1931

H'mm. War of the Worlds revisited. This time the invader isn't a fleet of tripods from Mars, but a mass of protoplasm from Andromeda.

WITH a puzzled frown, Donald Standish looked up from the photographic plates in front of him to the patch of dark blue heaven visible through the half-opened dome of the Mt. Wilson Observatory. There floated the enigmatic nebula of Andromeda the huge telescope probing directly toward it— as if to pluck out the very secret of its being. He arose, and paced the confines of the huge room, Under thirty, clean cut in features, he had already earned an enviable deputation as an astronomer, which had won him a "coveted place in the world famous observatory. From the very beginning, the great nebula had exercised a peculiar fascination over him. In some inexplicable way Standish had always felt that there lay the secret of the universe waiting for him in the role of a Perseus to deliver and bring forth.

In truth, many other contemplative observers had speculated about that faint, dusty patch of light sprawled athwart the enchained and enchanted body of the legendary daughter of Cepheus and Cassiopeia. For centuries men had pondered in vain, seeking the nature of that faint light-cloud which so persistently evaded their probings. It was not until recently, with the great advance in the manufacture and use of precision instruments and telephoto lenses, that the astounding truth had been revealed to startled astronomers— this faint glimmer in the skies is a great island universe of stars ; ' far beyond the confines of our own galaxy— millions on millions of suns and attendant planets, careening through the outermost reaches of space-time, so inconceivably remote that a ray of light traveling 186,000 miles per second would take nearly a million years to reach the earth.

Standish turned once more to the sheaf of photographs. Yes— there was no doubt about it, the faint pin-prick of light labeled on the sky charts as 12478, which he had himself named Alcoreth, showed an unmistakable increase in brightness in this most recent of his photographs.

For over a year, on every clear night, he had photographed the great nebula. The minute pin-pricks of light, representing huge stars, had been laboriously ticketed and compared. This queer behavior on the part of Alcoreth, hitherto a placid, ordinary star, aroused his interest.

"Something interesting happening to the constitution of that old lady," Donald remarked to himself, meditatively stroking his chin. "I'd better turn the prisms on her and see what's going on in her innards to account for it."

Deftly he adjusted the great spectroscope, and swung it on the errant orb. As he gazed, a startled "Whew" escaped him. These were not the spectral lines and bands customarily associated with hot gaseous stars in eruption.

"This is becoming more interesting— better verify it," he thought. Quickly he took out his series of comparison spectra. None of them checked with this spectrum.

Again he arose, and paced the room. This was evidently not a burning sun. Apparently it was a relatively cold mass. What then was it? Was it shining by reflected light? But, he argued with himself, there was no sun within billions of miles to produce such a vast outpouring of reflected light. There must be some other cause for its luminosity. Excitedly Standish paced about. Luminescence— phosphorescence. This must be a world composed of some radio-active mineral! He strode back to the spectroscope. No, these were not the characteristic lines of any radio-active mineral known to science. Again he took up his restless pacing. The word phosphorescence brought to his mind pictures of the fields at night alive with the darting sparks of fireflies— of the forests, and the glow of rotting fungus and decaying wood— of the tropic seas under the Southern Cross, criss-crossed with pallid witch-fires.

He stopped short in his tracks. By George, that was it! Life forms— protoplasm— under certain conditions Would become strongly luminescent. But no— that was too fantastic for serious consideration. And yet— and yet. Try as he would to dismiss the thought from his mind, it occurred again and again, until it obsessed him. He must check it, and that this very minute.

In the course of his researches, Standish had discovered that by causing the light of luminiferous protoplasm to pass through a series of gases, the spectroscope was capable of resolving the constituent elements. As yet the process was a guarded secret, but the material was at hand.

With trembling hands the astronomer set up four thin walled transparent chambers, put into each a definite quantity of a rare gas— different for each chamber— attached them in series to the great spectroscope in such a fashion that the light from Alcoreth passed through them, before reaching the prisms that would cause it to yield up its secret.

"What an idiot I am to waste my time on such a crazy idea!" he scoffed aloud, at the same time looking around guiltily. "It's damn foolish, all right, but what's the odds. Let's take a look-see." He inserted a comparison spectrum of the organic elements, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur and phosphorus— the essentials of life as we know it on this planet.

With elaborate carelessness, hardly masking his inner trepidation, he gazed into the aperture. The spectrum appeared. A quick look, a longer one, then a concentrated stare— a feverish scribbling of calculations— then he arose with a mighty shout, that echoed from the great white dome. "Eureka, I have found it!" The cry of Archimedes on making his famous discovery. The impossible was true. The life elements were all present on that distant star, and what was infinitely more, its spectrum showed the peculiar arrangement of lines and bands which his research had shown was invariably associated with living protoplasm.

His immediate impulse was to broadcast his discovery to the scientific world. But then a thought sobered him. So fantastic a theory would never be accepted unless supported by impregnable proof. Premature publication, and he would become a laughing-stock. No, he must wait until his spectroscopic research was perfected. In the meantime, keep on observing this strange new world.

For three weeks he took innumerable photographs, barely pausing for sleep and food. The star increased in brightness, then tiny streamers shot forth intermittently, then slowly it waned. From a fifteenth magnitude star it passed gradually down the scale, till finally a last plate failed to show any trace of it. Alcoreth was gone, and with her, Standish's hope of everlasting fame.

The astronomer was in despair. How now could he convince the scoffers that he had witnessed the impossible— a world of living protoplasm! His proof was gone.

Yet, when he pondered over it— it did not seem impossible. Life— protoplasm— was only a particular combination of five or six elements. These elements are found throughout the universe. Was it inherently impossible, or even wildly improbable, for these elements to combine in some other world to form living matter, just as on our own earth various elements combined to form the rocks that constitute the structure of the world?

So Standish argued, and thought wistfully of Douglas Cameron, his chum of college days, now a research worker on cancer in an isolated laboratory in the fastnesses of Colorado. He thought of Douglas and his sister and assistant Mary. Those two would listen to his tale of discovery. How he wished Mary was with him now! Well, another month' and she would be with him always, his wife and helpmate. He could see her now, the laughing eyes, tilted nose, puckered lips. She was fair to look upon, his Mary, but wiry and strong, and behind that clear brow was a brain which made her fit sister to one scientist and wife to another.

"Well, to work again," he sighed, and continued the search for living worlds.

ALCORETH heaved herself in long undulations that caused a plashing of luminous vibration in the surrounding ether. For Alcoreth was hungry. Eons of slow starvation stretched everlastingly ahead. Already huge vacuoles were dotting her interior, as the plasmic matter shrank and shrivelled away. The food

supply was disappearing— no more did rocky crags of green arid purple hue rise above Alcoreth's bosom. Only the inner core of minerals remained— and that was wearing dangerously thin over vast subalcorethean fires.

Never to be forgotten was that frightful time when, questing for food to still the retching hunger, she had greedily absorbed too large a section of life reaching bottom rock, and torn through the thin layer.

In an instant, the devastating flames had leaped and seared through the protoplasmic tissue. The very thought of it caused vast shudders, to course through Alcoreth. For ages, the hellish fire spewed and roared— devouring, incinerating— fringing the tortures of the damned to her viscid frame. In agony, she heaved and twisted, but to no avail. Her sister spheres gazed on in helpless pity, but could render no aid. That final period —when annihilation seemed-¹ imminent— and almost welcome— a slipping of the rocky substratum had miraculously closed the gap, and once again imprisoned the ravaging fires. Slowly, painfully, and with difficulty, Alcoreth recreated sufficient plasma to cover the wounded surfaces; but her marvelous powers of reproduction were lessened. Since that fateful time, she only nibbled gingerly at the food rocks, and the paries of hunger grew and grew.

Message after message for assistance was sent on ethereal vibration to her sister spheres in that vast universe, and ever and anon some being kindlier than the rest would disrupt a fragment of the precious mineral, and cast it meteor-like through space towards the starving world. But these were mere sops. Alcoreth foresaw the inevitable. Already had protoplasmic worlds come to the end of their food supply, and either broken through to the central fires, and flamed through space like blazing torches to imponderable dust; or, canniballike, devoured their own substance— until the last pitiful bit of plasmic intelligence curled up on itself and died.

Alcoreth was determined to avoid either of these fates. But how? For an eon her highly developed intelligence, diffused throughout her structure, brooded over the problem. Speculatively she vibrated in unison with the etheric waves from the galaxy of the Milky Way, of which -Earth was so minute a member. A quiver ran through her— causing a strange luminescence to run riot over the surface of her body. The solution was found— desperate, fantastic— failure meant annihilation— but then, so eventually did the present state. So Alcoreth set to work to do what was needful for the great adventure.

In this strange universe, electrons and protons had whirled just as naturally into the rhythmic forms of life— protoplasm— primitive plasm, as in our universe they had danced into the common rocks and minerals. Here, the first bits of plasma were casual in their beginnings ; taking sustenance out of the abundant mineral elements ; slowly and laboriously evolving and growing more and more complex through differentiation of structure and function ; and

culminating in highly complex man. There the cooling mist of electrons patterned overwhelmingly into diffused plasm, with enough of other elements to create a normal food supply. Each world was a living entity; there was no necessity for differentiation of parts ; intelligence was inherent and diffused throughout the entire mass, just as is found in the primitive unicellular animals and plants on earth.

The early forms of terrestrial life were able to absorb and digest mineral matter directly. In the universe of Andromeda, evolution had advanced further in that direction. Solid rock was ingested and digested rapidly and easily. Through the eons of time, the vast inchoate consciousness of the mass developed into a highly energized intelligence, that could grasp intuitively problems far beyond our highest flights— and could communicate with other life- worlds by etheric vibrations. Mental states were marked by tremendous luminosity over the surface of the plasma, which in turn set the ether into rapid vibration.

Alcoreth was busily at work. All over her body, she was rolling up into globules of protoplasm. The surfaces of these hardened into cell walls or cysts. Alcoreth was now disassociated into countless trillions of spores— as we call them. Each spore was in itself a unit of life, in a state of suspended animation; capable of resisting the frigid cold of space; capable of existing thus through countless ages; and expanding into life anew under favorable conditions.

Clerk-Maxwell, the great English physicist, toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, proved that light had a definite propulsive force, and that particles of matter, if minute enough, could be propelled through the ether with tremendous velocities by the electromagnetic rays of light. Svante August Arrhenius, the eminent Swedish scientist, used this discovery as a basis for bold speculation. Was it not possible— he argued— for minute spores of life to pass through interstellar space from world to world, and germinate anew on barren, uninhabited worlds?

All this Alcoreth knew as elemental truths. If only some of her spores could land on some far-off world, unaccountably and strangely formed of mineral matter solely— there to burgeon and grow with lightning-like rapidity in the midst of such plenty— what a marvelous rebirth! For inherent in each spore was the intelligence of the mass, and Alcoreth would exist anew in the alien universe.

Finally all was in readiness. The time for the perilous emprise had come! The teeming aggregate of spores concentrated their mighty intelligence. They heaved and swelled. Weird radiances played over their surfaces. Huge luminous masses propelled themselves into space. Cloud after cloud of spore forms tore themselves loose, and shot forward. The tremendous journey was begun! Never in all the history of the universe was there a stranger migration!

Criss-crossing the illimitable void were innumerable light vibrations. Instantly the spores were scattered in all directions, caught up by onrushing waves, carried along with the speed of light, scurrying towards the uttermost confines of space-time.

On— on— through the illimitable void! Ages— eons— thousands and hundreds of thousands of light years— never ceasing— never slackening in their headlong flight! Past mighty suns— past strange planets— past pale nebulosities— past pallid shapes of interspatial denizens— past rushing comets with hair afire— past meteors, debris of uncounted worlds— on— on! Whole universes waxed great and waned to pin pricks in the darkling void! On! On!

The Milky Way— a bend of light waves past the Sun— the earth planet loomed vast— a gravitational pull was exerted— and a cloud of spores had reached the end of their tremendous flight. Slowly through the warm air they settled and floated and dropped to the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.

MISSING FISHING VESSEL SAFE IN PORT!

Lunenburg Nova Scotia, Sept. 27th. AP.

The fishing smack Ellen Morse, two weeks past due, docked here this morning with a record catch. The vessel was blown off its course during the storm reported three weeks ago by the remainder of the fleet, and, on the abatement of the gale, ran into an unusually large school of haddock 100 miles off the Banks. She remained to take advantage of the unexpected good fortune. All on board are well.

"The crew report that during the catch a peculiar shower composed of small brown globules fell on and about the vessel. As this occurred at the height of the catch, no specimens of the 'dust' were preserved."

The early editions of one or two newspapers that September morning of 1938 carried this small squib. A commuter or two, traveling long distances, having exhausted the headlines, the sport pages, the stock reports, read it. Then it passed into the oblivion which awaits all such space filling items. No sixth sense, no intuitional alarm bell, warned any reader of the horror which this dust cloud, so casually observed, had brought to earth.

Only in the Mt. Wilson Observatory did one man start on reading the report. Standish, alone in all the world, saw here more than a mere unusual occurrence. And even he could place ne great stress on it. A careful clipping of the two inch account, a reference to data jotted down a few weeks before, then the clipping and the few notes in that neat scientific script were filed away.

It was a fair world that the dust cloud had entered. All the nations were at peace and had been for twenty years. The great strides in mechanical and scientific progress of the first two decades of the 20th century had somewhat slowed down. Not yet had the commerce of the world taken to the air. While

swift passenger and mail services across the continents and the seas had become commonplace, as yet aerial navigation had not been cheapened sufficiently to remove from the surface the carrying of freight. The life-blood of the nations, the foodsuffs, the textiles, the myriad varied components of commerce, still coursed in the old arteries along the surface of the seas. Still were the harbors of the world crowded with shipping, still across the seven seas plodded in the old slow way the gleaming freightliners and the tramps. Still across the continents streamed the long freight-trains, mile-long caravans bearing ore, coal, grain, machinery, food, and raiment that the race might be fed, and be clothed, that man might be housed, kept warm, might live and work.

The year 1938 was ushered out in the age-old flare of horns and carousal, the age-old watch-night prayers, and the fateful twelve-month of 1939 began. Again a newspaper item noted by but few signalled the approach of horror.

New York— April 3rd

The Hardin Line officers here report that yesterday afternoon, while their private radio station was receiving the routine daily report from the Hardin freighter, Ulysses, communication suddenly ceased and could not be reestablished. At the time the Ulysses was 50 miles due east of Cape Hatteras. Ves.sels in the vicinity have been requested to investigate.

Thus it began. The *Ulysses* was never heard of again. Other ships cruising over the position from which it was last reported could find no trace of the freighter, nor any of the usual evidences of marine disaster. Ten thousand tons of steel and wood, thousands of tons of freight, one hundred men, had disappeared without trace.

A month later, another great ship broke suddenly off in the midst of a wireless dialogue and vanished as completely as though it had never been. In quick succession a third, a fourth, a fifth abrupt vanishment caught the attention of the world within a week. No longer was the news relegated to the inside pages of the daily papers, but glaring front page headlines broadcasted the tidings of disaster. Marine insurance rose to exorbitant rates ; the navies of the earth were scouring the Atlantic; only the most essential traffic was proceeding. At last the world was aware that something brooded out there in the ocean which threatened the very life-blood of the earth.

One peculiar feature of the disappearances was early noted. The tragedies had occurred in no localized region of the ocean. Plotted on the maps which now appeared on the front page of every paper, it was seen that a broad belt of waters, extending from Nova Scotia on the north to the Caribbean on the south' was dotted with the black crosses of disaster. It was as if some tremendous power was erecting a fearful barrier across North and South Atlantic, a barrier which would end the commerce of the centuries between the Eastern and the Western Hemispheres, saying to the trade of the world : "Thou shalt not pass!"

And now indeed the barrier was complete. So rapid had been the multiplication of casualties that by the end of June over a thousand vessels had unaccountably vanished. On July 1, a general order was issued by the Admiralties of every nation forbidding all commercial traffic across the Atlantic. Supplies of food and other necessities were routed across the Pacific, across Asia and Europe to England and the seacoast countries of the Old World. Now, on the broad expanse of the Atlantic, unwonted quiet reigned, broken only by the gray war-craft searching, searching, for what they knew not.

A pall of horror overspread the world. The sole topic of conversation on the street, in business places and in homes was the mysterious barricade across the ocean and speculation as to its cause. In the capitals of the world the heads of governments conferred about nothing else. In the universities, in the headquarters of the scientific organizations, theory and counter-theory were spun/ as to the nature of this thing which had paralyzed commerce. The attention of all the earth was centered on the great radio towers and the word that came through them from the gray war vessels out on the tossing waters, searching, searching, ever searching for the thing which so swiftly, so relentlessly swallowed up the great vessels and small which ploughed the waves.

Ever there was the same news. Each day the tale was— "Battleship So and So, while reporting all well at such and such time ceased communication. Other vessels in the vicinity have been ordered to investigate." And then, one by one, the other vessels, too, would drop out of sight, never to be heard of again.

On the newspaper maps it was noted that the belt of black crosses widened and lengthened, extending ever closer to the shores of the Atlantic. And the horror deepened— blacker was the dread of the people.

ON the thirty-first of July the first faint intimation of the nature of the menace reached the world. The United States naval station at Arlington reported that while in communication with the U. S. S. *Texas* it had received the following messages:

From NXL Lat— Long— 10:12 A. M. July 31, 1939.

First officer reports iridescence covering entire surface of ocean to east and extending north and south as far as horizon. We are proceeding closer.

From NXL Lat— Long— 10:15 A. M. July 31, 1939— are now nearing iridescence. It is sweeping toward us—

Here communication ceased. The *Texas* had joined the long list of missing ships.

Hurriedly summoned into radio conference, the scientists of the world discussed this meagre report. A veritable babel of conflicting ideas, of fine-spun theories, of concepts old and new wove back and forth across the ether.

The least regarded explanation of the phenomena, the most derided, was the exposition by the astronomer of Mt. Wilson of his theory of an invasion of protoplasm in spore form.

In the streets of the cities wild-eyed ranters appeared at every corner. To excited, pallid crowds they raved of the judgment of God upon an evil world, of the second coming of Christ (or Buddha or Mohammed), of the end of the earth. As yet only those whose intelligence was of the lowest took stock in their dire predictions, but Hysteria, with staring eyes and windtangled hair, strained at the chains with which civilization had bound her.

The world will long remember the morning of August 5th, 1939, when the full nature of the Menace burst upon it. All that had passed before paled into insignificance at the startling news from Florida. That state of palms and oranges, that winter playground of the idle rich, no longer exists. But its name will long remain in the minds of man as the region where first the Menace came upon the land.

Baking in the glare of the August sun, terrifically hot, though still but an hour above the horizon, a small group waited on the platform of the ramshackle station of St. Nicholas, a few miles inland. Southern railway schedules were proverbially elastic and thus little thought was given to the fact that it was a full half hour past the time when the west-bound "number 9" should have made its appearance. The station-master (baggage-man, telegrapher, porter, etc.) had reported that the wires were down to the east but this was a none too rare occurrence. The talk was, of course of the vacant Atlantic (for now even the searching warships had been withdrawn— and the horror which had cleared it of shipping-

"It's my idee," quoth the village druggist, who was on his way to Jacksonville for his monthly buying trip, "It's my idee that the Germans are gonna start another war and they've got millyuns of submarines out there. If I was President— What the heck is that up the track!"

The oracular dictum was interrupted by the appearance to the east of a hand-car on the rails, traveling at the uttermost speed of which this conveyance was capable. It was being operated by one man, and his frantic heaving at the pump handle gave evidence of more than ordinary haste. The four-wheeled platform fairly flew along the steel pathway— "Jingo Neddy, he's clippin' it some!" "Who is it, kin you make out?" "It's Bob, the agent at Pablo Beach— musta been a wreck!" "What's he yellin'?"

There was time for but a few startled observations when the hand car had already reached the station. Its operator, pale, disheveled, staring with panic,

shaking in an ague of fear, was shouting "Run, run, it's coming. All gone, all gone, wiped out. Oh my God. Get 'im all out. Run, run!"

That fateful morning of August 5th, the little town of Pablo Beach; one of the many which once dotted the East coast of Florida, just waking to another day of toil, had been overwhelmed by a tremendous mass of quivering jelly suddenly heaving itself out of the ocean. "It was higher than the biggest house in town, and it stretched along the shore as far as I could see. It quivered like jelly, and it rolled— it rolled on up the beach and over the houses and the people. Everybody run toward it at first, only me, and I would have only 'number 9' was due, and I had to stick by my key. Everyone run toward it, and it just rolled on and over them. It 'peared to move slow, but it must have been coming fast 'cause, when the folks started to run away from it, it just kind of sent out part of itself a bit faster, and it caught them. God, it was terrible. Just before I grabbed the hand-car and got away it caught Pop Saunders, the postmaster. I saw it catch him. It just kind of heaved, and swallowed him up. I saw him inside of it, just like a fly in calf's foot jelly, just as clear, with his mouth open, and his eyes staring, and his legs kicking and his arms working, but his kicking and squirming didn't bother the thing any. And then his face kind of run together till it was just a blotch— and that's all I saw!"

In London, in Berlin and Paris men stopped their midday occupations to read aghast the story of the Florida station-agent. In New York, Boston and Baltimore the wheels of industry never started that day, as the office workers, the laborers, and the corporation presidents were halted on their way to their day's occupations by the dread tale. Sleeping Denver and 'Frisco were raked to nightmare terror by the shouting of the extras in the streets.

In the Mt. Wilson observatory Donald Standish, keeping his sleepless vigil at the eyepiece of his beloved telescope, was startled by the ringing of the "emergency news" bell on the broadcast receiver in a corner. Hurriedly switching on the speaker, he heard the terrible tale. "Gosh! I was right."

The stars were forgotten now. Standish joined the world in anxious waiting for the next report. It came:

U. S. News Service. Bulletin 25

The governor of Florida has mobilized the militia and troops are already moving rapidly toward Pablo Beach. Federal aid has been called for. The Secretary of War has ordered all available regulars with railroad artillery, flame-throwers, and gas projection apparatus to the threatened region. It is confidently expected that all danger will be over shortly.

U. S. News Service. Bulletin 26.

Troops have now arrived within a mile of the infested territory. Infantry is being deployed, armed with gas bombs and flame throwers. The 16 inch railroad guns are being prepared for action.

Bulletin 26a.

Artillery is now firing high explosive shells into the advancing mass. Infantry is rapidly approaching within range.

U. S. News Service Bulletin 27.

Artillery fire is utterly ineffective. Its only result is to hurl great globs of the jelly into air. They fall on the advancing infantry and envelop them. The loss is appalling. Indescribable scenes of horror are being witnessed. Even before the enfolded soldiers cease their struggles against asphyxiation their forms begin to melt away. They appear to be digested by the jelly. The big guns have been ordered to cease fire. The effect of poison gas which is being released in great clouds is now being observed.

Donald could restrain himself no longer. "Fools," he burst out. "All their big guns and their gases will never stop that stuff. Some scientific, method of attack must be found."

The next bulletin proved him right.

Poison gas has no effect. Flame-throwers wither the jelly where they reach it, but on both sides of each point of operation the mass continues its relentless march. Reports reach us now that the east coast as far north as Charleston has been invaded.

Donald burst out again. "We must find a way to stop the advance of the jelly, and then to kill it. Perhaps Doug will have a notion. He ought to, he's been working with cells long enough. I'll call him. Besides, I haven't spoken to Mary since noon yesterday."

As the astronomer made his way to the personal communications set, the call light on that device began to flash. He answered it. "Mt. Wilson Observatory, Standish speaking."

"Professor Standish, this is President Adams' office. There will be a radio conference of scientists in half an hour. You are requested to listen in."

"Right."

"Now to get Doug," rapidly whirling the dials to Cameron's wave length.

Quickly the connection was completed.

"Hello Doug, did you get the news? They know now that I was right. What, you haven't heard! Might have known "nothing matters to you but your blasted cancer. There soon won't be anybody left for you to save from cancer. Get this "

In quick, succinct phrases the savant outlined to the bacteriologist the tale of horror which was echoing , round the earth. He did not get very far, however, for an exclamation of horror stopped him. As he listened to the broken phrases of Cameron, the tanned face of the astronomer paled with horror. His knuckles whitened with the force of his grip on the receiver.

"What's that? Mary flew to New York yesterday to get you some pigments. Man, don't you realize that it's a matter of hours till the protoplasm visits New York. Get Mary back at once.

"Damnation! You can't? The radio on her phone is out of order? How was she flying, by sight? Can't you reach her? No? Then I'm going after her. The devil with the conference. One hair on Mary's head is more than the rest of the world to me. You'll go with me? Get ready then, I'll make it as fast as I can."

In a trice Douglas' flying suit was on, the hangar's doors were opened, and the trim little sport plane zoomed up to the 5000 foot speed level, then like an arrow flew to the east.

Meanwhile message after message of terror had been winging its way into the ether. All the east coast of Florida, Southern Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, in rapid succession had seen the creeping, iridescent terror. Resistlessly out of the sea it was heaving, twenty-five feet high, hundreds of miles long, this vast jelly-like tide of destruction. It was as if the sea had congealed and was making a final triumphant drive for mastery over its eternal enemy, the land. With the inevitableness of fate itself the thing rolled up, enveloping all that opposed it, enfolding the shrieking mobs which tried to flee before it, and, most horrible of all, digesting them.

IN New York the streets were packed with pale-faced throngs. Although every home had its receiver, the desire for the companionship of others had sent the entire population into the streets. The public loudspeakers, the newspaper bulletin boards were the nuclei of the masses. As one item after another of disaster was broadcast by the news-purveying agencies, a groan would rise from the crowds and then silence would come again. For these were silent crowds; the magnitude of the calamity had stricken the people dumb.

Forcing her way through the packed masses and into the hundred story tower which Columbia University had just occupied, was Mary Cameron. Astounded on her arrival by the terrific news of calamity, she was anxiously intent upon completing her errand and speeding her plane back to her brother. But tremendous difficulties had delayed her. Traffic was well-nigh suspended. It had taken an enormous bribe to persuade a taxi-driver to undertake the journey from the Governor's Island landing field, through the vehicular tunnel and up Broadway to the new educational centre in what had been Central Park. Held to a snail-like pace by the masses which packed the streets from building line to building line, the trip had taken hours. But now, at dusk, she had reached her goal.

The great building was deserted. But the doors of an elevator stood open and she could operate the simple mechanism. Swiftly she rose through the hundred floors of this latest apotheosis of education to where, in the very tip of

the soaring tower, Cameron's home laboratory was located. She unlocked the door, and entered the room. Quickly dropping her close-fitting cap and leather flying suit she began to assemble the bottles and jars listed on the slip which she had brought from the mountain retreat she had left the night before. But the strain of twenty-four hours of flying by sight and of the terrific scenes she had just witnessed suddenly told on even her wiry constitution, and she dropped into a chair for a moment's rest. She closed her eyes— in a moment she was sound asleep.

Startled awake by a roar which, ascending from a thousand feet below, rattled the windows with the force given it by millions of throats, she found the room glowing with a green and spectral light. The usual murmur of the great city had changed to a terrific tumult in which she could sense a terrible agony of fear even at this Alpine height. She ran to the window. Night had fallen, but it was not dark. From far below came the green light, a glowing luminescence, which reminded her of some rotting fungus which she had one night found in the woods near Cameron's laboratory. The glowing material made a gridiron there beneath, filling the streets south and west, till it merged in sheets of green flame where she knew the harbor and the rivers lay. Immediately beneath her the streets were still clear, but bathed in that unearthly light she could see black streams. In the cupboard she knew her brother had a pair of binoculars. Quickly getting them, she focussed them on the black streams. She saw people, thousands, tens of thousands, rushing north, shouting in a frenzy of terror, and there, only a little south, the glowing green light pouring, up the streets, towering far above the hurrying struggling mobs, moving with incredible swiftness, engulfing the stragglers. The menace had reached New York!

She swept the glasses north whence came a rolling as of thunder. Far up the Sound she could see flashes— the forts at the upper end of the city were fighting their big guns. South again, and below, quiet now, the glowing jelly had filled the streets. New York was dead.

"Well, I'm in a fine fix now! I'm safe enough here, but how am I going to get away. Probably starve to death. Well that's better than being swallowed up by that thing down there."

A terrific crash downtown came to her startled ears; then almost before she could turn, another, and another. Down on the tip of the Island, where first Manhattan had reached toward the sky, there was a clear space where the 85-story Bank of Manhattan building had been. Woolworth too was gone, and all the mountainous structures below. As she gazed she saw the 150-story City Hall Tower, just completed, sway, then, like some giant of the forest felled after centuries of growth by the woodman's axe, topple over, and gathering speed, crash into the lambent sea which bathed its foot. As it struck the surface of the quivering flood of light there was a tremendous splash, and through the air for

hundreds of feet flew huge glowing fragments. They fell on the roofs and the serried facades of the buildings for blocks around, and then, to Mary's horror, they spread, and wherever the patches of light lay the sturdy structures of steel and granite began to melt.

"Good God! I'm not so safe after all. The ghastly stuff eats even the material of which these buildings are made. I wonder how long this place will last. I guess it's finish for me."

ALL this time the yellow sport plane had been rushing across the continent, sliding down the radio beacon from New York. Intent on the path ahead, the two leather clad figures bent over the dashboard. No talk, for the muffler had been cut out for greater speed. No talk, but the thoughts of the two were identical. "What's happening in New York? What's happening to Mary? Is she safe?" Over and over these thoughts reiterated themselves in the weary brains. These two great scientists, in whose intellects lay perhaps the saving of the world, had forgotten everything save that wisp of a girl in New York, sister of one and sweetheart of the other.

At last the Appalachians appeared, passed beneath them, fell away behind them. Night had come. Donald who had yielded his place at the stick to Cameron, suddenly clutched his companion's arm and pointed ahead. On the horizon there pulsed a greenish glow. Standish's mind flew back to that star in Andromeda, whose passing he had watched months before. Here again he saw the light whose components he had analyzed in his gas spectroscope! The plane was headed directly for New York, and straight ahead of them the luminescence was at its brightest!

Ten minutes now, and they were circling over the great city. From the bay to Westchester, from the Palisades east to the sea, the city was invested. As far north as the ridge of giant erections about 42nd Street the smooth expanse of the phosphorescent sea told of the progress of destruction.

Cameron reached for the lever which silenced the roaring exhaust of the twin engines.

"If only we're in time; if only she is still in my lab. I'm going to go on past the windows and see."

Throttled down to its slowest flying speed, the little plane dipped gracefully past the doomed tower rising high above the glowing rectangle of the park. Not twenty feet from the tower it glided. And there, in the window which both men sought so eagerly, was the figure they had hardly dared hope would be there!

Up again then for consultation. "Doug, how close can we get to that window?"

"I'll get within a foot, or we'll all go to hell together."

"Then do it, and I'll get her out, but first tell her what we plan. Get a flashlight; she knows the Morse Code. Remember how I used to signal her in the old days?"

"A long slow glide now, about 500 feet away, lucky that your window faces the park." Cameron obeyed, while the astronomer flashed his dots and dashes. "On the sill, ready to jump." A wave of the brave little hand signalled understanding. Then up again.

Up to 5000 feet and a mile away. Then while Standish creeps out to the end of the wing, the motor is shut off and a long glide begun. Down, on a long slant, straight for that pinnacle rising sheer ahead. Down, ever down, with increasing speed hurtles the plane. A miracle of accurate steering, another miracle of perfect timing, and sheer muscular strength are required. Stark courage from all three, or the gallant attempt at rescue must end in disaster. Will they, can they do it? Too near— and a crash; too far and a new attempt cannot be made. For see, already the great tower sways with approaching dissolution.

Perfect aiming, the plane almost grazes the side of the tower. Perfect execution— a hundred feet from the window on whose sill Mary stands, one hand clinging to the sash, the other outstretched; the ship dips, then suddenly rising, almost stalls directly opposite the opening. Perfect timing— the hand of the man on the wing grips the hand of the girl on the sill ; a leap, a tug, and there are two now on the wing. Frantically Cameron works at the controls; frantically the lovers cling to the taut surface of the fabric on which they sprawl. Overbalanced, the craft reels drunkenly. Then the roar of the motor, the wings grip the air, and all is safe.

As Cameron zoomed upward, the hundred-story University rocks in ever-widening arcs; then slowly, slowly it begins to fall. Intact, entire, as it had for so short a time soared over the City, so it falls. Slowly at first, then with gradually increasing speed the great structure falls, until with a rush almost too fast for the eye to follow, it crashes into the lucent tide.

Into the little cockpit tumble the lovers, trembling, exhausted with their supreme effort. Cameron too, is trembling, but he must guide the ship with its precious freight. Westward now they turn, westward through the horrible night.

And now for the first time, they can look about them and take stock. The air is thick with darting planes, fleeing westward from the scourge. Below them not a house that is not ablaze with light, not a highway that is not jammed with rushing conveyances, not a railroad which is not crammed with hurrying trains, westward every one. Looking behind, from north to south, in the wide sweep which their height of 7000 feet allowed them, nothing but that terrible spectral green light, nothing but that immense sea, not of water, but of all-devouring jelly, come across the vast infinity of interstellar space to harry the earth and

conquer it. And overhead the velvet black sky, and the stars, gleaming still in the wide arch of the heavens as they did when Earth was a whirling mass, as they still shall when this ball is nought but a cold, dead thing.

"Switch on the communication receiver C; let's hear what the news broadcast says."

U. S. News Service. Bulletin 1248.

The entire eastern coasts of North and South America are now completely covered with the jelly. Extent of the investment from ten miles to twenty-five. Spain and southern France are being slowly covered; the rest of the western coast of Europe penetrated only from a mile to five.

U. S. News Service. Bulletin 1249.

The scientific conference is still in session. No solution has as yet been arrived at, but the chairman wishes to announce that the people of the earth need not despair; progress is being made. Donald Standish, the noted astronomer, is still unaccountably missing. It is requested that any one having information as to his present location communicate at once- with 2 AG, the government intelligence station.

Mary turned to Donald, in whose arms she was still being tightly held. "Oh Don, why did you leave your post for me. The world needs you, why did you leave it for me?"

"Dear, if you had gone, the rest of the world could have followed for all of me. But now, now that you're safe, we must get back. I've got a hunch that Doug and I together can arrive at the right thing to do. We can't land now. Once down in that mob we'd never be able to take off again. Besides, neither of us can think straight just yet; too much has happened in the last thirty hours. We'll soon be home now, and we'll get busy. Drive her, Doug."

Now the sun' had overtaken them and a new day was begun. Close ahead rose the peaks of the Rockies, among them the mountain on which perched Cameron's wilderness laboratory. A long spiral, and the little ship of the air dropped gently on the landing field at its door.

The passengers debarked stiffly from the flight plane, then Douglas taxied it into the hangar. Emerging promptly, the three of them entered the house,,

PHYSICALLY exhausted as they were by the long journey, there was yet no thought of sleep. They were still shaking with the horror of those frightful scenes they had so recently witnessed.

Mary was tottering with weariness, but held herself bravely. Not for worlds would she permit her lover to see how near the verge of hysteria she was, now that the danger was past. She looked around the long comfortable room—cheery fireplace and all— with a shudder. How peaceful and quiet everything was— and over there— nameless horrors out of hell— the indescribable

stampede of maddened humanity— the hideous screech of some poor devil engulfed in the advancing monster— no, no!— that way lay madness— she must stop.

Donald was watching her anxiously. "Mary, you must get some sleep at once."

"I'm all right— just a little attack of nerves," she smiled wanly. "Don't trouble yourself about me; I want to help, too."

"We'll puzzle this out ourselves, and when you wake, if we've evolved any ideas, we'll let you in on it. Now, be a good girl and go to bed. Haven't you something soothing in your lab?" he turned to Douglas.

"Certainly; just the thing for you, Mary." Douglas went to the cupboard and poured out a small tumbler full of a pale liquid. "Just drink this down, and you'll slide so smoothly into the arms of Morpheus, the next thing you'll know the birds will be twittering in the trees. Here you are; take it."

Mary looked at them both for a moment— saw the worry in their eyes, and capitulated. "All right, boys, if you insist; though I'm sure I can be of help." She drank the potion, and retired to her bedroom.

The two men filled their pipes, and settled back in their chairs. Their bodies were poisoned with fatigue, but their brains were racing keenly. For a while they smoked in silence, gratefully inhaling the fragrant fumes.

Standish was the first to break the silence.

"As you know, Doug, I have a theory that accounts for this demoniac visitation, but when I sprang it on the conference, I was laughed at for my pains."

Douglas looked at him keenly. He knew his chum, and knew that he was not given to hazarding wild hypotheses unless they contained a solid substratum of truth.

"Go over it again," he said quietly. "I promise to listen with an open mind."

Donald launched again into his tale— the strange living star in the island universe— its explosive disintegration into space— the queer dust cloud of tiny globules reported by the fishing smack— followed by the appearance of this horrible amorphous life-mass that was threatening to engulf the earth.

Cameron listened intently. Thoughtfully he drummed with his fingers on the arm of his chair. He, too, was familiar with the hypotheses of Clerk-Maxwell and Arrhenius.

"There is a good deal of plausibility about your theory," he acknowledged thoughtfully, "and it accounts . also for the vast proliferating powers of this monstrous mass— no life as we know it on this planet could even approximate the uncanny speed of its growth, nor have our primitive life-forms the ability to

subsist on inorganic matter to quite the extent that it has," again absently drumming on his chair.

He relapsed into brooding thought, Standish looked at his friend, but forebore to say anything. When Cameron was on the verge of something brilliant, he always drummed. So the astronomer waited.

The break was not long in coming. Douglas' brow suddenly cleared— a look of triumph gleamed in his eye.

"By George, I have it!" he almost shouted. "I believe your fantastic story, old man, and I'm going to rid the world of this menace. Listen to me for a moment."

"You have my closest attention."

"Suppose we assume the truth of your hypotheses. Then this living world, moving in the Andromeda universe, shining by its own luminosity, separated by unthinkable distances from any hot gaseous star, would naturally be accustomed only to the faint starlight of the heavens. No such blaze of light as even our ordinary sunlight ever came within its ken. Now you've heard of phototropism?"

Standish nodded his head, but his friend went on heedlessly, absorbed in the plan maturing in his mind.

"It's the reaction of protoplasm to light," he explained. "If you take any unicellular animal like the amoeba, and expose it to a strong light, it will shrink away from the source of the light, and try to get out of its path. If you use a powerful ray of concentrated ultra-violet light— the reaction will be much more apparent— the amoeba will literally run for its life— and if exposed long enough to the rays, will die.

"Now if we can obtain such drastic results with life forms inured and habituated by constant exposure to the sun's rays continually beating upon our planet, what about this alien protoplasmic mass, unaccustomed to strong light of any kind, and no doubt feeling irritable even during our normal sunshine?"

Standish sat up excitedly. He was beginning to catch the drift of Cameron's reasoning.

Douglas went on. "My plan is this. Have the nations of the world concentrate their technicians and engineers in the power plants and factories most remote from the menace. Construct huge searchlights of the utmost candle power; and machines for casting enormous beams of ultra-violet light. In the meantime have the people of the areas endangered by the billowing march of the monster retreat to the mountain fastnesses. That can be done fairly easily— its progress from all reports is approximately ten to fifteen miles a day. When all is in readiness, mount our machines on tractors, and drive them in front of the encroaching fiend. When it comes within striking distance, turn on the juice full blast. The power will come by tuned radio waves from the power plants operating in the hinterland. If our theories are correct, on the impact of our

rays, the viscid mass will react much more violently than an amoeba or Paramecium would. Retreat would be all it would think of, and the more exposed masses would be killed off. In that way, we could get rid of the menace, or at least drive it back into the ocean, by following it steadily all the way."

Standish got up in enthusiasm, and rung Cameron's hand. "Boy, you're a wizard! That's a marvelous scheme! You'll be the savior of the world!"

"Hold on a moment," Douglas smiled protestingly, "it may work and it may not. Remember, I'm basing my scheme on your hypotheses."

"It'll work all right," retorted Donald confidently, "and now I know I'm right, too."

"Don't run away so fast," warned the bacteriologist. "Remember, at the best, we shall only have managed to drive it back to the ocean. Once there, we can do no more. There, in the vast depths of the sea, with what we know of the rapidity of its procreation, it will once more overwhelm the world."

Douglas groaned. "There you go— get me all excited, and then you let me down. I forgot that part. So what's the good of your swell scheme?"

"Ah! but I have something else up my sleeve," grinned his companion. "You know, of course, that I've been working my head off trying to find a cure for cancer. I haven't succeeded as yet— though the outlook is promising. But in the course of my researches, I've invented a technique for excising cancer growths from the living organism, and growing them independently in special culture media. I have also discovered a method of activating them so that when replaced in living tissues they will multiply with unbelievable rapidity. At present, I have on hand here in the laboratory about fifty pounds of activated cancer cultures, and that is sufficient for my purpose."

"Now to get back to your theory again. If this visitation is in truth from an alien world, it is highly improbable that it was ever exposed to the disease of cancer. If that is so, then it lacks whatever immunity our life has attained through constant exposure, and the cancer cells will spread like wildfire through the whole vast organism— and this malign influence will- be eradicated from the face of the earth."

"Man, I repeat— you're a wizard!" The astronomer pumped his hand violently. Then an idea struck him. "But why not spray it with cancer immediately— why bother with ultra-violet light to drive it into the depths of the sea."

"Because," explained Douglas patiently, "cancer is no respecter of persons, and once let loose on land, it is liable to spread to all forms of earth life, and we shall only have succeeded in destroying ourselves too. In the ocean, however, the range is sharply limited— we shall instruct the people of the earth to remain inland until the danger is passed. Once killed, the whole mass will descend to

the floors of the seas and there the cold and pressure will destroy the cancerous tissues."

"You've thought of everything," was the admiring retort.

"Now to get into immediate communication with the conference chairman and unfold our plan."

"Right— there's not a moment to lose. The fate of the world is in the balance."

In a few minutes, the radio transmitter was sputtering out the code call signal of the conference. A lapse of five minutes and word came back. "Radio Emergency Conference talking— what is it?"

"Standish sending from the laboratory of Cameron in Colorado. Plan for combating menace has been evolved. Please connect me with the chairman." Then, for a solid hour across the ether vibrated the saving word.

Back came the answer. "Sounds all right. Our last hope anyway. Broadcasting immediately to all the nations to mobilize tractor, searchlights, ultra-violet apparatus. United States will mobilize on eastern length of Appalachian within twenty-four hours. Both of you report for service immediately at Allentown, Pa. Last reports show inundation extended as far as Scranton. Signing off."

"We need some sleep— let's snatch a few hours— and start," suggested Standish.

"Righto, we can get there in fifteen hours. We'll need only an hour or two for assembling our material here. That gives us plenty of time for a snooze."

Almost instantaneously, both were sleeping— drugged

WHEN they awoke, it was dusk. Mary was still asleep— a peaceful smile flitting over her lips. Donald looked at her tenderly. "Let's not disturb her. Poor girl— she has been through hell." He brushed her forehead lightly with his lips, and the smile grew into ecstasy, but still she did not awaken.

"Now to work!"

They hurried into the laboratory. Standish opened the door of a huge glass-lined oven, thermostatically controlled at blood heat. In the interior were twenty or more glass dishes, each containing a mass of tissue floating in culture media.

"These are my cancer growths," he explained. "They will live indefinitely in the cultures. Now to activate them so that when we cast them into the protoplasmic horror, they will grow and proliferate with extreme rapidity."

He turned to a row of glass stoppered bottles on his laboratory shelf, and took one down. It was filled with a pale green liquid. Carefully, with a pipette, he dropped five drops into each dish. A slight bubbling ensued— and then ceased."

"Bring that cabinet in the corner over here," he ordered, "and all the cotton wool you find in the end cupboards."

The cabinet was opened— a layer of cotton placed on the bottom— the cancer dishes placed carefully between layers of the soft material, and then the whole affair hermetically sealed.

"Now we're ready to go."

The two men quickly and silently donned their flying suits, and in short order the plane was trundled out of the hangar; the cabinet was carefully lifted into the cockpit, and they took their seats. The motor roared ; and the plane took off on its flight across the continent.

Next morning, as the first rays of dawn appeared over the serried tops of the Alleghany Mts., the haggard, wearied travelers descended stiffly from their plane after landing on the air field outside Allentown.

For a moment they gazed about them in dazed astonishment. The place was seething with activity. Hundreds of planes were landing on all sides ; tractors were lumbering and roaring over the field, soldiers and vast crowds of workmen swarmed in organized disorder.

"Where is the commander?" asked Donald of a big burly sergeant actively engaged in expending a stream of profanity at a company of men unpacking a huge searchlight.

"Over there!" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward the hangar at one end of the field, without deigning to turn around; and with hardly a pause in his flow of lurid objurgations.

"Come on, Doug let's report at once, and see what we can do."

At the door, they gave their names to the guard, and were ushered in immediately.

Seated at a rough pine board table, hastily built to function as a desk, was General Black, grizzled veteran of the World War, now commander-in-chief of all the American Armies! Officers dashed in— came to stiff salute— reported in staccato accents— received their orders even more crisply— and dashed out again. A field radio receiving set whined. The general put the phone to his ear. "What's that— only thirty miles away! All right— report every fifteen minutes on its progress."

Turning around, he saw the two scientists. "Yes, what is it? Make it snappy!"

They introduced themselves, and the general's attitude, became more cordial.

"I hope your ideas are correct— if not, we're all doomed." He sighed.

"Frankly, I'm not used to this sort of thing— out of my line. Artillery— machine-guns— gas— yes! But not this new-fangled stuff.

"However, we'll soon find out," he continued grimly, "my air scouts report it as only thirty miles away. At the rate it is traveling, it will be here in forty-eight

hours We'll be ready for it in about thirty-six hours— and then— " he shrugged fatalistically. "In the meantime, I'll get some quarters for you, and you can make yourselves comfortable until we're ready to start." He ' turned to an orderly, and soon the scientists were installed in a barrack-like room— their plane with its precious freight wheeled into the hangar, and placed under guard.

The next thirty-six hours were filled with feverish activity. All through the day and night, tractors kept coming in— apparatus and the requisite machines were deposited from planes— railroads— automobiles— every conceivable method of transportation.

In the meantime the radio reports were becoming more and more alarming. Inexorably the living tide was moving forward— swallowing everything in its path. Twenty miles away— fifteen miles— activity became frantic— ten miles— five miles— the last feverish touches— and all was in readiness for the supreme effort.

As far as the eye could see, stretched serried ranks of tractors. Along the whole Appalachian range, thousands of tractors were ready to go at the signal of command. On each was perched a powerful searchlight or violet ray machine capable of casting directional beams over a ten-mile radius. The final orders were given— everyone not directly concerned in the management of the apparatus was sent to the rear.

It was the zero hour!

Already in the distance, the horizon was glowing with the dreaded greenish light— the vast menace was flowing— flowing forward.

A hush fell on the embattled array. Could they stop it— was it victory or disaster? The bravest among them felt clammy hands clutching their hearts.

The radio command roared its voice along the farflung line. The motors roared— the current snapped on— and a blaze of light— intense— penetrating— flared out up and down the line. Another command— and the tractors moved forward— slowly— steadily. A ten-mile zone of intense illumination— blinding in its glare— moved ahead. It approached the green luminescence. Still the monstrous life flowed forward.

Nerves tensed to the snapping points— blood pounded in thousands of hearts— God!— would it have no effect— the life of the planet hung on the next few moments.

The wall of light reached the oncoming wall of alien life— touched it— overlapped it— swung over the top and over its viscous waves. Only three miles separated the opposing forces!

Was it a delusion? Did they see aright? A rustling murmur grew on the scene— a confused Babel of voices— and then— a mighty shout blasted the air— a pean of deliverance— the world was saved!

The oncoming mass had definitely ceased moving— the front reared high into the air— writhing and twisting as though in agony— and then— recession— slow at first— then faster and faster the monster was in full retreat— vainly seeking to escape the deadly rays.

Immediately the jubilant army moved, forward— ever concentrating the dazzling light on the discomfited foe. Who thought of food— or sleep or stopping— back into the sea with the monster! For two days and a night, the front of war advanced— steadily the enemy was driven back— remorselessly as ever it had advanced— agonized, writhing before the avenging glare. Once more the face of the earth appeared— but strange, alien in aspect— more like some desolate moon aridly moving through space, than this fair, smiling world of ours. No trees— no houses— no verdure was left ; the very surface of the earth was eroded away— pitted and scarred with deep holes and gullies, through which the tractors floundered and pitched.

Back— back through the ruin of what had once been New York— into the sea it was driven— and the world was temporarily saved from overwhelming disaster.

FROM all the endangered nations came the glad tidings of complete triumph. Everywhere the crawling life had been forced into the waters. .,

Wild celebrations took place among the people of the earth. The names of Cameron and Standish were broadcast to the joyful millions as the saviors of humanity.

But the menace was by no means over— though temporarily subdued. Orders were issued that no one was to approach within ten miles of the seaboard; and the armies of the world were placed on sentry duty to see that the orders were enforced.

At a conference at Pittsburgh, the temporary capital of the United States, Douglas Cameron told of his discoveries in cancer research ; his activating principle ; and outlined his plan of scattering the tissues of cancer into the floating masses of protoplasm. He was listened to with the most flattering attention. When he finished, President Adams arose, and grasped his hand and then that of his co-worker.

"Gentlemen," he said, his voice quivering with emotion, "you have already placed the world under an incalculable debt of gratitude to you; if you succeed in your present undertaking, and rid the earth of this frightful scourge, your names will go ringing down the ages as long as life exists on this planet. I have placed at your service a cruiser of our air fleet, fully manned and provisioned for a cruise of ten thousand miles. Go and God bless you!"

They bowed their thanks and left the meeting. In less than an hour they were seated in the cabin of the air cruiser, with their precious cabinet at their feet— the crew sprang smartly to their posts— and they took to the air.

The coast was reached in slightly over an hour, and they soon were winging their way out to sea.

The captain came into the cabin for instructions. "Drop to within five hundred feet of the water, and have your crew on the look-out for any traces of the beast. Have the first one to sight it sing out."

"It shall be done," and he retired. The great plane glided down, and whirled over the surface of the ocean. All eyes were strained in eager search.

A shout from an excited lookout.

"The Thing's directly below, sir!" All hands rushed to the side. Sure enough— the surface of the ocean to the east was heaving, and tossing— a weird green light flickered and flared— the sea crawled with the shiny evil Thing.

Quickly Cameron opened his cabinet and gingerly removed one of the dishes. Carrying it to the side, with one quick scoop, he ladled out the contents and threw it overboard. Down it splattered into the jellied mass— scourge set to fight scourge.

For two days, the plane cruised over the broad Atlantic, dropping the seeds of destruction into the bosom of the visitation. When the last dishful had been dispatched on its errand, the cruiser turned homeward. Its work was done. The rest was in the lap of fate.

The people of the earth waited in deep anxiety. Men of science— great biologists— broadcast learned opinions to the listening multitudes.

Daily, clouds of speedy pursuit planes were flung over the broad bosom of the Atlantic to observe and report. Daily they reported no signs of disappearance. If anything, the areas of infestations seemed to be actually increasing. Once more fear reared its hideous head— if the cancerous growths proved ineffectual— it was only a question of time before the horrible Thing would once more approach the shores.

But, ten days later, an observation plane reported seeing hard fibrous growths, like huge warts, covering the surface in one area. Then, in quick succession, other reports came in. The cancer had commenced its deadly work. Within a month the ocean was covered with dead, cancerous masses— the menace was a thing of the past. Slowly they heaved on the ocean tides, and slowly they sank beneath the waves. The earth was free of its hideous nightmare. The race was saved.

ON A MILD October morning a little group filed into the rustic church near the laboratory. A little group— but every broadcast receiver, every television

screen was attuned to the waves which were carrying each sound and sight in that church to every corner of the globe. All the people of the earth joined in a prayer for good fortune for the couple whose wedding rites were being celebrated there. And as Mary Cameron became Mary Standish, all the earth joined in the hymn which welled out in a mighty chorus of thanksgiving whose echoing vibrations must have been heard even in far distant Andromeda.

2: The Man Who Shot At Cats

J. Jefferson Farjeon

1883-1955

MacKill's Mystery Magazine Sep 1952

'WELL, what have we got on Wilfred Ablett?' asked the superintendent.

The detective looked surprised; almost hurt.

'What have we got on Ablett?' he repeated. 'Pretty well all but the handcuffs.' He added, with a touch of innocent sarcasm, 'Haven't you heard?'

'I've heard a lot, Ellington,' snapped the superintendent, 'but there's one thing we haven't got that I'm still waiting to hear about, and that's motive! Our minds may work differently, but I don't care what the evidence is, if I don't see the motive I'm not happy.'

'And I don't care what the motive is,' retorted the detective, 'if I see the evidence, I'm content. This is what we've got on him, and it's enough for me. Now listen, and tell me the flaw.'

He took out his cigarette case, held it out to the superintendent, and they lit up.

'Round about seven o'clock yesterday evening, July 6, Robert Smith is returning home from his office, his home being the top flat of three small flats at Keswick Place, N.W.3. His road passes the back of the flats, and he raises his eyes above the wall of the back garden to see whether his wife is at the window.

'Mrs. Smith didn't happen to be at the window that evening, but Smith saw someone sitting at the open window just below— namely, Wilfred Ablett, the neurotic occupant of the middle flat.

'He saw something else, too, although at the time it did not make much impression on him. Just the momentary gleam of something in Ablett's hand. We know now that it was a revolver.'

'The one he'd brought back from Burma,' nodded the superintendent. 'From where he also brought back his chronic neuroticism.'

'Quite. Well, Smith goes round to the front entrance, and just inside he passes George Baines, the occupant of the bottom flat. Baines, as we know, had only taken the flat a week previously, taken it furnished from the usual resident, Henry Hartwell, who had gone off for a month in the Lake District. 'Good evening,' says Smith to Baines, and receives no reply. Baines, apparently, was not a sociable fellow.'

'That's right. Spent most of his time indoors, and Smith had only bumped into him once before. Nobody knew much about Baines, and I wish we knew a bit more. You might talk a bit about him, Ellington.'

'The agent he got the address of the flat from had never seen him before. 'All I can tell you,' the agent said to me, 'is that he had a small bag, a cough, and

an American accent, that he gave his name as George Baines, and that he paid a month's rent in advance.'

'Let's get back to Smith and follow him up to his flat. He gets there. Has a wash. And he and Mrs. S. are just starting their meal when they are startled by a report. 'What was that?' exclaims Mrs. S. 'Probably a motor-bike back-firing,' says Smith.

'But then comes another report. They run to the window. See nothing. Then they run to the kitchen window at the back — the window above that at which Ablett had been seen by Smith.

'And there, in the garden below, lies George Baines. Quoting from the rest of Smith's statement—'

He took out his note-book.

We were aghast. I rushed down to the garden. It was Baines all right, the chap I'd seen alive only half an hour before. He was dead as a doornail. Shot through the heart.

The detective closed his notebook. 'And then we came into it. And what did we find?'

'Not Ablett,' remarked the superintendent, grimly. 'No. The bird had flown. And when he came back next morning he said he spent the night at an hotel, which he had, but he had arrived there at eight, not six, as he tried to make out. When asked why he had gone to the hotel, he just stared. In his panic, he hadn't thought of that. When asked whether a revolver found in an alley a couple of blocks away was his, he denied all knowledge of it. But we found his fingerprints on the weapon.

And then, when he had been told this, and that Smith- had seen him with the revolver at his window just after 7 p.m., about half an hour before Baines was shot, he broke down, and blubbed that he had aimed at a cat that had started yowling at night had kept him awake. He'd missed the cat, and when he saw Baines fall he panicked and fled. So there you are! What more do you want?'

'How many more times am I to tell you?' demanded the superintendent. 'If this is going to be a murder charge, I want the motive.'

Ellington laughed. 'Well, haven't you got that, too? He aimed at a cat, and killed a man instead. What a story!'

The superintendent did not join in the detective's mirth.

'You're ignoring something,' he rasped. 'That wasn't his story. He still denies that he hit the man!'

'Then why did he run?'

'Come come! You can answer that one. He ran because he's a nervous wreck, and because he knew that even detectives sometimes jump to wrong conclusions!

'I'm not defending Ablett's brain, any more than I'm defending his veracity, but before I make up my mind about him and see clearly what the charge should be, I want— yes, sergeant?'

He broke off as a police sergeant entered the room. The newcomer advanced importantly and held out a small book.

'Wonderful how a search warrant helps, sir,' he said. 'We found this, and thought it might interest you. It's Ablett's diary. You only want to read from a week back.'

The Superintendent took the book.

Then he read out:

June 30. Now someone has started coughing below me. You lie and wait for the next cough, and it doesn't come, and you say 'Good!' and then it comes. Who is it? It can't be Hartwell. He went off yesterday to the lakes.

July 1. This is getting unbearable. Cough, 'cough, cough. I don't know if I can stand it.

July 2. Why doesn't he go to a doctor? I mean, there's no let-up! Does he enjoy it? One can't get any sleep at all.

July 3. I've just banged on the floor. I'm writing this in bed. Has it stopped him? Yes! No! Here it comes! Cough, cough, cough! Thump, thump, thump! Cough, cough, cough! I believe he's doing it on purpose!

July 4. To-day I did rather an extraordinary thing. I took a train into the country, and when I got out I walked till I came to some quiet woods, and then I lay down and went to sleep amid the most wonderful silence. I slept for hours. I had one nasty moment when I woke up, because, I thought I was back in Burma, but when I'd got over that shock I lay down again for a few minutes, and then came home. Now I needn't go to bed, need I? He can cough himself to death! Who cares?

July 5. I can't stand it, I can't stand it, I can't stand it! Now he's begun to whistle as well as wheeze. Cough, cough, cough— cough, cough, cough— wheeze— whistle. I can't stand it! I can't stand it! My God, one day I'll shoot that chap!

The inspector closed the book, and then suddenly took out a large pocket-handkerchief.

'That's the poor devil's last entry, ' he growled, mopping his brow, 'and he won't be making any more. Next day George Baines was shot bang through the heart. Happy, Ellington? Nice, juicy headlines, eh, and a cinch for the jury. You've won.'

He turned rather wearily to the telephone at his elbow as it rang.

'Don't worry,' smiled the detective. 'I won't crow.'

The superintendent answered the 'phone call, confining his side of the conversation to monosyllables, then replaced the receiver and got up.

'You're not going to have the chance,' he said. 'That was a hospital. George Baines is there, dying, and he wants to make a statement.'

'What!' shouted the detective, leaping to his feet.

But the superintendent pushed him down into his chair again.

'You sit tight till I come back, he said. 'The doctor only wants one of us. I'm taking that statement myself.'

An hour later the superintendent returned, and found Ellington seething with indignant impatience. Unconsciously repeating the superintendent's own earlier inquiry, the detective asked: 'Well, what have you got?'

'Not Wilfred Ablett,' answered the superintendent. 'Have one of mine this time.'

He held out his case. The detective took a cigarette with a grunt.

'As a matter of fact, it wasn't George Baines,' began the superintendent.

'Will you repeat that?' begged Ellington, politely.

'It wasn't George Baines,' repeated the superintendent, 'but perhaps I'm not quite fair in putting it that way. It was the man we knew as George Baines, but his real name was Konrad Clark, a crook, and when he took the bottom flat at Keswick Place, he was going into hiding after being chased across the Atlantic by somebody who owed him something for double crossing them. He was at the end of his tether, and that cough of his was finishing him.'

'Who was chasing him?'

'His twin brother, Alfred. They were as alike as two peas, and owing to a mistake in an identity parade after Konrad had cracked a crib in Canada, Alfred was nabbed and juggled for it, while Konrad got away. When Alfred got out, he began looking for his brother, and the hunt ended last night.'

Detective Ellington looked up sharply.

'Then it wasn't George Baines— or, rather Konrad Clark— Smith said good evening to in the entrance to the flats?'

'It wasn't. When we question Smith again we can be sure he never heard that fellow cough, and the reason the man didn't reply was because the business he was on didn't put him in a communicative mood. It was Konrad's brother, Alfred— trying to get into the flat that had been bolted against him. Failing his efforts at the front, Alfred went round to the garden to try the back. The back windows were open.'

The superintendent paused. 'And now, Ellington, suppose you finish it for me?'

The detective put himself into the position of the pursued brother, while recalling the full details of Robert Smith's statement.

'I think I can do it, he said. 'Smith heard two shots.'

'Yes, we might have developed that point before,' remarked the superintendent. 'That was one of the frills you left out.'

'Thanks for rubbing it in. The first shot was Ablett's. The fool really did fire at a cat! He wasn't going to have yowling added to coughing. The second shot was Konrad Clark's— alias George Baines. He was at the window, watching for Alfred, and in his panic he thought the first shot came from Alfred— though, of course, nothing actually went his way.

So he shot back. And down went Alfred. And away ran Konrad in a brain storm—'

'As Ablett did a minute or two later,' interposed the superintendent. 'Queer if they'd taken the same direction— two men bunking together from the same corpse! But you've still got to tell me how Konrad died?'

'That's easy. Didn't you say he was at the end of his tether— and that his cough was finishing him?'

The superintendent nodded.

'He didn't spend his night at an hotel, like Ablett. He was picked up in the early morning outside the hospital to which he'd managed to drag himself, was taken in, and when he came to made his statement. A doctor, two nurses, and myself heard him make his statement, and I took it down. So now, Ellington, we've got our evidence and motive complete and we can both be satisfied.'

'Sure, sure,' admitted the detective, with a smile, 'but since you're so keen on motives, there's one that seems to be missing.'

'Oh, what's that?'

'Why did Konrad make, his statement?'

The superintendent wagged his head.

'It's too late now to ask him,' he replied, 'but I'm not worrying about that. Even crooks, you know, sometimes like to die clean. But suppose we leave the dead and get back to the living? Isn't it time we went to soothe poor old Wilfred Ablett?'

3: The Ten-Franc Counter

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863–1951

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OF ALL PLACES in the modern European world Monte Carlo is the most fascinating. It is most beautiful when seen from a distance as I see it now from my window in Bordighera with the sun full upon it; as I will see it this evening after dark, a spray of coloured lights, winked at by the far revolving light of Cap Ferrat.

Monte Carlo, as I sit smoking at night, sometimes reminds me of a beautiful woman— perhaps because of the necklace effect of the lights— and Cap Ferrat of the attitude of the world to her. The world winks at Monte Carlo and her doings; she is beautiful, she is fascinating, she makes men lose their heads; like all the great loved women of the past she has her private graveyard; she is detestable, which is part of her charm, and she ought long ago to have come under the hands of Monsieur Diebler, or whoever it is that has taken his place.

But there is no Diebler who deals with cities or towns; a town may be a murderer, like Monte Carlo, and a State a confederate, like Monaco, but there is no law to bring them to book, no punishment as yet, not even the mild punishment of reform.

Of course you will understand that I am writing of the tables, that conglomeration of roulette basins— little whirlpools that are yet capable of sucking a man's soul down into the drain-pipes of perdition.

To show you the power exercised by this suction I am going to tell you the story of Madame Bertaux, and that the powder of instruction may be properly balanced by the jam of amusement I am going to give it to you in its full detective dress as it was told to me by one of the international detectives who are always hunting this coast for international crooks. He was an elderly man with a Kalmuck type of face, yellow as old ivory from cigarette smoking, and he told me the yarn to exhibit the powers of M. Henri, of the Paris Sûreté— and for another reason.

Have you ever heard of the case of Madame Bertaux? he asked. Ah, well, she was an old lady who lived in the house of a M. Jacob in the Rue Paradis at Monte Carlo. The house was too large for M. Jacob, so he let the upper part as a flat to Madame Bertaux, a wealthy woman who had kept the old Phocée, a restaurant on the Rue de la Cannebière, of Marseilles. The lady never went out; she was afflicted with some malady of the back that prevented her from walking, and also an eczema that was most disfiguring; she had neither the power nor the desire to go into society, and yet she had the woman's craving for dress and adornment quite unimpaired.

She was very proud of her jewels, which were, in fact, very fine and worth a considerable sum of money. She was never happier than when dressing herself in them— rings, bracelets, brooches, ear-rings and so on— and when she was not wearing them she had the box containing them by her bed or couch so that she could touch them and see them. She also kept in her possession a good deal of loose cash.

All this exercised the mind of M. Jacob, and several times he pointed out to her the danger of valuables kept in a house in such a manner.

'Oh, nobody knows,' said she, 'only Rosalie, and she is safe. Who would bother coming to rob an old woman like me? Besides, I'd be able to defend myself against them if only by screeching for help. And,' she said, 'they amuse me, which they wouldn't if they were locked up in the bank; and I don't want to be told my business, not even by you, M. Jacob.' In fact, they might have fought, only that he knew her queer ways and that she was an invalid, and refused to get angry with her.

Well, one evening Madame Bertaux was found with her head battered in and her jewels gone. The case was left.

The window was open. There were marks on a drain-pipe close to the window showing where a man had evidently crawled up; otherwise there were very few marks at all, and the room was not disturbed, though from a drawer in an *escritoire* by the door ten louis in gold had been taken, pre-war money treasured by the old lady and tied in a handkerchief. She had in her possession a roll of notes of the value of ten thousand francs; they had not been touched.

There were no finger-marks anywhere. I was at *déjeuner* in the Hotel de Paris with M. Henri that morning when the Chief of Police of Monaco was shown in to us. He came about a certain person who has no connection with this story, and when he had done his business he mentioned the murder in the Rue Paradis. You know the police mind thinks in the form of reports, and this good gentleman, once he had set his speech machine going, gave us a complete *précis* of the details of the business, everything but the exhibits, in fact.

'We arrested a young man, Coudoyer, lover of the servant Rosalie, this morning,' he finished. 'We found in his pockets very little money, but in his box at the inn where he is employed, an old-fashioned watch which belonged to the dead woman, and which he said had been given to him long ago by the servant Rosalie, who had it as a present from Madame Bertaux. It's all pretty plain.'

He went into more details about M. Jacob, the owner of the house, Madame Bertaux, and so forth, till Henri cut him short.

'Did you find any finger-marks?' asked Henri.

'No,' said the Chief.

'And this young man, Coudoyer, what is he like?'

'Oh, quite a simple person,' the Chief answered him. 'Just a waiter, and with a good record, the last person in the world you'd suspect of doing a thing like this.'

'There were no finger-marks, which shows an expert was at work,' said Henri, 'and you have arrested Coudoyer?'

'On suspicion,' said the other, 'and on finding that watch in his trunk.'

'Yes,' said the Paris man; 'but the thing you didn't find was finger-marks, yet a woman had been murdered and furniture handled by the murderer. Your judgment must be wrong about Coudoyer; he must be no simple person, but an expert criminal; either that, or you have arrested the wrong man.'

That seemed pretty conclusive, but the Monaco man didn't get enthusiastic over it; he seemed rather to resent Henri's deductions, which cast a shadow on his own intelligence.

'We must go by what we find,' said he. 'We searched very thoroughly for finger-marks on all surfaces possible, even to the table legs, even to a ten-franc Casino counter lying on the floor by the bureau. We may not be equal in intelligence to Paris, but we are thorough.'

That was a hit at Henri, for it was after the botching of the Jondret affair in Paris, which, however, wasn't Henri's doing; however, the little man took it up and swelled out his chest. You've never seen Henri? Well, he's a little man with a pointed beard, and when he gets in a temper he puffs himself out— like that...

'Yes, you seem to be thorough,' said he. 'You actually find a ten-franc Casino counter on the floor, and then you arrest a resident of Monte Carlo, or at least an employee, for you know well that employees are not allowed in the Casino. Now, tell me,' said Henri, 'didn't it hit you at once that the ten-franc counter must have been dropped by the murderer and no one else?'

'How do you mean?' said the other.

'This way. It wasn't the old lady's if your statement about her is correct, for she never went out; it isn't Rosalie's, and it isn't Coudoyer's, for they are employees and can't use the Casino; it isn't M. Jacob's, because he is, as you said, a resident engaged in business, and can't use the Casino. It must evidently have belonged to a person who was neither of these people, who was neither Madame Bertaux nor M. Jacob nor Rosalie nor Coudoyer, some person other than any of these people who are known to have used Madame Bertaux's room or been connected with it; it most evidently belonged to a stranger, a fifth person, and a person, moreover, who has or had the entry to the Casino.'

'A moment,' said the Chief. 'That argument seems tempting; but suppose Coudoyer had that counter in his possession at the time of the murder and dropped it by accident? It is not impossible for a waiter to acquire a Casino counter; it might have been given to him, it might have been picked up by him, it might have come into his possession in several different ways.'

'Just so,' said M. Henri; 'but the most probable way for it to come into his possession would be through the Casino. In these cases we must move in the direction pointed out by the finger of Probability; in our work there is no certainty, otherwise there would be little work for us to do. I take it, then, the probability is that a person who had been playing at the Casino, and who had a counter left over, forgotten in his or her pocket— a thing that often happens, I assure you— paid a visit to the rooms of Madame Bertaux, and through accident dropped and left behind the counter.

'Now, what does that prove? Very little, you will say, yet to me it seems that here is evidence not without value.

'We can say, to begin with, that it is highly probable the counter was dropped neither by Coudoyer nor Rosalie nor M. Jacob, none of whom have the entrée to the Casino, nor Madame Bertaux, who was an invalid, but by someone else. Madame Bertaux had no friends. I understand from you that neither M. Jacob nor Rosalie knew of any visitors. Therefore the counter must have been dropped by a visitor who came in secret, or at least in a manner which drew the attention of no one in the house.

'A curious thing for anyone to pay a visit like that. Now, when we come across anything strange or curious in this world, time or common sense will often put in our hands a solution quite simple.

'There would be something curious in the secret conduct of this stranger if he came for a good and not for an evil purpose. We, in fact, find the old lady murdered, and we say to ourselves: "'Here is the fruit of the purpose that inspired our stranger— there is nothing curious in the matter at all. He came in secret to murder her.'"

""There is nothing curious in the matter at all."" That is the motto that every detective ought to take; every baffling crime seems at first sight to have something curious in its texture or make-up; but that is not so; in nearly every case the seeming strangeness is an illusion due to scanty or muddled evidence.'

'Well,' said the Chief of Police, 'what you say seems just, and if we could find the man who owned the counter your argument would bear heavily against him. We fancy we have found him in Coudoyer. Well, seeing you have taken an interest in this business, why not give us the benefit of your experience? Come and examine the chief parties in the affair for yourself, and look at the room.'

'I will do that with pleasure,' said M. Henri.

We left the hotel and went straight to the Rue Paradis. The body had been removed, but the room was in just the same state as when the tragedy was discovered. It was a pleasant, sunlit room on the first floor, with a window opening upon a small balcony. M. Henri went first to the balcony and inspected the drain-pipe by which the assassin had climbed; then he returned and stood with his hands behind his back looking at the room. Opposite the window there

was a sofa, and by the window was the armchair in which the invalid had been sitting when she was attacked.

Small objects of furniture stood about, including a fragile table bearing a vase of flowers; on another table stood the jewel-box, empty.

M. Henri, having inspected all these things individually, asked that Rosalie, the maid, should be called. The girl, when she came into the room, did not strike me very favourably. She was pretty, but pert-looking, shallow, just the tool one might fancy a scoundrel would easily handle. I confess, when I saw her, my belief in the innocence of Coudoyer was not increased.

'Tell me,' said M. Henri, 'what were you doing last night at nine o'clock?'

'I have already told Monsieur the Inspector,' replied she. 'I was with a friend.'

'She was with Coudoyer,' put in the Chief. 'Several people saw them together at twenty minutes to nine; after that no one saw them together. Her story is that they walked about together. She returned at half-past nine, after the crime had been discovered.'

'That will do,' said M. Henri, and he dismissed Rosalie. Then he turned to the Chief. 'Give me the girl's story,' said he, 'as she told it to you.'

'There was very little more,' replied the other. 'She parted, so she said, with Coudoyer at the corner of the Rue Marcell at twenty minutes past nine. He went for a walk by himself and returned home at ten.'

'And the murder was committed at nine?'

'Yes.'

'Who discovered the body?'

'M. Jacob. He was seated downstairs, reading, at nine o'clock, when he fancied he heard a cry. He thought it was from the rooms above, and then he fancied it was from the street. He went on reading, but felt, somehow, uneasy, went upstairs and knocked at the old lady's door, got no answer, and opened the door. Then he telephoned for the police.'

'Tell me,' said M. Henri, 'why haven't you arrested that girl as well as Coudoyer?'

'She's as good as arrested,' replied the other; 'she can't escape, and we are just letting her play about for a few days. Coudoyer had accomplices. None of the jewellery has been recovered, with the exception of that old watch which he swore was given him by Rosalie, who had it as a present from the old lady.'

'Let's have a talk with M. Jacob,' said Henri.

We went to the flat below, and found M. Jacob in. A middle-sized, prosperous-looking, elderly person, greatly disturbed by the tragedy of the night before. He told us all he knew. He had never heard of the gift of the watch to Rosalie, though, indeed, as he pointed out, it was little likely that he should have heard of it, for though he was on good terms with the old lady and often went

up to have a chat with her, a little affair of that sort would scarcely be mentioned between them.

'You never saw or heard of a Casino counter in her possession?' asked Henri.

M. Jacob was greatly astonished at the question: the police had not told him of the finding of the counter. No, he had never seen one in the possession of the old lady, it was the most unlikely thing for her to have, and no one else in the house would possess such a thing. Then we took our departure, to visit Coudoyer, who was held at the police department under arrest.

He was a pale-faced individual, with restless, shifty eyes. He did not impress me favourably; but, still, I would never judge a man by his appearance.

He told a tale substantially the same as that given by the servant Rosalie. He protested that his character was good, that his employers could speak well of him, that he was engaged to be married to Rosalie— and would a man about to marry commit a crime like that?

He said that he had never been even on the steps of the Casino.

He admitted that it was possible to pick up a counter dropped by some gambler in the café where he served, or in the street, but stated emphatically that he had not done so.

Yes, the watch, that was the only thing they had against him, but it had been given him by the girl; he could not prove this, because Madame Bertaux was dead, but it was a fact. Then, half unwillingly, but evidently speaking the truth, he said that he believed, or had strong suspicion, that Rosalie was not faithful to him; that she had a 'young man' other than himself. But he could give no name; the thing was a suspicion based on something she had mentioned.

That was what he had to say both on his own account and in answer to questions. When he was removed, the Chief turned to M. Henri.

'Now,' said he, 'you have seen all the important people in connection with this case, and here is a diagram showing the position in which the body was when found. What's your opinion?'

'I haven't any fixed opinion just yet,' said M. Henri, 'but from what I have seen I believe that man will be convicted. Monte Carlo never guillotines, so he will not pay the extreme penalty, and after a while it is possible he may regain his freedom.' A strange sort of speech, to which the Chief listened with a half-smile.

'And what about Rosalie?' he asked.

'I can't say anything about her,' replied Henri. 'I'm only telling the fortune of Coudoyer.'

'You would make your fortune as a fortune-teller,' said the Chief; 'you speak so convincingly.'

'I believe I could make money at that business,' replied the other; 'and legitimately, for my fortune-telling would be based on circumstance and

character. I say Coudoyer may regain his freedom, for the simple reason that in my belief Coudoyer is innocent. Mind you, that is only a belief.'

'And you base it—?'

'On the ten-franc counter, and on Rosalie's "young man," the existence of whom I half believe in.'

'That eternal counter!'

'Yes, that eternal counter— and other things that it seems to have revealed to me.'

'What are they?'

'I cannot tell you; you would say, "'Oh, this is nonsense!'" and besides, to let daylight in on half-formed ideas tends to shrivel them; and besides, to talk is fatal in a case like this: walls have ears, ideas have wings. I believe the murderer is now walking about Monte Carlo; I believe this climber of drain-pipes and assassin of old ladies fancies himself secure, but that, at a whisper, a breath of air, he would take measures which would prevent him ever from being caught. But this I will do if you like: I will lend you Malmaison, of the Paris Sûreté; he is not in very good health, and a change to the sunny South will do him good. He will come here, of course, as a private individual; nobody knows him here; and if he is successful the credit will go to you, for he is not longing after notoriety.'

You may be sure the Chief did not hesitate to accept this offer; it was all to the good and nothing to pay, for Paris and Monte Carlo are very necessary to one another and often lend mutual assistance without the exchange of a franc.

So it was settled.

After that and for a long time I heard nothing more. My business took me to Vienna and Rome. I heard, indeed, that Coudoyer and the girl had been condemned, both to imprisonment, and for life. Henri had prophesied truly, though he had not included the girl in his forecast. Then one day, and in pursuit of my business, I returned to Monte Carlo, only to find that the man on whose tracks I had been travelling had doubled back and been arrested at Milan. I was pretty much disgusted. I had committed a fault; he had got wind of me, and my reputation would suffer.

Being what you call at a loose end that evening, I went to the Casino. I don't care for music or plays, but people always interest me, especially the Casino crowd, and there I went; and scarcely had I made the tour of the rooms when whom should I find but Malmaison.

He was dressed to represent the part of a well-to-do business man, but I could not mistake him. I must tell you about Malmaison— that he is the most self-obliterating person in the world. In Paris he adopts a disguise; his name is unknown, never published in the papers; that is why he is so deadly. Here in Monte Carlo his best disguise was to be his real self.

I knew him, but then I am in the inner circle. Our eyes met, and I saw at once that I was not to speak. Then he turned from the table, and as he turned I saw the hand which was behind his back close twice.

I followed him slowly as he walked away, followed him through the room, stopping occasionally to look at the play, followed him outside, past *Ciro's*, and along a road leading to the *Rue Paradis*. Here he stopped, and we spoke to each other. *Henri* must have told him of my knowledge of the *Bertaux* affair, for he began to speak of it at once.

'And it is fortunate I met you to-night,' said he, 'for things have come to a crisis. I believe I have got my man; indeed, I could have pointed him out to you in the room where he was playing. He did not see me, I only got a glimpse of him, but to-night I expect he will re-visit the house where the murder took place and where I have taken rooms.'

'Taken rooms?' said I.

'Yes,' he said. '*Madame Bertaux's* flat was to let; people weren't anxious to rent it just after the crime, so *M. Jacob*, who owns the place and lives below, let it to me. I have been there a good while watching the *Casino* and the strangers who have come to *Monte Carlo*. I had to wait a good while, but I found my man— and my woman.'

'Who was the woman?'

'*Rosalie*— she was justly condemned.'

'And the man—?'

'Was her young man, a rival to *Coudoyer*.'

'And to-night,' I said, 'you expect him to re-visit the scene of the crime. What bait have you put out for him?'

'You'll see,' said *Malmaison*.

We had reached the door, and he opened it with a latch-key. The door of *M. Jacob's* flat was closed.

'You haven't told *M. Jacob*?'

'Not a word,' he replied. 'I believe in *Henri's* motto, which is "'Be dumb.'" He believes I am just a prosperous rentier, and as I pay my rent in advance he doesn't bother about anything else. Why should I tell him?'

He led the way up, and I found myself again in *Madame Bertaux's* room; but very different it looked now, with cigar and cigarette boxes about and glasses and other signs of good cheer.

Malmaison made me take the arm-chair, then he opened the window and left it standing half open.

'You expect him to come through the window?'

'Let us expect nothing,' said he. 'I believe in *Henri's* idea that not only ought one to be dumb, but that, given a true theory, too many brains in the know may

set up ether vibrations warning the criminal. However, a sketch of how the case stands up to a certain point will do no harm.'

He offered me a cigar and went on:

'I came here on seemingly an impossible task, but M. Henri had given me an idea of how to set to work. It was only during the last few days, however, that the truth became quite evident. The criminal is first of all and above everything else a gambler; the crime was committed to recoup his gambling losses. He has a cousin who runs an hotel here. A very shady man, this cousin. He it was, I suspect, who turned the stolen jewellery into money; a worse man, perhaps, than the actual murderer, who was urged by Play and the Devil to commit his crime.'

As Malmaison talked and as I looked at him, noticing his good clothes, his large watch-chain and the rings on his fingers, the idea came to me that the bait he had put down to catch the assassin was himself, and it gave me a very queer sensation, the thought that through that open window the tiger might suddenly appear. However, I said nothing, and he went on:

'The criminal has two addresses here. One is the hotel owned by his cousin. He doesn't stay there; he has a house of his own, a pleasant little house which he picked up cheap and where he lives free of taxes, the only drawback being that when he wants to play at the Casino he can't, owing to the fact that he's a resident employed in a bank. He is also a man with a certain power over women, and so it came about that Rosalie fell under his spell.

'Now you will see how things conspired to bring this man to his undoing. He has a brother very like himself who travels in wine for Meyer and Capablanca, of Bordeaux.

'This brother, when he visits Monte Carlo, stops at the cousin's hotel and plays at the Casino, and one fine day it occurred to the criminal, who was then only a bank cashier, to drop into the Casino under the brother's name and giving the address the brother had always given. The chief difference between the two men was the fact that the brother wore glasses. So you see it was quite an easy matter to buy a pair of glasses, and, handing the brother's card over the counter, gain admittance— or use his ticket for the season.

'Well, there you are: a man well-to-do and comfortable, yet sucked by the whirlpool of the tables— drawn into the net. Most likely the first time he went in under the guise of his brother he thought it would be the last; he just went in to see the play and have a flutter. Then the passion grew. Or it may be that he was a gambler at heart with a passion full grown to be satisfied— who knows? One can only say that the tables took him and turned him into a murderer, and that Henri jumped to the fact that the man who dropped that ten-franc counter might be a resident who played at the Casino under disguise.'

Malmaison rose and held up a finger.

'Here he is,' said he.

I could hear a far-away step in the silent street outside.

Malmaison closed the window.

'Why do you close the window?' I asked.

'I only left it open to let in a footstep,' said he. 'Come, this gentleman will enter boldly by the front door, if I am not mistaken. Quick!'

I took my hat and followed him downstairs to the hall, where we stood waiting while the footsteps paused outside. The hall light was on. We heard the noise of the key in the latch; the door opened, and a man entered. It was only M. Jacob.

I pitied Malmaison. I felt like a man watching a play which has suddenly broken down, a hunter who hears the footsteps of a tiger and finds them to be the footsteps of a lamb.

'Good evening, monsieur,' said Jacob when he saw Malmaison.

'Good evening,' replied the other. 'I was just going to show my friend out. How fortunate we have met, for my friend wished to ask you some questions concerning real estate in Monte Carlo.'

'Come into my room,' said M. Jacob, 'and we can talk.'

He opened the door of his flat and we entered the sitting-room, where he put on the light and offered us cigarettes, which Malmaison refused.

'Monsieur Jacob,' said he whilst we took seats, 'excuse my asking, but how much money did you make playing at the Casino to-night?'

The murderer rose to his feet at this terrible question, the full weight of which he had not quite realised. He knew he was caught, but not how seriously.

'Ah!' said he— 'a spy of the bank!'

'No,' said Malmaison, 'I have nothing to do with the bank of which you are cashier. I am a police officer in search of a certain ten-franc counter which was dropped—'

He did not finish the sentence. Jacob had made a dash for the door.

The struggle did not last a minute.

It wasn't much, for I had managed, seeing the truth, to seize Jacob from behind. We found the glasses in his pocket and a large number of banknotes which he had won that night. At the Bureau of Police, where we brought him, he was told that his cousin, the hotelkeeper, had confessed to the whole business; this was an untruth, but it served, for in his anger he rounded on the cousin and told how he had disposed of the jewels. Both men received life sentences. He rounded on Rosalie, the girl who had begun by stealing the antique watch as a present for Coudoyer and ended by assisting M. Jacob in his plans, the girl who had not given him away simply because she would have had to give herself away too, and who took her condemnation and sentence without a word, knowing she would do herself no good through freeing Coudoyer; feeling perhaps jealous

that Coudoyer should escape whilst she had to suffer. Women are strange things.

I have told you the story for two reasons. First of all, it is interesting as it shows the methods of M. Henri. He seized directly on the really essential thing, the counter. When he mentioned the counter to M. Jacob he saw at once what I did not see, that Jacob was the man who had dropped it, saw it by some subtle signal in the man's manner. Also, it seemed to him that the drain-pipe by which the assassin was supposed to have climbed was too fragile to support a grown man, and that the marks on it were 'artificial.'

When he sent Malmaison to Monte Carlo he told him to watch Jacob and, if possible, to secure the rooms left vacant by the death of Madame Bertaux.

Now, if Jacob had been a really clever man he would never have gone to the Casino again after the finding of that counter by the police, but, lulled to security by the conviction of Coudoyer and the girl, and little dreaming how that counter had talked to Henri, instead of destroying those fatal glasses he put them on and walked into the trap.

It was the finding of those glasses on him that really broke him down and saved a long trial by inducing him to confess.

The other reason for my telling you this story is to show you the pull of the tables and exhibit to you the men who run them as what they are, men who for the sake of profit sacrifice men to the Demon of Play.

The Demon kills a man every day on an average at Monte Carlo, kills him by his own hand and sends his soul to perdition. And what shall we say of the men who do not commit suicide yet are ruined; of their wives and children?

I am no priest; my business in life is the taking of criminals— criminals— criminals, but what shall we say of the men who are licensed by society to kill for gain?

Are they so much better than M. Jacob?

He crossed and put another cigarette-end on the pile in the ash-tray.

I did not answer his question. I was looking through the open window and the balmy night at the jewelled necklace of Monte Carlo, and the far-off light of Cap Ferrat winking across the sea.

4: The Golden Idol

J. Jefferson Farjeon

Detective Fiction Weekly 13 April 1929

The author wrote numerous short stories featuring Detective Xavier Crook from about 1925 onward.

"GO away! D'you hear? Go away!" shouted Harry Tenby.

The library door closed with a little click. Three minutes later he lay dead on the carpet.

There was no sign of struggle. The furniture was not disarranged, the standard lamplight still glowed with amber mellowness; but a little cool breeze flowed in through the open French window, and some four feet from the dead man's head lay a bloodstained handkerchief.

In the distance, across a night-black fringe of foliage, a church clock chimed eleven. Two minutes ahead of the church, a little brass clock on the mantelpiece ticked restlessly. Ticked away the hours of twelve, and one, and two, informed of its impatience each hour by the leisurely, distant chimes.

Three. Four. Five. The nightblack fringe of foliage took on a gray hue. Six. Birds stirred, waking the eaves, and a hoarse cock announced the day. Seven. The library door opened, again with a little click. Some one gasped.

The silent room, with its grim inmate, and its incongruous amber glow from the standard lamp, became suddenly alive. Forms flitted about. Voices whispered above the dead man's form.

Eight. The voices grew louder; they whispered less.

Nine. The room lost all its privacy. It became the center of buzzing officialdom; was pervaded with heavy significance. A picture of the Battle of Waterloo, slightly askant on the wall, was stared at with rude suspicion, and a volume of poems by Humbert Wolfe, innocently leaning against Wells's *History of the World* in a bookcase, became ridiculously significant.

Ten. Eleven. A dozen hours ago the form on the ground had been alive. An inspector stared at it meditatively, then suddenly turned. A newcomer had entered the room.

"Ah, Crook!" the inspector exclaimed. "Glad to see you! We've got a ticklish job on here."

"So I gather," answered Crook, his eyes on the silent figure. "What's known so far? Leave out theories for the moment." ,

The inspector nodded.

"All that's known so far," he replied, "is— that!" He pointed downward. "The parlor maid found him this morning at seven o'clock. He was lying just as he is now. Lamp up— as you see. Nothing's been altered."

Crook's eyes swept the room.

"No sign of a struggle," he commented.

"No," replied the inspector. "It must have been done— quick."

"That handkerchief?"

"It was lying just there. I did look at that, but it's replaced."

"Finger-prints?"

"Nothing to report in that line yet."

"Who saw him last?"

A slight frown came into the inspector's eyes.

"Ah— I was wrong when I said nothing else was known at the moment. It seems that Mr. Tenby's butler saw him last. And Mr. Tenby's butler has disappeared."

"That's interesting. And when was the butler seen last?"

"Shortly before eleven. A maid, passing on her way to bed, saw him go into the library— this room we're now in— and a few minutes later, when she was passing again—"

"Why did she pass a second time if the first time she was on her way to bed?" interposed Crook.

"She says she forgot something. A book. She reads before going to sleep. I've checked that."

"Well? Go on."

"The second time she heard voices raised. Mr. Tenby seemed angry. She heard him shouting: 'Go away, do you hear? Go away!'"

Crook considered the words.

"Is that all she heard?" he asked.

"All I can get out of her," answered the inspector. "She's a bit hysterical."

"So— coming now to theories— the superficial, schoolboy theory would be: Tenby quarrels with his butler over some matter unknown; the butler kills him and runs away. By the way, has the butler's bed been slept in?"

The inspector shook his head.

"You're searching for him?"

"Obviously."

"What's the doctor's report? How long has Mr. Tenby been dead?"

"He was alive at eleven o'clock last night— that we know. 'The medical evidence suggests that life was extinct before twelve. Wound inflicted by some sharp instrument. And no sign of the sharp instrument.'"

"Anything stolen— as far as you know?"

"Nothing."

"Papers reveal anything? Letters?"

"Not so far."

"Heard anything that might account for the tragedy— apart from the assumed quarrel with the butler?"

"Blank again. Nothing."

"Then why do you call this case a ticklish one?' inquired the detective. "You've got some nice superficial evidence on which to search for a butler, haven't you?"

"Well, of course, we're searching for that butler," retorted the inspector. "What do you think? But— come here— to the window."

They walked to the window, and the inspector pointed to some impressions in the earth outside.

"Big foot, that," he said. "The butler takes size seven. There's not a boot in the establishment that will fill those impressions. And they're newly made, too."

"Good," grunted Crook, his eyes lighting. "That's important. I rather thought you had something up your sleeve, inspector."

"I wish I had the boot that fits those impressions up my sleeve," returned the inspector, smiling sourly. "We've got a double trail here, and I'm blessed if I know what to make of 'em."

ii

CROOK bent down and examined the footprints carefully. Then he searched the adjacent grass, while the inspector stood by watching.

"I can't find any more," said the inspector. "The ground's pretty hard, and we've only got these because some of Mr. Tenby's special flowers happen to be growing there. The servants had orders to water these every evening, and that's what made the earth soft."

"I suppose," observed Crook, as he straightened himself, "you don't happen to have that boot that isn't up your sleeve on your foot?"

The inspector grinned.

"Oh, my boots fit there, right enough," he confessed. "I've a useful toe, as you see." He advanced his big boot, unashamedly. "Only, if you want to pursue that line, sir, I'll have no difficulty in producing my alibi."

"Well— just for the sake of argument— let's have it!"

"Right. Between ten and one o'clock last night, I was trying— unsuccessfully— to trace one Jim Smith who's been terrorizing Downthorpe, three miles from here."

"Burglar?"

"That's right. We'll get him presently."

"But you didn't get him last night— in Downthorpe."

"Didn't see his shadow."

"Do you think you might have found him if you'd searched— here?"

The inspector whistled. He stared at Crook, then at the earth.

"By Jove, that's an idea!" he exclaimed.

"But does it account for the vanished butler?"

"It might! Let's see if we can fit the pieces. Smith comes here, and— "

He paused abruptly. A constable was approaching, rather breathlessly, across the lawn.

"We've found Davis, sir," he reported, with big eyes.

"No, have you?" cried the inspector, and turned quickly to Crook. "That's the butler— Davis." He swung back to the constable. "Well, get on with it. Where is he?"

"In the pond," answered the constable.

The inspector gave an exclamation, and looked at his companion.

"Pond, eh?" he muttered. "That makes another piece to fit in, eh? Well— come along!"

"How far is the pond from here?" asked Crook.

"Don't know. There's more than one. Which pond is it?" he inquired of the constable.

"Arf a mile off," replied the policeman. "Through them woods. They're bringin' 'im out now."

The inspector made a movement, but Crook interposed.

"Better leave some one to watch the library," he suggested.

The constable heard the remark, and inwardly groaned. He wasn't too keen on the library. He'd really rather have been a cinema actor than a constable. It was much more interesting watching a corpse fished out of a pond. Still, duty was duty, and for half an hour he waited in the library while his superiors enjoyed better sport.

Davis, the butler, was as dead as his master. The doctor, who declared subsequently that he had never had such a busy morning, pronounced the opinion that the butler had been dead almost as long as Mr. Tenby.

"Drowned, obviously," he said, "but whether by his own hand or another's— well, I leave that for you to determine, gentlemen."

"Looks to me like suicide," confided the inspector, to Crook. "Kills his master, and then saves the hangman a job." "O Why should he kill his master?" asked Crook, as they walked back to the house. "We want a motive."

"We know they quarreled."

"Do we? I don't think so. A sharp order isn't necessarily a quarrel. Suppose— " He paused, and revolved an idea that had come into his mind.

"What?" queried the inspector.

"I must interview that housemaid— that's what," responded Crook. "Send for her, will you?"

They reached the house, and while waiting for the maid Crook made a further examination of the library. The constable watched him, and suddenly jumped.

"What have you moved the handkerchief for?" demanded Crook, and his voice sounded like a pistol shot.

"I just took it up, sir— " began the constable.

"Then just put it down again," snapped Crook. "Surely you know better than to move things before you're given permission?"

The constable colored, grew more convinced than ever that he ought to have taken up film acting, lifted the gruesome handkerchief from the table on which he had placed it, and dropped it on the floor.

"Was it as near the body as that?" inquired Crook, frowning.

"A bit farther off, sir, I think," said the constable. "More there, like."

"Yes— that's better. I remember it was there, by the pattern on the carpet." Crook's voice had lost its anger. You cannot concentrate while you are indignant, and Crook was concentrating now on the handkerchief. "Now, how did it get in that exact position?" he murmured. "It's beyond the dead man's reach. Though— of course— he may have dropped it."

"Floated down, like," suggested the constable poetically, trying to reinstate himself.

"Perhaps. And yet, do you notice, constable, that if the handkerchief had floated down, like— from the position of the body, it would probably have floated down on the other side. The attack assumedly came from the window. Everything points to that. The handkerchief is one of Mr. Tenby's. You cannot fight with a handkerchief. It either lay by his side when the attack came— but, then, why should he take it up?— or was in his hand at the moment, and so became involved? Perhaps he was about to blow his nose. 'Then— a few seconds later— it was used to try and stanch a wound, Yes— but Mr. Tenby's wound much have been beyond stanching."

He paused, then turned sharply. The housemaid was standing before him.

iii

HE scrutinized her keenly for a second or two, placed her in a category, then asked:

"You are the maid who heard Davis's voice in this room last night?"

"No, I didn't hear Davis's voice, sir," answered the maid tremulously. "I never said I heard his voice."

Crook nodded approvingly. The maid was calm now, despite her nervousness, and the fact that he had not tripped her up in this little detail impressed him with her usefulness as a witness.

"Please repeat what you heard."

"It was Mr. Tenby's voice. 'Go away,' he said. 'Do you hear? Go away!'" She paused. "He spoke sharp— that's why I heard."

"Did he seem in a rage?"

"No. I wouldn't say that."

"Very angry, then?"

"A bit angry, yes, sir. Irritated, as you might say."

"They weren't actually quarreling, then?"

"No, sir."

"Now, listen. This is important. Is there no other word— even one single word— that you can remember having heard?"

The maid flushed a little.

"Yes, sir," she said. "I was that upset that I couldn't think of it when the inspector asked me. But I've been thinking it all over, and I do remember the words, 'look after myself.' He said them just before the others. 'Look after myself.' "

Crook's eyes brightened. He leaned forward, and exclaimed, "This is important! Were the words in the form of a statement or a question?"

The maid did not seem to understand. "Listen," he said, and repeated the three words, " 'Look after myself.' That's a statement. 'Look after myself?' That's a question. Which was it more like?"

"It was a question," answered the maid.

"Thank you," replied Crook. "That's all, for the moment. You can go."

He also dismissed the constable, and ten minutes later the inspector came upon him in a brown study.

"Getting anywhere?" asked the inspector. "If you're not— / am!"

"Where are you getting?" inquired Crook.

"I've got Jim Smith," said the inspector. "Just been on the phone. They took him half an hour ago, and it's pretty clear you were right, and he was around here last night. They've looked at his boots. Size eleven. Same as those prints outside the French window— and same as mine."

"Then Davis may have been warning his master," mused Crook, and the inspector looked at him sharply.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"I've just got a little more out of that housemaid than you did," the detective explained. "She heard three more words than she told you. Mr. Tenby said— assumedly to Davis, before dismissing him, 'Look after myself?' Was he a headstrong man, do you know? Plenty of pride?"

"That's it! You're right!" cried the inspector. " Davis heard noises, or rumors, and interviews Mr. Tenby before going to bed. ' Jim Smith's about, he says to Mr. Tenby. 'Thought I'd better tell you, sir.' Tenby is busy. A bit nervy. We all

are, at times. 'Think I don't know how to look after myself?' he cries. Davis is about to press his point, when Tenby rounds on him, 'Go away! D'you hear? Go away!'"

The inspector chuckled delightedly. "How's that, for our lost pieces, eh?"

"There's a bit more of the picture to fill in," replied Crook. "What happened then? Davis, not satisfied, went into the grounds. Smith creeps up to the window. Enters. Kills Mr. Tenby. Davis comes upon him There's a chase— and Davis ends his life in the pond. Pushed in by Smith, eh?"

"That would be about it," nodded the inspector.

"Well, if that's it," said Crook, "you'll have to find bloodstains on Smith somewhere or other, I should imagine, and you'll have to prove him the sort of man who would commit two murders in a single night. And you'll have to search for the doctor's 'sharp instrument.' A sandbag seems to me more in Smith's line."

"Yes, but— confound it— " began the inspector. "Well, then, what do you think?"

"How are you sure, then, that Davis was in this room?"

"I'd seen him go in."

"He might have come out again, without you knowing it?"

"Yes, sir. He might. But I wasn't gone long before I came by again myself, I think he was still there."

"I think you've nearly got the story, but not quite," replied Crook.

"What is the story?" demanded the inspector.

"I don't know yet," admitted Crook, "but I've a notion that handkerchief on the ground there may tell -me. Do you mind if I take it away?"

"Not at all. But what are you going to do with it?"

Crook smiled.

DETECTIVE CROOK had been summoned from Hampstead that morning. Now he returned, with the bloodstained handkerchief carefully preserved in his pocket, and locked himself in a large and not too appetizing room.

The room bristled with bottles, containing queer fluids; with microscopes and magnifying glasses; with instruments, reflectors, tubes, and powders.

The handkerchief was brought out. The instruments, the magnifying glasses, and the fluids got to work. When, in due course, it had told all it could tell to the ruthlessly inquiring mind that ransacked its secrets, Crook traveled back to its former home.

He went straight to the library, and found the inspector there.

"You haven't hanged Jim Smith yet, have you?" he asked, almost facetiously.

"No, not yet," responded the inspector. "Who shall I hang in his place?"

"Some one with a darker skin, for choice," suggested Crook.

"That'd be hard," answered the inspector. "Smith used to be a miner, and the coal's still in him." But, though he spoke lightly, he was looking at Crook rather hard.

"Coal washes off," said Crook. "Try some one whose dark skin won't wash off. Say— an Indian."

"Look here! What are you driving at?" demanded the inspector.

"I'm driving at an Indian. Some of his blood was on that handkerchief. We've got to fit that into our picture, haven't we?"

"How do you know it's an Indian's blood?"

"I know because I've tested it, and analyzed it. Did you think all blood was the same, inspector? It differs in every country. Yours and mine might be hard to tell apart, but if yours or mine were on one end of a handkerchief and the Spanish ambassador's on the other end, it would be easy to say which belonged to which."

"How'd you do that?"

"By examining its composition. There are two qualities in blood that vary in proportion according to nationality, or locality. Call one A, and the other B. Mr. Tenby's blood contained forty-three per cent of A and seven of B. I found some of his blood on the handkerchief. But somebody else's blood was also on the handkerchief, with only eighteen per cent of A, and as much as forty-one per cent of B. That points to India— indisputably."

"Does anything else point to India, though?" demanded the inspector.

"We'll have to put that question, I think, to Jim Smith," answered the detective. "But, first— can't you help me at all?"

Almost as the question was asked, the inspector gave an exclamation.

"Wait a bit— I've thought of something!" he cried. "An Indian Why — it was from an Indian's house that Smith made his last haul in Downthorpe! Does that fit into it anywhere?"

"It will be an amazing coincidence if it doesn't fit into it somewhere," responded Crook; and there was silence for a few moments. Then he asked: "What did Smith take from the Indian's house? Did you get any definite report about that?"

"Oh, yes. We've got a list. Money, trinkets, odds and ends, ornaments, a little gold idol— "

"You needn't travel beyond the idol," interrupted Crook, his eyes narrowing. "We've got to it, now— or to the general idea of it. It's just a question of fitting in small details. Suppose Smith stole, unwittingly, an idol that was particularly valued by this Indian? Suppose the Indian, burning with a hatred that only an Oriental mind could understand, tracked Smith, and followed him, and effected a meeting at last— in this very room? Suppose— "

"Wait a minute," interposed the inspector. "It's Tenby's been murdered, not Smith!"

"I know that. The best-laid schemes of mice and Indians go astray! Listen! The butler warns Tenby about Smith. He's got hold of some rumor. When Tenby hears Smith outside, he slips into some dark corner for a moment. In comes Smith. Almost before he knows it, in slips our Indian after him, knife raised. Seeing this, Tenby rushes out. In the scramble, Smith escapes, and Tenby gets the knife— but not before he has managed to do some damage to the Indian, too. There was the Indian's blood on the handkerchief, you remember."

"What about the butler?" asked the inspector.

"I'm coming to him. Smith gets away. He may not even have seen the Indian— it's conceivable. As soon as he saw Tenby he turned and fled. The butler, going into the grounds to satisfy himself, gets there too late to see Smith, but he sees the Indian flying out. There's a chase. It ends at the pond. And the poor butler gets the worst of it."

"By God!" muttered the inspector. "If that's so— Mr. Hoodi Singh will have something to answer for!"

"Let's go to Downthorpe, and hear his answer," suggested Crook.

THEY WENT to Downthorpe. Mr. Singh received them courteously. With Oriental caution, he listened to their story, gravely, inscrutably, his eyes appearing unnaturally bright in their environment of dark skin. He volunteered nothing until every detail had been given to him. Then he smiled.

"And so I have killed Mr. Tenby and his butler?" he observed.

"We have made no accusation," said Crook.

"Oh, no. And you will not, I think. If my blood was on the handkerchief there will be some wound from which the blood has flowed." He held up his hands calmly. "Examine me. My skin is whole. There is no mark upon it." He smiled again. "And last night, as three very dull people will testify, I tried to learn your English game of bridge. While Mr. Tenby was dying— I was not much happier."

"The coincidence is odd, you will admit?" suggested Crook.

"Who speaks of a coincidence?" replied Mr. Singh. "There is no such thing. Fate decides. If that gold idol had belonged to me, the man who had taken it might have died at my hands. Yes, him," he added contemplatively, "and not another, through foolish blundering."

"Do you know whom the idol did belong to?" inquired Crook suddenly.

"Oh, yes," returned Mr. Singh. "It belonged to my servant. The man who let you in. Did you not notice his bound wrist?"

"Oh— so that's it, is it?" cried the inspector, jumping up. "Then we'll have to see your servant!"

"I will ring for him," answered Mr. Hoodi Singh. He pressed a bell. "But I fear he may not come. You will not blame me, I hope, if he has had some start?"

HOODI SINGH'S servant did not come. Science had thrown its searchlight upon him for an instant, but it could not catch him. He disappeared into the void. And so, when Jim Smith's haul was eventually unearthed, did a little gold idol.

5: Grins and Bitters

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 2 April 1937

Newspaperman, Broadway producer, and movie producer, Mark Hellinger's life was a crowded one. For years he had a daily newspaper column which was originally intended to be a Broadway gossip column, but he presented it in the form of short stories, writing one a day for the best part of two decades. They were usually short and sharp, like this one. A few hundred of them also appeared in Australian newspapers in the 30s and 40s.

JINKS BURKE was incorrigible. Jinks was a huge, flat-domed, pig-eyed guy with the smile of an infant in arms. He was hopeless. Utterly hopeless. In tracing his life from cradle to cell, it becomes obvious that nothing could be done to make Jinks an honorable citizen.

Take a look: When he was four, he crawled out of bed one morning and set fire to the lace curtains in the parlor. The child wept when he saw all the excitement he had caused, but he showed no remorse.

At seven, he used to hitch on trolleys and steal pennies from newsstands. At nine, he kicked a schoolteacher in the shins, and at 10 he was dismissed from class and sent to the school for incorrigibles. At 11, he was arrested for shooting dice, and at 12 he could inhale a cigarette. At 13 he snatched purses. At 14, he was convicted of juvenile delinquency and sent to a reform school. At 16, he escaped and held up a candy store. At 17, he shot a man, and his career might have ended right there, but the victim didn't die. Jinks was a lovely egg.

When he reached 27, the law decided that it had reached the end of its patience with Jinks. When he had achieved his fourth felonious conviction, the judge sent him away for life.

The warden made a sweet welcome speech:—

"Jinks," he said, wagging a threatening finger, "I'll take no nonsense from you. Now get this straight. The first time I hear a complaint about your behavior, I'm gonna slap you into solitary so long you'll be talking to yourself when you come out.

"This institution has a good record. And it's going to stay good. I'm well acquainted with your trouble-making in other places, but you'll find that this pen is run along different lines."

The first thing that Jinks did was to organise the prisoners in his cell, block. When the guards opened the gates one morning, the prisoners refused to file out for work. They demanded— get this!— more humane conditions for the inmates! The strike lasted 35 hours. Hunger made most of them give up. Fear of punishment broke the backs of the others. That night, Jinks was downstairs in a little kennel of his own.

He later organised a plan of escape that was so beautifully complicated that he couldn't remember all the details himself. But someone tipped off the warden and again Jinks went downstairs to a private room. They gave him plenty of time to get remorseful, but Jinks didn't have brains enough to feel sorry. They took away his privileges. They gave him the toughest jobs. They made life miserable for him. But he still remained the same old hopeless Jinks Burke.

One day, a new reformer named Whipple tripped into the jail and went over the records with the warden.

"How many men have you here?" asked Mr. Whipple. The warden sighed.

"Two thousand one hundred four— and Jinks Burke."

"And Jinks Burke? Who's he?"

"Any warden's nightmare."

Whipple, sanctimonious and soft, asked a lot of questions about Jinks. The warden spared none of the horrible details. When it was over, Whipple said he would begin his reformation of the inmates with Jinks.

You just can't blame the warden for laughing rudely.

Mr. Whipple made very little progress. He talked to Jinks for hours. The dope always looked tremendously interested, but he wasn't really hearing a word.

"Why," said Mr. Whipple on one occasion, "with your physique, you might have become a fighter! A world's champion. Making a lot of money ! And what are you doing instead? Hah? What are you doing instead?"

"Hah?" said Jinks vacantly.

"You're sitting here in prison, that's what you're doing. Sitting here behind walls. Your freedom is gone. Your privileges are gone. Your franchise as a citizen is gone.

"Undoubtedly, you think your case is pretty hopeless, Jinks. Well, it isn't. No, it isn't. I've known of plenty worse than you. I know one that I met four years ago. They said he was hopeless. He was a gunman. He's out now. He's free again. Do you know what he's doing, Jinks? He's studying law. Yes, indeed. He's going to be a lawyer. And a bright one, too.

"All he needed was for someone to put him on the right track. Treat life right and it will treat you right. That's the way to look at it. Play the game on the square and you'll come out on top. Keep that in mind all the time.

"Why, I know plenty of fellows who started out wrong like you did. But they wised up after awhile. They knew they couldn't beat the system. When you do wrong, you're one man against the world. You can't beat the world. Not when you're wrong."

Jinks was wondering whether he'd have chocolate pudding for supper again .

Whipple urged Jinks to read books. Morning, noon and night he begged Jinks to read the books in the prison library.

"The trouble with you Jinks, is that you haven't had time to think yet. You've been too busy, doing the wrong things. Now you've got a little time, you ought to read a little. The prison library is chock full of fine stuff. You don't have to read stuff like Shakespeare. Personally, I don't think you'd go for it.

"But what the dickens! There are plenty of fine books there that would hold your interest. Books that would set you straight on a lot of things.

"Start off on the easy stuff, Jinks. You can work up to the deep stuff later."

Jinks paid no attention whatever. He just said "yeah" or "that's oke with me," but he never did anything. This went on for a long time. Apparently, Whipple was determined to reform Jinks even if he had to kill the guy.

Then, one day, success came. It came so suddenly that Whipple himself was breathless when he reached the warden's office. "What do you think?" he said. "Jinks is reading a book!"

The warden blinked. "Yessir, so help me! I was just up at his cell and he waved me away. Said he was too busy to listen to me. He was reading a volume! If you don't believe me, call the librarian."

The warden ran behind his desk and snatched a phone.

"Librarian," he said tersely. Then, a moment later, "Warden's office. I got a report here that Jinks Burke is reading a book. What's that! It is true? Migod! It must be near the end of the world! When? What's that? Okay. Okay. Thanks."

He hung up and grinned.

"You're a fine reformer," he said. "A fine reformer."

"What's the matter, warden? Isn't he reading a book?"

"Sure he is," returned the warden. "All your talk about reading has finally borne fruit. He got out a book this morning.

"And what do you think it is? *The Life and Methods of Houdini!*"

6: Road to Fame

Mark Hellinger

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 25 May 1947

In 2018 I collected 2 volumes of Hellinger short stories, each containing exactly 100 stories. "Mark Hellinger's Broadway, 1930s", and "Mark Hellinger's Broadway, 1940s" which were published on MobileRead. This story, and the one that follows, are not in those books.

THE low-slung limousine sneaked over the rusty hills and down by an abandoned quarry. Then it swung left over the white road and disappeared in a cloud of chalky dust in the direction of Hawkstown. Jerome Denton, fat and pompous, sat inside the machine, directly behind the chauffeur. He talked to the man beside him.

"Harry," he said, "you may be interested to hear that I knew every inch of this country at one time."

"Born here?" asked Harry.

Jerome Denton nodded. He watched the farmhouses snap by, then pointed suddenly to one of the old houses.

"Old man Geller owned that one. I walked out here one day when I was about nine. Near the apple orchard I saw a bear. I ran and ran until I was out of breath. "Later I found out it was just a big sow." He chuckled. "She'd had a litter of pigs and was afraid I'd come to take them...."

"That wasn't there in my day." Jerome Denton pointed to a small hydro - electric plant on the river. "I guess all the houses have electricity now. We used to get kerosene for six cents a gallon and spill half of it on the road before we got home."

The other man smiled. "You've got a good memory, Jerry."

"That's where you're wrong," returned Jerome Denton swiftly. "I've got a bad memory. Very bad. But coming back to the old town after so many years sorts of jogs the memory. I could never forget Hawkstown in a million years. It owes me an apology.

"They ignored me here when I was a child, Harry; ignored me completely. And something cracks inside of a kid who's snubbed the way I was. After a while I got to be pretty bitter.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if the other kids had laughed at me, or even beaten me up. But they just walked by as though I didn't exist.

"When I was eight, dad died. And then I was completely alone, because mom was the kind of mom you seldom see in the movies. She was my mother through and through, and never stopped reminding me of it. She was always stern, always scolding, never complimenting."

"I know what you mean," Harry mused. "That's tough."

"Tough?" echoed Jerome Denton. "It nearly killed me. I used to stand at State and Fifth— we'll pass it in a few minutes— and swear that some day I'd have them all talking about me. I don't think now that they really meant to hurt me. They just didn't see me, that's all.

"So, many a night I cried myself to sleep. And as I grew bigger, I kept renewing my pledge to myself that I'd have them all talking about me some day." He paused for a moment. "And then, when mom died, I knelt beside her grave, got up, and left Hawkstown."

Harry picked up the speaking tube and asked the chauffeur to slow down a bit. The car loafed along noiselessly

"It's been many years since I saw this neck of the woods," Jerome Denton went on. "Many, many years. But, as you see, I never forgot it. And I never forgot my oath, either. Sometimes, in the rush of big business, Hawkstown would fade from my mind. But as soon as I had a chance to relax it would all come back."

Harry pointed.

"What's that big white church over there?"

"That's St. Mark's. Mom used to go there. We're right in the heart of town now. Corner of State and Fifth."

The car came to a stop outside the church. Jerome Denton eyed the crowd of townfolk with interest. He noted, too, that there were traffic lights on State Street now. The crowd began to filter around the car to get to the opposite side of the street. Suddenly, a man stopped and pointed. Jerome Denton grinned. The man was pointing at him. He waved a casual greeting in return.

Several other people stopped. There was a lot of talking going on now, and much gesticulation. Soon, quite a sizable crowd was milling about the car. Two very pretty girls, eyes wide, pressed against the window pane in the left door. One waved a pencil, indicating a request for an autograph.

"Oh, fine," Harry muttered. "We'll be lucky if we can get through this mob when the light turns green."

Jerome Denton shrugged.

"Look at them," he said. "Can you hear them through the glass? Jerome Denton, they're all saying. They know me now, all right. I don't recognise many faces, but I'm sure a few of those old-timers are the very kids who once snubbed me.

"I swore I'd make 'em talk about me," he chuckled; "and, by God, I've done it! Look at them stare!"

He turned to the other side of the car. "Go ahead, you yokels," he said softly.

"Go ahead and stare. You wouldn't look at me thirty-five years ago— but now it's very different, eh?" The light changed. The car inched through the mob and sped away....

BACK ON THE CORNER of State and Fifth, a man spoke to his neighbor.

"Yep," he nodded, "that's Jerome Denton all right. He used to live in this town. And that's Harry Sparks, Sheriff of Quiller County, with him.

"Denton killed his partner a few months ago. you know. Now he's on his way to prison for life...."

7: Echo

Mark Hellinger

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 13 May 1937

THERE WAS a light burning in the mansion. A solitary light. The servants had retired. The man let himself in with a passkey. He tip-toed through the foyer, dropping his coat and gloves on a chair. He peeked, into the huge living room and saw his wife in a chair that was drawn up by the fireplace. He walked to the chair and kissed his wife on the cheek. She smiled faintly. He glanced at the evening gown. And the jewels.

"Sorry, Helen," he murmured. "So sorry. Didn't mean to keep you waiting like this. Meant to come home very early, but I met Clayton Quaw, and we talked about stocks, and—"

The woman nodded. The smile was bitter now.

"It's all right, George. It's all right. It's business again. It always has been business." She paused. "Oh, George," she cried suddenly, "can't you forget business just once? We're still young enough to enjoy life. We can go somewhere, anywhere. We have the money; more money than we can ever spend. More money won't do us any good. Can't we relax somewhere? Just this once, dearest?"

She clutched his hand. "It means so much to me— to both of us. You're tired. You need a rest. So do I. Please, dear?"

He patted the hand that held his. "You're such a swell soldier," he said softly. "No other woman in the world would stand for this. But you won't have to stand it much longer. Because we're going to take that rest, and I mean it this time! We'll take a trip around the world.

"We'll leave as soon as possible. In a couple of months, perhaps..."

ONE AFTERNOON, the mansion door was opened by an ambulance surgeon. George was brought in by two policemen. His face was ashen. His mouth hung open. A week later, he sat up in bed. The family doctor stepped back and looked at him.

"There is nothing," he said abstractly, like a teacher, "that medicine can do for you, George." He turned politely to Helen, who was standing in the doorway, "He needs rest. He needs sunshine. There is no medicine I can prescribe. Rest is the one and only medicine."

He turned back to George.

"You will have to rest, George. Otherwise, I will not be responsible for your life."

George was eager. "Oh. I will," he said. "Really I will, doc. Why, Helen and I have been planning a rest, haven't we, dear?"

"For years," said the woman tiredly.

"And now I'm going to take it!" George nodded vigorously. "All I have to do is make arrangements at the office. We'll leave very soon now.

"In a couple of months...."

ANOTHER YEAR flew by. And one night, when George returned late from a business conference and attempted to kiss her, Helen drew away.

"Sit down, George. I want to talk." George sat. The woman shook her head sadly at the young, old man. "I'm leaving. In the morning."

He jumped up. He grinned. "You're fooling!" he cried. "Why you—"

"No, George," she said, "I mean it. I've found a man who is kind and considerate, and who cares more about me than he does about business. I will arrange the divorce."

The grin faded from the man's face.

"But you can't do this, Helen!" He began to talk like a little child. "You love me. You know you do. So we'll start all over again. We'll go away on a long trip."

"No, George," she said. "I've made up my mind."

George swallowed hard. He shrugged. "I'm sorry," he murmured brokenly. "I'm sorry for all the hurt I've caused you. I'd do anything to make you change your mind. I'd be ready to leave in a little while. Honestly, I would. A couple of months, at the most."

HELEN got her divorce. George continued to fight the battle of business. He managed to keep it up for some time.

And then, one noon, they found him on the rug behind his desk. They took him to a hospital. For eight days, no sound came from his lips. Then, on the ninth morning, he opened his eyes. He turned his head feebly and saw the old family doctor silting beside him.

"I warned you about this," sighed the doctor. "But you wouldn't listen to me and you wouldn't listen to Helen."

George spoke with an effort. "Listen, doc," he said, "and don't kid me. I'm sick. Very sick. They've got me this time. That right?"

The doctor nodded slowly. "Then tell me, doc," George whispered, "how much longer have I got? I want to know and I'm not afraid. How much longer will I live?"

The doctor shook his head. "No man can say," he replied quietly. "Maybe tomorrow. Maybe next week. But, at the very most, George, a couple of months."

8: A Patriotic Short

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

Esquire, Dec 1940

PAT HOBBY, the writer and the man, had his great success in Hollywood during what Irving Cobb refers to as 'the mosaic swimming-pool age— just before the era when they had to have a shinbone of St Sebastian for a clutch lever.'

Mr Cobb no doubt exaggerates, for when Pat had his pool in those fat days of silent pictures, it was entirely cement, unless you should count the cracks where the water stubbornly sought its own level through the mud.

'But it was a pool,' he assured himself one afternoon more than a decade later. Though he was now more than grateful for this small chore he had assigned him by producer Berners— one week at two-fifty— all the insolence of office could not take that memory away.

He had been called in to the studio to work upon an humble short. It was based on the career of General Fitzhugh Lee who fought for the Confederacy and later for the U.S.A. against Spain— so it would offend neither North nor South. And in the recent conference Pat had tried to co-operate.

'I was thinking—' he suggested to Jack Berners '—that it might be a good thing if we could give it a Jewish touch.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Jack Berners quickly.

'Well I thought— the way things are and all, it would be a sort of good thing to show that there were a number of Jews in it too.'

'In what?'

'In the Civil War.' Quickly he reviewed his meagre history. 'They were, weren't they?'

'Naturally,' said Berners, with some impatience, 'I suppose everybody was except the Quakers.'

'Well, my idea was that we could have this Fitzhugh Lee in love with a Jewish girl. He's going to be shot at curfew so she grabs a church bell—'

Jack Berners leaned forward earnestly.

'Say, Pat, you want this job, don't you? Well, I told you the story. You got the first script. If you thought up this tripe to please me you're losing your grip.'

Was that a way to treat a man who had once owned a pool which had been talked about by—

That was how he happened to be thinking about his long lost swimming pool as he entered the shorts department. He was remembering a certain day over a decade ago in all its details, how he had arrived at the studio in his car driven by a Filipino in uniform; the deferential bow of the guard at the gate which had

admitted car and all to the lot, his ascent to that long lost office which had a room for the secretary and was really a director's office...

HIS REVERIE was broken off by the voice of Ben Brown, head of the shorts department, who walked him into his own chambers.

'Jack Berners just phoned me,' he said. 'We don't want any new angles, Pat. We've got a good story. Fitzhugh Lee was a dashing cavalry commander. He was a nephew of Robert E. Lee and we want to show him at Appomattox, pretty bitter and all that. And then show how he became reconciled— we'll have to be careful because Virginia is swarming with Lees— and how he finally accepts a U.S. commission from President McKinley—'

Pat's mind darted back again into the past. The President— that was the magic word that had gone around that morning many years ago. The President of the United States was going to make a visit to the lot. Everyone had been agog about it— it seemed to mark a new era in pictures because a President of the United States had never visited a studio before. The executives of the company were all dressed up— from a window of his long lost Beverly Hills house Pat had seen Mr Maranda, whose mansion was next door to him, bustle down his walk in a cutaway coat at nine o'clock, and had known that something was up. He thought maybe it was clergy but when he reached the lot he had found it was the President of the United States himself who was coming...

'Clean up the stuff about Spain,' Ben Brown was saying. 'The guy that wrote it was a Red and he's got all the Spanish officers with ants in their pants. Fix up that.'

In the office assigned him Pat looked at the script of *True to Two Flags*. The first scene showed General Fitzhugh Lee at the head of his cavalry receiving word that Petersburg had been evacuated. In the script Lee took the blow in pantomime, but Pat was getting two-fifty a week— so, casually and without effort, he wrote in one of his favourite lines:

Lee (to his officers)

Well, what are you standing here gawking for? DO something!

6. Medium Shot

Officers pepping up, slapping each other on back, etc.

Dissolve to:

To what? Pat's mind dissolved once more into the glamorous past. On that happy day in the twenties his phone had rung at about noon. It had been Mr Maranda.

'Pat, the President is lunching in the private dining room. Doug Fairbanks can't come so there's a place empty and anyhow we think there ought to be one writer there.'

His memory of the luncheon was palpitant with glamour. The Great Man had asked some questions about pictures and had told a joke and Pat had laughed and laughed with the others— all of them solid men together— rich, happy and successful.

Afterwards the President was to go on some sets and see some scenes taken and still later he was going to Mr Maranda's house to meet some of the women stars at tea. Pat was not invited to that party but he went home early anyhow and from his veranda saw the cortège drive up, with Mr Maranda beside the President in the back seat. Ah he was proud of pictures then— of his position in them— of the President of the happy country where he was born...

RETURNING TO REALITY Pat looked down at the script of *True to Two Flags* and wrote slowly and thoughtfully:

Insert:

A calendar— with the years plainly marked and the sheets blowing off in a cold wind, to show Fitzhugh Lee growing older and older.

His labours had made him thirsty— not for water, but he knew better than to take anything else his first day on the job. He got up and went out into the hall and along the corridor to the water-cooler.

As he walked he slipped back into his reverie.

That had been a lovely California afternoon so Mr Maranda had taken his exalted guest and the coterie of stars into his garden, which adjoined Pat's garden. Pat had gone out his back door and followed a low privet hedge keeping out of sight— and then accidentally come face to face with the Presidential party.

The President had smiled and nodded. Mr Maranda smiled and nodded.

'You met Mr Hobby at lunch,' Mr Maranda said to the President. 'He's one of our writers.'

'Oh yes,' said the President, 'you write the pictures.'

'Yes I do,' said Pat.

The President glanced over into Pat's property.

'I suppose—' he said, '—that you get lots of inspiration sitting by the side of that fine pool.'

'Yes,' said Pat, 'yes, I do,'

...Pat filled his cup at the cooler. Down the hall there was a group approaching— Jack Berners, Ben Brown and several other executives and with

them a girl to whom they were very attentive and deferential. He recognized her face— she was the girl of the year, the It girl, the Oomph girl, the Glamour Girl, the girl for whose services every studio was in violent competition.

Pat lingered over his drink. He had seen many phonies break in and break out again, but this girl was the real thing, someone to stir every pulse in the nation. He felt his own heart beat faster. Finally, as the procession drew near, he put down the cup, dabbed at his hair with his hand and took a step out into the corridor.

The girl looked at him— he looked at the girl. Then she took one arm of Jack Berners' and one of Ben Brown's and suddenly the party seemed to walk right through him— so that he had to take a step back against the wall.

An instant later Jack Berners turned around and said back to him, 'Hello, Pat.' And then some of the others threw half glances around but no one else spoke, so interested were they in the girl.

In his office, Pat looked at the scene where President McKinley offers a United States commission to Fitzhugh Lee. Suddenly he gritted his teeth and bore down on his pencil as he wrote:

Lee

Mr President, you can take your commission and go straight to hell.

Then he bent down over his desk, his shoulders shaking as he thought of that happy day when he had had a swimming pool.

9: A Romance of Wookey Hole

J. S. Fletcher

1863-1935

Collected in: *Behind the Monocle and other stories*, 1930

PROFESSOR BROWNE-MITCHISON was known to all his circle of acquaintance as the most modest and unassuming of men. Most things about him betokened his modesty and made evident his naturally retiring disposition. Slightly built, eminently refined of feature, it was only the brightness of his eyes and the alertness of his look and gesture that redeemed him from an almost feminine delicacy of appearance; oddly enough, however, he invariably affected garments of a distinctly sporting sort— loud checks and pronounced tones; he even sported a gold horseshoe pin in his cravats, as if he had been a hunting man. But this was his little weakness; he had a curious fancy for seeing himself in clothes which would have done no discredit to an outside bookmaker. It was, perhaps, his way of asserting his manliness; however that may be, certain it was that his loud suits, his fawn spats, and his neckwear formed an amusing contrast to his usual half-shy, half abstracted, manner. A spick-and-span, quiet little gentleman this professor, yet in one respect he was as full of vanity and assurance as an old cheese is of mites— no one getting him on to his favourite subject could long be unaware that he held himself to be, without question or demur, the very greatest authority that lived, or that ever had lived, on the subject of caves.

The professor— who, to describe him fully, held the chair of geology in the University of Millchester— had some grounds for this opinion. He had been a cave hunter all his life of nine-and-thirty years. The fact is, he had first seen the light in the neighbourhood of the Cresswell Caves, in Derbyshire, and at an age when most boys are birds'-nesting or tickling trout he was exploring cavities and fissures, galleries and passages, and already forming ideas and theories about the tenancy of these retreats by folk who lived in them in the long-vanished past. As time went on his experience of caves increased. He had visited and explored every cave of importance in Europe. Blessed with ample means, he had spent much money and a good deal of time in visiting caves that lay far off. He had seen the cockroaches of the caves in the Philippine Islands, and the colourless fish of the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, and the blind salamanders of the Rock House Cave in Missouri, and the sightless snails which are found in certain caves in Austria— in short, Professor Browne- Mitchison had seen about everything that the world could show in this way.

And he had, of course, written a big book on the subject; it was published on his thirty-sixth birthday, and he wondered rather wistfully as he looked at it, supposing he lived another thirty-six years, if he would have accumulated more

knowledge on a matter wherein he believed himself to be unsurpassed in learning. He thought not.

Modest about politics, uncertain about the very ordinary things of life, the professor felt that when it came to any question about caves he was infallible. In fact, it is on record that upon one occasion he was heard to remark that while there might be some little delicate doubt as to whether the pope is or is not infallible in matters of faith and morals, there could be none that when he, Browne-Mitchison, delivered a pronouncement on caves and cave dwellers it was an *ex cathedra* decision against which there could be no possible appeal.

Much as the professor knew about caves, and intimate as he was with them, he found it literally impossible to keep away from their neighbourhoods. He regularly went cave hunting at Christmas, and at Easter, and at Whitsuntide; as soon as the long vacation set in he prepared for a perfect orgy of exploration. His friends used to tell him that sooner or later, penetrating into the cavernous and gloomy recesses in which his soul delighted, he would either lose his way or fall down some bottomless abyss and so never be seen again; the mere mention of these possibilities, and the thought of an unexplored passage or a peculiarly black and horrible cavity, were to the professor as the smell of powder to an old war horse— they only made him hasten his packing.

He loved his professorial duties much, and felt like a maternal uncle toward his students, but any hole opening out of a limestone ravine or behind some bush on a mountainside fascinated him— he would have gone into a rabbit burrow if he had been no bigger than a rabbit.

One fine April morning found the professor taking his way out of the romantic city of Wells toward Wookey Hole, that ancient and mysterious cavern which lies on the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills. He was not quite sure if this was his tenth or his eleventh visit to Wookey Hole— it was certainly one or the other. But he was one of those men who never lose interest in anything that has once interested, and he looked forward to renewing his acquaintance with Wookey Hole as ardently as a lover anticipates a renewal of adventure with a mistress from whom he has been separated for a while; he meant to have a whole week's philandering with its well-remembered charms. And, being fond of solitude, he was a little taken aback when, on reaching the mouth of the cave, he encountered a young lady who, it was very evident, had come thither with the same intention that he himself had.

The professor hitherto had never greatly concerned himself about young ladies. True, he had often lectured to them, but somehow he had never regarded them as being in any way different from the young men. However, vaguely realizing that here was a young lady who manifestly had some interest in caves, he looked at this one and endeavoured to comprehend that she was a human being.

He realized, too, in time, and very dimly, but with growing intelligence, that she was eminently attractive. She was a tall, well-developed young lady, about half as big again as himself, athletic, handsome; he even noted that she had brown eyes and beautiful brown hair. She was garbed fittingly and simply for cave-exploration purposes, and the professor began to wonder about her. And while he was wondering, tongue-tied, the young lady spoke and smiled. The smile was of the sort which strangers, thrown together in out-of-the-way places, give each other, the spoken words were simple. She asked if the professor was going into the cave. When he stammeringly replied that he certainly was, she remarked that in that case they might just as well go in together.

Therewith, as if she knew Wookey Hole very well, she led the way, and the professor meekly followed.

But, mild as Professor Browne-Mitchison was on what we may call lay occasions, his mildness and meekness departed instantly as soon as he got firmly fixed in the saddle of his favourite hobbyhorse. Once within any cave, from Yorkshire to Kent, he could no more help orating and exemplifying than a cat can keep off cream. And before he and his chance-met companion had been in Wookey Hole ten minutes he was off and away, pouring out a flood of information which sounded very like extracts from a textbook. Almost unconscious of an audience, he held on, pointing here and pointing there, and thoroughly enjoying himself.

But eventually the big brown-eyed girl got a look in, and when she at last spoke her speech was accompanied by a sort of sizing-up glance which took in the professor from top to toe.

"You seem to know something about caves," she remarked speculatively. "Do you get it out of guide books?"

The professor felt as if somebody had poured a bucketful of ice-cold water down his spine. But instead of shrinking he drew himself up to the full extent of his five foot four. "Er— ah!" he said. "I— may I ask if you know anything about caves?"

"I've examined a good many," replied the girl. "Here and abroad."

The professor became still more erect.

"The fact is," he remarked, "I am Professor Browne- Mitchison." He was not quite aware of what effect this announcement would produce. But the girl instantly smiled, as if greatly delighted, and thrust out a strong, capable hand which squeezed the professor's delicate fingers with genuine pleasure.

"Bless me!" she exclaimed. "Who'd have thought it? I'm awfully pleased to meet you, Professor. Of course I've read your big book. I bought it as soon as it came out. I constantly refer to it. Dear me! This is really good to meet you!"

"Very pleased indeed, I'm sure," murmured the professor. "Er—very kind of you. Are— you are interested in caves?"

"Deeply!" replied the girl. "You see, my father was a geologist, and when he was alive, I used to go about with him, and I got fond of this sort of thing, and, as I said, I've seen all the principal caves in England and most of the important ones in Europe."

"I trust you found my book of use to you?" inquired the professor.

"Oh, yes," said the girl. "Yes, it's an admirable book. But, do you know, I've often thought of writing to you about it, Professor. Indeed, if we hadn't met in this accidental fashion I should have written very soon, because, you know, good as your book is on most points, you're absolutely wrong in some of your theories — absolutely!"

The professor started. For a moment he wondered if all this was a dream. He, the infallible dogmatist, calmly told that he was wrong— and in Wookey Hole! Why, not a single critic had hitherto dared to canvass his theories! Wrong? Impossible! He glanced wonderingly at his companion. But she, evidently a very self-assured young person, was talking again.

"Now, for instance, take this very Wookey Hole, Professor," she continued. "Your twenty-third chapter is almost entirely devoted to it. You remember certain theories that you develop in that chapter? Well, they're all wrong—you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick in several instances. You'll have to modify, and correct, and revise, and in some cases withdraw altogether. That's what I was going to write to you about. You see, I dare say I know a lot more about Wookey Hole than you do."

"This is either my tenth or eleventh visit," declared the professor with some heat.

"And really, my dear young lady—"

"This is about my eleven hundredth visit," interrupted the girl calmly. "My mother and I live close by. And look here, Professor— will you attend to me, and I'll prove to you that your theories about the occupancy of this cave are perfectly untenable?"

Somewhere deep down in the recesses of his character Professor Browne-Mitchison possessed a spark of irascibility; it was never nearer bursting into flame than at this critical moment. But by a determined effort he threw cold water on it, and his otherwise modest and gentle spirit asserted itself.

"I trust that I am not averse to learning," he replied. "If there is anything that you can suggest"

"Just so," said the self-constituted mentor. "Because after all, there's no man can say that he's said the very last word on any given subject, is there now? Awful ass if he does, anyway, don't you think?"

The professor was not so sure about that. In his own opinion, he had already said several last words on this particular subject.

"I am waiting to be instructed," he answered.

"Very well," continued his companion. "Now, in your book you've said a lot about the Hyaena Den in this Wookey Hole, and its relation to the late Acheulian period. I think you're absolutely wrong in your conclusions, and I'll show you why. To begin with..."

During the next hour or so the professor passed through several mental stages. He was at first inclined to be incredulous and sardonic. Then he became interested, realizing that this brown-eyed damsel knew what she was talking about. Subsequently he became uneasy, and doubt arose in his mind; did he, after all, know quite as much as he had fancied he knew?

Eventually, when his companion emerged from the cave, he looked at her in the full light of day with a growing curiosity.

"This has been a deeply interesting conversation," he said. "Your theories are well worth considering and following up. I should like to know more of them, and— to whom I am indebted for them?"

"My name is Marchmont," said the girl. "Philippa Marchmont. My mother and I live in the valley down there— you see the gables of our house over there behind the elms. If you are staying in the neighbourhood, Professor, come and lunch with us to-morrow."

"I will certainly do myself that pleasure," replied the professor in his gravest tones. "And in the meantime I will— I will think."

He spent all the rest of that day thinking, and all the evening too, and he was still absorbed in thought when he went to fulfil his engagement next day. Before he left his hostesses, late in the afternoon, he confided to the younger one that he was seriously considering a drastic revision of some of his ideas, and suggested that he and she should make a thorough exploration of Wookey Hole to begin with.

"Your theories about flint culture in the later Paleolithic age are deeply interesting," he remarked. "I should like to pursue them further—much further."

"Nothing easier!" said Miss Marchmont cheerfully. "Meet me up there to-morrow morning, Professor."

The professor met her. He continued to meet her. They spent whole days together. The week which he had intended to devote to Wookey Hole lengthened into a fortnight.

It was a new experience for Professor Browne-Mitchison. He was no longer the teacher, but the taught; he realized that on certain points this young and charming friend knew more than he did. It was all very novel— surprising and disconcerting at first, but infinitely pleasing the further he got into it.

At the end of a fortnight he decided to fling Chapter XXIII of his great work to the dogs, and to rewrite it— in accordance with the theories of Miss Philippa Marchmont. But there was more than that. He felt, vaguely at first, more certainly later, that Miss Marchmont was indispensable to him.

And as he stuck his gold horseshoe pin into a very sporty hunting stock one morning he spoke aloud, as if delivering an ultimatum.

"There is but one thing for it!" he said firmly. "One thing only—Matrimony!"

When he met Miss Marchmont an hour or two later he took her hand and led her to a convenient ledge of rock.

"There is a certain thing I wish to say to you," he began, not at all nervously. "Don't you think that as you and I are probably— no, most assuredly!— the two greatest living authorities on our particular subject, and have so very much in common, we— er— don't you think that we owe it to science and the advancement of knowledge to— er— in short, to marry? Eh?"

Miss Marchmont became wholly feminine. But her hand grew warm in the professor's ardent clasp.

"Oh, Professor," she said tremblingly, "I—"

"Come, now!" said the professor. "Now, really—how do you feel about it?"

Miss Marchmont slowly turned her face and regarded him thoughtfully. Eventually she smiled.

"I— I think I feel about it— just as you do!" she answered.

10: The Marquis of Carabas

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

1889-1955

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The Strange Story of Two Young Doctors

PERHAPS you remember the story of "Puss in Boots"— how the talented and resolute cat caught game in the woods and presented it to the king as the gift of his master, the *Marquis of Carabas*. Then the cat advised his master to bathe in the river, and, as the king's coach rolled past, he set up a great shout that the *Marquis of Carabas* was drowning, and that his fine clothes had been stolen by thieves. The king stopped, ordered new clothes for the marquis, and took him into the royal coach. While they drove on, the cat ran ahead, and bullied the workers in the fields into saying that all the land belonged to Carabas.

There is more in the story, but the chief thing is that the cat secured for his master a fine castle and estate, and the hand of a beautiful princess. And, mind you, the young man was nothing on earth but the youngest son of a poor miller, the *Marquis of Carabas* being simply an invention of the clever animal's.

Well, there are people alive to-day who have the same ambition as that devoted cat— people who try to make a *Marquis of Carabas* out of some ordinary young man. Unfortunately, they do not always succeed. I know of a case in point.

THERE appeared one day in a certain town in Westchester a new doctor, arriving unknown and without introduction in the midst of a quite sufficient supply of well established practitioners. It was a prosperous town, but not a growing one. There seemed to be nothing for a new doctor to do, unless he set to work to create a demand for his services— a thing that doctors can't very well do. He put out his sign, however, on his tidy little house— "Noel Hunter, M.D."— sat down behind his sign, and waited.

Now and then he was seen out on his veranda, looking at the barometer, or strolling out to the garage, where an energetic little car ate its head off in idleness. Whoever saw him was favorably impressed, because he was a charming young fellow, slender, tall, and dark, with an honest, good-humored face and very fine black eyes. Indeed, he was almost too handsome for a doctor. It was cruel to think of his being called out at night in all weathers, of having hurried and inadequate meals and too little sleep, of losing his endearing youth in arduous and exhausting toil.

Well, to be sure, that was not happening. He had ample time for sleep, and, providing he was able to pay, there was nothing to prevent his eating all day.

And that, too, was a pity and a waste, because obviously he must be longing to give his medical services, and must have studied a long time to prepare himself. The people who lived on the same street felt embarrassed and a little guilty when they caught sight of Noel Hunter, M.D., all ready to be a doctor, but wanted by no one.

ONE DAY there came to Mr. Miles, the rector of the parish, an affable little lady, dressed in a conservative style suited to her years— which were fifty-five or so— and presenting a letter from a clergyman in Brooklyn. The letter gave information that the bearer was Mrs. Edwin Carew, "whom we are more than sorry to lose, because of her tact and sympathy and her invaluable assistance in parish work."

There was more of this, too, so that Mr. Miles blushed a little in deference to Mrs. Edwin Carew as he read it. He welcomed her very cordially. He assured her that she would find plenty of opportunities for using her tact and sympathy and for giving her invaluable assistance in parish work. He was so favorably impressed by the lady that he sent at once for Mrs. Miles, and Mrs. Miles was instantly charmed.

"The Needlework Guild is meeting now," said she. "If you would care to come in and meet some of the ladies—"

Mrs. Carew accepted graciously, was brought before this gathering of her peers, and was judged and found worthy. She seemed to be the nicest sort of little body, cheerful and kindly and gentle, and though she was far too well bred to boast, it was obvious that she was a person of some social importance. She had traveled; she knew the world; she knew what was what; she was an acquisition.

"Are you going to be here permanently, Mrs. Carew?" asked the august and resplendent Mrs. Lorrimer.

"I hope so," she answered, smiling. "I'm beginning to be quite fond of your pretty little town; but it all depends on my nephew. You see, he's used to life in a large city, and I'm afraid— Still, I hope he'll like it."

"Oh! Your nephew?" said Mrs. Lorrimer encouragingly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Carew. "Perhaps I did wrong in persuading him to leave the city and come here, where it's so— so much quieter; but I feel sure that after he's used to it, it will really do him good. He had so many friends in the city, and so many, many engagements, that it interfered with his work; and though I know we must make allowances for young people, still I can't bear the idea of his talent being wasted."

"Oh! His talent?" said Mrs. Lorrimer.

"Yes," said Mrs. Carew. "He's a physician. I think he has already 'hung out his shingle,' as they say— Noel Hunter. Of course, he doesn't expect to do much practicing yet. I want him to rest first, and to get accustomed to the place."

As if by magic, Dr. Hunter was transformed by those words from an object of pity into a very interesting young man. Professionally his life was not altered, but the very next week he was invited to a little dance; and every one who saw him there was irresistibly urged to invite him to something else. Ladies came to call upon Mrs. Carew, to sing the praises of her charming nephew. He was forever going out, or getting ready to go out, and he seemed to be very happy about it.

From the window Mrs. Carew would watch him drive off in his little closed coupé, so useful for a doctor, who must be abroad in all weathers. Much as she admired his resplendent appearance, and rejoiced in his popularity, she did wish that now and then he might be summoned to something less cheerful than a party.

That never happened. The more he was danced with and flirted with, the more did it seem tactless and ill-bred to mention one's sordid ailments to him. It was unthinkable to call in one's dancing partner and confess to a bilious headache from too much pastry. No one could see him as a doctor.

He seemed not at all downcast by this. Indeed, Mrs. Carew sometimes imagined that he had forgotten all about being a doctor.

"Don't you think you ought to read your medical books now and then, Noel?" she suggested. "Just to— to keep up?"

"Oh, no!" he replied cheerfully. "I'm not likely to forget all that stuff that was so much trouble to learn. Don't worry!"

"But you mustn't lose interest, Noel," she persisted.

He flushed a little, for he had at the moment two preoccupations which were nearer to his heart than the theory and practice of medicine. The first of these was Nesta Lorrimer, and the second was her brother's hydroplane. They merged very well, because Nesta was frequently in the vicinity of the hydroplane, so that they could both be studied together.

It was unfortunate that Noel did not mention this to his aunt, because she would have approved heartily of one of those interests; but he knew that aunts were extremely likely to worry about flying. He was very fond of her, and didn't want to worry her; so the poor lady knew nothing.

Mrs. Lorrimer knew, however.

"Alan," she said to her son, "don't you think you encourage that young Dr. Hunter a little too much?"

She spoke moderately, because she had a great respect for her son. He was a level-headed, intelligent young fellow, who used such things as hydroplanes only for diversion, and never neglected his business. He was not handsome, like

his sister, but he didn't need to be. He was a remarkably successful lawyer for his twenty-seven years, and he was a good-humored, quick-witted, tolerant fellow whom every one was obliged to like.

"Encourage him?" he repeated, with a smile. "That's a queer way to put it. I'd like to think I encouraged any one. But why? What's wrong with him?"

"He doesn't seem to get on very well," said Mrs. Lorrimer.

"He's mistaken his *métier*," her son replied casually. "But I like him very much. Plenty of nerve and grit. As a pilot—"

"Ah!" Mrs. Lorrimer interrupted. "I dare say; but as a brother-in-law?"

Alan was astounded, as brothers always are.

"What?" he exclaimed. "You don't mean that Nesta— impossible!"

"I'm afraid she's growing fond of him, Alan."

He reflected in silence for some time, and then he said:

"Well, after all, she might do worse."

"That's not the question," replied his mother, a little indignant. "I think she might do very much better."

"I don't know. He's a very decent fellow. Personally—"

"Oh, every one likes him!" she interrupted impatiently; "and every one seems to have forgotten that we don't know anything at all about him. Mrs. Carew is very nice, of course; but after all, they've only been here a few months. They don't seem at all well off, and yet he doesn't appear to be worried about not having the least sign of a practice. I can't help thinking—"

She paused significantly.

"What can't you help thinking?" inquired her son, with a smile. "That poor Hunter has some sinister secret in his past?"

"No," said she. "No, not that. I don't like to say it, but I've sometimes thought he might be nothing but an adventurer, who came here to find a wife with money."

"Mother!" exclaimed Alan, quite shocked. "That's not like you!"

But his trained and disciplined brain refused to remain shocked. He was obliged to admit that the qualities for which he admired Hunter— courage and daring and steady nerves— did not always signify moral excellence. An adventurer might very well possess them; and about Hunter's former life, about his home life, he knew absolutely nothing.

"Very well!" he said to himself. "In justice to Nesta, and in justice to Hunter as well, it's my business to find out."

The thing was to take him by surprise, to see him at home, off his guard.

ALAN FELT UNPLEASANTLY like a spy as he drew near the house that evening. He would have preferred putting Hunter on the stand and cross-examining him. After all, he was a lawyer, not a detective, and to go to a friend's

house for the purpose of observing and judging him seemed an unworthy thing to do.

"Still, if he hasn't anything to be ashamed of, he won't care," he reflected. "If he has, I'd better know it. I'll have to study him carefully for some time."

He rang the bell, and was amazed at the confusion the sound apparently caused. He had to wait outside for a long time, while furniture was being pushed about, footsteps hurried to and fro, and doors were closed. Then, at last, the door was opened, and he was still more amazed.

No one had ever heard mention of any other members of the household but Mrs. Carew and Hunter. Who, then, was this lovely girl, dark and serious, a little flushed and ruffled, as if from haste, but with the high-held head, the level, unabashed glance, the dignity of a young princess?

Having come expressly to observe, Alan did observe, and he thought this was the most intelligent and charming face he had seen in many a day. The girl was obliged to repeat her question.

"Who is it you want, sir?"

"Sir"— impossible! She didn't speak like a servant, or dress like one, or look like one.

"The doctor in?" he asked.

"No, sir— not at present. If you care to wait—"

He asked for Mrs. Carew, and gave her his name, and she left him in the little sitting room, where he began to walk up and down, very much perplexed. A pretty room, furnished in a very good taste, but shabby. Through the half-open folding doors he could see a dining room of very much the same sort, with the table still laid, as if the diners had just risen. And— the table was laid for three!

"For three!" he said to himself. "And yet there's no guest here. Mrs. Carew and Hunter— and who else?"

There was a light, quick step on the stairs. Turning, he saw the inexplicable girl descending. This was an excellent opportunity to study her, which Alan did not miss. A remarkable girl! Mere prettiness was not a thing that particularly appealed to this young man. He had met dozens of pretty girls without losing his heart. What interested him now was not the fine regularity of her features, but her air of candid and unassuming dignity, and the thoughtful intelligence of her face.

She entered the room to tell him that Mrs. Carew would be down directly.

"Thank you!" said he, and sought desperately for something to say that would keep her there.

Before he could do so, she had gone— only into the dining room, however, where he could still watch her as she cleared off the table. The more he watched, the more impressed and the more puzzled he became. When he caught sight of her hands— strong and beautiful hands, exquisitely tended— he

very nearly exclaimed aloud. Three places at the table, and a girl with hands like that playing the servant!

"It's a good thing I came," he reflected grimly. "There's something here that needs explaining."

Well, he didn't get much out of Mrs. Carew when she came down. He brought the talk around to the topic of servants. She said that she never had any trouble with them.

"You're fortunate," he observed.

"Indeed I am!" she replied brightly. "How charming the country is beginning to look now!"

After this, he couldn't very well go on with the subject; but he felt no hesitation in approaching Hunter in a more direct fashion when they were alone.

"That's a very remarkable young woman who opened the door for me," he said. His eyes were on the other man's face, and he saw him turn red.

"Yes," said Hunter. "She— she is."

But Alan's eyes were still on him, and he was obliged to continue.

"She's— not exactly a servant, you know," he said. "In fact, she's a sort of— relation. Helps my aunt, you know. She— she is remarkable, Lorrimer, very."

Alan gave serious attention to this problem. His legal training did not make him disposed to believe everything he heard, though he was too intelligent to go to the other extreme and believe nothing.

What was the explanation? Had Hunter made a misalliance, which he was ashamed of, and wanted to conceal? No— marriage with that girl wouldn't be a misalliance for any one, and she wasn't the sort who would consent to being concealed.

His sister? There was no possible reason for keeping a sister like that hidden. If it was the case that she really was a poor relation kept as a servant to help Mrs. Carew, then it was a very bad case, and the aunt and the nephew might well be ashamed of themselves. Alan believed that they were ashamed, too.

Hunter had mentioned that he was going to take Mrs. Carew to the moving pictures that evening, and Alan decided then and there that he would use that time for further investigations.

"Because, if they're capable of making a drudge of a girl like that," he said to himself, "Nesta's going to be told. It's the most beastly piece of snobbishness I've ever come across! Evidently she eats with them. No doubt she's one of the family until an outsider appears, and then she's nobody."

He was a little surprised at the vigor of his indignation. As a rule, he didn't easily become indignant.

"But she's such a remarkable girl," he explained to himself. "I've never seen any one like her."

THIS TIME, when he returned to the house, Alan did not feel in the least guilty, although he was now coming deliberately in Hunter's absence, and to collect evidence against him. On the contrary, he felt like a knight sallying forth to rescue a lady from duress.

He rang the bell without hesitation, and the girl opened the door. He had a plan. He explained to her that the doctor had invited him to make use of his medical library whenever he wished— which was true— and that he needed to look up fractures for a plaintiff in a damage suit— which was not true. He made his explanation long and markedly polite, and he was pleased to notice that she forgot all that nonsense about saying "sir." Instead, she preceded him into the library as if it were her own, lighted a lamp, and, going to the bookshelves, brought out two volumes.

"These are on fractures," she said.

This did not surprise him. She looked like a girl who would know all sorts of things.

"I'll sit here and make a few notes, if you don't mind," Alan said, for this was part of his plan.

He waited until he heard a door close after her somewhere. He waited a little longer; then he rose. He intended to be awkward, and to pull down a lot of books, making a great deal of noise. Then she would come back and help him to pick them up, and it would be easy enough, in such circumstances, to start a conversation. But— well, if his intention was to make a noise, he did that, certainly, and the girl did come back, in great haste; but it is not possible to believe that it was part of his plan to pull the bookcase over entirely, or that a bronze bust should fall and hit him on the side of the face.

"I'm very sorry," he said earnestly. "I don't know how I came to be so clumsy. I— really I'm very sorry."

"So am I," said she. "Let's see!"

To his amazement, she took his chin in fingers surprisingly strong, and turned his face toward the light.

"You'd better come into the office," she said.

"It's nothing, thanks," he began, but she had already vanished through the door, and he felt obliged to follow.

He said nothing at all while she washed and dressed the trifling wound, but he watched her moving about the bright, glittering little room, he noted her precision, her deftness, her familiarity— and he tried to draw conclusions.

"You're a trained nurse!" he suddenly exclaimed.

She turned toward him, and for the first time he saw her smile.

"No, Mr. Lorrimer, I'm not," she said. "Now I think you'll do very nicely."

It was a tone of polite dismissal, but he did not intend to go.

"I'll help you first to repair the damage I did," he said.

She replied that he needn't.

He said that he wanted to, and must; and because he was just the sort of young man he was, and because she had the intelligence to see it, she admitted him then and there to a sort of friendship. After the bookcase was set upright again, and all the books restored to order, they sat down, one on either side of the library table, in the most natural way in the world.

"You'd make a wonderfully good nurse," he observed.

"I'm afraid not," she answered, smiling again. "I shouldn't like it at all!"

"But you seem to know a good deal about that sort of thing," he went on. "It must interest you."

She made no reply, and for a moment he feared she had thought him unduly curious— impertinent, perhaps; but there was no sign of displeasure in her face. She was looking thoughtfully before her, grave, serene, almost as if she had not heard him. Suddenly he fancied he understood.

"Of course!" he said to himself. "She's in love with Hunter, and naturally she takes an interest in his work. That's why she's here, filling a servant's place, simply so that she can be near him!"

There was no reason why this should make him indignant, yet, instead of being touched by the idea of such devotion, he was angry and disappointed.

"I wonder what Mrs. Carew thinks of it!" he pursued. "She probably thinks that this girl isn't good enough for her precious Noel. She would object to such a marriage; or perhaps she doesn't know what the girl is. Perhaps he doesn't know, either. I may be the only one who has guessed her secret."

Then it occurred to him that he was drawing conclusions from very insubstantial premises, also that he was forgetting the object for which he had come, and that his silence might not be impressing her favorably. Looking at her again, he was forced to the unwelcome conclusion that she didn't care whether he spoke or not. It was presumptuous nonsense to feel sorry for a girl like this. Whatever she did, she intended to do; there was no helplessness or futility in those fine features.

Alan felt ashamed of himself for trying to find out about her in any indirect way. She deserved to be treated with absolute honesty and candor. He knew she would not misunderstand anything else.

"I came back here to see you," he said bluntly.

She accepted that tranquilly.

"As soon as I saw you, I felt a very great interest in you," he went on. "I don't mean that as an impertinence, or as a compliment. It's simply the truth. There are some human beings who make that sort of impression on others, and it seems to me a foolish and a wrong thing to stifle that interest because it doesn't happen to be conventional."

"As a human being, I welcome your interest," said she, with her quiet smile. "I've heard of you from Noel, and I'm sure I should enjoy talking to you."

"Of course I knew at once that you weren't what you— you pretended to be," he went on rather clumsily.

She stopped him.

"It wasn't pretending, Mr. Lorrimer. I am here as a servant."

"You shouldn't be."

"It suits me. After all, there's nothing better in life than really serving the people who need you, is there?"

"Sometimes there is," he answered promptly. "It may mean the sacrifice of a fine life to a much less valuable one."

A faint color rose in her cheeks.

"Well, you see," she said, "I don't feel wise and perfect enough to judge which lives are the most valuable."

He was silent, because he could not well say that her life was a hundred times more valuable than all the Mrs. Carews and Dr. Hunters ever born— that in her grave youth, and her fine and dignified simplicity, she seemed to him absolutely invaluable.

"I dare say you're right," he answered seriously. "I'm sure your way is a good way. If you think you really would care to talk to me, when may I come again?"

"I have Sunday afternoons off," she answered, and he believed there was a hint of a laugh in her voice.

"Then I'll come at—"

"Oh, no! That's not the way it's done. I'll meet you somewhere and we'll take a walk," she said, and this time she could not suppress a smile.

Alan refused to smile, however. He didn't care if she came in an apron. He was willing to sit on the back steps, or in the kitchen, so long as he could be with her. It wasn't a joke— it was serious, the most serious thing he had ever known.

He proposed a convenient meeting place, and she agreed to it.

"But I'd rather you didn't mention me to any one, please," she added. "I like a— a very quiet life, just now."

THIS DAY was going to be the day. Nothing was going to put him off— not the fact that the mirror showed him a face he hated to think was his own, not the inner voice which warned him that it might be better to remain in doubt and still have hope. He didn't want hope, if it was a false one.

He went downstairs, aware of all sorts of new defects in himself. He felt that he was the most commonplace, uninteresting fellow imaginable, and that there was nothing about him that could possibly please or interest any one.

Mrs. Lorrimer and a group of friends were on the veranda. He saluted them with a strange sort of severity, and went off down the road, in an odd state of despair and determination.

"Yes," said his mother proudly. "It's very unusual to see a man as serious as Alan is, at his age!"

She was wrong. She had herself seen any number of young fellows of twenty-seven overtaken by exactly the same sort of seriousness, only, in the case of her son, she didn't recognize it. Alan himself, however, had known what it was for weeks— it was Judith.

She had told him to call her Judith, and he did, hundreds of times, but not once in her hearing. Indeed, there was an astounding difference between the things he said to her when she was not there and the words she actually heard from him. If she could only have heard those other things, or guessed them! He knew that what he was going to say would be so inferior to what he felt and thought.

He turned into the lane where they always met, and sat upon the stone wall to wait. He was thinking about her, in a curious way, half wretched, half blissful. He didn't care two straws about her very humble position, nor did she. He had sat on the back steps and talked to her when the others were out, he had seen her in an apron, peeling potatoes, and she was more than ever exalted in his eyes by her quiet acceptance of such things. There was to him a sort of nobility in everything she did, in all her words and gestures, in her smile, even in her little transient moments of gayety.

Nor did he care two straws for the mystery that surrounded her. Wherever she came from, whatever her name or her history or her reason for living as she did, he knew that she was right, and could never be anything else.

No— the things that troubled him were those things which so often trouble people in his condition— all sorts of doubts and alarms and hopes and determinations mixed together. He wasn't good enough, but he was obliged to convince her that he was. She couldn't care for him, and yet she must.

At last he saw her coming, and went forward to meet her. She was walking unusually fast, as if, he thought with a fast beating heart, she were hurrying to him. Whatever joy he had felt in that thought vanished at the sight of her face.

"Judith!" he said. "Tell me, what has happened?"

She had all her usual fine composure, but she was very pale, and, in some subtle way apparent more to his heart than to his eyes, there was grief upon her face. She did not answer him, but she held out her hand, and he fancied that she clung to him.

"Let's walk a little," she said, after a moment.

They went on side by side along the lane, thick with cool, white dust under the old trees. So dense was the foliage on the branches meeting overhead that

the light came through it greenish and wavering, like water. The dust might have been the sandy floor of the sea, and the church bells that rang seemed mournful and distant, as they must sound to the mermaids.

A painful sense of unreality oppressed Alan. He didn't know her; she was terribly remote, a stranger, indifferent to him. Not once in all the time they had spent together had she talked freely about herself, about her life. She might have any number of anxieties and griefs of which he had no suspicion. She had been friendly, but in such an impersonal, untroubled way!

At last they reached the fence at the foot of the lane, where the fields began, and she spoke.

"Noel has gone," she said.

"Gone?" he echoed.

"He left a letter," she continued. "Perhaps I had better read you a part of it." She took a letter out of her pocket, and turned as he noticed, past the first page to the second. She read:

So I've taken this job in the airplane factory. It's a remarkably good job, and I expect to do rather more than well. I'm sorry, my dearest girl, to disappoint you so after all you've done for me, but, to be frank, I can't be a doctor. I always hated the whole thing. I'd never have been any good at it. Now I've found the one thing I am good at. I think you know how I felt about Nesta Lorrimer, and now I see some faint chance of being able to speak to her some day.

Try to forgive me, Judith. It is really the best and kindest thing I can do for you— to clear out and leave you free.

"That's all that matters," she ended. "So you see—"

Her look amazed and angered him terribly. She seemed so sure that he would understand and sympathize. She wasn't a child, she was very far from slow-witted, and she must have seen how it was with him. And now this!

Try to forgive me, Judith. It is the best and kindest thing I can do for you— to clear out and leave you free.

Such bitterness and pain overwhelmed him that he could scarcely speak.

"I'd rather— go now," he said. "Another time— I can't—"

"But—" she began.

"Not now!" he said vehemently. "It was cruel of you to do this. Why didn't you tell me before that you weren't free? Why did you let me go on? I trusted you so! And all this time you've been thinking of him! No, please don't speak to me! Let me go!"

She was looking at him with a curious sort of inquiry, her dark brows drawn together in a faint frown.

"You don't understand," she said. "I thought you had guessed long ago. I didn't think you'd have— gone on like this, if you hadn't guessed!"

She was not by nature impulsive, but it was impulse alone that moved her now. She came nearer to him, laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face, with bright tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Alan!" she cried. "It was a beautiful thing to do— to accept me on faith, like that! Not to know, or to care! Oh, Alan, my dear!"

"Judith!" he said. "Don't you see what you've done? Nothing else could have mattered to me, except your caring for him—"

"For Noel?" she asked. "I'm afraid I cared for him a little too much— more than was good for him. But, you see, he's my only brother."

"Brother!" shouted Alan. "Then why—"

"Walk home with me, and I'll explain," said she. "I thought you had found out long ago."

Alan went on by her side, willing to wait forever for any further explanation. There were a few questions he wanted to ask, and Judith answered them to his satisfaction, but they had nothing to do with Noel.

"Now look!" said she.

He did look, but he saw nothing but the front of Dr. Hunter's neat little house.

"I don't see anything," he said.

She opened the gate, and he followed her along the path and up on the veranda.

"Look at that!" she said.

It was nothing but the usual sign in the window. "Noel"— but it wasn't! In blue letters on a white ground was printed:

JUDITH HUNTER, M.D.

"YOU SEE," she said, a little later, when they were in the library, "Noel and I were left orphans when we were very young, and Aunt Katherine Carew took care of us. I couldn't begin to tell you all she did, all the sacrifices she made. Naturally, it was Noel, the boy, that she hoped and expected most from. I wanted to study medicine, and poor Noel couldn't make up his mind exactly what he wanted to do; so he chose that, too, and we studied together. It was a terrible strain for Aunt Katherine. It took almost all she had, and after we'd both left the hospital, she couldn't possibly set up two young doctors. We talked it over, and it was my idea to give him his chance first. He's two years older, and— well, I thought I could wait. Poor Aunt Katherine couldn't manage everything herself, and we couldn't afford a servant, and yet she felt that it was very important to keep up appearances; so I decided that I would be the servant. I intended to be invisible until I was ready to appear as a full-fledged M.D. myself." She paused, and smiled a little. "We both worked very hard to make a doctor of Noel," she went on. "I think now that we tried a little too hard. If he

hadn't felt that so much was expected of him, he might have gone through with it."

"He may do better where he is," said Alan.

"I can't think that," said she, "even if he makes a great deal of money; because, for me, our profession is by far the noblest one in the world. There's nothing else so fine and so—"

"Absolutely nothing else?" asked Alan. "Nothing to compare with it?"

He thought that the slight confusion she betrayed was infinitely more becoming to her than her usual composure.

"Well, of course," said she, "there's— there's *you!*"

11: A Little Essay on Boarders

Ernest O'Ferrall (as by "Kodak")

1881-1925

The Lone Hand, 1 June 1908

THE boarder is a by-product of civilisation. In the Beginning, each man had his own cave, and nobody ever dreamt of paying one dodo per week to sit by another man's fire. Exactly what catastrophe produced the first boarder will never be known, but it was probably some dreadful disaster.

When I was a small boy— it was just after the awful Boom— there was a "bust" atmosphere over the whole suburb. People talked in hushed voices of past grandeur, wore rather shabby clothes, and took in boarders.

Boarders were the great natural crop of the period. Everything hinged on boarders. If people were getting rich it was because they had lots of boarders. If they were getting poor it was because lots of boarders had them. The sun rose joyously on droves of boarders hurrying off to work— it sank hurriedly to rest on herds of boarders galloping home to tea. What the boarder said overshadowed the utterances of the Premier of the day, and what he thought blotted out the Royal Family. When he moved a want-of-confidence motion against the joint of beef, the head of the house seized his frayed belltopper and rushed off to tell the butcher, in a choked voice, that he was no gentleman; and, if his egg was too emphatic, the grocer's young man was ambushed at the kitchen door and talked almost to death by anguished females with sharp, high voices.

There were many different kinds of boarders—I daresay there are still. People who had fought with their people; people who never had any people; people who were too weary to tell anything, and went away as they came— mysteries.

Of the first kind, I cherish the recollection of one tough, old campaigner, who was reported to have slept in every boarding-house in the State. She had been married three times, was as deaf as a post, and had a remarkable hobby. She was a collector of hatreds.

To sit in some struggling landlady's best room, to ferret out any shabby little secrets that were lying about, to insult helpless women to the verge of hysteria—these were her main— in fact, they were her only— objects in life, and as soon as she had exhausted one neighborhood she would break camp and get herself carried off to another, to begin all over again. She is dead now— has been for years— but she lives in the memory of many a lone widow and weary spinster.

Of the men, I liked best the athletic boarders who used to have friendly boxing bouts, and get along very well until one or the other got an unearthly clout on the nose. Then there would be black rage and red blood, and two men

in singlets and pants, locked together in a deadly embrace, would fall heavily into the dust-box.

Then there were the boarders who sang in the bath, and the boarders who fell in love and were dragged out of it by the landlady. The sound of a shot calls up dim, dusty memories of the boarder who bought a revolver on purpose to shoot the cat next door, but who wounded the serving-maid instead, and was sued by her for breach of promise.

(He lost the case, but told us the night before he fled the country that the judge "hated him like poison." He said he didn't know why, and we said we didn't know either. But we all hated him too.)

The boarding-house is the home of argument and the cradle of strife. That old incompetent, Fate, takes at random a handful of human beings, of widely diversified tastes, and throws them together in a cheap lodging-house. Forced by lack of money and friends to stay always under the one roof; wanting (in many instances) reading, good humor, tolerance, logic, or common sense, they fall back naturally on the pastime, which, above all others, is fit for the ignorant mind— the ancient art of argument. Then there would be black rage and red blood."

Haven't we all (at one time or another) come upon the tail-end of it, threshing like an enraged crocodile in the darkened dining-room, while the landlady wept into the tea-cosy, and the cat, unnoticed, devoured the meat? Haven't we all stood aghast at the explosions of mines of ignorance, fired by the friction of mind on mind— or never-mind on doesn't-matter? Who is there amongst us who, having once beheld such a scene, has not gone away and sorrowed for the race?

I have a distinct recollection of one such argument on the subject of religion, between a man named Clement Spadledge, who had been in the Thibet Civil Service, and was an enthusiastic Buddhist, and Fodgers, a pale man, who had lived in— and been chased out of— Japan. Fodgers was an ardent supporter of Shinto, and every time the subject of religion came up he used to make insulting remarks about Buddhist monasteries. He went so far one night as to say that, whereas the Buddhist monks claimed to hold rigidly to the doctrine of the inflation of ghosts, they took d—d fine care to keep the common people fiddling about with prayer-wheels and praying-banners, and tripe of that sort.

At that Spadledge shook a lean, brown fist, and a yard of rattling shirt-cuff in Fodgers' face, and said: "By Gad, sir, I'll stand a good deal, but I won't stand that!"

Fodgers flung one arm negligently over the back of his chair, and said "Bah!"

Spadledge stood up, and hissed: "You may jeer at the Buddhist, my friend, but I'll tell you one thing. He doesn't defile his temple with the scent of d—n cheap joss-sticks!"

Instantly Fodgers was on his feet, and glaring across the strip of tablecloth that separated him from the enraged Buddhist.

"Hound!" he shouted. "Sacriligious cad ! Take that!"

That was a dish of stewed plums, and when Spadledge rose from the floor, with the crimson juice dripping off his hair and beard, he looked more like an evening paper tragedy than anything I have ever seen.

That was the worst of the theological discussions; in fact, it was the worst of all the discussions. They went to the very verge of bloodshed, but never actually arrived.

But, as I remarked before, the boarder is merely a by-product.

12: Morning Glory

Randolph Bedford.

1868-1941

The Lone Hand, 1 Jan 1910

THE miracle of dawn trembled on the dark when John Regard, aged four, and Eric Regard, aged seven, descended the creaking stairs to secure the new boots bought for them the day before. They awakened their father, who moaned in deep bass that he could never get a wink of sleep, and their mother, who told them the place of the boots and begged them to be quiet.

They took the heavy, copper-toed boots upstairs again, dropping them at every other step. Reaching their room, they placed the boots against the skirting-board and sat down to regard them with pride and worship.

But the sun had not completed his ten minutes' work of warming the garden before they wearied of these new toys; and five' minutes later the boots were utterly forgotten. By common consent they moved towards the stairs again, John's white body shining through his torn nightgown, Eric in a small shirt and trousers he held up constantly, having mislaid his braces, and his squirrel brain refusing any memory of them. They caused little noise on the stairs this time; for they were making for the door, and escapes had to be managed secretly.

Eric drew back the bolt gently and opened the door; and they entered the garden, the place being heaven on earth, the time September, in Sydney. The grass was dewy, and the children walked in it, laughing as it wetted their feet; the baby touched the dewdrops on the rose leaves, set his mouth to cry when he found that a touch destroyed the jewels, but forgot his grief when he heard the joyous bark of the long, lolloping, open-mouthed dog on the chain at the kennel on the further side of the garden.

Shrieking his delight, he ran to the dog, Eric was there before him; the great retriever puppy bent his head on his forepaws and invited them to play.

"Good old doggie," said John. "I luv yer."

Eric slipped the collar. The dog was mad with his new-found liberty, protruded six inches of red tongue, and sprang on Eric to kiss him, whereat Eric ran away. The dog knocked the baby down for love and affection, and licked him all over; and the baby shouted in rage, and beat the ravening and profane beast with his small fists. At last the puppy left him and raced through the cabbages and roses, spoiling more than the money value of many dogs.

Eric came back to his small brother, lifted him and led him to the gate; and at this promise of adventure the baby was glad again.

"We'll go an' see Mister Firth," he said very clearly. "Come on."

Eric opened the gate; and the dog ran madly between them and threw them down again. The grass-grown tracks led down the valley to Marrickville and

Cook's River; a red track, pierced with the nests of fierce bull-ants, ascended the hill to Judge Josephson's Corner and disappeared towards the End of the World and Sydney. There were few houses downwards— the cottages of Lucy Bennett's father, and of Dan Peberdy's mother, and of the mother of Billy Eager and Myrtle, and of the mother of Jacky Farrar ended the settlement. To that point the track was of yellow clay, bounded by grassy footpaths; below that it was merely grass scarred by wheels. Up the hill lived Mr. Clooney, who drove his ancient omnibus three times a day to Sydney; and Mr. Duffy, the village constable, sheltered his bulky form and his stupid head, and his red whiskers like unto half-teased oakum, in the half-cottage, half-lockup, next to Clooney's horse paddock. The lockup was never used and never necessary; but Duffy was full of the importance of its possession, and lighted the lamp over his gate every night, so that the wandering malefactor might find his home without trouble, and he liked.

The Government had begun to make the road; and outside Regards' fence was a great heap of stones, to be hand-broken into road-metal. While the children stood hand-in-hand looking up the road, an old man, a little old man with a small, red face and twinkling, kindly, foolish, blue, little eyes, and a wild, white beard and whiskers, entered the footpath from a vacant grass plot; and as he came within a dozen yards of the children, who welcomed him with smiles, the dog ran through his legs and almost upset him.

The kindly, blue eyes became stupidly wrathful; he advanced to his stone heap and said, "That dog's yourn?"

The baby did not answer; he was too busy with the humor of it; he put his head on one side, impudent as a sparrow, half-closed his eyes, and protruded his tongue. The man looked indignantly at Eric; and he falteringly, but cheekily, said,

*"Stare! Stare!
Like a bear!
Stare! Stare!
Everywhere!"*

The old man's glance came back to the more impudent John, and the old man began to laugh.

"Y're the Fun o' the World," said he. "Y'ain't a hinfant— y're a bird."

He looked again at them— two yellow-haired children, dazzlingly fair, growing like maize on the Snowy River after a flood; skins of rose and apple bloom, eyes like violets and summer skies; youth glowing on each smooth forehead like a star. Possibly some regret for his own lost youth stirred him— the melancholy of age in the presence of childhood. He put his disengaged hand

first on Eric's head and then on John's, and said, " 'Stare like a bear!' ses he t' me; 'Stare like a bear!' ses he! An' this one out wi' his tongue. Fun o' the World, not a hinfant; 'e's a bird."

He seated himself on the grass edge; and they joined him on each side—they were old friends, for Julius Firth had been stone-breaking there for a fortnight. They looked up at him very fearlessly and in great confidence. The sun had risen high, a pleasant wind blew, romance was in every blade of grass; the old man felt younger; the Morning Glory was very close to him.

He opened a great, red neckerchief and exposed meat and bread, an onion, cheese and a bottle of cold tea; he cut the cheese into dice; and immediately the hand of Fun o' the World came under his elbow and took a piece of cheese, and Stare the Bear followed suit upon his right. While taking the cheese they looked into his face, watching the old man narrowly; and he fixed his gaze on the distant gum forest behind Clooney's, pretending that he saw them not at all.

At last he said, "Now, Stare the Bear, y'ave 'ad enough; an' so's Fun o' the World; an' here's y'r big brother, Joe."

Big brother Joe was of the ripe age of eleven a quick-eyed, brown-haired, small-mouthed, over-tall boy with an indeterminate nose; a boy of most inventive fancy, with a mental equipment of special and peculiar misinformation which unjustly earned for him the reputation of ' a considerable liar. He sat down on the grass edge and laced his boots; old Julius Firth took up his hammer and began his day of stone-breaking.

"It's a nice day," said he. "Ain't it, Fun o' the World?"

" It's a shiny day," said Fun o' the World.

"Lissen t' him," chuckled Julius Firth. "A shiny day!"

"A shiny day an' a breathy day," said Stare the Bear.

"Gimme the bloon," said Fun o' the World. "Gimme the bloon, Otto."

The make-believe of the school boys made them call Joe "Otto," because his name was Joe. Joe took from his pocket a little wooden cylinder with a rubber bag at its end, inflated the balloon, and allowed the air to escape in a long, ear-piercing wail. Then he handed it to Fun o' the World, with the injunction,

" Mind! Fun. When you blow the balloon don't let the noise out o' the squeaker go into your mouth or you'll get cancer."

" Rubber's full o' cancers," said Stare the Bear.

Julius Firth chuckled; but Joe met the doubting comment calmly and looked so innocent that the old man felt ashamed and almost apologised. With the first shriek of the collapsing balloon came the cry for "Jacky," for "Eric," and for "Joe"; the three said good-bye to Firth and ran to the garden; there were indignant cries of "Out without boots! Well I never! You'll get it, my gentlemen," and then the door slammed, and Julius Firth was left to his stone-breaking. He looked up the road and down the road; the sun was high and the dew was dried;

the dog of the devil chased a hen in the distance. Work come unto the world—the Morning Glory gone.

By half-past eight the houses in the dip of the road had despatched their children on the long walk to school—the Peberdy children, the Bennetts, Jacky Farrar, Willie Eager and his sister Myrtle, and two children of the Regards. Myrtle Eager pulled up her stocking for the tenth time, as usual, and had passed the heaps of road metal where Julius Firth labored, before Fun o' the World—again, as usual—had stormed and screamed because he could not accompany Eric, his playmate and brother, to school. It was a separation for ail day. The long road caused the scholars of the valley to take their lunch with them; and their absences from home were as a man's in duration. This time Julius Firth, even more than usually tender to childhood that day, calmed baby John's grief at its beginning.

"Don't cry, Fun o' the World," said he, "an' I'll get shut of this stone-crackin' airily, an' then, 'way we go to Under the Cliff!"

So Fun o' the World wept no more, but watched the stone-cracking patiently, merely demanding about once every minute if each successive stone was to be the last broken that day, and being replied to by Firth in this unvarying formula, "Just twoerthreeerfourerfive, Fun, an' away we go."

On the long, red track to school, past great gum trees which were old before Captain Cook cut his first tooth, past the nests of aggressive bulldog ants went the scholars; unwilling, because the bush, from its most valued parrakeet and most liquid-noted magpie to its most insignificant cicada, drumming his abdomen in token of courtship, called to them to stay out and enjoy the day.

But duty was there, and they were afraid to take the challenge up. Suddenly from a belt of scrub by Breillat's garden came the sounds of an anguished fowl; and a moment later a large, fluffy, matronly hen ran out of the scrub and fled to the bush, crying "Murder." After her came the big, lolloping pup.

"Breillat's chook!" shouted Joe, and took to the bush after the dog and the hen. Eric ran after him, and Sammy Eager followed, but unwillingly; Dan Peberdy, hearing the noises of the captains and the shouting, ran into the bush to cut the line of pursuit. He shouted, "Joe's dorg!" as he ran.

The pursuit continued madly. Joe vanished into the bush. But soon the others were winded and gave up. Sammy Eager, happily, and Myrtle, reluctantly, took their way to school; and Dan set out with Eric to find the vanished Joe. Dan extended his hand to Eric, and the little boy and the tall boy with the very small head walked deeper into the bush.

They "coo-eed" once without a reply, and then almost forgot Joe.

Quite satisfied, they gave themselves up to the pleasure of the bush—the searching for geebung, lillypillies and five-corners; and finding them as easily as if they were birds and 'possums, and not mere boys destined to grow to be men.

They had eaten their fill of the ground fruit when a “coo-ee” sounded close. They replied shrilly, and Joe entered their little park. Joe led the lolling dog by a tether made of his braces, whereby Joe was fain to hold up his trousers by one hand.

“Where’d y’ catch him, Joe?”

“Eatin’ the chook,” replied Joe, pointing to the nose of the murderer stained with the matron’s blood.

“Father ’ull get into it,” said Eric.

“That’s why I tied him. I beat him, too; didn’t I, pup?”

The dog lifted his head and looked at his chastiser affectionately but puzzled, wagged his head and his tail, and looked down again.

“It’s too late for school.”

“We’ll go in the afternoon,” said Joe. “Nobody ’ull know.”

They hunted the bush until the sun was high, and then they ate and looked for water, and found it, and wandered afar; and suddenly heard the bells again, more distant and less calculated to awake duty than the morning bell.

“It’s too late,” said Dan.

“We can go to-morrer,” said Eric.

“An’ it’s hot,” said Joe. “Let’s go Under the Cliff and have a swim.”

They arose without argument.

“Come on, pup,” said Joe, and led the way, holding his trousers with one hand. The bush gave way to a grassy plain, belted with Christmas tree. Half a mile of plain, and then the bush again— great gums, thick scrub, honeysuckle and she-oaks, and the cool, sap-green river far below its red and rugged cliffs. And then Joe found that, in his rapture, he had lost the dog again. The profane beast had slipped the handkerchief, and returned to the places of fowls to ravin and destroy.

IT WAS the dog that proved the undoing of them all. He made back to Clooney’s and chased all Clooney’s broody hens; and then he invaded Constable Duffy’s fowlyard. He had trodden on a chicken or two and licked a duckling all over when Constable Duffy became alive to the insult. The bulky policeman struggled into his uniform coat and his glazed helmet before attempting the criminal’s arrest; so that by the time he entered the fowlyard the dog had torn the tail out of a lunatic cockerel and stopped to clean his mouth of feathers.

Duffy yelled and threw his baton; and the dog ran at the fence, scaled it and fled. Duffy pursued him. The sweat streamed down his fat face and tickled his red whiskers; but he held to the chase, yelling like a fiend as he ran. But the run was long, and he needed all his breath for speed; so by-and-bye he ran silently, his little, thick, round head almost bursting with rage and stress.

“It’s the Raygard’s dog,” thought he, “that have been ating me fowls. Whin I ketch ’im I’ll kill ’im, an’ summons the father o’ them little divils aftherwards.”

But the dog had no intention of being caught. Danger had immediately discovered his mongrelism; he put his tail hard down and took his tongue into his mouth and ran, trying to make himself small against the ground, a prey to cruel fear.

They ran through the Christmas tree, the gums and the scrub belts; and the leaf-tinted river was below. The dog heard the voice of the boys, yelped as if he were already beaten, and scrambled down the high and precipitous cliffs to them. Duffy, almost exhausted, his face a furnace, burning with over-exercise and rage, almost fell after him. The dog uttered a mad howl of terror, and took to the river as the lesser evil.

Dan Peberdy, the tall youth with the little bird-like head, and Joe and Eric Regard ran mother-naked along the yard-wide strip below the cliff. They saw the rage in Duffy’s eyes, and foolishly ran away from their clothes. Duffy saw it; and the rage became joy as he pursued them heavily. Three motions of his foot kicked the three clothes-heaps into the river; then he started to run the boys down. That he would never had done had they kept to the beach or taken to the water; but Dan had more speed in his long legs than forethought in his rudimentary head, and he turned into a steep path that led up the cliff. Duffy almost thought he had lost them; but suddenly the path ended in a landslip with an unscaleable rock on the land side, the river below. Duffy exclaimed in joy, and caught Eric and Joe; the tall Peberdy leaped to the water and dived, and from midstream insulted Duffy until that brilliant officer could think only of murder.

“Don’t pinch mv neck!” said Eric. “It hurts!”

“I’ll hurrt yer, me noble.”

“We done nothin’,” said Joe indignantly.

“Yer dog ate me fowls; and run in ye’ll be, me noble.”

“What for?”

“Indacincy! Shwimmin’ without throwsies.”

“Garn! ” yelled Dan from the water. “There’s nobody here.”

“O’im here,” retorted Duffy, with much grandeur. “Indacincy in a public place, that’s what it is. An’ run in y’are; an’ I’ll kill yure dog—whin I get ’im.”

“When you get ’im!” repeated Dan scornfully. “When! Garn! Oakum whiskers.”

“ Oh! Me long shlip of a currency lad. I’ll have you. The dhirty drop’s in you, me boy; ’tis a lifer you’ll be yet.”

“Garn!” said Dan again. “Oakum whiskers! Curvy legs!”

“Oh! Curvy legs, is it ? ” Mr. Duffy’s legs were bowed, and he knew it, and hated the truth. He was getting his second wind, and the insult paled his face to cold fury.

“Yah! Curvy legs! Sossige nose.”

“Oh! Sossige nose, is it?”

“Garn! Duck’s mouth! Oakum whiskers!”

“O-o-oh, me noble! Just give me wan chance at you! Only wan duck’s mouth, is it? Duck’s mouth and curvy legs! Oh! me foine currency lad; whin I get you I’ll bite you! You dhirty Norfolk Island lifer, that’s what you are.”

“Garn, duck’s mouth!” and then— long drawing out the word to make the insult terrible— “Garn! Stinker!”

Duffy was vanquished; the insult was unanswerable. He cuffed Eric, who began to snivel quietly. Joe had, in the moment of retreat, taken up his boots, and these he had pulled on, feeling not so naked. Duffy dragged him to his feet, and taking each by the scruff marched them to the beach again and along to an easier ascent. Dan followed them in the water, repeating his varied insults to Duffy, so that Duffy’s rage became dangerous because it was cold.

“Where’s me clothes?” whimpered Eric.

“They oughter be here,” said Joe, looking at the beach.

“Where are they?” demanded Joe of the policeman; and under that clear, accusing gaze even Duffy felt that he had gone too far, and must, therefore, go further.

“How d’ye tink I’d know?” said he, accusing himself with his own indignation.

Dan from the river: “He chucked ’em in; I know he did.”

“Ye’re a loir.”

“Y’ did; y’ did. Duck’s mouth! Curvy legs!”

The renewal of the insults made Duffy forget his own offence. He pinched the boys harder, and said, “Come on, thin— come on!”

“I won’t go without my clothes,” said Joe, and struggled desperately. Duffy pinched him again ; and the pain made them march. Duffy dragged them up the path, and felt triumphant; but Dan Peberdy followed, and Dan was armed.

A piece of driftwood thrown by his practised hand knocked off Duffy’s helmet. Encumbered with his prisoners, Duffy made a slow attempt to recover it; and, in his first moment of indecision, Joe, naked except on the feet, kicked sideways, and the helmet dropped over the cliff.

Duffy then determined really to arrest them. He had intended to liberate them at the cliff top; but the assault, and the loss of helmet and dignity, hardened him to the end. He gripped them harder, and ran them at a jog trot through the gum belts and scrub; and Dan followed, armed with punitive weapons and an accurate arm.

Thud! A stone struck the Majesty of the Law in the back. He grunted rage and pain and ran with his prisoners, Eric wailing that his feet were “hurted,” and Joe trying to kick Duffy’s shins as he ran.

Thwack Dan threw a stick that time, and it struck Duffy on the neck and nearly stunned him.

“The dhirty lifer!” muttered Duffy. “Oi’ll kill ’im yet. There’s the Christmas tree. He’ll have to hide directly, the houses do be near.”

But outside the limit of the Christmas tree another stone struck him. Dan had not abandoned the pursuit. Duffy turned as he ran, and saw the tall boy running, bare to the buff, in a pair of very short trousers he had retrieved from the river. Duffy cursed and prepared to take more punishment. He got it. He ran his prisoners over the last paddock to the road, and there were a group of five— Mrs. Eager, Myrtle’s mother, who uttered a piercing shriek when she saw the Law and Order arresting Obscenity, and fled into her cottage from the immoral spectacle of nakedness; Lucy Bennett, who stared open-mouthed and not understanding; Myrtle Eager, who saw only that her friends were in trouble; Julius Firth, who had Fun o’ the World in hand, being at last ready to take him to Under the Cliff.

The sight stiffened Joe’s obstinacy.

“Lemme go,” he gasped. “Lemme go! Ginger whiskers! There’s Myrtle— lemme go!”

“Ye’ll come to the logs with me,” said Duffy, tasting his own salt perspiration as he gasped.

“I won’t— lemme go!” He twisted in the policeman’s grasp and kicked the policeman’s shins. Duffy uttered a cry of agony; the boots were copper-toed, and hurt grievously.

“Oh! The curse o’ Crummle be on you,” he howled.

Crash! Again the terrible boot on his shin. He loosened his hold of Joe, who, blushing all over, fled to the shelter of the Christmas tree, suffering an agony of shame. For he loved Myrtle with a love as great and high as it was secret and ashamed.

Julius Firth and Myrtle and Fun o’ the World, missing Mrs. Eager from her view-point, saw only trouble for their friends. Myrtle advanced to Duffy, seized Eric by the arm, and said, “Let him go! D’ye hear. You great, big beast! Let him go!”

Smash! Another and more painful stone arrived for Duffy from Peberdy, now divided between modest hiding and the necessity for harassing the enemy. Duffy was quite mad then, craving for somebody grown-up to strike. It was with joy that he saw Julius Firth coming to him, still hampered by Fun o’ the World, howling loudly because his friends were in evil case.

The ruddy face of the old stone-breaker was firmly set; his blue eyes burning like molten steel; his wild, white whiskers bristling with rage.

“Let the boy go, Duffy,” said he, knowing that Duffy would not, and setting his teeth for the struggle.

“I’ll arrist you,” said Duffy shouting.

“Y’ll, will y’? Red Irish!”

“Red Irish, is it?” He loosed Eric, and that ashamed child (who had taught him to be ashamed of his skin?) ran along the street, his white body shining the more for the yellow of the sunlight and the greenness of the grass.

They fought silently. Duffy had taken the first blow, a smashing stroke on the mouth that cut his lips and made him as mad as a baited bull. Dan Peberdy, seeing more friends in trouble, threw another stone, which weakened Duffy considerably. And yet another, which struck Julius Firth on the arm; and the consequent momentary faltering decided the fight. Duffy got the stone-breaker’s right arm and twisted it.

“Will y’ go quietly?” he yelled. “Will y’ go quietly?”

“I’ll go,” said Julius Firth, his voice hoarse with pain. “I’ll go! Let’s up! You’ll break me arm.”

They began the uphill walk, Dan Peberdy striking at Duffy and missing, in his excitement, and Myrtle soothing Fun o’ the World. Suddenly the dog, the cause of all the trouble, came from Regards’ garden, and, deciding that all was peace and that Duffy and Firth were playing, joined the game, barking joyously at the heels of the Law, and biting the socks of constituted authority. Duffy went mad again, kicked at the dog, missed him, and struck a boulder instead with much violence.

“O-oh!” he said agonisedly. “I’ve sthubbed me toe an’ bruk me shpine. O-oh, murderin’ divil of a dog! Whin I put this wan away I’ll do for you.”

Exhausted, in pain but triumphant, he took Firth across the road to the lockup, proud of that rare thing— a prisoner; opened the cell, pushed him in, slammed the door and shot the bolts. Once his arm was released Julius Firth made a great disturbance in the cell, stamping and yelling crude insults through the keyhole.

Then Dan remembered that he loved Lucy Bennett and that he was naked to the buff. He fled, leaving her with the sobbing Fun o’ the World, bereft by the one stroke of his friend and his pleasure and joined Joe in the scrub.

Julius Firth soon tired of yelling insults through the keyhole, but he did not abate the sum of noise as he sang the “Black Velvet Band” and “Ten Thousand Miles Away” a few keys too high for his voice.

Half an hour later, when Duffy, washed and clothed and proud of himself, though very sore, went to his front gate to show himself to the people, he found new trouble.

Mr. Regard had come to ask the charge against Firth, prior to seeking a magistrate to bail him; and Duffy scratched his red head and wondered for a moment what Firth had really done, and remembered that he had been so elated by victory that he had not entered a charge yet, and finally said, "Assaultin' me in the execution of me jooty, an' incitin' prisoner to escape."

"Where are those prisoners?" demanded Mr. Regard; and the little crowd of neighbors laughed with him. Duffy looked around and saw no friendly face. He ran the gauntlet of them all before he could reply; of Jacky Farrar's mother, who had been told that Jacky Farrar was to be prosecuted for "indacincy" also; of even Mrs. Eager, who now charged the Law with insulting her modesty, by leading the malefactors naked; of Myrtle, who called him "oakum whiskers" unchecked; and of Dan Peberdy, who loudly reiterated the well-known insults of Duffy's legs and mouth.

Meanwhile, the profane dog barked loudly at a safe distance and ran in rout among the excited women, almost throwing Mrs. Eager down when she was eloquent.

"If you had prisoners, they are my sons," said Mr. Regard, when he could get a word in. "What are they charged with?"

"Indacincy."

"You low-minded w r retch," said Mrs. Farrar. "I'd like to ooh— you— you—"

"Indacincy!" repeated Mr. Regard, witheringly, and losing all his calm judicial manner. "Indecency! You thick-headed, blue-nosed ass. For two pins I'd give you—"

Mrs. Farrar uttered a shrill scream, and threw herself between him and Duffy; the dog yelped as if beside himself with joy, and ran x under Mrs. Eager's petticoats again, quite upsetting her this time.

Mr. Regard recovered himself, and addressed the abashed Duffy. "You've not arrested them! Are you going to summons them?"

"Yes," said Duffy, weakly, "I— I— tink so."

"You tink so!" repeated Mrs. Farrar.

"He tinks so. Listen t' him! He tinks. Oh! I've no patience."

"If you don't summons them I'll prosecute you for assault," said Mr. Regard. Duffy was weary of the badgering. "I'll summons them, me mahn," said he; "an' I'll charge that old Firt' wit hittin' me."

Regard's threat had failed to release Firth; but reinforcements came from an unexpected quarter. They were Duffy's wife, a large, overflowing woman who was never seen without a fat infant under her arm; and her bachelor brother and lodger, Mr. Tittibochel, who was incidentally also a grocer and Jacky Farrar's uncle, the last his most important qualification. He was a very learned grocer, and kept Mr. Duffy in his place always.

“What’s this? What’s this?” demanded Mr. Tittibochel magisterially.

The fat baby under his sister’s right arm made shocking faces at the crowd.

A dozen voices answered, “Mr. Regard’s boys were swimmin’ at Under the Cliff an’ Duffy run ’em in naked; an’ Julius Firth’s in the lockup now.”

“Oh! You great, big bullick of an Irish fool,” said Mrs. Duffy. “Why did I ever marry such a big slouch of a man?”

“Whist, woman, wasn’t I doin’ me jooty?”

“Doin’ yer jooty! Ain’t they good neighbors? Why can’t yer live in peace and quietness? You beg pardin, that’s what you do; beg pardon of everybody,” pursued Mrs. Duffy.

“What harm could two little pretty children do? Arnster me that,” said Mr. Tittibochel.

“Let Firth out,” said Mr. Regard, “and we’ll all shake hands and say no more about it.”

Duffy was silent.

“He’s a gennelman, is Mr. Regard,” said Mrs. Duffy; “an’ you— what are you?”

“That’s the point,” repeated Mrs. Farrar, a little sharp-nosed woman, gifted with the persistency of a bloodhound. “What are you?”

The noise of the argument had penetrated Julius Firth’s dungeon, and he was now heard screaming for justice.

“Duffy, you red-faced ’og! Let’s have a go ; a fair go ; that’s all I want! Bar the frog’s march yer broke me arm with, an’ I’ll fight yer for twelve months without breakfast. I’ll fight yer with anything— stones or hammers. Duffy, you big, ginger ’og—”

“What did he do to the man?” shrilled Dan Peberdy. “What did yer do, Curvy Legs?”

Duffy groaned as if in torture. Mrs. Eager answered Peberdy, “Broke Mr. Firth’s arm, he did.”

“For hivins sake, give me a bitter peace!”

Mr. Tittibochel seized on the word. “It’s a bitter peace they’re giving you.”

“Let him out and beg everybody’s pardin,” said Mrs. Duffy. “They’re better neighbors than you deserve, you big, red, Irish—”

Duffy was weary unto death. “All right, all right, ” said he. “Ask him if he’ll come out quiet, an’ we’ll let begones be begones; an’ --- d--- that dog.”

After ten minutes of excited persuasion of Julius Firth through the cell door he agreed to peace, and retired with all the honors of war; and the children escorted him, a hero who had been through charges. They took him to Regards garden, where Fun o’ the World was pacified, and the dog appeared from nowhere, tore up three cabbages and a rose bush, and disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived.

The dusk found Duffy nursing his wrongs and his bruises in the lockup, conscious of his loss of dignity, but comforting himself with the knowledge that both charges and counter charges were wiped out. He went apologetically through the garden to his tea, ready to buy peace with patient endurance of the criticism he knew must come.

While passing the fowlyard he heard the excited cackle of poultry, discovering an intruder in their bedroom. He flushed all over with joy. It must be the accursed and profane dog. Revenge!

Cautiously he entered the fowlhouse. The apprehensive cackling continued. He saw in the darkness the suggestion of a figure about the height of a dog; its head was probably hidden in a nesting-box. Duffy lifted his great foot, grinned maliciously to himself, and kicked with tremendous force.

No dog voice uttered that awful yell. The figure about the height of a dog was that of Mr. Tittiboche, searching the nests for a new-laid egg to mix with his nightcap of brandy, a cockadoodle broth of which he was extremely fond.

That night Mr. Tittiboche went to bed in the shape of a V, and Constable Duffy had naught to eat or drink, and the peace he had was exceeding bitter.

But at Regards' house, when Julius Firth had gone home to rub his twisted arm, Joe and Eric and Fun o' the World lay in bed with the blinds up, and the big moon streamed in, and they talked of new excursions and alarums for the morrow.

And at midnight, Mr. Regard, hearing a noise as of all the burglars of London, descended to the kitchen and found the profane dog toying with a leg of mutton intended for next day's baking. There were hollow sounds and piercing cries, ending with a noise suggesting that the retreating dog had suffered the door rudely closing on his tail.

As a matter of fact, he had.

13: Fatal Obstacle

Anthony Hope

1863-1933

The Windsor Magazine, July 1901

One of a series of "Dolly" dialogues

"WHAT I can't make out," I observed (addressing myself to Lady Jane), "is why women don't fall in love with me. I'm all a man should be, and a reasonable number of things that he shouldn't."

Lady Jane always tries to be polite. "Perhaps it's just that you don't find it out," she suggested after a moment's consideration.

"I shall adopt that view," said I cordially. "It will add a spice to the most formal greeting."

"It'll make you do awfully silly things," remarked Dolly, with an air of experience.

Lady Jane was looking thoughtful. "Mamma says love comes with marriage," she went on presently.

"Yes, generally," I assented. "Not," I added, turning to Dolly, "that three in a brougham is really comfortable, you know."

"One has to invite him sometimes," Dolly murmured.

"Oh, but I'm sure mamma meant—"

"Mamma meant that you'd been flirting with the curate, Jane."

"Dorothea dear!" gasped Lady Jane.

"The secret of love lies, I suppose, in unselfishness" (I threw out the suggestion in a tentative way).

"That's what makes Archie such a good husband," said Dolly.

"It must, of course, exist on both sides. Lady Mickleham."

"Oh, no, that's tiresome. It's like getting through the door— nobody'll go first."

"True. You spend all your time trying to be allowed to do what you don't want to do; and the other party does the same."

"Mr. Shenton says that the power of sympathy is the real secret of it."

Mr. Shenton, by the way, is the curate.

I glanced at Dolly and shook my head; she nodded approvingly. Thus buttressed, I remarked deliberately, "The power of sympathy has wrecked far more homes than it has— er— blessed. I would, on the whole, back it against the Victoria Cross."

"I think I could love a man just for being good," mused Lady Jane.

"Oh, you impossible kind of an old dear!" Dolly gurgled affectionately. "Besides, that's no use to poor Mr. Carter."

"I am not so very bad," said I. "Come, now, we'll run through my vices and—"

"I think I forgot to water that fern," said Lady Jane rather suddenly.

"There was once a governess," I began, thinking to beguile Dolly's leisure with the story. Lady Jane had left us.

"I know about that; Mrs. Hilary told me."

"Then you're quite friends now?"

"Not particularly, but one must talk about something. There was another girl in love with you once, too."

"Why not have told me at the time? I should have enjoyed it."

"I mustn't tell you her name."

I did not speak for a moment. "Well then, it was Agatha Hornton.

"Agatha Martin that is?"

"I suppose she thought that, as you were hopeless," (Dolly was seeming a good deal amused at something), "she might as well marry Captain Martin."

"One can be unhappy without being absurd," said I, rather crossly. "Dear, dear! Having known me to decline—"

"Decline? I didn't say she absolutely asked you!"

"I wish you would read a little poetry sometimes. Your ignorance cramps my conversation. Was she very fond of me?"

"She thought you *handsome*," said Dolly conclusively.

"It was a grande passion?"

"Oh, no. She'd been very well brought up. But she just adored you."

"She was a nice girl— a thoroughly nice girl. I never thought much of Martin. Ugly fellow, too."

"She used to bore me awfully about you. You see, I was her great friend, and she knew she could trust me."

"Not to give her away?"

"Yes," said Dolly, gently caressing the Japanese pug that the Admiral Commanding on the Pacific Station has recently sent her.

"It's beautiful how you women stand by one another," I observed. "What was it that particularly attracted her in me?"

"I really cannot think," said Dolly. "Any more than I can think what attracted— Oh, do you mind ringing the bell? It's Fushahima's tea-time."

"I wish she took it a minute later," said I, as I obeyed. "Martin was a very dull chap, you know."

"Something seems to have set you thinking of Captain Martin."

"I met them all coming back from church (they were coming back, I mean) a Sunday or two ago. Four, aren't there?"

"Five. Three girls and two boys."

"Getting big too, aren't they?"

"Fine children, Mr. Carter," observed Dolly cheerfully.

"She was certainly a clever girl— in those days."

"Ah, in those days!" Dolly murmured, with an indulgent smile— one that means you can go on if you like, but that you are obviously rather foolish.

"Idyllic happiness," said I, resuming my seat, "comes to very few of us, Lady Mickleham."

"Well, one marries, or something, you see."

"There is, of course, one's career."

"Archie's quite keen on being an Under-Secretary."

"I may not understand, but I am willing to admire. Why didn't the girl encourage me? I expect that's all I wanted."

"Well, what do you mean by encouragement?" asked Dolly, pulling Fushahima's ears. She is always alive to the artistic value of the brute creation.

"What I mean by it is conveying, however delicately, that I was the only man in the world she ever did or could care for. Isn't that what you used to mean by it, Lady Mickleham?"

"You can take Fushahima, Pattern," said Dolly.

"Yes, my lady."

"Not too much cream in her milk."

"Very good, my lady."

"What were you saying, Mr. Carter?"

"I forget, my lady."

There was a moment's silence— sometimes there should be.

Then I took my tea and stood on the hearthrug, drinking it.

"Solitude, I believe, has its consolations, when one looks at other people's families. Besides, it's surprising the number of little luxuries I get for nothing."

"For nothing?"

"Well, out of Mrs. Carter's dress allowance. It's quite moderate— only four hundred a year— but it keeps a cab, and buys a little drawing, perhaps, and so on. It's a great comfort, I assure you."

Dolly began to laugh gently.

"She'd have exceeded it, and I never do more than anticipate it," I pursued.

"I've sometimes wondered at your extravagance."

"Ah, well, you understand it now."

"Did the allowance include frocks for the girls?"

"Pray curb your imagination. Lady Mickleham."

"You quite shuddered!"

"I had visions of short stiff frocks and long black stockings— like a family group at the Royal Academy, all legs and innocence, you know."

"Yes, and all named Carter!" sighed Dolly, with a commiserating air.

"You don't like the name?"

"Not much."

I looked at Dolly. I think we must have smiled.

"I might have known there was some such reason," said I.

"I do wonder what's become of Jane, and why they don't bring Fushahima back," said Dolly.

"It's always a comfort to get at the real reason of anything. Now if my name had been Vavasour— or—"

"I don't mind 'Mr. Carter' so much, but 'Mrs. Carter' sounds horrible," Dolly explained.

"Girls being, as we all know, in the habit of writing the competing names in conjunction with their own Christian names on the backs of envelopes and the fly-leaves of library books, in order to see how they look, I can well understand that, if it came to a choice between Carter and—"

At this point, before I had fully developed my remark. Lady Jane came back. She sometimes does by accident what the Dowager would do on purpose. Heredity, I imagine.

"I've been thinking about it," said Lady Jane, "and I'm quite sure it's goodness of heart."

"A fatal obstacle," I said, shaking my head despondently.

"Another!" murmured Dolly, with a lift of her brows.

"Shining through, you know, Mr. Carter," added Lady Jane.

"I really don't see the use of continuing the conversation."

"You must encourage him, Dorothea," said Lady Jane, with a smile.

Dolly laughed. I won't swear she didn't blush just a trifle.

"Oh, I've given up trying to do that, long ago, Jane dear," said she.

"She used to succeed far too well, you know. Oh, but pray allow me to hand you a cup of tea."

I went away soon afterwards. I had to pay a call— on the Martins,

14: Waiting for the Police

J. Jefferson Farjeon

Collected in: *Waiting for the Police and Other Stories*, 1943

'I WONDER WHERE Mr Wainwright's gone?' said Mrs Mayton.

It didn't matter to her in the least where he had gone. All that mattered in regard to her second-floor back was that he paid his three guineas a week regularly for board and lodging, baths extra. But life— and particularly evening life -was notoriously dull in her boarding-house, and every now and again one tried to whip up a little interest.

'Did he go?' asked Monty Smith.

It didn't matter to him, either, but he was as polite as he was pale, and he always did his best to keep any ball rolling.

'I thought I heard the front door close,' answered Mrs Mayton. 'Perhaps he went out to post a letter,' suggested Miss Wicks, without pausing in her knitting. She had knitted for seventy years, and looked good for another seventy.

'Or perhaps it wasn't him at all,' added Bella Randall. Bella was the boarding-house lovely, but no one had taken advantage of the fact.

'You mean, it might have been someone else?' inquired Mrs Mayton.

'Yes,' agreed Bella.

They all considered the alternative earnestly. Mr Calthrop, coming suddenly out of a middle-aged doze, joined in the thinking without any idea what he was thinking.

'Perhaps it was Mr Penbury,' said Mrs Mayton, at last. 'He's always popping in and out.'

But it was not Mr Penbury, for that rather eccentric individual walked into the drawingroom a moment later.

His arrival interrupted the conversation, and the company reverted to silence. Penbury always had a chilling effect. He possessed a brain, and since no one understood it when he used it, it was resented. But Mrs Mayton never allowed more than three minutes to go by without a word; and so when the new silence had reached its allotted span, she turned to Penbury and asked:

'Was that Mr Wainwright who went out a little time ago?'

Penbury looked at her oddly.

'What makes you ask that?' he said.

'Well, I was just wondering.'

'I see,' answered Penbury slowly. The atmosphere seemed to tighten, but Miss Wicks went on knitting.

'And are you all wondering?'

'We decided perhaps he'd gone out to post a letter,' murmured Bella.

'No, Wainwright hasn't gone out to post a letter,' responded Penbury. 'He's dead.'

The effect was instantaneous and galvanic. Bella gave a tiny shriek. Mrs Mayton's eyes became two startled glass marbles. Monty Smith opened his mouth and kept it open. Mr Calthrop, in a split second, lost all inclination to doze. Miss Wicks looked definitely interested, though she did not stop knitting. That meant nothing, however. She had promised to knit at her funeral.

'Dead?' gasped Mr Calthrop.

'Dead,' repeated Penbury. 'He is lying on the floor of his room. He is rather a nasty mess.'

Monty leapt up, and then sat down again. 'You— don't mean...?' he gulped.

'That is exactly what I mean,' replied Penbury.

There had been countless silences in Mrs Mayton's drawing-room, but never a silence like this one. Miss Wicks broke it.

'Shouldn't the police be sent for?' she suggested.

'The police have already been sent for,' said Penbury. 'I phoned the station just before coming into the room.'

'God bless my soul!' said Mr Calthrop.

'How long— that is— when do you expect...?' stammered Monty.

'The police? I should say in two or three minutes,' responded Penbury. His voice suddenly shed its cynicism and became practical. 'Shall we try and make use of these two or three minutes? We shall all be questioned, and perhaps we can clear up a little ground before they arrive.'

Mr Calthrop bridled.

'But this is nothing to do with any of us, sir!' he exclaimed.

'The police will not necessarily accept our word for it,' answered Penbury. 'That is why I propose that we consider our alibis in advance. I am not a doctor, but I estimate from my brief examination of the body that it has not been dead more than an hour. It could not, of course, be more than an hour and a half,' he went on, glancing at the clock, 'since it is now ten past nine, and at twenty to eight we saw him leave the dining-room for his bedroom...'

'How do you know he went to his bedroom?' interrupted Miss Wicks.

'Because, having a headache, I followed him upstairs to go to mine for some aspirin, and my room is immediately opposite his,' Penbury explained. 'Now, if my assumption is correct, he was killed between ten minutes past eight and ten minutes past nine, so anyone who can prove that he or she has remained in this room during all that time should have no worry.'

He looked around inquiringly.

'We've all been out of the room,' Miss Wicks announced for the company.

'That is unfortunate,' murmured Penbury.

'But so have you!' exclaimed Monty, with nervous aggression.

'Yes -so I have,' replied Penbury. 'Then let me give my alibi first. At twenty minutes to eight I followed Wainwright up to the second floor. Before going into his room he made an odd remark which— in the circumstances -is worth repeating. "There's somebody in this house who doesn't like me very much," he said. "Only one?" I answered. "You're luckier than I am." Then he went into his room, and that was the last time I saw him alive. I went into my room. I took two aspirin tablets. I went into the bathroom to wash them down with a drink of water. By the way, my water-bottle again needs filling, Mrs Mayton. Then as my head was still bad, I thought a stroll would be a good idea, and I went out. I kept out till approximately nine o'clock. Then I came back. The door you heard closing, Mrs Mayton, was not Wainwright going out. It was me coming in.'

'Wait a moment!' ejaculated Bella.

'Yes?'

'How did you know Mrs Mayton heard the front door close? You weren't here!'

Penbury regarded her with interest and respect. 'Intelligent,' he murmured.

'Now, then, don't take too long thinking of an answer!' glared Mr Calthrop.

'I don't need any time at all to think of an answer,' retorted Penbury. 'I know because I listened outside the door. But may I finish my statement in my own way? Thank you! As I say, I came back. I went up to my room.' He paused. 'On the floor I found a handkerchief. It wasn't mine. It hadn't been there when I left. I wondered whether it was Wainwright's— whether he'd been poking around. I went into his room to ask if the handkerchief was his. I found him lying on the ground near his bed. Dressed, of course. On his back. Head towards the window, one arm stretched towards the fireplace. Stabbed through the heart. But no sign of what he'd been stabbed with... It looks to me a small wound, but deep. It found the spot all right... The window was closed and fastened. Whoever did it entered through the door. I left the room and locked the door. I knew no one should go in again till the police and police doctor turned up. I decided to make sure that no one did. I came down. The telephone, as you know, is in the dining-room. Most inconvenient. It should be in the hall. Passing the drawing-room door I listened, to hear what you all were talking about. Then I went into the dining-room and telephoned the police. And then I joined you.'

Flushed and emotional, Mrs Mayton challenged him.

'Why did you sit here for three minutes without telling us?' she demanded.

'I was watching you,' answered Penbury, coolly.

'Well, I call that a rotten alibi!' exclaimed Mr Calthrop. 'Who's to prove you were out all that time?'

'At half past eight I had a cup of coffee at the coffee-stall in Junkers Street,' replied Penbury. 'That's over a mile away. It's not proof, I admit, but they know me there, you see, and it may help. Well, who's next?'

'I am', said Bella. 'I left the room to blow my nose. I went to my room for a handkerchief. And here it is!' she concluded, producing it triumphantly.

'How long were you out of the room?' pressed Penbury.

'Five minutes, I should say,' she answered.

'A long time to get a handkerchief?'

'Perhaps. But I not only blew my nose, I powdered it.'

'That sounds good enough,' admitted Penbury. 'Would you oblige next, Mr Calthrop? We all know you walk in your sleep. A week ago you walked into my room, didn't you. Have you lost a handkerchief?' Mr Calthrop glared.

'What the devil are you implying?' he exclaimed.

'Has Mr Calthrop dozed during the past hour?' pressed Penbury. 'Suppose I have?' he cried. 'What— what damned rubbish! Did I leave this room without knowing it, and kill Wainwright for— for no reason at all?' He swallowed, and calmed down. 'I left the room, sir, about twenty minutes ago to fetch the evening paper from the dining-room to do the crossword puzzle!' He tapped it viciously. 'Here it is!'

Penbury shrugged his shoulders.

'I should be the last person to refute such an emphatic statement,' he said, 'but let me suggest that you give the statement to the police with slightly less emphasis, Mr Smith?'

Monty Smith had followed the conversation anxiously, and he had his story ready. He had rehearsed it three times in his mind, and he was not going to make Mr Calthrop's mistake. Speaking slowly and carefully -he knew that if he spoke fast he would stutter— he answered:

'This is why I left the room. I suddenly remembered that I'd forgotten to return Mr Wainwright's latchkey. He'd lent it to me this afternoon, when I lost mine. But when I got as far as the first floor I met Mrs Mayton, who asked me to help her with the curtain of the landing window. It had come off some of its hooks. I did so and then returned to the drawing-room with her. You'll remember, all of you, that we returned together.'

'That's right,' nodded Mrs Mayton. 'And the reason I went out was to fix the curtain.'

Penbury looked at Monty hard.

'What about that latchkey?' he demanded.

'Eh? Oh, of course,' jerked Monty. 'The curtain put it out of my mind. I came down with it still in my pocket.'

'Then you've got it now?'

'Yes.'

'And you didn't go up to his room?'

'No! Thank goodness! I've just said so, haven't I?'

Penbury shrugged his shoulders again. He did not seem satisfied. But he turned now to Miss Wicks, and the old lady inquired, while her needles moved busily.

'My turn?'

'If you'll be so good,' answered Penbury. 'Just as a matter of form.'

'Yes, I quite understand,' she replied, smiling. 'There's no need to apologize. Well, I left the drawing-room to fetch some knitting-needles. The steel ones I'm using now. My room, as of course you know, is also on the second floor, the little side-room, and after I'd got the needles I was just about to come down when I heard Mr Wainwright's cough...'

'What! You heard him cough?' interrupted Penbury. 'What time was that?'

'Just before nine, I think it was,' said Miss Wicks. 'Oh, that irritating cough! How it gets on one's nerves, doesn't it? Or I should say, how it did get on one's nerves. Morning, noon and night. And he wouldn't do anything for it. Enough to send one mad.'

She paused. The tense atmosphere grew suddenly tenser. 'Go on,' murmured Penbury.

'Well,' continued Miss Wicks. 'Your door was open, Mr Penbury, and I went in to ask if we couldn't do something about it. But you were out. You've just told us where. And suddenly, when I heard Mr Wainwright coughing again across the passage— that awful clicking sound it always ended with— well, I felt I couldn't stand it any more, and I was knocking at his door almost before I knew it. It was my handkerchief you found in your room, Mr Penbury. I must have dropped it there.'

She paused again. Again Penbury murmured, 'Go on.'

She turned on him with sudden ferocity. Mr Calthrop nearly jumped out of his chair.

Monty felt perspiration dripping down his neck. Bella twined her fingers together to prevent herself from shrieking. Mrs Mayton sat rigid.

'Will you stop interrupting?' shouted the old woman.

Penbury moistened his lips. For a few moments Miss Wicks knitted rapidly, the steel points of the needles making the only sound in the room. They seemed to be doing a venomous dance. Then she continued, in a queer hard voice.

"Come in," called Mr Wainwright. "I'm coming in," I called back. And I went in. And there he stood smiling at me. "You haven't come to complain of my cough again, have you?" he asked. "No," I answered. "I've come to cure it." And I plunged a steel knitting needle into his heart— like this!

She stretched out a bony hand, and, with amazing strength, stabbed a cushion.

The next instant there came a knocking on the front door.

'The police!' gasped Mr Calthrop. But no one moved. With tense ears they listened to the maid ascending from the basement, they heard the front door open, they heard footsteps entering...

A moment later they heard Mr Wainwright's cough.

'Yes, and I heard it when he went out ten minutes ago,' smiled Miss Wicks. 'But thank you very much indeed, Mr Penbury. I was as bored as the rest of them.'

15: A Corner in Oils

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 19 Oct 1918

OBSERVE HIM. He would knock a man on the head for a five-pound note, but wouldn't do a day's honest work for twenty. Mr. George Horace Wallen looked the man over with an interest the absorption of which was almost child-like. He would have liked to linger in a doorway and gaze his fill on the phenomenon. George Horace Wallen had never killed a man himself; he had never had any particular need to; but there had been moments in his life when he felt that the capacity to do this thing, not only without remorse of conscience, but with a certain artistic relish, would have been a source of peculiar gratification to him.

Raymond Twicer was known to the elite of the criminal professions as Twicer the Bite. An inch or so over middle height, he was slimly built, with neat, long hands and small feet. His face was ivory pale, he had light eyes, the colorlessness of which created in the beholder a peculiar uneasy suggestion of cats. His chin was long and pointed, he had a small nose, scarcely more assertive than that of a babe, and ears so tiny you had to search for them, curled away under his thin, straight, dust-colored hair.

"Bless my soul!" said George Horace Wallen. "You don't mean to say he has actually, eh, done away with people— real people?"

"He is credited with at least a score," said Dell. "But nobody knows for certain. The fellow is reticent, has no vestige of the egregious conceit of the ordinary artist. Crowther, for instance, is said to be indebted to Twicer for the removal of his aunt. She was rich, but reluctant. The Bite never speaks of it."

Dell linked his arm in Wallen's and hauled him along, the well-known art patron dragging back like an unwilling child, gaping at this prodigy through his great, round spectacles, much as a rabid ethnologist might have gloated upon an entirely new specimen of the species.

George Horace Wallen was not the man you would suspect of entertaining any fugitive sympathy with casual assassins, being a short-legged, tubby gentleman, with large, mild eyes like those of a pet goat, benevolent side whiskers snow-white against his chubby cheeks, and a fine, old Mosaic nose. Mr. Wallen was reputed rich; at any rate he could afford to indulge in an expensive hobby, and was a rabid collector of pieces of virtu, pictures, and other specimens of the plastic arts.

The virtuoso was even now on his way to an exhibition of paintings at the rooms of the Impecunious Institute, managed by the members of the Association of Impecunious Australian Artists. Andrew Dell was his lawyer, a

gentleman utterly guiltless of artistic instincts of any kind, for which he fervently thanked heaven, and a strict methodistical upbringing.

Dell frequently acted as Mr. Wallen's agent, making purchases for that gentleman when the latter had some good and sufficient reason for maintaining secrecy in his dealings.

Out of sight of that delightful master craftsman. Twicer the Bite, George Horace Wallen's interest returned precipitately to the important work in hand. It was he who hauled the lawyer up the elaborately tortuous stairway of the Impecunious Institute, dragged him into the gallery where hung the somewhat listless pictures of the younger shoal of Australian painters for the gratification of a few limp spinsters, who seemed to be there because there was nothing else in life a body could do, and who drifted about, catalogue in hand, seeking to have their righteous indignation aroused by the more objectionable features of the painter's art as practised by a ribald generation.

"That's nice," ventured Dell, holding back before a violent vision of a lean lady fishing for crabs with her great toe off Point Cook.

"Garr!" snorted Wallen; "Walter Devoy's dish clouts. Don't look at 'em, they'll spoil your eye. Fantastical rubbish painted with a stick. Bannerman is mad about them, thinks this Decoy boy a genius. Rub a cat with three primaries, and let her loose after mice on twelve yards of canvas, and she'll produce you such works of genius by the dozen. I've tried it, Dell; I've tried it. Bannerman is buying up this Decoy stuff as fast as he can lay hands on 'em. Bannerman's a fool. Look at the prices. Twenty guineas for that spatter of anti-friction called 'Wallflowers.' Bannerman will be in the soup. Look this 'Daydreams'— fifteen guineas, and tripe nine pence the pound in any of the suburbs! Posh! Bannerman a connoisseur! I tell you, man, he doesn't know a work of art from a string of smoked bolognas."

"Here we are!" Wallen pinched Dell's sleeve and drew the lawyer closer; his voice fell to a whisper. "Hush! This is the boy, Jo Norman." The virtuoso looked right and left, with the air of an operatic conspirator, and pointed a trembling finger at a canvas representing two Watteau shepherdesses pushing a plump, undraped lady in a perambulator through a sylvan glade. "Beautiful! Glorious!"

"Hum, ye-as." Dell pursed his lips, and looked dubious. "Nicely lit up but a trifle— eh, eh— that is to say. Well, where the deuce are they going with the poor woman?"

Wallen snorted. "Shut up, you," he said. "As an art lover, you are still in the cave-dweller stage. All you have to do is but 'em, buy 'em, buy 'em. Buy this one, and that and that. They're simply marvelous. The boy is gifted like Velasquez. Man, I tell you in a thousand years educated humanity will be talking of these pictures with a reverence you haven't the grace to extend to Providence. You are a measly Scotch lawyer, Dell, with no more sense of beauty than a wombat;

but you have your uses. Buy these pictures for me. One, two three, four five—ten. Buy the lot. I must have them. Bannerman's eyes may be opened, but I wouldn't have his costar's collection of tobacco tabs relieved with a genuine Jo Norman for anything in the world."

Dell marked the pictures on his catalogue with a tick. "That one, too?" There was reproof in his tone.

He pointed to an undraped Eve holding familiar converse with a checkered serpent dappled with sunlight.

"I'm not consulting my spiritual adviser, Dell," said the little man with the white whiskers. "A lawyer with the Presbyterian bias is a mistake.

"Buy the lot, Dell. Buy one or two yourself. Get your clerks to work. And beat down the prices, man— beat them down. The paintings are cheap as dirt as it is, but knock off the odd shillings, turn guineas into pounds sterling. These infernal artists grow so apish. If they get all they ask they wax fat and kick. Get a couple or your friends to buy a pair, but keep my name out of it. Let this blackguardly painter devil know George Horace Wallen is buying his pictures en masse, and there'll be no holding him— he'll be opening his mouth as wide as the Hay Market gates. Get 'em, Dell, and get 'em cheap. For what else did I engage a braw, wee lawyer far' the wilds o' Glaze?"

George Wallen had begun as a picture lover; he had developed into a mere collector. It was a passion, a vice, like alcohol, or morphed, or the afternoon tea habit. He bought pictures that pleased him for the lust of possession, and stowed them away in all sorts of holes and corners. The philatelist's craving for a rare stamp was a pensive and rational desire compared with the yearning that consumed Wallen in the presence of a certain type of painting.

Wallet's latest craze was a comparatively sane one. Young Norman's oils were distinctly clever; they had a marked individuality; they were bright, saucy, exquisitely drawn, deftly painted. The young artist had an astonishing precocity. It was well within the bounds of reason that his works would survive to be the wonder and delight of a generation knowing him to be dead, and incapable of presuming on its generous appreciation.

The virtuoso went straight from the exhibition to Bannerman's rooms. Bannerman was in business; he ran a sort of new curiosity shop, where you could buy all the modern improvements on all the old masters in every department, from quite fresh Japanese prints to rejuvenated Michael Angelo's. Bannerman, a long, lean, dry, brown man, entirely bald saving for two thin arabesques of the original hair in dead centre just above his forehead, like a misplaced Norse moustache, craned over his counter, and peered at Wallen.

"Well," he said, "been up at the show, wasting your money on the wild Watteau of Woebegone?"

George Horace pursed his lips, and shook his head. "No," he said; "I have all the Jo Norman's I want. He grows too productive. The fellow will paint himself right out."

"Ah," said Bannerman, dubiously, stowing his glasses in ambush up under his cranial tuft, "we all lie a bit. I have bought three Decoy's. Great lad that. I've got a room full of his stuff, all cheap, all good. A splendid investment. That boy is coming into his own presently, and then I shall ask just what I like for those paintings and find dozens eager to give it."

"Rubbish!" said Wallen, warmly; "the fellow's a daub. He ought to be doing refined mural decorations for ice cream carts. He does those things in strings. If there ever is a market for him he'll supply it if he has to put on two additional mechanical arms, and smudge in four of his puzzling pictures simultaneously."

Bannerman grinned a dry, sour grin.

"Walter Decoy will not be there to do it," he said. "I can tell you this. You would not buy him if he was selling in truepenny bundles. He won't be there when he comes into his own." Bannerman lowered his voice, his eyes grew cunning. "He'll be dead. He has consumption. He comes into my shop here, coughing like a whole hospital for incurables. He has consumption. He has confided in me. His father died of it, his mother died of it. He will die of it. I have his positive assurance. He may last a year, and then when he has gone, up springs the demand for him, and old Bill Bannerman steps in to supply it at a three hundred per cent increase all round."

Wallen left his friend's shop, feeling a great disgust for the man. Banner-man dealt in pictures, as he did in old pipes and the whiskers of ancient Tibetan priests, for purposes of gain, but there was no need to be so sordid about it. George hated the idea of this parched ghoul trading on poor little Decoy's disease.

"At least I wouldn't do a low thing like that," said Wallen, in cordial self-appreciation. "If I did, I certainly wouldn't mention it to Bannerman."

George Horace Wallen went on with his subterranean buying of Jo Norman's paintings, hugging in secret his almost insane satisfaction at the thought that when at length a generation arose that wanted Jo Norman paintings, and wanted them badly, it would find the lovely things practically cornered in the justly celebrated Wallen collection.

But Norman continued to turn out his lively oils, and the time came when Wallen was haunted with a craven feeling of impending failure. It began to appear that his corner could not hold. If the painter could be stopped by any means all might be well. But what would hold the fellow off? How can you keep a rabid painter from painting?

"I'll die before the infernal scamp, and he'll go on turning out pictures, better pictures, perhaps. Mine will be of no particular value. My reputation may

even be discredited. I may be spoken of as a simple creature of indifferent judgment, who was content with the comparatively infantile spattering of an unripe genius. This must be seen into. This must be stopped."

George Horace Wallen dwelt upon the matter nervously, apprehensively, only to receive fresh occasion for alarm every month or so, as the papers grew warmer in the plaudits bestowed, upon young Norman, and printed new announcements of further superb products of Jo's prolific brush.

George had a sudden resolution. "I'll go and see the fellow," he said. "I'll pay him a visit in his mountain fastness. It may be worth while to secure an option on his crop. I might even get a chance to cut off his Dexter finger or something."

Wallen had no difficulty in securing an invitation. As a rich and assiduous buyer, every artist in Australia recognized George Horace as a man to be cultivated. He received a hearty welcome from the young artist, whom he found stowed away in a quaint chalet on the mountain side at Woebegone, living in an atmosphere of gum trees and tin fish, his bachelor household in tumultuous disorder, and littered from end to end with evidence of the occupant's craft.

The virtuoso saw Jo Norman, a slim-limbed youth of perhaps twenty-five, pale of face, and with a most deceptive air as of one suffering from some interesting congenital trouble aggravated by damp beds and malnutrition.

"Not strong!" said Wallen to himself, rubbing his hands with a certain glee. "Not at all strong. Weak chest, I should say. A touch of pneumonia, and, puff, out he goes!"

He heard Norman cough with gentle satisfaction. It helped to restore his confidence. "Lung trouble, perhaps," he mused. "He won't last."

George Horace noted, too, that the house was damp. There was fungus under the linoleum. He was careful not to mention it to the artist. "Useless to protract the poor fellow's existence. Why should he suffer?" Wallen felt a virtuous thrill, looking at the matter in this light.

The artist showed his guest paintings that caused the latter to open his eyes so wide with wonder that he never quite closed them again to his dying day.

"Of course, I've turned out leagues of inferior stuff," Norman said. "I've sold it, too. What does it matter? People wanted it. It's their own look out if they have a butcher's appreciation of tripe. A man has to learn, has to feel his way. Practice makes perfect. I think I have arrived where I was going at last, and now I am going to paint pictures. That 'King Henry Canoodling' is a fair sample."

"It's a masterpiece!" said Wallen, miserably; "I'll give you thirty pounds for it."

"Never on earth," said Norman. "The price is one hundred."

"Pounds?" ventured the patron, gingerly.

"Guineas! My prices have taken a jump, a running high jump. For the future people are not going to buy Norman paintings because they are cheaper than

wall-paper. Probably that King Hen is the cheapest thing I shall sell from now on."

"It's mine!" said Wallen, somewhat hastily. "But you must not go too fast, young man. You have rivals, you know. There's that lad Decoy, for instance. Oh, a clever lad— and cheap. He sells. People may turn from you. Go slow, go slow."

"Wally Decoy?" Jo Norman laughed easily. "Yes, he's clever; but he's only painting rubbish for one mad buyer in the city there."

"Bannerman?" said George Horace. Jo Norman nodded. "Devoy's got the old boy on a string. Goes in to him made up like a case of galloping consumption, and coughs all over the place, kidding he's in the final stage of a deadly malady, and Bannerman buys his pot-boilers by the gross, believing Wally will soon peg out, and that the public will want to buy Devoy's at fifty quid a time."

"And this Devoy— he really isn't sick at all?" asked Wallen, in sheer amazement.

"Sick? He's as healthy as I am. He'll never die. Eats like a circus bear, strong as a bull-camel. You couldn't kill that fellow with a maul. I've had a shot at it."

George Horace Wallen was shocked. His friend Bannerman was the victim of a shameful imposition. It was scandalous that a confiding, well-disposed man of business should be traded upon by a young scoundrel through his most generous emotions. But Wallen did not tell Bannerman. He was too busy brooding over his own case, for one thing. He, too, was the victim of misplaced confidence. Posterity, instead of applauding him as the most far-seeing art patron of his time, the Macaenas of Jo Norman, would gibe at him as a mere dilettante, if it heard of him at all, which was doubtful.

These considerations wrought a great change in Wallen; he lost his amiability, he became moody, sullen, vicious. Then came into his mind with a rush the grim idea, the great scheme. He thought of Bannerman and Devoy. Bannerman wanted his painter to die for no motive but vulgar gain; he (Wallen) had a similar wish, but a high, a noble motive. Meanwhile Jo Norman was painting like a mill. It must be stopped. Wallen had only one recourse, he called in Twicer the Bite.

"Yes," said The Bite, when the client had explained his case. "I'll kill the fellow for a reasonable consideration. My fee for artists is low. Say two hundred guineas. That's higher than usual rates, but this boy is some class. Two hundred guineas, and ten guineas per day travelling expenses."

"Too much!" cried Wallen in real distress. "Too much, too much."

Twicer the Bite took up his hat, and walked to the door. "Good day," he said. "Aren't the roses beautiful just now?"

"Stop!" yelled Wallen.

"I allow of no criticism of my terms," said Twicer. "If you want a cheap, nasty murder you can get a kind of slaughterman for, say, a ten pound note."

"But this is such a weak little fellow," said George Horace Wallen. "He's half dead already."

"They hang you for that sort just as readily as for Herculean specimens. I must be going. I have an engagement to amputate a clergyman's mother-in-law at eight this evening."

"All right, all right, all right," growled Wallen. "When can you have it done?"

"That I cannot say, until I have studied the local conditions."

"What will it be— cold steel, poison, lead?"

"Just as circumstances dictate. I may remind you that that is my business. In any case they are all the same price."

"You'll identify him easily, a slight-built, pale-faced youngster. His place is conveniently situated for a little affair of this kind. You have an easy job."

"Possibly; but I got my nickname for this." Twicer exposed a deep scar in his neck, startlingly suggestive of a full set of human teeth. "That's where I was fastened on by a shrimp of a fellow I was removing to the order of snide insurance society, a bit of a Scotch lawyer. He nearly ate me before I got through with him. You never can tell."

"You want fifty pounds cash?"

"Fifty in advance, thirty for exes., and your I.O.U. for one hundred and fifty guineas in each instance."

Twicer the Bite was away three days. When he returned he found George Horace Wallen reading *The Herald* with intense interest.

"Well," said the Bite; "is it all there?"

"Yes, yes, it's all here. You've done it." Mr Wallen looked with sudden suspicion. "If you did do it. The paper says he was killed by a dry limb falling from a tree under which he was working. It might have been an accident after all."

"Your I.O.U. for one hundred and fifty guineas," said Twicer, coolly. "Cash up. I do not discuss my professional methods with clients. If I had not gone to Woobegong that limb would not have fallen on the unfortunate young artist. That is sufficient for you. Big notes, please."

Wallen paid up. Twicer the Bite wished him a jaunty "Good day," and departed. An hour later George Horace Wallen, suffused with elation, went forth to call on Bannerman. He went as a conqueror. He had in his possession practically the whole of the output of the justly celebrated painter, Jo Norman, unhappily cut off in the flower of his youth and the height of his productiveness, and now humanity, awakening to the true significance of this superb genius, must turn to him, George Horace Wallen, for the mere privilege of gazing upon the work of the greatest painter Australia and the generation had produced.

When he entered the shop, he found Bannerman with a paper in his hand, capering like a mad Indian, and uttering a curious pagan chant expressive of

unbounded rapture. At the sight of Wallen, the business man drew up short, and eyed the virtuoso keenly.

"Well," said Wallen. "What would you give now for, say, a haphazard dozen of Jo Norman's oils?"

"Twenty per cent, over and above the cost of frames and canvas," Bannerman replied. "Is it possible you haven't seen the last edition? It's a case of mistaken identity, my friend. Mistaken identity. Norman is not killed. The victim was another young artist staying at the chalet." Bannerman threw Wallen the paper, and resumed his ridiculous song and dance.

Wallen read, and a cold despair swelled in his chest like an accumulating snowball, choking him. He uttered an inarticulate cry, and fell to the floor in a kidney fit.

Twicer the Bite had made a ridiculous mistake. The artist killed by him was one Walter Devoy!

16: The Vengeance of Dungarvan

Edwin L. Arnold

1857-1935

The Queen Christmas 1893

Collected In: *The Story of Ulla*, 1895

JOHN HACKETT, of Dungarvan, made a mistake that sunny afternoon in 1630, when he bore into the green courtyard of the O'Driscoll's castle, which looks down upon the pleasant Irish south coast town of Baltimore, the news of her lover's death to Margaret O'Driscoll. Like many another cunning rogue, he made a mistake on the threshold of the black game he was playing, having in it the germ of a disappointment which brought about his ultimate defeat, and drove him to the elaboration of a plot conceived by a mind cruel and bloody, and carried out in its maturity with remorseless determination. Hackett himself was an angular, lantern-jawed man of fifty, with a clean-shaved, wrinkled face ; an eagle nose, twinkling black eyes set close together, dark grizzled hair that hung down in uneven strands upon his shoulders, and, backed by the wide black hat he always wore, made his naturally pale face seem many shades paler still. Added to the uncouthness of his appearance, he had a secret way about him, a stealthiness of approach that was infinitely dispossessing. On the mountain roads he kept the shady side, and walked or rode his grey pony through the short ling with such instinctive secrecy that children playing amongst the brambles screamed and fled as the black horseman on the silent steed passed without a warning sound through their midst, the hill sheep scrambled in a startled herd across the pastures when Hackett was afoot, and in the town honest folk stopped their chatter and drew back to their doors, as, without a footfall or a whisper they could swear, without a smile or a look to right or left, his long loose cloak held close against his breast, and his keen, hard eyes aglimmer in that pale lean face of his, the stern Dungarvan agent came from the shadows, and, surly and morose, passed on down the street as secret and impenetrable as ever.

The bright Celtic nature shrank from that grim reserve. That he was severe and rapacious they knew to their bitter cost, and from their fear grew darker fancies. He had been abroad, he had strange languages and dreadful arts it was thought. He had trafficked with the Moor in an age when the cheek of Christendom blanched to hear even the mention of that name, and now and then they said he wrote long missives in unknown character, and far out at sea where he went, forsooth! to fish, he met prowling southern vessels, and held long conclave with their captains.

Many a black tale was whispered by the evening fires, to which the factor's name came in at the ending. Now some one would tell how, years ago, strong

John Croome had flouted Hackett in the public streets; had spit upon and derided him— as, God wot, he had well deserved— and then, dropping his voice until all the listening folk bent down over the glimmer of the low red peat in mid-floor to hear, the narrator would whisper how that same John Croome was found two days after in a peat-hole, dead— stabbed deep into the back; "and in the gaping wound just such a fletcher's knife as old Mort, of Dungarvan, makes and sells, and Hackett always carried." Another time another would vow the agent's luck was such that surely devils rattled Hackett's dice for him, throwing to his favour— fair or foul ! Did they not remember old Mike Ranstead— how he had the smartest yawl in the bay, and the longest nets, and the best team of horses, and the tallest sons, and the comeliest wife? And did they not recall how he ended a long grudge against Hackett by flogging him one day in the tavern parlour? Oh yes; his auditor remembered. And then the teller would take a pull at his wide brown mug, and seem to question of the good Tudor ale within whether they had forgotten how Mike's ships had sunk thereafter; how his nets, storm-broke, were lost adrift; " how his horses took the murrain; how his wife sickened and died, and two of his sons were killed fighting in Flanders?" And wives and gossips in the inglenook would shake their heads over the distaff and the loom, and say modest maids fled home when Hackett went afield; whisper of the blight his shadow had brought to many a hearth and household; whisper and sigh to recall how poor Kathleen Ardtornish died, and beautiful, vain Jennie Capard, and proud, false-played Margaret Kerwan— a dusky-hearted traitor, if one ever breathed.

So the tales spread, widening and gathering strange detail as they passed from lip to lip; and, little caring for good or bad report, the dreaded factor ruled with a rod of iron, while the sullen, submissive hate of those he ground down in their poverty, smouldered under the surface of their sullen helplessness. And then, one day, when bitter tongues had had nothing new to wag about for many months, the gossips were set talking again, for it was told that Hackett coveted Margaret O'Driscoll, the daughter of the petty thane whose ruined keep looked down from its rocky mound upon the townlet. A sweet and winsome girl she was, ruddy, and white, and active, with a step as light and springy as the green turf of her own hill-sides, and kind, bright Irish eyes, prone to melt with pity or flash at affront or slight with the spirit of her ancient but fallen line, and a mouth rosy and flexible, and a wealth of soft, dark hair, and a skin whiter than the froth upon the mill-stream, and, to back her comeliness, a heart as gentle, and brave, and faithful as ever beat under the cross folds of an island shawl.

And was this sweet wild Irish flower to fall to Black Hackett? It was with a thrill of something like horror the townsmen heard that that winsome girl had come under his evil notice, and they watched and waited, the women with keen vindictiveness noting his every movement, and the men scowling from street

corner and tavern window on the Dungarvan bully, who, by fair means or by foul, would rob "the master" of his daughter, and the town of its sweetest maiden. A wiser man than Hackett would have seen how deep and sullen the hate was growing against him, and hidden the iron hand of tyranny in a velvet glove. But tyrants rarely discern in time, and Hackett took a moody pleasure in the scowls. He smiled his sour, insipid smile to note how well the people hated him, and pressed his suit, until one day he thought the time was ripe, and then put the matter boldly to O'Driscoll's self with all his cunning verbiage. And that bulky Irish princeling of many ancestors and little gear would not even hear him out— he laughed in Hackett's wrinkled face, and told him it was not to be. He would not hear of it though Hackett brought half the country-side for dower— there were twenty worthy reasons against it, each one final, and the least of them all was that the maid was promised by her own accord to young John O'Hara of Bandon a year ago!

Then deep and fiercely Hackett swore he would not take no for an answer, and there, on that day twelve months hence, he would come again for the maid, and she should follow him, willy-nilly, and thus flung out in a furious passion, and rode away over the hills, so that the Baltimore gossips, who knew all this an hour after it had happened, fondly thought they were truly rid of him.

But in a couple of days he came riding back again, a little more jaundiced about the face, perhaps; a little sterner about the thin, close-set lips, but otherwise in good mood, and made his peace with the lady and her father, shaking hands with young O'Hara, and then presently in a month's time— wonder on wonder!— it became known that Margaret's happy lover was going southward on a voyage with rich merchandise, and it was Hackett who was to fit out and start O'Hara for that fortune, which should enable him to claim the fair Irish maiden's hand, on his returning. He fledged that fortunate youth in gallant style, and sent him forth with something so like generosity, that in the months that followed, a glimmer of goodwill began to dawn amongst the townsmen for their taxman; and some said if O'Hara came safely home, and Hackett stood by his present mood— why then he was a better man than they had taken him for. But others still shook their heads, and, muttering of wolf and lambs, waited grimly.

And then when half a year had gone by, one afternoon Hackett rode up the cobbled village street of white walls and deep-thatched roofs, where the swallows built amid the gabled fronts, taking his way to the O'Driscoll's keep, and there, his cunning face streaked with traitor grief, told him and the white-faced, broken-hearted girl at his side, that news had come to Dungarvan, telling how O'Hara's ship had been taken three months before by Moorish pirates and robbed and burnt, and all her company— saving one man who had escaped and

brought the tidings— were killed, or, what was much the same, captives to the Moslem.

Bitter again burnt up the anger and hatred of the people against that lean purveyor of sorrows, and Baltimore, with a keen suspicion Hackett knew more of this matter than he chose to show, scowled afresh to hear his horsehoofs in her street, and cursed his black shadow. But little that mattered to him. The factor saw the hatred of men and women, and laughed at it in his mirthless way, and, his small eyes ashine with secret triumph and his pale lips set hard, turned all the bitter skill he had in usury or extortion on them, and while he racked and bullied he renewed his wooing of shrinking, tearful Margaret O'Driscoll, at first insidiously, then, as he thought he prospered, more boldly, and never conquering the girl's open dislike— an aversion deepened by recollection of the fact that it was he who had sent her lover on his fatal quest, it was he who had brought home the luckless news— still hovered about, a grey epitome of her grief, and dogged her footsteps, and strove to dry her tears with his hateful comforting. So things ripened to the final catastrophe.

A few weeks after, and one forenoon, down in the grassy castle-yard of O'Driscoll's keep, encircled by its ragged fringe of crumbling stone walls, and backed by the loopholed front of the main tower, were collected a surging crowd of peasants and fishermen, bare-armed, bare-headed, bare-footed most of them, all shouting and crying angrily in the native tongue, and pointing the finger of hatred against one man, who stood in the centre of the rough circle, with arms folded across his breast, head sunk down upon his shoulders, grey eyes agleam, and teeth uncovered in an angry snarl like a gaunt dog that the red hill-wolves have bayed between the rocks.

It was Hackett, and over against him were two or three men of better dress than the others, but, like them, blue-eyed and ruddy-haired; while behind them, again, away in the shadow of the tower, where a patch of sapphire sea showed through a gap in the crumbling rampart, and the ranks of yellow wall-flower were dancing their golden heads in the windy sunshine— back there stood Margaret O'Driscoll, weeping on the shoulder of an ancient nurse, who strove in vain to dry the hot, gusty tears that kept welling into the averted face of the Irish girl.

Presently the angry babel quieted for a minute, and then Brian Borgil, the nephew of the absent O'Driscoll, turned, flushed and scowling, from the prisoner in front of him to the tumultuous, motley crowd beyond, and asked of one stalwart kern, "You, Shawn, what has Black Hackett been doing now?" and Shawn, nothing loath, stepped forward, and in hot, fluent Gaelic, with fierce, dramatic gestures and an accusing finger pointed at the culprit, told how he and another, as they worked unobserved on the peat hags, had seen the man secretly follow fair Margaret down through the birches to the well in the glen,

and how some time afterwards they had heard her cry for help, and throwing down their spades had gone to her rescue, and had met the maid "running like a hunted roe, with hair astream and face aflame and dress all torn, and a minute after— hot on the trail, like a stoat after a leveret— Black Hackett of Dungarvan; and how they guessed the cause, and fell upon him, whereupon he pulled a pistol and shot Cogan of Rathsulla through the shoulder," and here the hapless Cogan interrupted with a yell of recollected pain and anger, and all the sympathetic folk about him yelled in tune, and shouted and waved their hands, and over the babble you could hear the invective of their long-stored anger at the flood bursting out in furious curses. "To hell with him!" some one cried. "Are our maids Dungarvan trulls that he should harry them, and our men dogs for him to draw upon?" "And it is not the first time he has brought shame upon us," screamed a shrill woman's voice amid the crowd, "who durst not go o' nights past the pool where Margaret Kerwan drowned herself, who starts and scowls to hear me cry on Jennie Capard, and the black-haired daughter o' Ardtornish?"

"Who stabbed young Michael in the back o' Dunkerron?" shouted another.

"Beast! Villain! Traitor agent!" yelled the excited peasants. " Hang him, Brian! Throw him from the tower! It is he brings tax and cesi upon us! It is he thieves widows' corn, and take: usury, and steals poor fishers' profits! It is In stands in wait for maids at corners! It is his black shadow on the white cottage wall that is grief ii summer and sorrow in winter! Kill him, Master Kill him, strong son of Macgillah!"

And so the fierce, plaintive, picturesque testimony of those rude witnesses in that rough court of justice rose in a turbulent medley up to the grey walls above.

Then the judge spoke, his native wrath thinly hampered by his sense of feudal dignity—

"Hound! Is it not enough that you should fill your secret money-bags with the hard-won pence of these my kinsman's people? is it not enough that you should hector and bully here who stand cap in hand, like the cringing slave you are, yonder before your masters and ours? Is it not enough that you should be a murrain to our cattle in spring, and disaster to our fleet in winter, and a curse to our streets? Must you, too, be a shame and a sorrow to our hearths? Look!" and pouncing on the unhappy agent as the last reserves of his feudal equity gave out, the furious young Irishman dragged him through the howling crowd to the ragged edge of the battlement. "Look at yonder red bar of rusty iron jutting from the wall," he cried. "It was on that my grandfather hung Hugh MacDermot for the half of your offences, and his father in turn hung Browell the Brave and twenty others. O'Moore of Lockee hung there ten months, and when the crows above had done with him, they cut him down to give the dogs below a chance. Say, people!" cried Borgil, grasping the struggling agent by one strong hand and

holding up the other, open palmed, to heaven, "say, is the measure of bitterness full— is the black harvest ripe? Have our maidens sighed and our widows wept enough, say! Shall we do what no one else will do for us, and try if yonder bar will bear yet one more load? Speak, speak!" And, at first low, like the wailing of women, and then stronger, like the wind coming across the hollow ground, and then with one wild yell of hatred and anger the verdict of the suffering people was given, and Hackett of Dungarvan doomed.

And now all was fierce excitement in the grassy, cobbled courtyard, and while the women hung back, and some half-dozen urchins ran gleefully waving their caps down the hill to tell the startled village that the great factor was to be hung, the men crowded to the ancient battlements and made their scanty preparations. They found a rope in the sheds— a beautiful coil of red "leader," new got for a herring net, as round and supple as you could wish, and— because there is always one genius in every crowd— out of the surging mass sprang little Haggie Crooked-shank, and in a trice, as though he had been bred to it, he took the tail of the rope, and made a loop two feet long, and took three turns upon the slack, and passed the end down through the turns inside and jerked it tight, and put his foot upon it, and pulled and pulled again, and then, jumping on a block, proudly displayed as sweet and neat a noose as ever stilled the feeble flutterings of a wicked heart Next light Haggie slipped over the ragged wall, and in dead, silence, with all eyes on him, went down by gurgyle and crumbling coping to where that stern old symbol of rough justice jutted from the ancient masonry, and crawled out along the rotten iron beam, and, nicely measuring the distance, made the halter fast with a couple of stout knots, then, turning, brought the loop back in his teeth to the courtyard battlements where the eager faces were as thick as head of corn in August.

They dragged the luckless agent to the scarp, screaming and howling hideously, then drowning his yells for mercy and mad ravings of a swift retribution to follow on them with the fierce cries of their long-stored anger, and hustling and pulling, they got him close to the wall that, in strange mockery to the horrible scene of vengeance they were enacting, was hung with the yellow and crimson flowers of summer, and framed the sweet picture of sea and sky beyond. There Hackett fought them like a fury until his clothes were all in ribbons, fought them with horrible oaths and blasphemies, until the cowering women hid their heads beneath their shawls and shrank into the corners. There was no time to bind their victim— it was fierce butcher work which nothing excused but the much they had suffered. They overpowered him with sheer numbers, they slipped the noose about his neck, and with a fierce yell of scorn, hoisted him shoulder high at last, and bore him struggling so to the nearest gap.

Then up jumped Margaret O'Driscoll, and with a cry of horror and compunction, fled to her kinsman, and "Oh, cousin!" she cried, "it is horrible—

horrible like this! Let him live, let me plead for him ; I, who have most wrong, of mercy have most right ; see how he strains and holds out his hands to you, and knots them together, and implores— oh, cousin, he will not offend again— for my sake!" and then suddenly, with a scream of terror, she dropped her white face upon her kinsman's shoulder and stopped her ears.

Even while she spoke two strong fellows had taken Hackett up, poising him for a moment like a bar, and as the last syllables of gentle pleading left her lips they had swayed for a minute, and then together, with one dreadful send, had tossed the villain out into space! Over he went— over and over, with the spin of that strong impetus, under the stare of the hundred stern, revengeful faces lining the ramparts— over and over— now head up and now heels, with his wretched rags fluttering from him, and one wild, dying yell rising sharp and keen into the air through the confused shout of the spectators; and then there was a horrible thud, and the rope tightened with a jerk. Surely, surely, Hackett of Dungarvan was fairly ended now!

Out over the battlements eager heads were crowded ; the little urchins, bare-headed, clambered up amongst the wall-flowers; the pale women peered irresolute through the gully-holes to see Black Hackett swinging; and then, as the sound of that sickening thud died away, out of the dry throats of those straining executioners, as they peered down into the fosse below, broke a furious cry, and then they were wildly gesticulating, and waving their arms, and running here and there. Hackett of Dungarvan's luck was not yet out. Hackett had escaped! The rope caught under his arm in those mad twirls, and, with a desperate effort, as he fell he got it somehow in his teeth, and when it tightened with a jerk, the rotten mortar up above gave to that desperate strain, out came the stanchion that had hung a score of better villains; out came staples and stone and casing, and in a cloud of rubble and dust and mortar, in an avalanche of green and grey lichens and disjointed masonry, gallows and gallows'-bird fell crashing into the ling and brambles that choked the ancient ditch below.

It was a sheer steep deep drop of thirty feet or more, and at first the ragged kerns who bent eagerly over the rotten parapet hoped that, if their victim escaped hanging, yet the fall itself would have killed him. Eagerly they bent over, staring with starting eyes and open mouths into the green tangles of briar and fern below. Was he alive ? Was he dead ? They could scarce fashion the question in a fierce whisper one to another ere in a minute the brambles rustled and parted, and out of them rose a wild head and ragged shoulders, and in another second a horrible ashy face, lean with pain and terror, was turned up in dazed confusion to those who peered above, and Hackett of Dungarvan was staring at them with a dull, vacant stare while the blood and sweat ran down from his forehead in thin streams, and the strong throes of the unspent fear shook him like an ague.

There was no gate on that side— only a long sweep of steep grey wall, and so for a minute judges and judged glared at one another, and then— the kerns had suffered, and the furious Irish blood was up— on the ears of the hunted man fell the shout of some running round from the rear of the castle to take him again. With a hoarse cry, Hackett staggered to his feet, tore the broken strands of the noose from his swollen neck, and casting it down, scrambled up the bank of the moat. An hundred yards away his grey Irish pony was standing, where he left it, under the lee of a hawthorn bush, with no thought in its placid mind of human hates and passions, and round the far corner of the keep the kerns were streaming, their bare sheath-knives in their hands and their shaggy red hair flying in the wind.

All around the wretch saw the sweet green hills in the low rays of the afternoon sun, and yonder was the steed might sweep him to them out of the fangs of this cursed mob of wolves; but he was sick and giddy and weak, he reeled and pitched so like a ship in a cross sea the first few steps he made, that those who, with bated breath, watched from the castle, thought even then he could not escape. Out over the flower-speckled grass staggered the unhappy agent, one hand stretched before him towards the white form of that patient beast, and the other grasping his burning throat, reeling and tottering and faint and behind him fifty paces, running three steps to his one, were the pursuers. Another moment and he had got the startled pony by the mane, and the foremost of the kerns was not twenty yards away.

Then they who watched upon the wall saw Hackett essay to get upon the beast— and fail, They saw the swiftest-footed runner behind draw his fingers down the white blade of his knife as though he were already wringing red blood from it— they saw Hackett gather himself for one last effort— and the next moment the white pony was galloping out towards the open heather with Hackett— near prone— lying along its back, and the kern's keen Irish blade was hurtling harmlessly through the summer sunshine after them.

Out towards the moors he galloped, and when he came to the top of the first rise and pursuit was already over, and the grey town, lost to him forever, lay basking below in the green arms of the hills, he pulled reign for the first time, and looking back, broke out in a furious, incoherent, spluttering storm of rage and shame, shaking his clenched fist back at the peaceful village of white fronts, grey thatch, and square red chimney-stacks whence the blue evening smoke was already drifting out in a thin veil over the marsh lands.

"Curse on you, Baltimore! Curse on you! Curse on your foundations and your roof-ridges! Curse on your pavements and hearthstones ! Curse on your walls and roofs ! Black death walk your streets, and disaster dwell with you! The bitter, bitter curse be yours for this day's work!"

And so, spending his spleen in savage invective, he presently gave out, and turning once more rode northward along the bleak, unwall'd coast road, with its barren peat mosses on one hand, and long sad beach and streaks of seawrack on the other, ambling sullenly along, though each step was agony to his battered limbs and many bruises, his black cloak flapping in the wind, and his long, lean arms thrown out at times, as the wrath and the pain welled-up. And sometimes he would stop and shake his fist back at the blue smoke-mist of the village, and shout such bitter curses back at it that the plovers which had settled on the grassy hillocks for the night rose in wheeling flocks against the saffron-sunset sky, circling overhead with plaintive cries, and then he would press forward with head again deep down between his shoulders, and blind fury, headlong malice, and wounded pride grinding in his heart.

For an hour he rode like that, until presently, when the pale stars had risen one by one into the evening sky, he suddenly smote his clenched hand fiercely into the other, and peering wickedly here and there, laughed a guttural wicked laugh that broadened soon into a concachinnation of devilish merriment— a dry, cruel peal of black laughter that contorted his lean visage with puckers, and shook his sides, and hung about in the folds of the dim shadow draperies of the night, and came back from the hollows of the hills in mocking echoes that sounded to his heated spirit like grim approval from out of the throats of the darkness. An idea had flashed on Hackett of Dungarvan— a dreadful fancy full of the smell of smoke and new blood, full of the dying screams of shame and agony— a wicked plot, as grateful to his heated lust of vengeance as a cup of clean spring water to a dusty messenger; and he chuckled as it grew out in detail before him, and the spleen and cruelty on his face gave way to glee. He no longer ranted and fumed under the lash of his rage, but clapped hands upon the neck of his grey pony, and, with an occasional twitch of pain or merriment shaking him now and then, rode on steadily until he presently crossed the last of the low peat hills, and dropped down with the end of the twilight into the little waterside village where he lodged.

Two hours after, unwashed, unfed, his throat bandaged in wet linen, and an earthen jar of spirit at his elbow, Hackett was writing a long letter in Arabic which, when it was done, he signed and sealed with the utmost care, addressing the silk-tied envelope and putting a name upon it that Western Christendom shuddered even to dream of.

IT WAS a warm still evening in June, just twelve months afterwards, and Baltimore, relieved from the incubus of her black agent, had grown rich and happy. Such a good season had not been for many years ; the herring-nets were lined each haul with silver, the straggl'ing yellow harvest of the autumn had come to shock heavier and riper than for twenty reapings, the green meadow

grass had been cut three times, each time knee-deep; the brown stacks of winter peat— now Hackett of Dungarvan was away— stood cottage-high upon the hills! And Baltimore was rich. Baltimore had sold her fish and corn and kine, had thatched her houses anew with deep golden rushes, and painted the doorsteps blue, and bought longer, redder nets ; and the great morse brooches sparkled again on the shoulders of her comely wives and maidens, and the wooden shoes of the little ones clattered gleefully on the cobbles of the streets. More swallows had come that year to Baltimore, they said, than any year before, and a white stork— certain harbinger of happiness— had built upon her market top!

Never was there such a merry townlet as that which clustered round O'Driscoll's rocky mound that pleasant summer nightfall. The strong, sweet tide of happiness set strong upon her beaches, and every cottage-hearth felt the gladdening touch of it. Surely it was wonderful and sad to see how much difference one man's going could make to any place ; but so it was, and Baltimore, rich in love and contentment, at peace with all mankind, wrapped itself in rosy dreams of lovely to-morrows and slept. The pale primrose twilight on the harbour water deepened into purple and went out; the hazel thickets and the marshy meadows faded back into the shadows of the hills ; the faint, fine strands of summer mist, as light as lady's lawn, came in dim procession down from off the mosses, with the soft music of the eddying evening air to marshal, and the deep, drowsy scent of sleeping meadow-flowers for heralding; and the great fabric of the unfathomed sky above was dusted presently with a thousand glittering planets. Below, one by one, the lesser lights in Baltimore went out, until only that lamp burned where pale Margaret O'Driscoll sat and sighed for her dead and distant lover, and then soon that one also faded. The wife's head was on her husband's arm, the babe on its mother's breast; the dogs were slumbering in the shadows down below, and the swallows silent in their nests above. Clearer and clearer burnt out those brilliant saffron stars, and in and out amongst them the velvet bats went flittering, and, save the cry of the heron to its mate upon the distant tarn and the lowing of contented cattle, knee-deep in shadowy thyme and parsley, no sound broke the Arcadian stillness of that midsummer evening.

Baltimore slept!

Then— it was near two in the morning, and the yellow shine of the moon was coming down aslant off Gabriel and tipping with a pale ghostly light, like a lying dawn, the hummocks of the moor and the stone walls and the cottage-tops; the wind blew fresh in from the water; the rising tide was prattling amongst the green stakes of the jetty; and the first curlew of the morning was calling on Aghadown— then— just at that hour when sleep was deepest and no one watched, two pale forms, two ghostly shadows of sail and mast and long

lean hulk, came stealing towards Baltimore up the creek that led in from the open sea beyond. Unhappy, sleeping Baltimore! They came on and on, stealthy and silent, past the salt marshes and creeks and flats, taking shape and form, as they slipped from the darkness, of craft such as had never touched at Baltimore before, with long lateen yards and spritsail aft, high-sterned, with low green sides pierced for tier on tier of sweeps, hued green and white; and dangling from the peak each carried, damp and limp with night dew, that symbol of cruelty and rapine— the red crescent flag of the Algerian.

The white marsh air swung about them, it parted before their bows and went swirling and eddying to right and left in the last rays of the yellow summer moonlight, the rank, salt herbage sighed and shivered as they slipped by, the long oars dipped silent and slow in the black water ; and so at last, out of the night, and the mist, and the moonshine those twin spectres came secretly down upon the town, and under the shadow of her houses, half a stone's-throw from her deserted market-place, they presently ran their iron keels up the slanting beach.

Then, while the lateen yards chafed gently against the masts, and the harbour water swirled and played under their lifting sterns, the rows of oars were drawn back into the hulks, and out of the hatches swarmed in silent confusion a jostling crowd of dusky men, turbaned and shaven, with soft, slippered feet, and swarthy bodies bare to the middle, their many-coloured waistcloths stuck full of deadly things from the cruel smithies of Al Araish and Melillah— daks from Kossur, and shining poniards from Malaga anvils— and, tumbling and scrambling, yet all with the robber instinct silent as death, they surge up and clamber into the sloping bulwarks of the galleys. Then a whisper goes round amongst them, and from his place at the tiller— fitting guide for such a swarm— comes forward a sombre figure in a long black cloak and broad hat, and as the first gangway plank is run out, he leaps lightly upon it, and, running down, set first foot upon the empty quay of Baltimore. Standing there in a slant of moonlight that comes between two house-tops, he lifts his cap in bitter mockery to the town, and that light shines for an instant on the cunning face, a gleam with pride and vengeance, of Hackett of Dungarvan, the oppressor, the spoiler, who has come to-night to settle some old grudges, and, though he knows it not, make, by one strange chance, restitution, full and complete, to her who of all others he has wronged the most.

Behind him the plunderers pour out from the ships in a silence that makes the whole scene like some horrible ghastly pantomime, dropping over the sides in clusters, and slipping down by every stay and rope until there are two hundred of them in the shadow of the walls, armed to the teeth— as fierce and desperate a crew of ruffians as ever landed on a Christian shore. For a minute or two, until all is ready, Hackett flits amongst them, urging and counselling; then,

while their yellow-slipped captains glide here and there, dividing the Moslem raiders into gangs and blowing up their smouldering torches, he singles out a pair of cut-throat rogues, and, with them close at his heels, runs swift and softly down the sleeping street that leads from the market-place, and still keeping in the shadows and turning and twisting through the alleys— no one knows them better— makes for O'Driscoll's hold.

There is not a sound yet in the dark starlight of the summer morning— not a suspicion of the cruel robbers who lie hidden under the wide cottage-eaves, waiting but one signal-shot to begin their wild revel of blood and pillage— and Hackett creeps unnoticed up the winding path to the Irish chieftain's portal, and entering, close followed by those scoundrel shadows, crosses with a savage grin of pain and shame the green courtyard where the wild justice of the kerns condemned him, thence passing the trustful Irish doors one by one, in a minute is in Margaret's chamber.

The pale shine of the morning steals through the lattices, casting as it comes a faint, soft radiance into the room, and by that light Hackett steps over to the maiden bed and draws the white curtain. There lies the beautiful Irish girl that he has robbed of life and lover, fast asleep, all in her comely homespun night-gear; her black hair astray over the white pillows, her fair pale face upon her arm, and on her long lashes he sees, as he puts his envious face in the grey twilight close to hers, two shining tears have gathered. For a minute Hackett glowers at her with triumph and love in his eyes, then, like a wolf claiming his quarry, leans a heavy hand upon her shoulder, and as she starts and wakes and stares wildly about, he bends over and laughs.

"Ho! ho! sweetheart! You thought I was more forgetful than I am! But, see, I have come to claim my own with these kind gentlemen behind for groomsmen— nothing on earth parts us now, my pretty. Away in the South I have built you a bower. Thither we fly with the daylight. We will forgive and forget old scores, and take our fill of love and toying."

And so he ran on until Margaret started up with a fierce effort and pressed her fingers to her eyes, and wrung her hands and burst out—

"O Mother of Christ ! is this some nightmare— some dreadful madness of my mind? For the love of all the saints, say who you are who stand so grim and dreadful about me! Oh! I am mad ! Help, Kathleen! Help, Rhona! or I shall die!"

And the unhappy girl struggled furiously to shake those long, lean fingers from her.

But Hackett held her down.

"What, honey! Ungrateful and contrary still. There! there! Lie quiet, you banshee— I have a ship upon the quay, and if you will be gentle and amenable I will squander kindness on you. Ah! if you will come sweetly with me—"

"Never! never!" screamed Margaret, half witless with shame and terror; "if you are who you seem indeed, and not some hideous shadowy nightmare, I spit on and deride and hate you! Help! father! Help! " and the girl screamed until the turret echoed.

Hackett knew there was little time to parley, and swearing with a wicked oath no maid ever yet twice said no to him, he made a sign, whereon his ruffians seized on the girl, dragging her from the bed, and while one hoisted her, all in torn white night-linen, shoulder high, and bore her struggling out, the other blew his smouldering torch into flame, setting fire first to the bed, then bursting the lattice, fired the summer-dry thatch outside, and retreated just as O'Driscoll, sword in hand, was hurrying from his distant sleeping place.

Down the rocky slope the slaves dragged the hapless girl, and hardly had they got amongst the streets below when sharp and clear in the still morning air came the sound of a shot from a pistol, and at once— it was like listening to the first hungry cry of the wolves in dusky thickets around you— rose from the four quarters of the townlet the fierce wild yell of "Allah! Allah!" and on the breath of the morning came the rushing of slippered feet, the bark of a startled dog or two, and the guttural laughter of the plunderers let loose. Another minute, and a strange hectic flush rose up against the dark sky overhead, as though hell were opening in a dozen places, and Hackett knew the torches were firing thatch and gable to give light for that fierce orgie just beginning.

He saw and knew there was no time to waste. He had some private debts to pay, the very thought of which made him lick his lean lips, and grind his teeth, and draw the keen Moorish blade hidden in his waistband half from its sheath. So, with a hasty word to the slaves to bear the fainting girl down to the ships, and see her safely secured, he turned into the alleys, and disappeared amid those shadows which a strange new red light was quickly brightening.

And by this time hell indeed had opened, and sleeping Baltimore woke to find itself in flames, and its streets filled with savage hordes of cruel plunderers who cared neither for men nor gods, who knew no syllable of the language in which shame and misery wailed for mercy, and took a keen infernal pleasure in the bloody scenes of torture and ruin they invoked.

There was no hope, no chance of resistance against a visitation so sudden, so deadly, and so unexpected. John Fraenkel, the tanner, heard some one tapping at his door just before the flames burst out, and running down and casting the hatchway open, his head was split to his chin with a single blow from a scimitar. Old Simeons was dragged by his white beard from his bed, and his neck struck in two against the kitchen bench. Maclenner -and O'Callish— strong men both of them— were stabbed before they were half awake, and their screaming wives were dragged naked into the street, and tied hand and heel, and left so, sprawling on the cobbles, until they could be come for presently.

O'Driscoll and all his household perished after twenty minutes of fierce fighting. Out on the meadows and down by the harbour, asleep and awake, supplicant or fierce, the people were slain alike.

From street to street the Moslems ran, crying, "Allah! Allah!" and plunging their torches into the low thatch of booth and cottage as they passed, butchering and destroying, bursting doors and windows, casting out of the lattices stuffs and gear, and boxes and bags of hoarded coin and trinkets; plundering, and robbing and shouting, while the scream of the women and the wail of the children, and the hum and rattle of spreading flames soared up to heaven on a great pillar of grey smoke and crimson light. And as the wild din and uproar swelled and spread, and the guttural cries of the pillagers thrilled in the dim vortex of the smoke and darkness, the fury of the sack mounted each moment. The streets were full of women who ran here and there, splashing through pools of kinsmen's blood; of little children, who sobbed and died on the yataghans of dark-faced butchers; of strong men, who fought a moment and then fell; of strange, fitful, momentary scenes of cruelty and rapine that shone for a space, and then gave place to others that in turn rose and vanished between the folds of the dim, gold-streaked curtain of the smoke.

From street to street the Moslems ran like banded furies, slaying the unarmed peasantry, pillaging and killing. Yet even in that dreadful hour— defenceless and surprised— the gallant Irish blood showed bravely here and there. Many a gentle deed was done that night, and many a gallant act of useless valour lay buried under the white ashes of the town when morning dawned. Patrick Bernson held his cottage for an hour of that terrible evening, and safely kept his fair young wife and his babes; for when that dreadful hour was over, the burning roof fell in, and all four died together. Long-legged Andrew Kearn, the poor wastrel of the quay, whose heart was thought to be as empty as his yellow head, had distanced all pursuit, and had near got out upon the safe, free moors beyond the outmost houses, when he heard a little damsel cry in the town, and back he came— back to his death, picking her from under the very knife of a drunken ruffian, and as the poor fool— who was so mean no man in that place was mean enough to call him friend— staggered off again through the market-square with his little golden-haired prize pressed to his silly heart, the same bullet killed him and her.

Aye, gallantry was of no account, and valour stood for nothing against those hungry wolves. Strong John Ellingham saw his young wife carried down to the ships— he had but fetched her home a month before— and snatching an ancient broad-sword from its hooks, went after her through the howling mob, and the smoke, and the flame, and carving a bloody passage into the Moslem pack, he presently came to the fair girl, and lopping down those that held her, she was free. Thereat, in a gust of love, and thoughtlessness, and terror, she

leapt to that strong man, and, pressing her lips to his, threw her white arms round him. And so, pinned and hampered by those gentle fetters, brave Ellingham was helpless, and in a trice five knives were in his back, and he died, and his sweet wife was slave and plaything to Abu Said, of Omara, for seventeen years.

Now drew near that wonderful chance which spoiled the completeness of Hackett's plans and, on that night of separations, united two lovers against all likelihood or expectation. For by this time the town was blazing furiously, and loud over the wail of the people, and the confused shout of the victors, the steady, sullen roar of the flames went up into the sky, and the hungry rattle of the red gleams leaping from roof to roof echoed amid the crash and rumble of walls and rafters falling in behind them. The streets were strewn with dead and dying, while wild forms of Arabs rushing here and there— the kennels down the centre ran rippling red with crimson blood— and the burning flakes of golden fire fell like a molten infernal rain, without stop or pause, on everything. Through all that blood and turmoil, the destroyers, true to their robber-instincts, had not ceased to throw out of doors and windows such things as they thought of value, and the better ways were still littered with the out-turn of plundered homes, cups and pots and pans of old Irish craftsmanship, the cherished heirlooms of a frugal race, and golden morses and bronze bangles and amber beads, and yards of green silk and furs for holidays, and holy cups and jewelled crucifix from the chapel, and boxes and bales, and misers' chests and housewives' wallets— those greedy thieves had had no time to be discriminate, but had sacked and gutted, and butchered and burned, step by step as they won their way, without pause or chance to do more than toss everything, quaint or rich, that took their fancy into the streets below. And now here was the town burning like Tartarus' self, and the spoil drowning in the gutters or sinking under the glowing rain of embers— oh, it was enough to make an honest pirate weep red tears to see such wastefulness! and that swart villain Al Gakdul, of Melk, the captain of the galleys, beat his hand upon his dusky breast, and shouting to a passing ruffian, bid him run like the red wind itself to the quay, and tell those who stayed by the ships to loose the galley-slaves from their fetters at the benches and send them here to help get down the goodly stuffs and trinkets. Away went the messenger, and Al Gakdul, crying " Allah! Allah!— burn, my children, burn, and plunder!"— plunged into the smoke again.

Five minutes afterwards hammer and file were at work upon the slaves who sat in foul darkness at the galley oars, the hatches were taken off, and blinking and winking in the ruddy glow, naked to the waist for the most part, of many countries, haggard, savage, half-starved and wretched, their stiff lean fingers still bent like eagle's talon to the shape of the sweeps they plied in eternal misery in the black womb of those pirate ships, by twos and threes and fours the

slaves came trooping up from below until they tasted the fresh night air, then stood and leered and stared, rubbing their eyes and grinning to see another sort of hell, brighter and more cheerful than that black purgatory they had just left, open up before them. They eyed the lines of captive women cowering between their guards with the sullen pleasure with which beasts long taken welcome new comers to their shame and misery, they stretched their lean hungry nostrils towards the blazing village whence quaint smells of spilt wine and burning were wafted— then, stumbling and scrambling under their master's lash like lost souls, as indeed they were, herded by furies— over the sides— mean cringing Jews from Iskenderoun, sullen cut-throat rogues from Levant and Kibris, pale sad Franks, ragged scoundrels from Skutri, and scum from all the wicked places of the Midland Sea— up out of their black steaming holds they streamed, and over the sides and away into the town, screaming and yelling and gibbering in a dozen languages as the fierce joy of momentary freedom reft them of their senses. Up out of the foul black bowels of those wicked ships like a pack of hungry witch-dogs, noisy and sullen, young and old they swarmed until there were but three left— two of them grizzled ruffians unshorn, unwashed, with a pest-house odour in their rags, and the other younger than they, a Frank by skin and stature, though turbaned and slippered and clad in sorry rags like the others.

He, that latter, went to the side, as though in the torpor of pain and weakness he thought they had but come home again to the white hulks of Al Hamisi. He put his hand upon the taffrail, and for the first time looked up. Then with a cry of fear and wonder— a clear heart-cry that thrilled above all the sounds of the sack and pillage— he stepped back a pace, and hid his eyes and stared anew, and gasped, and cried out again, and wept and laughed, and twined his fingers, and turned away, and would not land. Oh! surely it was some horrible fancy— some hideous dream— some devilish nightmare mixture of love and anguish— some cruel mirage of a place he once had known that possessed his mind? he thought as tower and roof and gables, market-house and keep of that town shone black and clear against the furious red curtain of the fire behind them, and down he crouched with a sob of misery and bitterness under the shadow of the gunwale, and cowered, and hid his eyes.

He cowered there for a minute, then rose again as though there were some wondrous fascination in the sight before him. "Oh! could it be true!" he gasped; "was it— was it possible that after all those months of anguish, out of all those places to which he might have come, fate had brought him here?" He stopped his ears at the wild hubbub of that hideous night, and covered his face in his thin hands a space, then laughing to himself, as though he humoured the madness of some ghastly dream, he took a naked scimitar from the deck, and scrambled out upon the mud and sea-weed of the beach.

He staggered past the green-fringed piles of the old pier, and the rough masonry of the quay, until in a minute he was amongst a knot of slaves in the market-place. He had not stood irresolute by them more than a breathing space when up ran Hackett of Dungarvan on the other side, his gaberdine torn, his elflocks flying, a red blade in his hand, and his black, silver-buckled shoes full of blood that was not his own.

"Where is the girl?" he cried in Arabic, almost incoherent in his excitement. "Where is Margaret O'Driscoll?"

And at that name the young galley-slave started as though he had been struck in the back.

"Where is the maiden you were told to carry to the ships?" asked Hackett of one of the slaves whom he recognised as the ruffian in whose care he had sent Margaret down. And that rogue scowled and hesitated; then swore behind his grizzled moustache that it was not his fault, but the girl had escaped. He and Abu Om were dragging her screaming through the fight, when a red-headed unbeliever rushed out, and seeing mayhap who it was they struggled with, fell on them naked-handed as he was, and fought so like a tiger, that it was all they could do to kill him in the end; and while they fought the maid had slipped from their hands and fled into the smoky curtain that shrouded everything.

With a furious imprecation on the Arab and his story, Hackett asked which way the girl had gone, and as he bent eagerly forward to catch the answer amid the roar and rattle of the fire the pale Frankish slave was at his side, all his soul in his fierce flushed face— shoulder by shoulder with Hackett, cheek by cheek with that black schemer with whom his destiny was so linked! Yet neither recked of the other, or thought in the hurry of the moment who stood at his side, whose hot breath it was mixed with his, and whose whole soul was strained in the same eager purpose, to catch the Moslem's words. They heard, and round they both turned on their heels, dashing across the market-place into the reek and vapour, beyond where they were parted, each in his separate way seeking the unhappy Irish girl, who cowered or died somewhere in the red tangles of that glowing charnel-house.

A dreadful search it was. The sack was soon over, the robbers withdrawn, and no one lived then in Baltimore. From house to house the slave fled, and empty street to street in a torture of hope and fear, and dreadful expectation. And between the blackened strands of creepers swinging in the furnace draught he looked through charred windows into hideous mockeries of what once were homes. The mothers were dead across their kitchen hearths, and the babes were dead at their dead breasts. Mother and son and brother, grey-headed dames and yellow-haired striplings, lay in swathes down in the gutters. There, in one place, at an upper window, a fair young girl was leaning out, as though she played, her long yellow hair swaying against the white cottage wall. Down in the

red shadows hamstrung horses screamed and died; and here was a tender maid of six summers prone on the cobbles in her night gear, her doll in one hand and her shoes in the other. Higher up the street again a dead plunderer was sitting by a blackened wall, and at his throat, dead like aught else— ripped by the Syrian's blade, but his long fangs still buried in that dusky throat— hung a shaggy Irish boarhound. Overhead in those dismal thoroughfares the white linen was still drying on cords from house to house, fair household gear, quaint wear of fishermen and maid, and it lifted and flapped as the heavy black curtain of smoke rolled in choking eddies, and the gusty streams of flames and sparks burst through that murky shroud!

Down through streets already silent and ghostly under a deep powdering of ashes the slave ran, crying perpetually, "Margaret! Margaret!" For an hour he had run from block to block, and alley to alley on that hopeless quest, until at last, sick and giddy and hopeless he was sitting down himself to die, when, as he staggered along through the heat and the dust, the smoke screen parted in front of him, and out of it stepped Black Hackett of Dungarvan, his long cloak flapping, his grey elf-locks lifting in the hot gust, and across his shoulder, senseless and limp, with arms a trail and hair over her face, and thin night linen wrapping her in the pink shine of the fire like the drapery of a marble nymph— lay the prize they both were seeking.

He caught sight of the slave, and, half mad with gratified vengeance and the fierce excitement of the evening, burst out laughing, until it seemed a hundred devils were laughing in the red sockets of the empty homes about them; then beckoning up the Moor, he slid into his arms the luckless burden that he bore. "There, there! good fellow!" he shouted above the roar, wiping the streaked dust and sweat from his face with the bloody corner of his gaberdine, "you are younger than I am; carry me this bundle of love and obstinacy down to the ships— down to the galleys with her, my bully— and, once ashore again, you shall run riot for a week, with a light heart and a heavy wallet!"

Infinitely gently, with every fibre athrill, and heart beating wildly, the slave took the maiden, and went down upon one knee, then resting that fair form upon the ground, propped her against his bosom, and so— in that position— oblivious to all else, her head on his heart, her long white arms about his neck, the poor thin flutter of her breath fanning his hot pale cheek, he parted her tangled hair, and put it back from her face. Kismet!— it was decreed! the Fates were good— that girl was Margaret O'Driscoll, and he in whose arms she lay so still and white was John O'Hara, the betrayed, the dead— the returned!

He tore his Moslem turban from his head, casting it fiercely into the gutter, and Hackett with a yell recognised him— and he Hackett— and there they stood, snarling and scowling at each other over the prone girl, while shame, and

wrath, and anger burnt in their faces, and filled their hearts with a bitterness too great for words.

O'Hara asked no explanation of the man who, he knew too well, had betrayed him into slavery, and brought this red night's work on Baltimore for his own base purposes; and Hackett knew that the other knew all now, and offered no parley to that pale stern form risen from the dead at his feet, in the very moment of victory, to accuse at once and condemn him— but they glared at one another for a minute like two hungry wolves, and then, with a shout of defiance, O'Hara with his Turkish scimitar, and Hackett with a round target he had snatched up upon his left arm, and in his right hand that long keen fletcher's knife he could use with such deadly cunning, they sprang upon one another. And round and round they stamped, as though it were some pleasant green amphitheatre they fought in, spurning the hot grey dust in clouds about them, stabbing, lunging and striking, reeling and tripping over the bloody bodies of the sack, screaming fierce hate and defiance in the fury of their excitement, fighting for white Margaret O'Driscoll like two mountain eagles for a dead kid upon the ledges. And all about swirled and twined and eddied the soft brown curtain of the smoke, laced with golden threads of fire. And the flames went up like a crimson forest through the black night air to the bronze dome of the sky overhead, and the thunder of the destruction about them— the fierce lapping of ten thousand tongues of flame was like the sound of the waves in the hollow caves of Dunmanus when the wild west wind blows at nightfall!

Round and round they had fought for twenty minutes with no remembrance of time, or place, or circumstance, and no wish but one, and still they were fighting, circling, and crying, and looking for an opening to each other's throats, when, on a sudden, a roar close beside them louder than any other sound in that place of a thousand echoes made them pause and involuntarily leap apart. All the side of the narrow white street on their right— there higher than elsewhere— was glowing hot, and now as they looked the long line of white walls curved forward like the bellying canvas of a ship in full sail, a hundred golden fissures gleamed for a second all down its front, then the lower storeys of the houses collapsed, the uppers tilted and overhung the combatants, the roof-pins were unloosened far to right and left, and in a moment an acre of burning thatch was escalating down upon them— an hundred score of tons of molten stuff was let loose, and ribbed with bright light, tasselled with fiery fringes, and plumed with a thousand waving featherets of smoke, was sliding swiftly down.

Quick as thought— with one brave leap O'Hara got to Margaret's side and, seizing her by the white shoulders, dragged her back. He saw the red flush on Hackett's face, he saw him hesitate— then turn and fly, and trip, and lie sprawling in the gutter with a dead woman's long hair twined tight about his

ankles, and then the red avalanche came roaring down between them— night was ruddy bright day for one moment, and when darkness fell again Baltimore was a city of the dead.

Two hours afterwards, a fair girl was slowly recovering life and consciousness under a grey rock upon the heathery hillside, and by her side was kneeling one who chafed her hands, and wrapped an Irish shawl closer about her, and watched the pink colour dawn in her face with consuming tenderness and solicitude. And all about them on the sweet, smiling, contented mid-summer earth another dawn had come. Every bent and grass was gemmed with dewdrops that shone and scintillated and blushed an hundred colours in the warm early sunlight. The lark, under the pale morning dome of the sky, was deluging the world with music; the little brown linnets were piping on the bramble; the sleepy yellow bee was drowsily about the task he left unfinished yesterday; the fresh breeze came off the hills loaded with scent of thyme and heather-bells; the sea was sleeping in unruffled loveliness, and the earth a fair tapestry of tender lights and shadows interwoven.

There was life and hope in the very breath of that morning, and presently Margaret heaved a deep sigh and sat up, and as her eyes looked about the fair country they took a new colour from it, but when they , chanced upon the tumbled grey plain of ruins by the harbour that once was Baltimore, she shuddered and hid her face in her lover's shoulder. "Oh, hide me ! hide me!" she cried, "they may come again!" But O'Hara pressed her close and answered, "Fear not, my pearl! We are free— they are gone— and God's malediction go with them! Look: yonder's the last of them," and she looked where he pointed to the very verge of the southernmost sea and saw two white specks of lateen sail, that flushed as she watched tender rose-colour on the sapphire rim of the ocean, and shone and diminished, and now were no bigger than fairy mustard seed, and then but the size of a grain of sea sand, and glittered so for a space like the red flush on the one facet of a gem, and seemed to grow large again for a second, and hung there— the shining points of that lovely tender morning; and then her fair eyelids dropped for a moment, and when they rose again, the rim of the sea was vacant from edge to edge.

17: The Hills of the Dead

Robert E. Howard

1906-1936

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1. Voodoo

THE TWIGS which N'Longa flung on the fire broke and crackled. The upleaping flames lighted the countenances of the two men. N'Longa, voodoo man of the Slave Coast, was very old. His wizened and gnarled frame was stooped and brittle, his face creased by hundreds of wrinkles. The red firelight glinted on the human finger-bones which composed his necklace.

The other was a white man and his name was Solomon Kane. He was tall and broad-shouldered, clad in black close garments, the garb of the Puritan. His featherless slouch hat was drawn low over his heavy brows, shadowing his darkly pallid face. His cold deep eyes brooded in the firelight.

"You come again, brother," droned the fetish-man, speaking in the jargon which passed for a common language of black man and white on the West Coast. "Many moons burn and die since we make blood-palaver. You go to the setting sun, but you come back!"

"Aye." Kane's voice was deep and almost ghostly. "Yours is a grim land, N'Longa, a red land barred with the black darkness of horror and the bloody shadows of death. Yet I have returned—"

N'Longa stirred the fire, saying nothing, and after a pause Kane continued.

"Yonder in the unknown vastness"—his long finger stabbed at the black silent jungle which brooded beyond the firelight—"yonder lie mystery and adventure and nameless terror. Once I dared the jungle—once she nearly claimed my bones. Something entered into my blood, something stole into my soul like a whisper of unnamed sin. The jungle! Dark and brooding—over leagues of the blue salt sea she has drawn me and with the dawn I go to seek the heart of her. Mayhap I shall find curious adventure—mayhap my doom awaits me. But better death than the ceaseless and everlasting urge, the fire that has burned my veins with bitter longing."

"She call," muttered N'Longa. "At night she coil like serpent about my hut and whisper strange things to me. *Ai ya!* The jungle call. We be blood-brothers, you and I. Me, N'Longa, mighty worker of nameless magic. You go to the jungle as all men go who hear her call. Maybe you live, more like you die. You believe in my fetish work?"

"I understand it not," said Kane grimly, "but I have seen you send your soul forth from your body to animate a lifeless corpse."

"Aye! Me N'Longa, priest of the Black God! Now watch, I make magic."

Kane gazed at the black man who bent over the fire, making even motions with his hands and mumbling incantations. Kane watched and he seemed to grow sleepy. A mist wavered in front of him, through which he saw dimly the form of N'Longa, etched black against the flames. Then all faded out.

Kane awoke with a start, hand shooting to the pistol in his belt. N'Longa grinned at him across the flame and there was a scent of early dawn in the air. The fetish-man held a long stave of curious black wood in his hands. This stave was carved in a strange manner, and one end tapered to a sharp point.

"This voodoo staff," said N'Longa, putting it in the Englishman's hand. "Where your guns and long knife fail, this save you. When you want me, lay this on your breast, fold your hands on it and sleep. I come to you in your dreams."

Kane weighed the thing in his hand, highly suspicious of witchcraft. It was not heavy, but seemed hard as iron. A good weapon at least, he decided. Dawn was just beginning to steal over the jungle and the river.

2. Red Eyes

SOLOMON KANE shifted his musket from his shoulder and let the stock fall to the earth. Silence lay about him like a fog. Kane's lined face and tattered garments showed the effect of long bush travel. He looked about him.

Some distance behind him loomed the green, rank jungle, thinning out to low shrubs, stunted trees and tall grass. Some distance in front of him rose the first of a chain of bare, somber hills, littered with boulders, shimmering in the merciless heat of the sun. Between the hills and the jungle lay a broad expanse of rough, uneven grasslands, dotted here and there by clumps of thorn-trees.

An utter silence hung over the country. The only sign of life was a few vultures flapping heavily across the distant hills. For the last few days Kane had noticed the increasing number of these unsavory birds. The sun was rocking westward but its heat was in no way abated.

Trailing his musket he started forward slowly. He had no objective in view. This was all unknown country and one direction was as good as another. Many weeks ago he had plunged into the jungle with the assurance born of courage and ignorance. Having by some miracle survived the first few weeks, he was becoming hard and toughened, able to hold his own with any of the grim denizens of the fastness he dared.

As he progressed he noted an occasional lion spoor but there seemed to be no animals in the grasslands— none that left tracks, at any rate. Vultures sat like black, brooding images in some of the stunted trees, and suddenly he saw an activity among them some distance beyond. Several of the dusky birds circled about a clump of high grass, dipping, then rising again. Some beast of prey was defending his kill against them, Kane decided, and wondered at the lack of

snarling and roaring which usually accompanied such scenes. His curiosity was roused and he turned his steps in that direction.

At last, pushing through the grass which rose about his shoulders, he saw, as through a corridor walled with the rank waving blades, a ghastly sight. The corpse of a black man lay, face down, and as the Englishman looked, a great dark snake rose and slid away into the grass, moving so quickly that Kane was unable to decide its nature. But it had a weird human-like suggestion about it.

Kane stood over the body, noting that while the limbs lay awry as if broken, the flesh was not torn as a lion or leopard would have torn it. He glanced up at the whirling vultures and was amazed to see several of them skimming along close to the earth, following a waving of the grass which marked the flight of the thing which had presumably slain the black man. Kane wondered what thing the carrion birds, which eat only the dead, were hunting through the grasslands. But Africa is full of never-explained mysteries.

Kane shrugged his shoulders and lifted his musket again. Adventures he had had in plenty since he parted from N'Longa some moons ago, but still that nameless paranoid urge had driven him on and on, deeper and deeper into those trackless ways. Kane could not have analyzed this call; he would have attributed it to Satan, who lures men to their destruction. But it was but the restless turbulent spirit of the adventurer, the wanderer— the same urge which sends the gipsy caravans about the world, which drove the Viking galleys over unknown seas and which guides the flights of the wild geese.

Kane sighed. Here in this barren land seemed neither food nor water, but he had wearied unto death of the dank, rank venom of the thick jungle. Even a wilderness of bare hills was preferable, for a time at least. He glanced at them, where they lay brooding in the sun, and started forward again.

He held N'Longa's fetish stave in his left hand, and though his conscience still troubled him for keeping a thing so apparently diabolic in nature, he had never been able to bring himself to throw it away.

Now as he went toward the hills, a sudden commotion broke out in the tall grass in front of him, which was, in places, taller than a man. A thin, high-pitched scream sounded and on its heels an earth-shaking roar. The grass parted and a slim figure came flying toward him like a wisp of straw blown on the wind— a brown-skinned girl, clad only in a skirt-like garment. Behind her, some yards away but gaining swiftly, came a huge lion.

The girl fell at Kane's feet with a wail and a sob, and lay clutching at his ankles. The Englishman dropped the voodoo stave, raised his musket to his shoulder and sighted coolly at the ferocious feline face which neared him every instant. Crash! The girl screamed once and slumped on her face. The huge cat leaped high and wildly, to fall and lie motionless.

KANE reloaded hastily before he spared a glance at the form at his feet. The girl lay as still as the lion he had just slain, but a quick examination showed that she had only fainted.

He bathed her face with water from his canteen and presently she opened her eyes and sat up. Fear flooded her face as she looked at her rescuer and she made to rise.

Kane held out a restraining hand and she cowered down, trembling. The roar of his heavy musket was enough to frighten any native who had never before seen a white man, Kane reflected.

The girl was a much higher type than the thick-lipped, bestial West Coast negroes to whom Kane had been used. She was slim and finely formed, of a deep brown hue rather than ebony; her nose was straight and thin-bridged, her lips were not too thick. Somewhere in her blood there was a strong Berber strain.

Kane spoke to her in a river dialect, a simple language he had learned during his wandering, and she replied haltingly. The inland tribes traded slaves and ivory to the river people and were familiar with their jargon.

"My village is there," she answered Kane's question, pointing to the southern jungle with a slim, rounded arm. "My name is Zunna. My mother whipped me for breaking a cooking-kettle and I ran away because I was angry. I am afraid; let me go back to my mother!"

"You may go," said Kane, "but I will take you, child. Suppose another lion came along? You were very foolish to run away."

She whimpered a little. "Are you not a god?"

"No, Zunna. I am only a man, though the color of my skin is not as yours. Lead me now to your village."

She rose hesitantly, eyeing him apprehensively through the wild tangle of her hair. To Kane she seemed like some frightened young animal. She led the way and Kane followed. She indicated that her village lay to the southeast, and their route brought them nearer to the hills. The sun began to sink and the roaring of lions reverberated over the grasslands. Kane glanced at the western sky; this open country was no place in which to be caught by night. He glanced toward the hills and saw that they were within a few hundred yards of the nearest. He saw what seemed to be a cave.

"Zunna," said he haltingly, "we can never reach your village before nightfall and if we bide here the lions will take us. Yonder is a cavern where we may spend the night—"

She shrank and trembled.

"Not in the hills, master!" she whimpered. "Better the lions!"

"Nonsense!" His tone was impatient; he had had enough of native superstition. "We will spend the night in yonder cave."

She argued no further, but followed him. They went up a short slope and stood at the mouth of the cavern, a small affair, with sides of solid rock and a floor of deep sand.

"Gather some dry grass, Zunna," commanded Kane, standing his musket against the wall at the mouth of the cave, "but go not far away, and listen for lions. I will build here a fire which shall keep us safe from beasts tonight. Bring some grass and any twigs you may find, like a good child, and we will sup. I have dried meat in my pouch and water also."

She gave him a strange, long glance, then turned away without a word. Kane tore up grass near at hand, noting how it was seared and crisp from the sun, and heaping it up, struck flint and steel. Flame leaped up and devoured the heap in an instant. He was wondering how he could gather enough grass to keep a fire going all night, when he was aware that he had visitors.

Kane was used to grotesque sights, but at first glance he started and a slight coldness traveled down his spine. Two black men stood before him in silence. They were tall and gaunt and entirely naked. Their skins were a dusty black, tinged with a gray, ashy hue, as of death. Their faces were different from any negroes he had seen. The brows were high and narrow, the noses huge and snout-like; the eyes were inhumanly large and inhumanly red. As the two stood there it seemed to Kane that only their burning eyes lived.

He spoke to them, but they did not answer. He invited them to eat with a motion of his hand, and they silently squatted down near the cave mouth, as far from the dying embers of the fire as they could get.

Kane turned to his pouch and began taking out the strips of dried meat which he carried. Once he glanced at his silent guests; it seemed to him that they were watching the glowing ashes of his fire, rather than him.

The sun was about to sink behind the western horizon. A red, fierce glow spread over the grasslands, so that all seemed like a waving sea of blood. Kane knelt over his pouch, and glancing up, saw Zunna come around the shoulder of the hill with her arms full of grass and dry branches.

As he looked, her eyes flared wide; the branches dropped from her arms and her scream knifed the silence, fraught with terrible warning. Kane whirled on his knee. Two great black forms loomed over him as he came up with the lithe motion of a springing leopard. The fetish stave was in his hand and he drove it through the body of the nearest foe with a force which sent its sharp point out between the negro's shoulders. Then the long, lean arms of the other locked about him, and white man and black man went down together.

The talon-like nails of the black were tearing at his face, the hideous red eyes staring into his with a terrible threat, as Kane writhed about and, fending off the clawing hands with one arm, drew a pistol. He pressed the muzzle close against the black's side and pulled the trigger. At the muffled report, the negro's

body jerked to the concussion of the bullet, but the thick lips merely gaped in a horrid grin.

One long arm slid under Kane's shoulders, the other hand gripped his hair. The Englishman felt his head being forced back irresistibly. He clutched at the other's wrist with both hands, but the flesh under his frantic fingers was as hard as wood. Kane's brain was reeling; his neck seemed ready to break with a little more pressure. He threw his body backward with one volcanic effort, breaking the deathly hold. The black was on him and the talons were clutching again. Kane found and raised the empty pistol, and he felt the black man's skull cave in like a shell as he brought down the long barrel with all his strength. And once again the writhing lips parted in fearful mockery.

And now a near panic clutched Kane. What sort of man was this, who still menaced his life with tearing fingers, after having been shot and mortally bludgeoned? No man, surely, but one of the sons of Satan! At the thought Kane wrenched and heaved explosively, and the close-locked combatants tumbled across the earth to come to a rest in the smoldering ashes before the cave mouth. Kane barely felt the heat, but the mouth of his foe gaped, this time in seeming agony. The frightful fingers loosened their hold and Kane sprang clear.

The black man with his shattered skull was rising on one hand and one knee when Kane struck, returning to the attack as a gaunt wolf returns to a wounded bison. From the side he leaped, landing full on the black giant's back, his steely arms seeking and finding a deadly wrestling hold; and as they went to the earth together he broke the negro's neck, so that the hideous dead face looked back over one shoulder. The black man lay still but to Kane it seemed that he was not dead even then, for the red eyes still burned with their grisly light.

The Englishman turned, to see the girl crouching against the cave wall. He looked for his stave; it lay in a heap of dust, among which were a few moldering bones. He stared, his brain reeling. Then with one stride he caught up the voodoo staff and turned to the fallen negro. His face set in grim lines as he raised it; then he drove it through the black breast. And before his eyes, the giant body crumbled, dissolving to dust as he watched horror-struck, even as had crumbled he through whom Kane had first thrust the stave.

3. Dream Magic

"GREAT GOD!" whispered Kane; "these men were dead! Vampires! This is Satan's handiwork manifested."

Zunna crawled to his knees and clung there.

"These be walking dead men, master," she whimpered. "I should have warned you."

"Why did they not leap on my back when they first came?" asked he.

"They feared the fire. They were waiting for the embers to die entirely."

"Whence came they?"

"From the hills. Hundreds of their kind swarm among the boulders and caverns of these hills, and they live on human life, for a man they will slay, devouring his ghost as it leaves his quivering body. Aye, they are suckers of souls!

"Master, among the greater of these hills there is a silent city of stone, and in the old times, in the days of my ancestors, these people lived there. They were human, but they were not as we, for they had ruled this land for ages and ages. The ancestors of my people made war on them and slew many, and their magicians made all the dead men as these were. At last all died.

"And for ages have they preyed on the tribes of the jungle, stalking down from the hills at midnight and at sunset to haunt the jungle-ways and slay and slay. Men and beasts flee them and only fire will destroy them."

"Here is that which will destroy them," said Kane grimly, raising the voodoo stave. "Black magic must fight black magic, and I know not what spell N'Longa put hereon, but—"

"You are a god," said Zunna decidedly. "No man could overcome two of the walking dead men. Master, can you not lift this curse from my tribe? There is nowhere for us to flee and the monsters slay us at will, catching wayfarers outside the village wall. Death is on this land and we die helpless!"

Deep in Kane stirred the spirit of the crusader, the fire of the zealot— the fanatic who devotes his life to battling the powers of darkness.

"Let us eat," said he; "then we will build a great fire at the cave mouth. The fire which keeps away beasts shall also keep away fiends."

Later Kane sat just inside the cave, chin rested on clenched fist, eyes gazing unseeingly into the fire. Behind in the shadows, Zunna watched him, awed.

"God of Hosts," Kane muttered, "grant me aid! My hand it is which must lift the ancient curse from this dark land. How am I to fight these dead fiends, who yield not to mortal weapons? Fire will destroy them— a broken neck renders them helpless— the voodoo stave thrust through them crumbles them to dust— but of what avail? How may I prevail against the hundreds who haunt these hills, and to whom human life-essence is Life? Have not— as Zunna says— warriors come against them in the past, only to find them fled to their high-walled city where no man can come against them?"

The night wore on. Zunna slept, her cheek pillowed on her round, girlish arm. The roaring of the lions shook the hills and still Kane sat and gazed broodingly into the fire. Outside, the night was alive with whispers and rustlings and stealthily soft footfalls. And at times Kane, glancing up from his meditations, seemed to catch the gleam of great red eyes beyond the flickering light of the fire.

Gray dawn was stealing over the grasslands when Kane shook Zunna into wakefulness.

"God have mercy on my soul for delving in barbaric magic," said he, "but demonry must be fought with demonry, mayhap. Tend ye the fire and awake me if aught untoward occur."

Kane lay down on his back on the sand floor and laid the voodoo staff on his breast, folding his hands upon it. He fell asleep instantly. And sleeping, he dreamed. To his slumbering self it seemed that he walked through a thick fog and in this fog he met N'Longa, true to life. N'Longa spoke, and the words were clear and vivid, impressing themselves on his consciousness so deeply as to span the gap between sleeping and waking.

"Send this girl to her village soon after sun-up when the lions have gone to their lairs," said N'Longa, "and bid her bring her lover to you at this cave. There make him lie down as if to slumber, holding the voodoo stave."

The dream faded and Kane awoke suddenly, wondering. How strange and vivid had been the vision, and how strange to hear N'Longa talking in English, without the jargon! Kane shrugged his shoulders. He knew that N'Longa claimed to possess the power of sending his spirit through space, and he himself had seen the voodoo man animate a dead man's body. Still—

"Zunna," said Kane, giving the problem up, "I will go with you as far as the edge of the jungle and you must go on to your village and return here to this cave with your lover."

"Kran?" she asked naïvely.

"Whatever his name is. Eat and we will go."

AGAIN the sun slanted toward the west. Kane sat in the cave, waiting. He had seen the girl safely to the place where the jungle thinned to the grasslands, and though his conscience stung him at the thought of the dangers which might confront her, he sent her on alone and returned to the cave. He sat now, wondering if he would not be damned to everlasting flames for tinkering with the magic of a black sorcerer, blood-brother or not.

Light footfalls sounded, and as Kane reached for his musket, Zunna entered, accompanied by a tall, splendidly proportioned youth whose brown skin showed that he was of the same race as the girl. His soft dreamy eyes were fixed on Kane in a sort of awesome worship. Evidently the girl had not minimized the white god's glory in her telling.

He bade the youth lie down as he directed and placed the voodoo stave in his hands. Zunna crouched at one side, wide-eyed. Kane stepped back, half ashamed of this mummerly and wondering what, if anything, would come of it. Then to his horror, the youth gave one gasp and stiffened!

Zunna screamed, bounding erect.

"You have killed Kran!" she shrieked, flying at the Englishman who stood struck speechless.

Then she halted suddenly, wavered, drew a hand languidly across her brow— she slid down to lie with her arms about the motionless body of her lover.

And this body moved suddenly, made aimless motions with hands and feet, then sat up, disengaging itself from the clinging arms of the still senseless girl.

Kran looked up at Kane and grinned, a sly, knowing grin which seemed out of place on his face somehow. Kane started. Those soft eyes had changed in expression and were now hard and glittering and snaky— N'Longa's eyes!

"*Ai ya*," said Kran in a grotesquely familiar voice. "Blood-brother, you got no greeting for N'Longa?"

Kane was silent. His flesh crawled in spite of himself. Kran rose and stretched his arms in an unfamiliar sort of way, as if his limbs were new to him. He slapped his breast approvingly.

"Me N'Longa!" said he in the old boastful manner. "Mighty ju-ju man! Blood-brother, not you know me, eh?"

"You are Satan," said Kane sincerely. "Are you Kran or are you N'Longa?"

"Me N'Longa," assured the other. "My body sleep in ju-ju hut on Coast many treks from here. I borrow Kran's body for while. My ghost travel ten days march in one breath; twenty days march in same time. My ghost go out from my body and drive out Kran's."

"And Kran is dead?"

"No, he no dead. I send his ghost to shadowland for a while— send the girl's ghost too, to keep him company; bimeby come back."

"This is the work of the Devil," said Kane frankly, "but I have seen you do even fouler magic— shall I call you N'Longa or Kran?"

"Kran— *kah!* Me N'Longa— bodies like clothes! Me N'Longa, in here now!" he rapped his breast. "Bimeby Kran live along here— then he be Kran and I be N'Longa, same like before. Kran no live along now; N'Longa live along this one fellow body. Blood-brother, I am N'Longa!"

Kane nodded. This was in truth a land of horror and enchantment; anything was possible, even that the thin voice of N'Longa should speak to him from the great chest of Kran, and the snaky eyes of N'Longa should blink at him from the handsome young face of Kran.

"This land I know long time," said N'Longa, getting down to business.

"Mighty ju-ju, these dead people! No, no need to waste one fellow time— I know— I talk to you in sleep. My blood-brother want to kill out these dead black fellows, eh?"

"'Tis a thing opposed to nature," said Kane somberly. "They are known in my land as vampires— I never expected to come upon a whole nation of them."

4. *The Silent City*

"NOW WE FIND this stone city," said N'Longa.

"Yes? Why not send your ghost out to kill these vampires?" Kane asked idly.

"Ghost got to have one fellow body to work in," N'Longa answered. "Sleep now. Tomorrow we start."

The sun had set; the fire glowed and flickered in the cave mouth. Kane glanced at the still form of the girl, who lay where she had fallen, and prepared himself for slumber.

"Awake me at midnight," he admonished, "and I will watch from then until dawn."

But when N'Longa finally shook his arm, Kane awoke to see the first light of dawn reddening the land.

"Time we start," said the fetish-man.

"But the girl— are you sure she lives?"

"She live, blood-brother."

"Then in God's name, we can not leave her here at the mercy of any prowling fiend who might chance upon her. Or some lion might—"

"No lion come. Vampire scent still linger, mixed with man scent. One fellow lion he no like man scent and he fear the walking dead men. No beast come; and"— lifting the voodoo stave and laying it across the cave entrance—"no dead man come now."

Kane watched him somberly and without enthusiasm.

"How will that rod safeguard her?"

"That mighty ju-ju," said N'Longa. "You see how one fellow vampire go along dust alongside that stave! No vampire dare touch or come near it. I gave it to you, because outside Vampire Hills one fellow man sometimes meet a corpse walking in jungle when shadows be black. Not all walking dead men be here. And all must suck Life from men— if not, they rot like dead wood."

"Then make many of these rods and arm the people with them."

"No can do!" N'Longa's skull shook violently. "That ju-ju rod be mighty magic! Old, old! No man live today can tell how old that fellow ju-ju stave be. I make my blood-brother sleep and do magic with it to guard him, that time we make palaver in Coast village. Today we scout and run; no need it. Leave it here to guard girl."

Kane shrugged his shoulders and followed the fetish-man, after glancing back at the still shape which lay in the cave. He would never have agreed to leave her so casually, had he not believed in his heart that she was dead. He had touched her, and her flesh was cold.

They went up among the barren hills as the sun was rising. Higher they climbed, up steep clay slopes, winding their way through ravines and between great boulders. The hills were honey-combed with dark, forbidding caves, and these they passed warily, and Kane's flesh crawled as he thought of the grisly occupants therein. For N'Longa said:

"Them vampires, he sleep in caves most all day till sunset. Them caves, he be full of one fellow dead man."

The sun rose higher, baking down on the bare slopes with an intolerable heat. Silence brooded like an evil monster over the land. They had seen nothing, but Kane could have sworn at times that a black shadow drifted behind a boulder at their approach.

"Them vampires, they stay hid in day-time," said N'Longa with a low laugh. "They be afraid of one fellow vulture! No fool vulture! He know death when he see it! He pounce on one fellow dead man and tear and eat if he be lying or walking!"

A strong shudder shook his companion.

"Great God!" Kane cried, striking his thigh with his hat; "is there no end to the horror of this hideous land? Truly this land is dedicated to the powers of darkness!"

Kane's eyes burned with a dangerous light. The terrible heat, the solitude and the knowledge of the horrors lurking on either hand were shaking even his steely nerves.

"Keep on one fellow hat, blood-brother," admonished N'Longa with a low gurgle of amusement. "That fellow sun, he knock you dead, suppose you no look out."

Kane shifted the musket he had insisted on bringing and made no reply. They mounted an eminence at last and looked down on a sort of plateau. And in the center of this plateau was a silent city of gray and crumbling stone. Kane was smitten by a sense of incredible age as he looked. The walls and houses were of great stone blocks, yet they were falling into ruin. Grass grew on the plateau, and high in the streets of that dead city. Kane saw no movement among the ruins.

"That is their city— why do they choose to sleep in caves?"

"Maybe-so one fellow stone fall on them from roof and crush. Them stone huts, he fall down bimeby. Maybe-so they no like to stay together— maybe-so they eat each other, too."

"Silence!" whispered Kane; "how it hangs over all!"

"Them vampires no talk nor yell; they dead. They sleep in caves, wander at sunset and at night. Maybe-so them black fellow bush tribes come with spears, them vampires go to stone kraal and fight behind walls."

Kane nodded. The crumbling walls which surrounded that dead city were still high and solid enough to resist the attack of spearmen— especially when defended by these snout-nosed fiends.

"Blood-brother," said N'Longa solemnly, "I have mighty magic thought! Be silent a little while."

KANE seated himself on a boulder and gazed broodingly at the bare crags and slopes which surrounded them. Far away to the south he saw the leafy green ocean that was the jungle. Distance lent a certain enchantment to the scene. Closer at hand loomed the dark blotches that were the mouths of the caves of horror.

N'Longa was squatting, tracing some strange pattern in the clay with a dagger point. Kane watched him, thinking how easily they might fall victim to the vampires if even three or four of the fiends should come out of their caverns. And even as he thought it, a black and horrific shadow fell across the crouching fetish-man.

Kane acted without conscious thought. He shot from the boulder where he sat like a stone hurled from a catapult, and his musket stock shattered the face of the hideous black thing who had stolen upon them. Back and back Kane drove his inhuman foe staggering, never giving him time to halt or launch an offensive, battering him with the onslaught of a frenzied tiger.

At the very edge of the cliff the vampire wavered, then pitched back over, to fall for a hundred feet and lie writhing on the rocks of the plateau below. N'Longa was on his feet pointing; the hills were giving up their dead.

Out of the caves they were swarming, the terrible black silent shapes; up the slopes they came charging and over the boulders they came clambering, and their red eyes were all turned toward the two humans who stood above the silent city. The caves belched them forth in an unholy judgment day.

N'Longa pointed to a crag some distance away and with a shout started running fleetly toward it. Kane followed. From behind boulders black-taloned hands clawed at them, tearing their garments. They raced past caves, and mummied monsters came lurching out of the dark, gibbering silently, to join in the pursuit.

The dead hands were close at their back when they scrambled up the last slope and stood on a ledge which was the top of the crag. The fiends halted silently a moment, then came clambering after them. Kane clubbed his musket and smashed down into the red-eyed faces, knocking aside the upleaping hands. They surged up like a black wave; he swung his musket in a silent fury that matched theirs. The black wave broke and wavered back; came on again.

He— could— not— kill— them! These words beat on his brain like a sledge on an anvil as he shattered wood-like flesh and dead bone with his smashing

swings. He knocked them down, hurled them back, but they rose and came on again. This could not last— what in God's name was N'Longa doing? Kane spared one swift, tortured glance over his shoulder. The fetish-man stood on the highest part of the ledge, head thrown back, arms lifted as if in invocation.

Kane's vision blurred to the sweep of hideous black faces with red, staring eyes. Those in front were horrible to see now, for their skulls were shattered, their faces caved in and their limbs broken. But still they came on and those behind reached across their shoulders to clutch at the man who defied them.

Kane was red but the blood was all his. From the long-withered veins of those monsters no single drop of warm red blood trickled. Suddenly from behind him came a long piercing wail— N'Longa! Over the crash of the flying musket-stock and the shattering of bones it sounded high and clear— the only voice lifted in that hideous fight.

The black wave washed about Kane's feet, dragging him down. Keen talons tore at him, flaccid lips sucked at his wounds. He reeled up again, disheveled and bloody, clearing a space with a shattering sweep of his splintered musket. Then they closed in again and he went down.

"This is the end!" he thought, but even at that instant the press slackened and the sky was suddenly filled with the beat of great wings.

Then he was free and staggered up, blindly and dizzily, ready to renew the strife. He halted, frozen. Down the slope the black horde was fleeing and over their heads and close at their shoulders flew huge vultures, tearing and rending avidly, sinking their beaks in the dead black flesh, devouring the vampires as they fled.

Kane laughed, almost insanely.

"Defy man and God, but you may not deceive the vultures, sons of Satan! They know whether a man be alive or dead!"

N'Longa stood like a prophet on the pinnacle and the great black birds soared and wheeled about him. His arms still waved and his voice still wailed out across the hills. And over the skylines they came, hordes on endless hordes— vultures, vultures, vultures! come to the feast so long denied them. They blackened the sky with their numbers, blotted out the sun; a strange darkness fell on the land. They settled in long dusky lines, diving into the caverns with a whirl of wings and a clash of beaks. Their talons tore at the black horrors which these caves disgorged.

Now all the vampires were fleeing to their city. The vengeance held back for ages had come down on them and their last hope was the heavy walls which had kept back the desperate human foes. Under those crumbling roofs they might find shelter. And N'Longa watched them stream into the city, and he laughed until the crags re-echoed.

Now all were in and the birds settled like a cloud over the doomed city, perching in solid rows along the walls, sharpening their beaks and claws on the towers.

And N'Longa struck flint and steel to a bundle of dry leaves he had brought with him. The bundle leaped into instant flame and he straightened and flung the blazing thing far out over the cliffs. It fell like a meteor to the plateau beneath, showering sparks. The tall grass of the plateau leaped aflame.

From the silent city beneath them Fear flowed in unseen waves, like a white fog. Kane smiled grimly.

"The grass is sere and brittle from the drouth," he said; "there has been even less rain than usual this season; it will burn swiftly."

Like a crimson serpent the fire ran through the high dead grass. It spread and it spread and Kane, standing high above, yet felt the fearful intensity of the hundreds of red eyes which watched from the stone city.

Now the scarlet snake had reached the walls and was rearing as if to coil and writhe over them. The vultures rose on heavily flapping wings and soared reluctantly. A vagrant gust of wind whipped the blaze about and drove it in a long red sheet around the wall. Now the city was hemmed in on all sides by a solid barricade of flame. The roar came up to the two men on the high crag.

Sparks flew across the wall, lighting in the high grass in the streets. A score of flames leaped up and grew with terrifying speed. A veil of red cloaked streets and buildings, and through this crimson, whirling mist Kane and N'Longa saw hundreds of black shapes scamper and writhe, to vanish suddenly in red bursts of flame. There rose an intolerable scent of decayed flesh burning.

Kane gazed, awed. This was truly a hell on earth. As in a nightmare he looked into the roaring red cauldron where black insects fought against their doom and perished. The flames leaped a hundred feet in air, and suddenly above their roar sounded one bestial, inhuman scream like a shriek from across nameless gulfs of cosmic space, as one vampire, dying, broke the chains of silence which had held him for untold centuries. High and haunting it rose, the death cry of a vanishing race.

Then the flames dropped suddenly. The conflagration had been a typical grass fire, short and fierce. Now the plateau showed a blackened expanse and the city a charred and smoking mass of crumbling stone. Not one corpse lay in view, not even a charred bone. Above all whirled the dark swarms of the vultures, but they, too, were beginning to scatter.

Kane gazed hungrily at the clean blue sky. Like a strong sea wind clearing a fog of horror was the sight to him. From somewhere sounded the faint and far-off roaring of a distant lion. The vultures were flapping away in black, straggling lines.

5. *Palaver Set!*

KANE SAT in the mouth of the cave where Zunna lay, submitting to the fetish-man's bandaging.

The Puritan's garments hung in tatters about his frame; his limbs and breast were deeply gashed and darkly bruised, but he had had no mortal wound in that deathly fight on the cliff.

"Mighty men, we be!" declared N'Longa with deep approval. "Vampire city be silent now, sure 'nough! No walking dead man live along these hills."

"I do not understand," said Kane, resting chin on hand. "Tell me, N'Longa, how have you done things? How talked you with me in my dreams; how came you into the body of Kran; and how summoned you the vultures?"

"My blood-brother," said N'Longa, discarding his pride in his pidgin English, to drop into the river language understood by Kane, "I am so old that you would call me a liar if I told you my age. All my life I have worked magic, sitting first at the feet of mighty ju-ju men of the south and the east; then I was a slave to the Buckra— the white man— and learned more. My brother, shall I span all these years in a moment and make you understand with a word, what has taken me so long to learn? I could not even make you understand how these vampires have kept their bodies from decay by drinking the lives of men.

"I sleep and my spirit goes out over the jungle and the rivers to talk with the sleeping spirits of my friends. There is a mighty magic on the voodoo staff I gave you— a magic out of the Old Land which draws my ghost to it as a white man's magnet draws metal."

Kane listened unspeaking, seeing for the first time in N'Longa's glittering eyes something stronger and deeper than the avid gleam of the worker in black magic. To Kane it seemed almost as if he looked into the far-seeing and mystic eyes of a prophet of old.

"I spoke to you in dreams," N'Longa went on, "and I made a deep sleep come over the souls of Kran and of Zunna, and remove them to a far dim land, whence they shall soon return, unremembering. All things bow to magic, blood-brother, and beasts and birds obey the master words. I worked strong voodoo, vulture-magic, and the flying people of the air gathered at my call.

"These things I know and am a part of, but how shall I tell you of them? Blood-brother, you are a mighty warrior, but in the ways of magic you are as a little child lost. And what has taken me long dark years to know, I may not divulge to you so you would understand. My friend, you think only of bad spirits, but were my magic always bad, should I not take this fine young body in place of my old wrinkled one and keep it? But Kran shall have his body back safely.

"Keep the voodoo staff, blood-brother. It has mighty power against all sorcerers and serpents and evil things. Now I return to the village on the Coast where my true body sleeps. And what of you, my blood-brother?"

Kane pointed silently eastward.

"The call grows no weaker. I go."

N'Longa nodded, held out his hand. Kane grasped it. The mystical expression had gone from the dusky face and the eyes twinkled snakily with a sort of reptilian mirth.

"Me go now, blood-brother," said the fetish-man, returning to his beloved jargon, of which knowledge he was prouder than all his conjuring tricks. "You take care— that one fellow jungle, she pluck your bones yet! Remember that voodoo stave, brother. *Ai ya*, palaver set!"

He fell back on the sand, and Kane saw the keen sly expression of N'Longa fading from the face of Kran. His flesh crawled again. Somewhere back on the Slave Coast, the body of N'Longa, withered and wrinkled, was stirring in the ju-ju hut, was rising as if from a deep sleep. Kane shuddered.

Kran sat up, yawned, stretched and smiled. Beside him the girl Zunna rose, rubbing her eyes.

"Master," said Kran apologetically, "we must have slumbered."

18: The Haunted Bell

Jacques Futrelle

1873-1912

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IT WAS A THING, trivial enough, yet so strangely mystifying in its happening that the mind hesitated to accept it as an actual occurrence despite the indisputable evidence of the sense of hearing. As the seconds ticked on, Franklin Phillips was not at all certain that it had happened, and gradually the doubt began to assume the proportions of a conviction. Then, because his keenly-attuned brain did not readily explain it, the matter was dismissed as an impossibility. Certainly it had not happened. Mr. Phillips smiled a little. Of course, it was— it must be— a trick of his nerves.

But, even as the impossibility of the thing grew upon him, the musical clang still echoed vaguely in his memory, and his eyes were still fixed inquiringly on the Japanese gong whence it had come. The gong was of the usual type— six bronze discs, or inverted bowls, of graduated sizes, suspended one above the other, with the largest at the top, and quaintly colored with the deep, florid tones of Japan's ancient decorative art. It hung motionless at the end of a silken cord which dropped down sheerly from the ceiling over a corner of his desk. It was certainly harmless enough in appearance, yet— yet—

As he looked the bell sounded again. It was a clear, rich, vibrant note— a boom which belched forth suddenly as if of its own volition, quavered full-toned, then diminished until it was only a lingering sense of sound. Mr. Phillips started to his feet with an exclamation.

Now, in the money-marts of the world, Franklin Phillips was regarded as a living refutation of all theories as to the physical disasters consequent upon a long pursuit of the strenuous life— a human antithesis of nerves. He breathed fourteen times to the minute and his heart-beat was always within a fraction of seventy-one. This was true whether there were millions at stake in a capricious market or whether he ordered a cigar. In this calm lay the strength which had enabled him to reach his fiftieth year in perfect mental and physical condition.

Back of this utter normality was a placid, inquiring mind; so now, deliberately, he took a pencil and tapped the bells of the gong one after another, beginning at the bottom. The shrill note of the first told him instantly that was not the one which had sounded; nor was the second, nor the third. At the fourth he hesitated and struck a second time. Then he tapped the fifth. That was it. The gong trembled and swayed slightly from the blow, light as it was, and twice again he struck it. Then he was convinced.

For several minutes he stood staring, staring blankly. What had caused the bell to ring? His manner was calm, cold, quiet, inquisitive— indomitable common-sense inspired the query.

"I guess it was nerves," he said after a moment. "But I was looking at it, and—"

Nerves as a possibility were suddenly brushed ruthlessly aside, and he systematically sought some tangible explanation of the affair. Had a flying insect struck the bell? No. He was positive, because he had been looking directly at it when it sounded the second time. He would have seen an insect. Had something dropped from the ceiling? No. He would have seen that, too. With alert, searching eyes he surveyed the small room. It was his own personal den— a sort of office in his home. He was alone now; the door closed; everything appeared as usual.

Perhaps a window! The one facing east was open to the lightly stirring air of the first warm evening of spring. The wind had disturbed the gong! He jumped at the thought as an inspiration. It faded when he saw the window-curtains hanging down limply; the movement of the air was too light to disturb even these. Perhaps something had been tossed through the window! The absurdity of that conjecture was proven instantly. There was a screen in the window of so fine a mesh that hardly more than a grain of sand could pass through it. And this screen was intact.

With bewilderment in his face Mr. Phillips sat down again. Then recurred to him one indisputable fact which precluded the possibility of all those things he had considered. There had been absolutely no movement— that is, perceptible movement— of the gong when the bell sounded. Yet the tone was loud, as if a violent blow had been struck. He remembered that, when he tapped the bell sharply with his pencil, it swayed and trembled visibly, but the pencil was so light that the tone sounded far away and faint. To convince himself he touched the bell again, ever so lightly. It swayed.

"Well, of all the extraordinary things I ever heard of!" he remarked.

After a while he lighted a cigar, and for the first time in his life his hand shook. The sight brought a faint expression of amused surprise to his lips; then he snapped his fingers impatiently and settled back in his chair. It was a struggle to bring his mind around to material things; it insisted on wandering, and wove fantastic, grotesque conjectures in the drifting tobacco smoke. But at last common-sense triumphed under the sedative influence of an excellent cigar, and the incident of the bell floated off into nothingness. Business affairs— urgent, real, tangible business affairs— focused his attention.

Then, suddenly, clamorously, with the insistent acclaim of a fire-alarm, the bell sounded— once! twice! thrice! Mr. Phillips leaped to his feet. The tones chilled him and stirred his phlegmatic heart to quicker action. He took a long,

deep breath, and, with one glance around the little room, strode out into the hall. He paused there a moment, glanced at his watch— it was four minutes to nine— then went on to his wife's apartments.

Mrs. Phillips was reclining in a chair and listening with an amused smile to her son's recital of some commonplace college happening which chanced to be of interest to him. She was forty or forty-two, perhaps, and charming. Women never learn to be charming until they're forty; until then they are only pretty and amiable— sometimes. The son, Harvey Phillips, arose as his father entered. He was a stalwart young man of twenty, a prototype, as it were, of that hard-headed, masterful financier— Franklin Phillips.

"Why, Frank, I thought you were so absorbed in business that—" Mrs. Phillips began.

Mr. Phillips paused and looked blankly, unseeingly, as one suddenly aroused from sleep, at his wife and son— the two dearest of all earthly things to him. The son noted nothing unusual in his manner; the wife, with intuitive eyes, read some vague uneasiness.

"What is it?" she asked solicitously. "Has something gone wrong?"

Mr. Phillips laughed nervously and sat down near her.

"Nothing, nothing," he assured her. "I feel unaccountably nervous somehow, and I thought I should like to talk to you rather than— than—"

"Keep on going over and over those stupid figures?" she interrupted. "Thank you."

She leaned forward with a gesture of infinite grace and took his hand. He clenched it spasmodically to stop its absurd trembling and, with an effort all the greater because it was repressed so sternly, regained control of his panic-stricken nerves. Harvey Phillips excused himself and left the room.

"Harvey has just been explaining the mysteries of baseball to me," said Mrs. Phillips. "He's going to play on the Harvard team." Her husband stared at her without the slightest heed or comprehension of what she was saying.

"Can you tell me," he asked suddenly, "where you got that Japanese gong in my room?"

"Oh, that? I saw it in the window of a queer old curio shop I pass sometimes on my charity rounds. I looked at it two or three months ago and bought it. The place is in Cranston Street. It's kept by an old German— Wagner, I think his name is. Why?"

"It looks as if it might be very old, a hundred years perhaps," remarked Mr. Phillips.

"That's what I thought," responded his wife, "and the coloring is exquisite. I had never seen one exactly like it, so—"

"It doesn't happen to have any history, I suppose?" he interrupted.

"Not that I know of."

"Or any peculiar quality, or— or attribute out of the ordinary?"

Mrs. Phillips shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," she replied. "The only peculiar quality I noticed was the singular purity of the bells and the coloring."

Mr. Phillips coughed over his cigar.

"Yes, I noticed the bells myself," he explained lamely. "It just struck me that the thing was— was out of the ordinary, and I was a little curious about it." He was silent a moment. "It looks as if it might have been valuable once."

"I hardly think so," Mrs. Phillips responded. "I believe thirty dollars is what I paid for it— all that was asked."

That was all that was said about the matter at the time. But on the following morning an early visitor at Wagner's shop was Franklin Phillips. It was a typical place of its kind, half curio and half junk-store, with a coat of dust over all. There had been a crude attempt to enhance the appearance of the place by an artistic arrangement of several musty antique pieces, but, otherwise, it was a chaos of all things. An aged German met Mr. Phillips as he entered.

"Is this Mr. Wagner?" inquired the financier.

Extreme caution, amounting almost to suspicion, seemed to be a part of the old German's business régime, for he looked at his visitor from head to foot with keen eyes, then evaded the question.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to know if this is Mr. Wagner," said Mr. Phillips tersely. "Is it, or is it not?"

The old man met his frank stare for a moment; then his cunning, faded eyes wavered and dropped.

"I am Johann Wagner," he said humbly. "What do you want?"

"Some time ago— two or three months— you sold a Japanese gong—" Mr. Phillips began.

"I never sold it!" interrupted Wagner vehemently. "I never had a Japanese gong in the place! I never sold it!"

"Of course you sold it," insisted Mr. Phillips. "A Japanese gong— do you understand? Six bells on a silken cord."

"I never had such a thing in my life— never had such a thing in my shop!" declared the German excitedly. "I never sold it, so help me! I never saw it!"

Curiosity and incredulity were in Mr. Phillips' eyes as he faced the old man.

"Do you happen to have any clerk?" he asked. "Or did you have three months ago?"

"No, I never had a clerk," explained the German with a violence which Mr. Phillips did not understand. "There has never been anybody here but me. I never had a Japanese gong here— I never sold one! I never saw one here!"

Mr. Phillips studied the aged, wrinkled face before him calmly for several seconds. He was trying vainly to account for an excitement, a vehemence which was as inexplicable as it was unnecessary.

"It's absurd to deny that you sold the bell," he said finally. "My wife bought it of you, here in this place."

"I never sold it!" stormed the German. "I never had it! No women ever came here. I don't want women here. I don't know anything about a Japanese gong. I never had one here."

Deeply puzzled and thoroughly impatient, Mr. Phillips decided to forego this attempt at a casual inquiry into the history of the gong. After a little while he went away. The old German watched him cautiously, with cunning, avaricious eyes, until he stepped on a car.

As the cool, pleasant days of early spring passed on the bell held its tongue. Only once, and that was immediately after his visit to the old German's shop, did Mr. Phillips refer to it again. Then he inquired casually of his wife if she had bought it of the old man in person, and she answered in the affirmative, describing him. Then the question came to him: Why had Wagner absolutely denied all knowledge of the bell, of its having been in his possession and of having sold it?

But, after a time, this question was lost in vital business affairs which engrossed his attention. The gong still hung over his desk and he occasionally glanced at it. At such times his curiosity was keen, poignant even, but he made no further effort to solve the mystery which seemed to enshroud it.

So, until one evening a wealthy young Japanese gentleman, Oku Matsumi, by name, son of a distinguished nobleman in his country's diplomatic service, came to dinner at the Phillips' home as the guest of Harvey Phillips. They were classmates in Harvard, and a friendship had grown up between them which was curious, perhaps, but explainable on the ground of a mutual interest in art.

After dinner Mr. Matsumi expressed his admiration for several pictures which hung in the luxurious dining-room, and so it followed naturally that Mr. Phillips exhibited some other rare works of art. One of these pictures, a Da Vinci, hung in the little room where the gong was. With no thought of that, at the moment, Mr. Phillips led the way in and the Japanese followed.

Then a peculiar thing happened. At sight of the gong Mr. Matsumi seemed amazed, startled, and, taking one step toward it, he bent as if in obeisance. At the same time his right hand was thrust outward and upward as if describing some symbol in the air.

UTTER SILENCE! A suppliant throng, bowed in awed humility with hands outstretched, palms downward, and yellow faces turned in mute prayer toward the light which fluttered up feebly from the sacred fire upon the stony, leering

countenance of Buddha. The gigantic golden image rose cross-legged from its pedestal and receded upward and backward into the gloom of the temple. The multitude shaded off from bold outlines within the glow of the fire to a shadowy, impalpable mass in the remotest corners; hushed of breath, immovably staring into the drooping eyes of their graven-god.

Behind the image was a protecting veil of cloth of gold. Presently there came a murmur, and the supplicants, with one accord, prostrated themselves until their heads touched the bare, cold stones of the temple floor. The murmur grew into the weirdly beautiful chant of the priests of Buddha. The flickering light for an instant gave an appearance of life to the heavy-lidded, drooping eyes, then it steadied again and they seemed fixed on the urn wherein the fire burned.

After a moment the curtain of gold was thrust aside in three places simultaneously, and three silken-robed priests appeared. Each bore in his hand a golden sceptre. Together they approached the sacred fire and together they thrust the sceptres into it. Instantly a blaze spouted up, illuminating the vast, high-roofed palace of worship, and a cloud of incense arose. The sweetly sickening odor spread out, fanlike, over the throng.

The three priests turned away from the urn, and each, with slow, solemn tread, made his way to an altar of incense with the flaming torch held aloft. They met again at the feet of Buddha and prostrated themselves, at the same time extending the right hand and forming some symbol in the air. The chant from behind the golden veil softened to a murmur, and the murmur grew into silence. Then:

"Gautama!"

The name came from the three together— the tone was a prayer. It reverberated for an instant in the recesses of the great temple; then the multitude, with one motion, raised themselves, repeated the single word and groveled again on their faces.

"Siddhartha, Beloved!"

Again the three priests spoke and again the supplicants moved as one, repeating the words. The burning incense grew heavy, the sacred fire flickered, and shadows flitted elusively over the golden, graven face of the Buddha.

"Sayka-muni, Son of Heaven!"

The moving of the multitude as it swayed and answered was in perfect accord. It was as if one heart, one soul, one thought had inspired the action.

"O Buddha! Wise One! Enlightened One!" came the voices of the priests again. "Oh, Son of Kapilavastu! Chosen One! Holy One who found Nirvana! Your unworthy people are at your feet. Omnipotent One! We seek your gracious counsel!"

The voices in chorus had risen to a chant. When they ceased there was the chill of suspense; a little shiver ran through the temple; there was a hushed

movement of terrified anxiety. Of all the throng only the priests dared raise their eyes to the cold, graven face of the image. For an instant the chilling silence; then boldly, vibrantly, a bell sounded— once!

"Buddah has spoken!"

It was a murmurous whisper, almost a sigh, plaintive, awestricken. The note of the bell trembled on the incense-laden air, then was dissipated, welded into silence again. Priests and people were cowering on the bare stones; the lights flared up suddenly, then flickered, and the semi-gloom seemed to grow sensibly deeper. Behind the veil of gold the chant of the priests began again. But it was a more solemn note— a despairing wail. For a short time it went on, then died away.

Again the sacred fire blazed up as if caught by a gust of wind, but the glow did not light the Buddha's face now— it was concentrated on a bronze gong which dropped down sheerly on a silken cord at Buddha's right hand. There were six discs, the largest at the top, silhouetted against the darkness of the golden veil beyond. From one of these bells the sound had come, but now they hung mute and motionless. Only the three priests raised reverential eyes to it, and one, the eldest rose.

"O Voice of Buddha!" he apostrophized in a moving, swinging chant— and the face of the graven-god seemed swallowed up in the shadows— "we, your unworthy disciples, await! Each year at the eleventh festival we supplicate! But thrice only hast thou spoken in the half-century, and thrice within the eleventh day of your speaking our Emperor has passed into the arms of Death and Nirvana. Shall it again be so, Omnipotent One?"

The chant died away and the multitude raised itself to its knees with supplicating hands thrust out into the darkness toward the dim-lit gong. It was an attitude of beseeching, of prayer, of entreaty.

And again, as it hung motionless, the bell sounded. The tone rolled out melodiously, clearly— Once! Twice! Thrice! Those who gazed at the miracle lowered their eyes lest they be stricken blind. And the bell struck on— Four! Five! Six! A plaintive, wailing cry was raised; the priests behind the veil of gold were chanting again. Seven! Eight! Nine! The people took up the rolling chant as they groveled, and it swelled until the ancient walls of the temple trembled. Ten! Eleven!

Utter silence! A supplicant throng, bowed in awed humility, with hands outstretched, palms downward, and yellow faces turned in mute prayer toward the light which fluttered up feebly from the sacred fire upon the stony, leering countenance of Buddha!

MR. MATSUMI straightened up suddenly to find his host staring at him in perturbed amazement.

"Why did you do that?" Mr. Phillips blurted uneasily.

"Pardon me, but you wouldn't understand if I told you," replied the Japanese with calm, inscrutable face. "May I examine it, please?" And he indicated the silent and motionless gong.

"Certainly," replied the financier wonderingly.

Mr. Matsumi, with a certain eagerness which was not lost upon the American, approached the gong and touched the bells lightly, one after another, evidently to get the tone. Then he stooped and examined them carefully— top and bottom. Inside the largest bell— that at the top— he found something which interested him. After a close scrutiny he again straightened up, and in his slant eyes was an expression which Mr. Phillips would have liked to interpret.

"I presume you have seen it before?" he ventured.

"No, never," was the reply.

"But you recognized it!"

Mr. Matsumi merely shrugged his shoulders.

"And what made you do that?" By "that" Mr. Phillips referred to Mr. Matsumi's strange act when he first saw the bell.

Again the Japanese shrugged his shoulders. An exquisite, innate courtesy which belonged to him was apparently forgotten now in contemplation of the gong. The financier gnawed at his mustache. He was beginning to feel nervous— the nervousness he had felt previously, and his imagination ran riot.

"You have not had the gong long?" remarked Mr. Matsumi after a pause.

"Three or four months."

"Have you ever noticed anything peculiar about it?"

Mr. Phillips stared at him frankly.

"Well, rather!" he said at last, in a tone which was perfectly convincing.

"It rings, you mean— the fifth bell?"

Mr. Phillips nodded. There was a tense eagerness in the manner of the Japanese.

"You have never heard the bell ring eleven times?"

Mr. Phillips shook his head. Mr. Matsumi drew a long breath— whether it was relief the other couldn't say. There was silence. Mr. Matsumi closed and unclosed his small hands several times.

"Pardon me for mentioning the matter under such circumstances," he said at last, in a tone which suggested that he feared giving offence, "but would you be willing to part with the gong?"

Mr. Phillips regarded him keenly. He was seeking in the other's manner some inkling to a solution of a mystery which each moment seemed more hopelessly beyond him.

"I shouldn't care to part with it," he replied casually. "It was given to me by my wife."

"Then no offer I might make would be considered?"

"No, certainly not," replied Mr. Phillips tartly. There was a pause. "This gong has interested me immensely. I should like to know its history. Perhaps you can enlighten me?"

With the imperturbability of his race, Mr. Matsumi declined to give any information. But, with a graceful return of his former exquisite courtesy, he sought more definite knowledge for himself.

"I will not ask you to part with the gong," he said, "but perhaps you can inform me where your wife bought it?" He paused for a moment. "Perhaps it would be possible to get another like it?"

"I happen to know there isn't another," replied Mr. Phillips. "It came from a little curio shop in Cranston Street, kept by a German named Johann Wagner."

And that was all. This incident passed as the other had, the net result being only further to stimulate Mr. Phillips' curiosity. It seemed a futile curiosity, yet it was ever present, despite the fact that the gong still hung silent.

On the next evening, a balmy, ideal night of spring, Mr. Phillips had occasion to go into the small room. This was just before dinner was announced. It was rather close there, so he opened the east window to a grateful breeze, and placed the screen in position, after which he stooped to pull out a drawer of his desk. Then came again the quick, clangorous boom of the bell— One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven!

At the first stroke he straightened up; at the second he leaned forward toward the gong with his eyes riveted to the fifth disc. As it continued to ring he grimly held on to jangling nerves and looked for the cause. Beneath the bells, on top, all around them he sought. There was nothing! nothing! The sounds simply burst out, one after another, as if from a heavy blow, yet the bell did not move. For the seventh time it struck, and then with white, ghastly face and chilled, stiff limbs Mr. Phillips rushed out of the room. A dew of perspiration grew in the palms of his quavering hands.

It was a night of little rest and strange dreams for him. At breakfast on the following morning Mrs. Phillips poured his coffee and then glanced through the mail which had been placed beside her.

"Do you particularly care for that gong in your room?" she inquired.

Mr. Phillips started a little. That particular object had enchained his attention for the last dozen hours, awake and asleep.

"Why?" he asked.

"You know I told you I bought it of a curio dealer," Mrs. Phillips explained. "His name is Johann Wagner, and he offers me five hundred dollars if I will sell it back to him. I presume he has found it is more valuable than he imagined, and the five hundred dollars would make a comfortable addition to my charity fund."

Mr. Phillips was deeply thoughtful. Johann Wagner! What was this new twist? Why had Wagner denied all knowledge of the gong to him? Having denied, why should he now make an attempt to buy it back? In seeking answers to these questions he was silent.

"Well, dear?" inquired his wife after a pause. "You didn't answer me."

"No, don't sell the gong," he exclaimed abruptly. "Don't sell it at any price. I— I want it. I'll give you a cheque for your charity."

There was something of uneasiness in her devoted eyes. Some strange, subtle, indefinable air which she could not fathom was in his manner. With a little sigh which breathed her unrest she finished her breakfast.

On the following morning still another letter came from Johann Wagner. It was an appeal— an impassioned appeal— hurriedly scrawled and almost incoherent in form. He must have the gong! He would give five thousand dollars for it. Mrs. Phillips was frankly bewildered at the letter, and turned it over to her husband. He read it through twice with grimly-set teeth.

"No," he exclaimed violently; "it sha'n't be sold for any price!" Then his voice dropped as he recollected himself. "No, my dear," he continued, "it shall not be sold. It was a present from you to me. I want it, but"— and he smiled whimsically—"if he keeps raising the price it will add a great deal to your charity fund, won't it?"

Twice again within thirty-six hours Mr. Phillips heard the bell ring— once on one occasion and four on the other. And now visibly, tangibly, a great change was upon him. The healthy glow went from his face. There was a constant twitching of his hands; a continual, impatient snapping of his fingers. His eyes lost their steady gaze. They roved aimlessly, and one's impression always was that he was listening. The strength of the master spirit was being slowly destroyed, eaten up by a hideous gnawing thing of which he seemed hopelessly obsessed. But he took no one into his confidence; it was his own private affair to work out to the end.

This condition was upon him at a time when the activity of the speculative centres of the world was abnormal, and when every faculty was needed in the great financial schemes of which he was the centre. He, in person, held the strings which guided millions. The importance of his business affairs was so insistently and relentlessly thrust upon him that he was compelled to meet them. But the effort was a desperate one, and that night late, when a city slept around him, the bell sounded twice.

When he reached his downtown office next day an enormous amount of detail work lay before him, and he attacked it with a feverish exaltation which followed upon days and nights of restlessness. He had been at his desk only a few minutes when his private telephone clattered. With an exclamation he arose; comprehending, he sat down again.

Half-a-dozen times within the hour the bell rang, and each time he was startled. Finally he arose in a passion, tore the desk-telephone from its connecting wires and flung it into the waste-basket. Deliberately he walked around to the side of his desk and, with a well-directed kick, smashed the battery-box. His secretary regarded him in amazement.

"Mr. Camp," directed the financier sharply, "please instruct the office operator not to ring another telephone-bell in this office— ever."

The secretary went out and he sat down to work again. Late that afternoon he called on his family physician, Doctor Perdue, a robust individual of whom it was said that his laugh cured more patients than his medicine. Be that as it may, he was a successful man, high in his profession. Doctor Perdue looked up with frank interest as he entered.

"Hello, Phillips!" was his greeting. "What can I do for you?"

"Nerves," was the laconic answer.

"I thought it would come to that," remarked the physician, and he shook his head sagely. "Too much work, too much worry and too many cigars; and besides, you're not so young as you once were."

"It isn't work or cigars," Phillips replied impatiently. "It's worry— worry because of some peculiar circumstances which— which—"

He paused with a certain childish feeling of shame, of cowardice. Doctor Perdue regarded him keenly and felt of his pulse.

"What peculiar circumstances?" he demanded.

"Well, I— I can hardly explain it myself," replied Mr. Phillips, between tightly-clenched teeth. "It's intangible, unreal, ghostly— what you will. Perhaps I can best make you understand it by saying that I'm always— I always seem to be waiting for something."

Doctor Perdue laughed heartily; Mr. Phillips glared at him.

"Most of us are always waiting for something," said the physician. "If we got it there wouldn't be any particular object in life. Just what sort of thing is it you're always waiting for?"

Mr. Phillips arose suddenly and paced the length of the room twice. His under jaw was thrust out a little, his teeth crushed together, but in his eyes lay a haunting, furtive fear.

"I'm always waiting for a— for a bell," he blurted fiercely, and his face became scarlet. "I know it's absurd, but I awake in the night trembling, and lie for hours waiting, waiting, yet dreading the sound as no man ever dreaded anything in this world. At my desk I find myself straining every nerve, waiting, listening. When I talk to any one I'm always waiting, waiting, waiting! Now, right this minute, I'm waiting, waiting for it. The thing is driving me mad, man, mad! Don't you understand?"

Doctor Perdue arose with grave face and led the financier back to his seat.

"You are behaving like a child, Phillips!" he said sharply. "Sit down and tell me about it."

"Now, look here, Perdue," and Mr. Phillips brought his fist down on the desk with a crash, "you must believe it— you've got to believe it! If you don't, I shall know I am mad."

"Tell me about it," urged the physician quietly.

Then haltingly, hesitatingly, the financier related the incidents as they had happened. Incipient madness, fear, terror, blazed in his eyes, and at times his pale lips quivered as a child's might. The physician listened attentively and nodded several times.

"The bell must be— must be haunted!" Mr. Phillips burst out in conclusion. "There's no reasonable way to account for it. My common-sense tells me that it doesn't sound at all, and yet I know it does."

Doctor Perdue was silent for several minutes.

"You know, of course, that your wife did buy the bell of the old German?" he asked after a while.

"Why, certainly, I know it. It's proved absolutely by the letters he writes trying to get it back."

"And your fear doesn't come from anything the Japanese said?"

"It isn't the denial of the German; it isn't the childish things Mr. Matsumi said and did; it's the actual sound of the bell that's driving me insane— it's the hopeless, everlasting, eternal groping for a reason. It's an inanimate thing and it acts as if— it acts as if it were alive!"

The physician had been sitting with his fingers on Mr. Phillips' wrist. Now he arose and mixed a quieting potion which the other swallowed at a gulp. Soon after his patient went home somewhat more self-possessed, and with rigid instructions as to the regularity of his life and habits.

"You need about six months in Europe more than anything else," Doctor Perdue declared. "Take three weeks, shape up your business and go. Meanwhile, if you won't sell the gong or throw it away, keep out of its reach."

Next morning a man— a stranger— was found dead in the small room where the gong hung. A bullet through the heart showed the manner of death. The door leading from the room into the hall was locked on the outside; an open window facing east indicated how he had entered and suggested a possible avenue of escape for his slayer.

Attracted by the excitement which followed the discovery of the body, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips went to investigate, and thus saw the dead man. The wife entered the room first, and for an instant stood speechless, staring into the white, upturned face. Then came an exclamation.

"Why, it's the man from whom I bought the gong!" She turned to find her husband peering over her shoulder. His face was ashen to the lips, his eyes wide and staring.

"Johann Wagner!" he exclaimed.

Then, as if frenzied, he flung her aside and rushed to where the gong hung silent and motionless. He seemed bent on destruction as he reached for it with gripping fingers. Suddenly he staggered as if from a heavy blow in the face, and covered both eyes with his hands.

"Look!" he screamed.

There was a smudge of fresh, red blood on the fifth bell. Mrs. Phillips glanced from the bell to him inquiringly.

He stood for a moment with hands pressed to his eyes, then laughed mirthlessly, demoniacally.

ii

HERE a small brazier spouting a blue flame, there a retort partially filled with some purplish, foul-smelling liquid, yonder a sinuous copper coil winding off into the shadows, and moving about like an alchemist of old, the slender, childlike figure of Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph. D., LL. D., F. R. S., M. D., etc., etc. A ray of light shot down blindingly from a reflector above and brilliantly illuminated the laboratory table. The worker leaned forward to peer at some minute particle under the microscope, and for an instant his head and face were thrown out against the darkness of the room like some grotesque, disembodied thing.

It was a singular head and face— a head out of all proportion to body, domelike, enormous, with a wilderness of straw-yellow hair. The face was small, wizened, petulant even; the watery blue eyes, narrow almost to the disappearing point, squinted everlastingly through thick spectacles; the mouth drooped at the corners. The small, white hands which twisted and turned the object-glass into focus were possessed of extraordinarily long, slender fingers.

This man of the large head and small body was the undisputed leader in contemporaneous science. His was the sanest, coldest, clearest brain in scientific achievement. His word was the final one. Once upon a time a newspaperman, Hutchinson Hatch, had dubbed him The Thinking Machine, and so it came about that the world at large had heard of and knew him by that title. The reporter, a tall, slender young man, sat now watching him curiously and listening. The scientist spoke in a tone of perpetual annoyance; but a long acquaintance had taught the reporter that it was what he said and not the manner of its saying that was to be heeded.

"Imagination, Mr. Hatch, is the single connecting link between man and the infinite," The Thinking Machine was saying. "It is the one quality which distinguishes us from what we are pleased to call the brute creation, for we have the same passions, the same appetites, and the same desires. It is the most valuable adjunct to the scientific mind, because it is the basis of all scientific progress. It is the thing which temporarily bridges gaps and makes it possible to solve all material problems— not some, but all of them. We can achieve nothing until we imagine it. Just so far as the human brain can imagine it can comprehend. It fails only to comprehend the eternal purpose, the Omnipotent Will, because it cannot imagine it. For imagination has a limit, Mr. Hatch, and beyond that we are not to go— beyond that is Divinity."

This wasn't at all what Hatch had come to hear, but he listened with a sort of fascination.

"The first intelligent being," the irritated voice went on, "had to imagine that when two were added to two there would be a result. He found it was four, he proved it was four, and instantly it became immutable— a point in logic, a thing by which we may solve problems. Thus two and two make four, not sometimes, but all the time."

"I had always supposed that imagination was limitless," Hatch ventured for a moment, "that it knows no bounds."

The Thinking Machine squinted at him coldly.

"On the contrary," he declared, "it has a boundary beyond which the mind of man merely reels, staggers, collapses. I'll take you there." He spoke as if it were just around the corner. "By aid of a microscope of far less power than the one there, the atomic or molecular theory was formulated. You know that— it is that all matter is composed of atoms. Now, imagination suggested and logic immutably demonstrates that the atoms themselves are composed of other atoms, and that those atoms in turn are composed of still others, ad infinitum. They are merely invisible, and imagination— I am not now stating a belief, but citing an example of what imagination can do— imagination can make us see the possibility of each of those atoms, down to infinity, being inhabited, being in itself a world relatively as distant from its fellows as we are from the moon. We can even imagine what those inhabitants would look like."

He paused a minute; Hatch blinked several times.

"But the boundary lies the other way— through the telescope," continued the scientist. "The most powerful glass ever devised has brought no suggestion of the end of the universe. It only brings more millions of worlds, invisible to the naked eye into sight. The stronger the glass, the more hopeless the task of even conjecturing the end, and here, too, the imagination can apply the atomic theory, and logic will support it. In other words, atoms make matter, matter makes the world, which is an inconceivably tiny speck in our solar system, an

atom; therefore, all the millions and millions of worlds are mere atoms, infinitesimal parts of some far greater scheme. What greater scheme? There is the end of imagination! There the mind stops!"

The immensity of the conception made Hatch gasp a little. He sat silent for a long time, awed, oppressed. Never before in his life had he felt of so little consequence.

"Now, Mr. Hatch, as to this little problem that is annoying you," continued The Thinking Machine, and the matter-of-fact tone was a great relief. "What I have said has had, of course, no bearing on it, except in so far as it demonstrates that imagination is necessary to solve a problem, that all material problems may be solved, and that, in meeting them, logic is the lever. It is a fixed quantity; its simplest rules have enabled me to solve petty affairs for you in the past, so—"

The reporter came to himself with a start. Then he laid before this master brain the circumstances which cast so strange a mystery about the death by violence of Johann Wagner, junk-dealer, in the home of Franklin Phillips, millionaire. But his information was only from the time the police came into the affair. Mr. Phillips, Doctor Perdue and Mr. Matsumi alone knew of the ringing of the bell.

"The blood-spot on one of the bells," Hatch told the scientist in conclusion, "may be the mark of a hand, but its significance doesn't appear. Just now the police are working on two queer points which they developed. First, Detective Mallory recognized the dead man as 'Old Dutch' Wagner, long suspected of conducting a 'fence'— that is, receiving and disposing of stolen goods; and second, one of the servants in the Phillips' household, Giles Francis, has disappeared. He hasn't been seen since eleven o'clock on the night before the body was found, and then he was in bed sound asleep. Every article of his clothing, except a pair of shoes, trousers, and pajamas, was left behind."

The Thinking Machine turned away from the laboratory table and sank into a chair. For a long time he sat with his enormous yellow head thrown back and his slender, white fingers pressed tip to tip.

"If Wagner was shot through the heart," he said at last, "we know that death was instantaneous; therefore he could not have made the blood-mark on the bell." It seemed to be a statement of fact. "But why should there be such a mark on the bell?"

"Detective Mallory thinks that—" began the reporter.

"Oh, never mind what he thinks!" interrupted the other testily. "What time was the body found?"

"About half-past nine yesterday morning."

"Anything stolen?"

"Nothing. The body was simply there, the window open and the door locked, and there was the blood-mark on the bell."

There was a pause. Cobwebby lines appeared on the broad forehead of the scientist and the squint eyes narrowed down to mere slits. Hatch was watching him curiously.

"What does Mr. Phillips say about it?" asked The Thinking Machine. He was still staring upward and his thin lips were drawn into a straight line.

"He is ill, just how ill we don't know," responded the newspaper man.

"Doctor Perdue has, so far, not permitted the police to question him."

The scientist lowered his eyes quickly.

"What's the matter with him?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Doctor Perdue has declined to make any statement."

Half an hour later The Thinking Machine and Hatch called at the Phillips' house. They met Doctor Perdue coming out. His face was grave and preoccupied; his professional air of jocundity was wholly absent. He shook hands with The Thinking Machine, whom he had met years before beside an operating-table, and reentered the house with him. Together the three went to the little room—the scene of the tragedy.

The Japanese gong still swung over the desk. The crabbed little scientist went straight to it, and for five minutes devoted his undivided attention to a study of the splotch on the fifth bell. From the expression of his face Hatch could gather nothing. What the scientist saw might or might not have been illuminating. Was the splotch the mark of a hand? If it were, Hatch argued, it offered no clew, as the intricate lines of the flesh were smeared together, obliterated.

Next The Thinking Machine critically glanced about him, and finally threw open the window facing east. For a long time he stood silently squinting out; and, save for the minute lines in his forehead, there was no indication whatever of his mental workings. The little room was on the second floor and jutted out at right angles across a narrow alley which ran beneath them to the kitchen in the back. The dead-wall of the next building was only four feet from the Phillips' wall, and was without windows, so it was easily seen how a man, unobserved, might climb up from below despite an arc-light above the wide front door of an apartment-house across the street, visible in the vista of the alley.

"Do you happen to know, Perdue," asked The Thinking Machine at last, "if this west window was ever opened?"

"Never," replied the physician. "Detective Mallory questioned the servants about it. It seems that the kitchen is beneath, somewhat to the back, and the odors of cooking came up."

"How many outside doors has this house?"

"Only two," was the reply: "the one you entered, and one opening into the alley below us."

"Both were found locked yesterday morning?"

"Yes. Both doors have spring-locks, therefore each locks itself when closed."

"Oh!" exclaimed the scientist suddenly.

He turned away from the window, and, for a second time, examined the still and silent gong. Somewhere in his mind seemed to be an inkling that the gong might be more closely associated than appeared with the mystery of death, and yet, watching him curiously, Doctor Perdue knew he could have no knowledge of the sinister part it had played in the affair. With a penknife The Thinking Machine made a slight mark on the under side of each bell in turn; then squinted at them, one after another. On the inside of the top bell— the largest— he found something— a mark, a symbol perhaps— but it seemed meaningless to Hatch and Doctor Perdue, who were peering over his shoulder.

It was merely a circle with three upward rays and three dots inside it.

"The manufacturer's mark, perhaps," Hatch suggested.

"Of course, it's impossible that the bell could have had anything to do—" Doctor Perdue began.

"Nothing is impossible, Perdue," snapped the scientist crabbedly. "Do not say that. It annoys me exceedingly." He continued to stare at the symbol. "Just where was the body found?" he asked after a little.

"Here," replied Doctor Perdue, and he indicated a spot near the window.

The Thinking Machine measured the distance with his eye.

"The only real problem here," he remarked musingly, after a moment, as if supplementing a previous statement, "is what made him lock the door and run?"

"What made— who?" Hatch asked eagerly.

The Thinking Machine merely squinted at him, through him, beyond him with glassy eyes. His thoughts seemed far away and the cobwebby lines in his forehead grew deeper. Doctor Perdue was apparently at the moment too self-absorbed to heed.

"Now, Perdue," demanded The Thinking Machine suddenly, "what is really the matter with Mr. Phillips?"

"Well, it's rather—" he started haltingly, then went on as if his mind were made up: "You know, Van Dusen, there's something back of all this that hasn't been told, for reasons which I consider good ones. It might interest you, because you are keen on these things, but I doubt if it would help you. And besides, I should have to insist that you alone should hear it."

He glanced meaningfully at Hatch, whom he knew to be present only in his capacity as reporter.

"There's something else— about the bell," said The Thinking Machine quickly. It was not a question, but a statement.

"Yes, about the bell," acquiesced the physician, as if a little surprised that the other should know. "But as I said it—"

"I undertook to get at the facts here to aid Mr. Hatch," explained The Thinking Machine; "but I can assure you he will print nothing without my permission."

Doctor Perdue looked at the newspaperman inquiringly; Hatch nodded.

"I guess perhaps it would be better for you to hear it from Phillips himself," went on the physician. "Come along. I think he would be willing to tell you."

Thus the scientist and the reporter met Franklin Phillips. He was in bed. The once masterful financier seemed but a shadow of what he had been. His strong face was now white and haggard, and lined almost beyond recognition. The lips were pale, the hands nervously clutched at the sheet, and in his eyes was horror— hideous horror. They glittered at times, and only at intervals reflected the strength, the power which once lay there. His present condition was as pitiable as it was inexplicable to Hatch, who remembered him as the rugged storm-centre of half a dozen spectacular financial battles.

Mr. Phillips talked willingly— seemed, indeed, relieved to be able to relate in detail those circumstances which, in a way, accounted for his utter collapse. As he went on volubly, yet coherently enough, his roving eyes settled on the petulant, inscrutable face of The Thinking Machine as if seeking, above all things, belief. He found it, for the scientist nodded time after time, and gradually the lines in the dome-like forehead were dissipated.

"Now I know why he ran," declared the scientist positively, enigmatically. The remark was hopelessly without meaning to the others. "As I understand it, Mr. Phillips," he asked, "the east window was always open when the bell sounded?"

"Yes, I believe it was, always," replied Mr. Phillips after a moment's thought.

"And you always heard it when the window was open?"

"Oh, no," replied the financier. "There were many times when the window was open that I didn't hear anything."

A fleeting bewilderment crossed the scientist's face, then was gone.

"Of course, of course," he said after a moment. "Stupid of me. I should have known that. Now, the first time you ever noticed it the bell rang twice— that is, twice with an interval of, say, a few seconds between?"

"Yes."

"And you had had the gong, then, two or three months?"

"About three months— yes."

"The weather remained cool during that time? Late winter and early spring?"

"I presume so. I don't recall. I know the first time I heard the bell was an early, warm day of spring, because my window had not previously been opened."

The Thinking Machine was dreamily squinting upward. As he stared into the quiet, narrow eyes a certain measure of confidence seemed to return to Mr. Phillips. He raised himself on an elbow.

"You say that once you heard the bell ring late at night— twice. What were the circumstances?"

"That was the night preceding a day of some important operations I had planned," explained Mr. Phillips, "and I was in the little room for a long time after midnight going over some figures."

"Do you remember the date?"

"Perfectly. It was Tuesday, the eleventh of this month,"— and, for an instant, memory called to Mr. Phillips' face an expression which financial foes know well. "I remember, because next day I forced the market up to a record price on some railway stocks I control."

The Thinking Machine nodded.

"This servant of yours who is missing, Francis, was rather a timid sort of man, I imagine."

"Well, I could hardly say," replied Mr. Phillips doubtfully.

"Well, he was," declared The Thinking Machine flatly. "He was a good servant, I dare say?"

"Yes, excellent."

"Would it have been within his duties to close a window which might have been left open at night?"

"Certainly."

"Rather a big man?"

"Yes, six feet or so— two hundred and ten pounds, perhaps."

"And Mr. Matsumi was, of course, small?"

"Yes, small even for a Japanese."

The Thinking Machine arose and placed his fingers on Mr. Phillips' wrist. He stood thus for half a minute.

"Did you ever notice any odor after the bell rang?" he inquired at last.

"Odor?" Mr. Phillips seemed puzzled. "Why, I don't see what an odor would have to do—"

"I didn't expect you to," interrupted The Thinking Machine crustily. "I merely want to know if you noticed one."

"No," retorted Mr. Phillips shortly.

"And could you explain your precise feelings?" continued the scientist. "Did the effect of the bell's ringing seem to be entirely mental, or was it physical? In other words, was there any physical exaltation or depression when you heard it?"

"It would be rather difficult to say— even to myself," responded Mr. Phillips. "It always seemed to be a shock, but I suppose it was really a mental condition which reacted on my nerves."

The Thinking Machine walked over to the window and stood with his back to the others. For a minute or more he remained there, and three eager pairs of eyes were fixed inquiringly on the back of his yellow head. Beneath the irritated voice, behind the inscrutable face, in the disjointed questioning, they all knew intuitively there was some definite purpose, but to none came a glimmer of light as to its nature.

"I think, perhaps, the matter is all clear now," he remarked musingly at last. "There are two vital questions yet to be answered. If the first of these is answered in the affirmative, I know that a mind— I may say a Japanese mind— of singular ingenious quality conceived the condition which brought about this affair; if in the negative, the entire matter becomes ridiculously simple."

Mr. Phillips was leaning forward, listening greedily. There was hope and fear, doubt and confidence, eagerness and a certain tense restraint in his manner. Doctor Perdue was silent; Hatch merely waited.

"What made the bell ring?" demanded Mr. Phillips.

"I must find the answer to the two remaining questions first," returned The Thinking Machine.

"You mentioned a Japanese," said Mr. Phillips. "Do you suspect Mr. Matsumi of any connection with the— the mystery?"

"I never suspect persons of things, Mr. Phillips," said The Thinking Machine curtly. "I never suspect— I always know. When I know in this case I shall inform you. Mr. Hatch and I are going out for a few minutes. When we return the matter can be disposed of in ten minutes."

He led the way out and along the hall to the little room where the gong hung. Hatch closed the door as he entered. Then for the third time the scientist examined the bells. He struck the fifth violently time after time, and after each stroke he thrust an inquisitive nose almost against it and sniffed. Hatch stared at him in wonderment. When the scientist had finished he shook his head as if answering a question in the negative. With Hatch following he passed out into the street.

"What's the matter with Phillips?" the reporter ventured, as they reached the sidewalk.

"Scared, frightened," was the tart rejoinder. "He's merely morbidly anxious to account for the bell's ringing. If I had been absolutely certain before I came out I should have told him. I am certain now. You know, Mr. Hatch, when a thing is beyond immediate understanding it instantly suggests the supernatural to some minds. Mr. Phillips wouldn't confess it, but he sees back of the ringing of that bell some uncanny power— a threat, perhaps— and the thing has preyed

upon him until he's nearly insane. When I can arrange to make him understand perfectly why the bell rings he will be all right again."

"I can readily see how the ringing of the bell strikes one as uncanny," Hatch declared grimly. "Have you an idea what causes it?"

"I know what causes it," returned the other irritably. "And if you don't know you're stupid."

The reporter shook his head hopelessly.

They crossed the street to the big apartment-house opposite, and entered. The Thinking Machine inquired for and was shown into the office of the manager. He had only one question.

"Was there a ball, or reception, or anything of that sort held in this building on Tuesday night, the eleventh of this month?" he inquired.

"No," was the response. "There has never been anything of that sort here."

"Thanks," said The Thinking Machine. "Good-day."

Turning abruptly he left the manager to figure that out as best he could, and, with Hatch following, ascended the stairs to the next floor. Here was a wide, airy hallway extending the full length of the building. The Thinking Machine glanced neither to right nor left; he went straight to the rear, where a plate-glass window enframed a panorama of the city. From where they stood the city's roofs slanted down toward the heart of the business district, half a mile away.

As Hatch looked on The Thinking Machine took out his watch and set it two and a half minutes forward, after which he turned and walked to the other end of the hall. Here, too, was a plate-glass window. For just a fraction of an instant he stood staring straight out at the Phillips' home across the way; then, without a word, retraced his steps down the stairs and into the street.

Hatch's head was overflowing with questions, but he choked them back and merely trailed along. They re-entered the Phillips' house in silence. Doctor Perdue and Harvey Phillips met them in the hallway. An expression of infinite relief came into the physician's face at the sight of The Thinking Machine.

"I'm glad you're back so soon," he said quickly. "Here's a new development and a singular one." He referred evidently to a long envelope he held. "Step into the library here."

They entered, and Doctor Perdue carefully closed the door behind them.

"Just a few minutes ago Harvey received a sealed envelope by mail," he explained. "It inclosed this one, also sealed. He was going to show it to his father, but I didn't think it wise because of— because—"

The Thinking Machine took the envelope in one slender hand and examined it. It was a perfectly plain white one, and bore only a single line written in a small, copper-plate hand with occasional unexpected angles:

"To be opened when the fifth bell rings eleven times."

Something as nearly approaching complacent satisfaction as Hatch had ever seen overspread the petulant countenance of The Thinking Machine, and a long, aspirated "Ah!" escaped the thin lips. There was a hushed silence. Harvey Phillips, to whom nothing of the mystery was known beyond the actual death of Wagner, sought to read what it all meant in Doctor Perdue's face. In turn Doctor Perdue's eyes were fastened on The Thinking Machine.

"Of course, you don't know whom this is from, Mr. Phillips?" inquired the scientist of the young man.

"I have no idea," was the reply. "It seemed to amaze Doctor Perdue here, but, frankly, I can't imagine why."

"You don't know the handwriting?"

"No."

"Well, I do," declared The Thinking Machine emphatically. "It's Mr. Matsumi's." He glared at the physician. "And in it lies the key to this affair of the bell. The mere fact that it came at all proves everything as I saw it."

"But it can't be from Matsumi," protested the young man. "The postmark on the outside was Cleveland."

"That means merely that he is running away to escape arrest on a charge of murder."

"Then Matsumi killed Wagner?" Hatch asked quickly.

"I didn't say it was a confession," responded the scientist curtly. "It is merely a history of the bell. I dare say—"

Suddenly the door was thrown open and Mrs. Phillips entered. Her face was ashen.

"Doctor, he is worse— sinking rapidly!" she gasped. "Please come!"

Doctor Perdue glanced from her pallid face to the impassive Thinking Machine.

"Van Dusen," he said solemnly, "if you can do anything to explain this thing, do it now. I know it will save a man's reason— it might save his life."

"Is he conscious?" inquired the scientist of Mrs. Phillips.

"No, he seems to have utterly collapsed," she explained. "I was talking to him when suddenly he sat up in bed as if listening, then shrieked something I didn't understand and fell back unconscious."

Doctor Perdue was dragged out of the room by the wife and son. The Thinking Machine glanced at his watch. It was three and a half minutes past four o'clock. He nodded, then turned to Hatch.

"Please go into the little room and close the window," he instructed. "Mr. Phillips has heard the bell again, and I imagine Doctor Perdue needs me. Meanwhile, put this envelope in your pocket." And he handed to Hatch the mysterious sealed packet.

It was twenty minutes past nine o'clock that evening. In the little room where the gong hung were Franklin Phillips, pale and weak, but eager; Doctor Perdue, The Thinking Machine, Harvey Phillips and Hatch. For four hours Doctor Perdue and the scientist had labored over the unconscious financier, and finally a tinge of color returned to the pale lips; then came consciousness.

"It was my suggestion, Mr. Phillips, that we are here," explained The Thinking Machine quietly. "I want to show you just why and how the bell rings, and incidentally clear up the other points of the mystery. Now, if I should tell you that the bell will sound a given number of times at a given instant, and it should sound, you would know that I was aware of the cause?"

"Certainly," assented Mr. Phillips eagerly.

"And then if I demonstrated tangibly how it sounded you would be satisfied?"

"Yes, of course— yes."

"Very good." And the scientist turned to the reporter: "Mr. Hatch, 'phone the Weather Bureau and ask if there was a storm about midnight preceding the finding of Wagner's body; also if there was thunder. And get the direction and velocity of the wind. I know, of course, that there was thunder, and that the wind was either from the east, or there was no wind. I know it, not from personal observation, but by the pure logic of events."

The reporter nodded.

"Also I will have to ask you to borrow for me somewhere a violin and a champagne-glass."

There happened to be a violin in the house. Harvey Phillips went for it, and Hatch went to the 'phone. Five minutes later he reappeared; Harvey Phillips had preceded him.

"Light wind from the east, four miles an hour," Hatch reported tersely. "The storm threatened just before midnight. There was vivid lightning and heavy thunder."

To prosaic Doctor Perdue these preliminaries smacked a little of charlatantry. Mr. Phillips was interested, but impatient. The Thinking Machine, watch in hand, lay back in his chair, squinting steadily upward.

"Now, Mr. Phillips," he announced, "in just thirty-three and three-quarter minutes the bell will ring. It will sound ten times. I am taking pains to reproduce the exact conditions under which the bell has always sounded since you have known it, because if I show you there can be no doubt."

Mr. Phillips was leaning forward, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Meanwhile, I will reconstruct the events, not as they might have happened, but as they must have happened," continued The Thinking Machine. "They will not be in sequence, but as they were revealed to me by each added fact, for logic, Mr. Phillips, is only a sum in arithmetic, and the answer based on every

known fact must be correct as inevitably as that two and two make four— not sometimes, but all the time.

"Well, a man was found dead here— shot. His mere presence indicated burglary. The open window showed how he probably entered. Considering only these superficial facts, we see instantly that more than one person might have entered that window. Yet it is hardly likely that two thieves entered, and one killed the other before they got their booty, for nothing was stolen, and it is still less likely that one man came here to commit suicide. What then?

"The blood mark on the bell. It was made by a human hand. Yet a man shot instantly dead could not have made it. Therefore we know there was another person. The door locked on the outside absolutely confirmed this. Ordinarily, I dare say, the door is never locked? No? Then who locked it? Certainly not a second thief, for he would not have risked escaping through the house after a shot which, for all he knew, had aroused every one. Ergo, some one in the house locked the door. Who?

"One of your servants, Giles Francis, is missing. Did he hear some one in the room? No, for he would have alarmed the household. What happened to him? Where is he? There is, of course, a chance that he ran out to find an officer and was disposed of in some way by an outside confederate of the man inside. But remember, please, the last we know of him he was asleep in bed. The vital point, therefore, is, what aroused him? From that we can easily develop his subsequent actions."

The Thinking Machine paused and glanced casually at his watch, then toward the east window, which was open with the screen in.

"We know," he resumed, "that if Francis had been aroused by burglars, or by a sound which he attributed to burglars, he would have awakened other servants. We must suppose he was awakened by some noise. What is most probable? Thunder! That would account for his every act. So let's say for the moment that it was thunder, that he remembered this window was open, partially dressed himself and came here to close it. This was, we will also presume, just before midnight. He met Wagner here, and in some way got Wagner's revolver. Then the fatal shot was fired.

"From this point, as the facts developed, Francis' acts became more difficult of comprehension. I could readily see how, when Wagner fell, Francis might have placed his hand over the heart to see if he were dead, and thus stained his hands; but why did Francis then smear blood on the fifth bell of the gong, leave this room, locking the door behind him, and run into the street? In other words, why did he lock the door and run?

"I had already attached considerable importance to the gong, primarily because of the blood, and had examined the bells closely. I even scratched them to assure myself that they were bronze and not a precious metal which would

attract thieves. Then, Mr. Phillips, I heard your story, and instantly I knew why Francis locked the door and ran. It was because he was frightened—horribly, unspeakably frightened. Naturally there was a nerve-racking shock when he found he had killed a man. Then as he stood, horror-stricken perhaps, the bell rang. It affected him as it did you, Mr. Phillips, but under circumstances which were inconceivably more terrifying to a timid man. The bell rang six, seven, eight—perhaps a dozen times. To Francis, looking down upon a man he had killed, it was maddening, inexplicable. He placed his hand on it to stop the sound, then, crazed with terror, ran out of the room, locking the door behind him, and out of the house. The outer door closed with a spring-lock. He will return in time, because, of course, he was justified in killing Wagner."

Again The Thinking Machine glanced at his watch. Eighteen minutes of the specified thirty-three had elapsed.

"Now, as to the bell itself," he went on, "its history is of no consequence. It's Japanese and we know it's extremely old. We must assume from Mr. Matsumi's conduct that it is an object of—of, say, veneration. We can imagine it hanging in a temple; perhaps it rang there, and awed multitudes listened. Perhaps they regarded it as prophetic. After its disappearance from Japan—we don't know how—Mr. Matsumi was naturally amazed to see it here, and was anxious to buy it. You refused to listen to him, Mr. Phillips. Then he went to Wagner and offered, we'll say, several thousand dollars for it. That accounts for Wagner's letters and his presence here. He came to steal the thing which he couldn't buy. His denial of all knowledge of the bell is explained readily by Detective Mallory's statement that he had long been suspected of handling stolen goods. He denied because he feared a trap.

"I may add that I attributed an ingenuity of construction to the bell which it did not possess. When I asked if you ever noted any odor when it sounded, Mr. Phillips, I had an idea that perhaps your present condition had been brought about by a subtle poison in which the gong had once been immersed, particles of which, when the bell sounded, might have been cast off and drawn into the lungs. I can assure you, however, that there was no poison. That is all, I think."

"But the sealed letter—" began Doctor Perdue.

"Oh, I opened that," was the casual rejoinder; but Doctor Perdue, as he looked, read a warning in the scientist's face. "It related to another matter entirely."

Doctor Perdue gazed at him a moment and understood. Unconsciously Hatch felt of the pocket where he had placed the letter. It was still there. He, too, understood. The Thinking Machine arose, glanced out of the window, then turned to the reporter.

"Now, Mr. Hatch," he requested, "please go across the street to the apartment-house, and open the rear window in the hall where we were. See

that it remains open for twenty minutes; then return here. Keep out of the hall while the window is open, and if possible, keep others out."

Without a word or question, Hatch went out. The Thinking Machine dropped back into his chair, glanced at his watch, then scribbled something on a card which he handed to Doctor Perdue.

"By the way," he remarked irrelevantly, "there's an excellent compound for nervous indigestion I ran across the other day."

Doctor Perdue read the card. On it was:

"Letter dangerous. Probably predicts death. Has religious significance. Would advise Phillips not be informed."

"I'll try it some time," remarked Doctor Perdue.

There was a silence of two or three minutes. The Thinking Machine was idly twirling his watch in his slender fingers; Mr. Phillips sat staring at the bell, but there was no longer fright in his manner; it seemed rather curiosity.

"In just three minutes," said The Thinking Machine at last. A pause. "Now, two!" Again a pause. "Now, one! Be perfectly calm and listen!" Another pause, then suddenly: "Now!"

"Boom!" rang the bell, as if echoing the word. Despite himself, Mr. Phillips started a little, and the scientist's fingers closed on his pulse. "Boom!" again came the note. The bell hung motionless; the musical clangor seemed to roll out methodically, rhythmically. Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!

When the last note sounded, The Thinking Machine was staring into Mr. Phillips' face, seeking understanding. He found only bewilderment, and with quick impatience picked up the violin and bow.

"Here!" he exclaimed curtly. "Watch the champagne glass."

He tapped the fragile glass, and it sang shrilly. Then, on the violin, he sought the accompanying chord. Four times he drew the bow across the strings, and the glass was silent. Then the violin caught the pitch and the glass, three or four feet away, sang with it. Louder and louder the violin note grew, then suddenly, with a crash, the thin receptacle collapsed, shattered, tumbled to pieces before their eyes. Mr. Phillips stared in the utmost astonishment.

"A little demonstration in natural philosophy," explained The Thinking Machine. "In other words, vibration. Vibration sounded the glass, just as vibration sounded the bell on the gong there. You saw me sound the glass; the note which sounds the bell is a clock on a direct line half a mile away due east."

Mr. Phillips stared first at the shattered glass, then at the scientist. After a moment he understood, and an inexpressible feeling of relief swept over him.

"But the bell didn't always sound when the window was open," objected Doctor Perdue, after a moment.

"The bell can only sound when this window and both hall windows on the second floor across the way are open— on warm nights, for instance," replied

The Thinking Machine. "Then, too, the wind must be from the east, or else there must be none. A gust of air, a person passing through the hall, any one of a dozen things would interrupt the sensitive sound-waves and prevent all strokes of the clock reaching the bell here, while some of them might. Of course, any bell on the gong may be sounded with a violin, or, if they are true notes, with a piano, and I knew this at first. But Mr. Phillips had once heard the bell long after midnight— say two o'clock in the morning. Pianos and violins are not going so late, except perhaps at a ball. There was no ball across the street that night; therefore we came to the obvious remainder— a clock. It is visible from the rear window of the second-floor hall over there. It's all logic, logic!"

There was a pause. Doctor Perdue, looking into the face of his patient, was reassured by what he saw there, and something of his own professional jocundity asserted itself.

"Instead of being a thing to make you nervous, Phillips," he said at last with a smile, "it seems to me that the bell is an excellent and reliable timepiece."

Mr. Phillips glanced at him quickly and the drawn, white face was relieved by a slight smile. After a while Hatch returned and for some time the little party sat in the room talking over the affair. Their conversation was interrupted at last by the clangor of the bell, and every person present rose and stared at it anew with the exception of The Thinking Machine. His squint eyes were still turned upward— he didn't even alter his position. There were eleven strokes of the bell, then silence.

"Eleven o'clock," remarked The Thinking Machine placidly. "You left the windows open over there, Mr. Hatch."

Hatch nodded.

Mr. Phillips was in bed sleeping when Doctor Perdue and The Thinking Machine, accompanied by Hatch, went away.

"Suppose we drop in at my place and look at that letter?" suggested the doctor.

The Thinking Machine, in Doctor Perdue's office, took the sealed packet from the reporter and opened it. Doctor Perdue was peering over his shoulder. The scientist squinted down the page with inscrutable face, then crumpled up the letter, struck a match and ignited it.

"But— but—" protested Doctor Perdue quickly, and Hatch saw that some strange pallor suddenly overspread his face, "it said that— that eleven strokes meant— meant—"

"You're a fool, Perdue!" snapped The Thinking Machine, and he glared straight into the physician's eyes. "Didn't I show why and how the bell rang? Do you expect me to account for every barbaric superstition of a half-civilized race regarding the bell."

The paper burned, and The Thinking Machine crumpled up the ashes and dropped them in a waste-basket.

TWO DAYS later Franklin Phillips was himself again; on the fourth day he appeared at his office. On the sixth the market began to feel the master's clutch; on the eighth Francis was taken into custody and related a story identical with that told by The Thinking Machine to account for his disappearance; on the eleventh Franklin Phillips was found dead in bed. On his forehead was a pallid, white spot, faintly visible. It was a circle with three dots inside and three rays extending out from it.

19: The Greek God

Jacques Futrelle

The Red Book Magazine, June 1909

Today Futrelle's name is inextricably linked to the "Thinking Machine" detective stories, but he wrote in other genres too, such as this story. He died in the Titanic.

REGINALD de COURCEY VINCENT was as handsome as a Greek god, but that was the only thing that ailed him. He was a square built, up-standing young chap whose physical perfections came near to realizing all the chaste, unearthly beauty of a clothing advertisement. The dainty flush of the ripening peach was in his velvet cheeks; his hair clustered in crisp curls about temples that might have been fashioned from Satin-grained marble by the cunning hand of genius; his nose was cast in the same mold as Apollo Belvedere's and was, if anything, an improvement upon that classic nasal organ. His mouth was curving as a Cupid's bow, scarlet, compassionate, tenderly poetic; and every time he smiled it looked like a special pose for a new dentifrice. And he had eyes like a gazelle.

When women saw him they drew a long breath and said, "Oh!" Their age mattered not, nor their station, nor their previous condition of servitude— they always drew a long breath and said "Oh!"

Now it happens that the man who is so handsome he makes Apollo Belvedere look like a misshapen dummy in front of a clothing store can not have the disposition of the shrinking violet, even if he would. He simply can not. It is just as impossible for him as it is for the rich man to crawl through the eye of a camel. People wont let him shrink. As a rule men detest him, and rather like to be seen in his company; women rave about him and besiege him with invitations. He is pawed over, and dragged about, and pointed out, and flattered willy-nilly. Egotism is superimposed upon him like frosting on a cake; he becomes a standard of comparison by which other men are shown their physical shortcomings.

Mr. Vincent, familiarly Rex, was no exception to the rule. However unhappy the knowledge made him, he could not deny, even to himself, that he was just about the prettiest man he had ever come across. Standing in front of his mirror, gazing into the limpid depths of the gazelle eyes, studying the curves of the Cupid's bow mouth, and gazing upon the supernatural perfection of his nose he was simply overwhelmed by the utter hopelessness of combating popular opinion. So enveloped in despair was he that at times he felt like sitting down in a quiet corner somewhere, far from the madding adulation, and weeping in his hat. It was terrible!

But every swallow-tail has a silken lining. So one faint gleam of promise percolated his pall of misery. He knew— he knew— that when the time came

and the virgin heart within him was aroused to the glory of the adoration, the world was his to choose from; no woman there was who would not be happy and proud to bend the knee to him in surrender and submission. From the very beginning he had been made to understand this. Doting mothers, loving aunts, scheming match-makers had conspired to keep him informed of the overpowering influence of his beauty upon the heart feminine. Sometimes it had been done subtly, at other times clumsily, but it had always been done, and he came to understand it. All he had to do, when the time came, was to lift a finger, then raise his guard to stay the rush.

And at last he met his Fate.

Many words might be used to palliate the facts in the case. For instance, it might be said that this girl— this wonder-girl— was unhandsome, disbeauteous, mispretty, or even plain. But none of these would fully express it. As a matter of fact she was ugly, much— so ugly that one's first impression was that some frightful accident had befallen her. Surely Nature had not been so unkind as to purposely group all those features into one homogeneous whole and call it a face? And yet, after scrutiny, one could not believe otherwise because it was all connected up in the regular way— nothing was missing.

For one long, tense instant Rex stood transfixed, staring, staring at her with adoration blazing in the gazelle eyes, and the awakened heart pounding to suffocation within him. Finally she turned, as if in acknowledgement of his burning gaze, and her eyes met his squarely; whereupon she drew a long breath and said "Oh!" They always did. And then Rex was enveloped in a sort of ecstasy. Mute, motionless he basked in the full flood of it while her eyes lingered; then she looked away and the magic spell was broken, leaving him limp and cold and quivering.

He sought out his hostess.

"Who— who is the girl over there?" he queried with a strange quaver in his voice.

Mrs. van Benthuisen turned her regal head and glanced in the direction indicated.

"The little chick of a thing with the splendid gold hair?" she asked in turn. "Isn't she perfectly delicious? Just like a French doll— all dimples, and curves and smiles. Come over here; I want you to meet her."

Even in his rapt condition Rex couldn't quite fit that description to the wonder-girl.

"You and I are not talking about the same person," he told her. "I mean the slender girl sitting down?"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Mrs. van Benthuisen with a sort of excuse-me-I-have-tasted-a-pickle expression about her mouth. "Isn't it awful?"

"Who is she?" Rex insisted.

Mrs. van Benthuisen regarded him sharply.

"She is the daughter of one of my husband's business associates in the West, visiting New York," she explained. "Charming enough, I daresay, but isn't she awful? Poor thing!"

In the splendor of her own mature beauty Mrs. van Benthuisen could well afford to pity almost any woman of the younger generation.

"What's her name?"

"Pike."

"Pike!" he breathed softly.

"Martha Pike."

"Martha Pike!"

It was almost a caress. Pike— Martha Pike! Was there ever music so sweet as that? 'Twas like a lingering strain of a mighty melody by Mendelssohn. Martha Pike! His entranced senses reeled at the sheer beauty of that name; it was a symphony in itself. Martha Pike!

"Rex, what's the matter with you?" demanded Mrs. van Benthuisen in sudden anxiety.

"Nothing," he assured her absently, and he stole a glance at the wonder-girl. "Nothing," he repeated. "Please introduce me."

Mrs. van Benthuisen was frankly alarmed.

"Introduce you to— to her?" she gasped. "Of course you'll meet her, but— but— Rex," she asked suspiciously, "this isn't any joke to make that poor girl feel uncomfortable, or look foolish, is it? I know you so well."

Rex turned those lusterful, gazelle eyes full upon her, and there was deep reproach in them.

"How can you ask, Mrs. Van?" he wanted to know. "Who is my dinner-partner?"

"Miss Anstruther, the stunning English girl there. She's perfectly gorgeous. Every man I've seen is crazy about her."

Rex turned and listlessly appraised a splendid, brilliant, Junoesque creature, and then, true as the needle to the pole, his eyes sought again the enthralling face of the wonder-girl.

"Can't I swap Miss Anstruther for Miss Pike?"

"Swap her for Miss Pike?" exclaimed Mrs. van Benthuisen in amazed horror. "That for that? Why, Rex Vincent!"

"Now, Mrs. Van," he pleaded, "just this once. You know I've done you lots of favors. I've made love to every lonesome little *débutante* that you have ever taken under your wing just to give her a sort of standing, as a personal kindness to you. Now reward the faithful. I want to swap 'em. Please let me?"

"But— but I promised Miss Anstruther that her partner at dinner was to be the handsomest man in New York?" Mrs. van Benthuisen protested.

"Oh, work off Wilson on her," Rex suggested. "Maybe she won't know the difference."

Mrs. van Benthuisen stared at him coldly.

"Are you doing it on a bet?" she queried.

Tragically Rex shook his head.

Reason and recollection and a moderate degree of sanity returned to him as he was bending over a frail white hand which Miss Pike extended to him with true Western hospitality. He liked women who shook hands. Speechlessly he collapsed into a seat beside her.

"Treat him kindly, Miss Pike," Mrs. van Benthuisen requested with a gracious, indulgent smile. "He's utterly spoiled."

Miss Pike's lips curled a little in amusement, and a glint of mischief flashed in her eyes. She favored Rex with one side-long glance that anchored him right in his chair. Mrs. van Benthuisen glared at him and went away.

"You must be awfully lonesome, Mr. Vincent," the wonder-girl began demurely.

Her voice was all right, anyway; low, well modulated, soothing. The melody of it partially aroused Rex from his trance-like condition.

"Why?" he murmured feebly.

"One of a kind is usually lonesome," she explained enigmatically.

"One of a kind?" he repeated.

"As a general thing it finds itself in the discard," she went on.

Rex sat up straight and gazed into eyes now frankly quizzical. He wasn't quite sure whether she was leading up to a discussion of poker, or— or what.

"Did you ever read Musset's 'Story of a White Blackbird?'" she asked with uplifted brows.

He shook his head wonderingly.

"There was only one made," she elucidated, "then they broke the mold."

It was dawning upon Rex slowly that he was out of the conversation. She was asking riddles, and he didn't know the answer. He sought for it vainly in eyes grown demure again.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

She laughed, and she did have beautiful teeth.

"It must be a dreadful thing, really, to be the handsomest man in New York," she said solemnly. "One must feel so— so by himself when he has that reputation."

Rex felt the color mounting to his velvet cheeks, and he closed his teeth with a snap. Then he grinned sheepishly.

"Oh!" he said.

"I can sympathize with you because I have that same lonesome feeling myself," she went on smiling again. "Except mine is on the reverse."

Her tone of raillery and self-mockery prevented Rex from rushing in with a denial. It would have been the proper thing to do, of course, but that amused glint in the wonder-girl's eyes stopped him in his tracks. He only stuttered and stammered and feverishly fished for the reasonable thing to say.

"Don't excite yourself," she advised laughingly. "No one has ever found the right combination of words to deny it."

"Oh, but—" he floundered.

"My position is, if anything, calculated to make me even more lonesome than you," she interrupted. "You are only the handsomest man in New York; I am the ugliest woman in the world."

There are lots of words in the English language. Rex pawed them all over in a desperate effort to find one or two that he could use, then he drew a long breath and nervously ran his fingers through the clustering crisp curls.

"I despise handsome people," he burst out.

Those were the only four words he could lay hand to at the moment.

"Between us, we cover the map thoroughly then," she put in gayly. "I despise ugly ones."

And so a tentative bond of sympathy was established.

"You find it rather hard to talk to me, don't you?" Miss Pike broke the silence frankly, and shot another tantalizing sidelong glance at him.

"On the contrary," he denied gallantly, and knew it didn't ring true. "That is, I mean—"

"Oh! That accounts for your verbosity then? I wondered."

"You're the sort of a woman with whom mere words are not necessary."

At last Rex was coming to form. She laughed.

"You see, if I'd been pretty, as pretty for instance as Miss Anstruther there, we would have had a subject of conversation in the beginning," she said. "You would have started with my eyes, and by this time we would have been wonderfully well advanced. As it is, you can't think of a word to say. It is an awful handicap, I know." She was thoughtful a moment. "There's the weather," she suggested. "We haven't touched upon that."

"I despise handsome people," said Rex again, irrelevantly.

"And I despise ugly ones. But we've gone over that ground."

"Pretty people are shallow."

"Ugly ones are hard to look at."

"Pretty people are insipid."

"Ugly ones are acrid."

"Pretty people are always seeking adulation."

"Ugly ones are grouchy because they can't get it."

"Pretty people are domineering, merciless, inconsiderate."

"Ugly ones are high-tempered, sharp-tongued, petty."

"Pretty people are— are—"

And he vainly thought for some abusive sockdolager that would end the controversy.

She laughed again.

"You and I are in the same boat, Mr. Vincent. You know what always happens to the little boy when he eats too much sugar? You, the handsomest man in New York, have eaten too much sugar; I, the ugliest woman in the world, have eaten too many pickles. Shall we call it quits?"

Dinner was announced. Rex arose and offered her his arm.

"But you are not my dinner-partner," she protested, as she, too, arose. "Mr. Wilson is my partner."

"I beg your pardon," said Rex, and he bowed low before her. "I am your partner."

For an instant some vaguely veiled perplexity was in her eyes, and then she smiled.

"What's the matter?" she inquired. "Couldn't Mr. Wilson stand it?"

"I am your partner," said Rex again.

"But why? How did it happen?"

"I was to take Miss Anstruther in," he explained. "As a personal favor to me Mrs. van Benthuyzen juggled the cards and assigned you to me. It was done at my request."

She stared at him for a moment.

"Opposites do attract, don't they?" she remarked naively, as she took his arm.

ii

NOW, Helen of Troy, in her day and generation, was quite widely regarded as the ultima Thule of feminine loveliness. Even the women in her own set couldn't deny it, albeit there were those who did say, and mayhap with justice, that Helen was— but that's another story. Anyway, when Paris made love to Helen of Troy he had a substantial working basis; a limitless field of poetic comparison. He didn't have to strain his imagination unduly when he likened her eyes to yon star, and her lips to the scarlet budding rose, and her cheeks to the tender pink of earliest dawn. Then there was her hair, and the arch of her brows, and all the rest. It was easy for Paris.

But, if Helen of Troy had been named Pike— Martha Pike— and had been ugly to a point just beyond the field of credulity, and had been fully aware of the fact that she was ugly; and had, in addition, a keen, breezy sense of humor, one wonders just where Paris would have begun, supposing that he had begun at all.

She did have beautiful teeth, did Miss Pike, and a voice that was alluring in its sweetness. But an ardent young man needs something more tangible than a voice and a set of teeth to rave about. He wants to get a good grip on some poetic fantasy, and work it out in detail. And when that young man is desperately, madly in love it hardly seems just and right that his verbal extravagances should be so limited. And Reginald de Courcey Vincent loved Martha Pike! Beside this all-consuming passion of his life, that little affair between Helen of Troy and Paris was an airy, summer flirtation, an idle peccadillo. That's how Rex felt about it.

DAYS HAD PASSED, many days, since that first meeting at Mrs. van Benthuisen's. And each of those days Rex had spent in devising some new thing to please this wonder-girl. He was adept at it: flowers, bon-bons, luncheons, dinners, automobile excursions, he had crowded them upon her. Haunts that knew him once now knew him not at all, for the lure of love was upon him. And yet when he was with her he was dumb as to the reason for it all. Banal trivialities made up his conversation. For instance:

"Reginald de Courcey Vincent!" he exclaimed once. "Isn't that an awful name to fasten upon an innocent child?"

"But they call you 'Rex,'" she expostulated, "and I like that. And think, oh, think, of the sheer horror of Martha— Martha Pike!"

"Rex!" he growled. "Why, Mrs. van Benthuisen has a pug dog named Rex. I believe I could have been perfectly happy if my name had only been Peter. Pete! Isn't that bully? Pete?"

"And I could have realized the fullness of life if I had only been Doris," said she.

"Or Uriah," said he.

"Or Evelyn," said she.

"Or Peleg."

"Or Cicely."

"Or Abijah."

"Or Edna."

"Or Caleb."

"Or Miriam."

"Or Joab," he went on, "or Pat, or Mike, or Izzy, or Eliphalet— anything but Reginald de Courcey." He pronounced the name as if he were swearing. "Pete Joab Vincent! Now that would have been something like."

And on another occasion: "What merit is there in merely being good looking?" he asked.

"That is a point on which I am least qualified to speak," replied the wonder-girl. "It's more in your line."

"There isn't any." Rex answered his question. "People merely stare at one, and point one out, and make remarks about one; and one has to be absolutely certain that his coat fits. No one ever worries about the fit of a coat if it is on a pug-nosed man; they don't notice it if his trousers bag at the knees, or if he wears a brilliant red necktie that matches his brilliant red nose."

"True, beauty has its obligations," mused the wonder-girl.

Lambent flames of amusement played in her eyes, and crinkles appeared on her nose.

"Now, if some one would tell me I was the best ditch-digger in New York," Rex went on, "why I should positively love him— her— it, whoever said it."

"Did you ever dig a ditch?" inquired Miss Pike. demurely.

"No," he admitted despondently.

"Too bad," she commented.

Rex was dense; it passed.

"I can do things," he went on vehemently. "I would like people to know I can do things, and tell me that I do 'em well instead of—instead of—"

"Pray go on," she taunted.

"Instead of always telling me I'm handsome, particularly old ladies," he continued shamelessly. "I despise old ladies. They take advantage of their age and sex to impose upon one. I know I'm handsome; I don't want to be told about it."

Miss Pike lifted her brows just a fraction.

"You know you are handsome?" she repeated.

"Lord, how can I help but know it?" he demanded. "I've never been allowed to forget it. They've pounded it into me ever since I was a little shaver. All the boys in school used to call me 'Beaut,' and teacher called me Cutey."

"Poor boy!" the wonder-girl sympathized.

Pause.

"If it would please you to know it," she said at last slowly, "I don't think you are handsome."

"You don't?"

A great joy beamed in the gazelle eyes, and Rex impulsively reached for one of the frail white hands, which was discreetly placed in a position of greater security.

"No, I don't think you are handsome," the wonder-girl repeated, demurely. "I think you are positively beautiful."

Then she laughed; and he couldn't strike a woman, you know.

There is no mystery whatever about what happened next. Reginald de Courcey Vincent told Martha Pike he loved her. Of course you thought all along he was going to tell her. Well, far be it from me to disappoint you— he told her. It happened several days later. He groveled at her feet, and turned loose a flood

of adjectives that hadn't been used before all summer. He idolized her, he adored her, he worshiped her; she was the light of his life, the queen of his heart, the oasis in his desert of existence; he would give his life for her, his soul for her, his wealth for her; a future without her would be a desolate waste, a bleak wilderness, a perpetual night; and, please, would she deign to accept his unworthy heart and hand, would she marry him, would she become his wife?

And did Martha Pike hang her head shyly, and murmur a faint assent?

No.

Martha Pike laughed, albeit there was a singular little quaver in the trill of it. She began to laugh along in the middle somewhere when Rex inadvertently dragged into his declaration some anatomical references, and in an impetuous burst of enthusiasm began to fling off poetic things about eyes as soft as a star-haze, whatever that is; and lips like the bursting heart of a rose; and hair that held enmeshed the lure of the dying sun. He hadn't intended to go into those details, they were hardly germane, but once in, over his head, he plunged on to destruction. He had captured one of the frail white hands in the *mêlée*, and crushed it fiercely.

"You will be mine," he pleaded tensely. "You will! You will!"

She withdrew her hand.

"Don't be absurd, Rex," she said, gently.

"Say yes? Yes? Yes?"

She shook her head.

"Please, like a good fellow now," she coaxed, "set up from there and sit here beside me. No, not so close. Now."

"Say you will?" he insisted desperately.

"No," she replied.

"I won't take that answer," he declared hotly. "You must say yes."

"No."

It was all working out differently, somehow, from that finger lifting episode he had pictured. She was perfectly serious now. Her clear, sane eyes met his squarely and lingered until the blaze of hope was all but extinguished, and shadows of uncertainty came. Her lips trembled a little, ever so little, and for a time they were silent.

"You know I love you, don't you?" Rex began again.

"Rex, please don't," she urged.

"You know I love you, don't you?"

"I think you do, and yet— yet—"

"You know it?"

"Yes," wearily, "I know it."

"And you?"

He was eager again; the blaze within his eyes.

"And you?" he demanded the second time.

"Why do you love me?" she asked curiously.

"Why do I love you?" he echoed. "Why does the sun shine, and the birds sing, and—"

And Rex began to rave again. She listened patiently to the end.

"You have given no reason," she said. "Why do you love me?"

"Because— because you are you," he answered.

She drew away a little and turned to face him.

"It has pleased you to weave a little tragedy about yourself," she said dispassionately, "a little comic tragedy. A man who is handsome and is unhappy because he is too handsome deserves about as much sympathy as the man who wants a million and is unhappy because he gets two millions. But did it ever occur to you that there is a tragedy, a real tragedy, in every ugly girl you meet? Just as you have been made self-conscious by constant reference to your good looks, she has been made self-conscious by her ugliness. Can you imagine what they called me in school?"

"Angel?" he ventured.

"'Ugly-Mug,'" she went on in a strained little voice, "corrupted later on into 'Mug,' and finally into 'Muggins.' There was the beginning of a tragedy, you see. I used to weep my heart out because I was not pretty like other little girls, and the taunt was forever flung into my face. It is to this day. All my girl friends call me 'Muggins' now— innocently it is true, and yet— yet it stings. You know the thing that a woman lives for is admiration, flattery, appreciation in the eyes of those who are dear to her. It is nothing against her that this is true. And your ugly girl gets none of those. I have passed the supersensitive period," and a smile was growing about her lips again. "I don't even mind people staring at me now, but sometimes I wonder— I wonder how it must feel to be beautiful, and know you are beautiful!" There was infinite longing in the voice.

"Well, speaking from experience—" Rex began.

"And now, why do love me?" she interrupted. "Why should I, above all others in the world, attract you, the very last man whom I might hope to attract?"

Rex was on his knees again.

"I love you," he said simply. "Say yes? Yes?"

"No," she said firmly, "always no, no, no!"

"Why?" he demanded abruptly.

"Why?" she echoed. "Aren't these things I have been telling you sufficient to make you see?"

"But I don't understand."

"The contrast between us? Don't you see it?" One white hand rested for an instant on the crisply curling hair. "It would make me ridiculous; you would grow to be ashamed of me."

Rex arose and stared at her grimly.

"You don't mean that?" he declared masterfully.

"Perhaps not just that," she admitted, "but they— they would call us 'Beauty and the Beast.'"

"They!" he growled savagely.

He had a trick of crowding dire imprecation into a single word like that at times.

"As I understand it," he went on after a moment, "your sole objection to marrying me is that I am too beautiful?"

"Isn't it perfectly absurd?"

A dreary little smile curled the corners of her mouth.

"Well, wont you be brave and marry me in spite of my beauty?" He was pleading now. "We'll try to bear it together?"

She shook her head.

"Beauty and the Beast," she murmured faintly.

"Couldn't I— couldn't I cultivate a stoop, or have my nose broken, or lose an eye or something?" he suggested frantically.

Again the head shook.

"And is there no hope for me?"

"None. Nothing in this world could induce me to become your wife. I have tried to make you understand."

He took both the frail white hands and brought her to her feet; eyes challenged eyes.

"Do you love me?" he whispered.

"Oh, if it were only that!"

Suddenly his arms closed around her, and their lips met. She struggled free, with face averted.

"It is the end," she said sadly. "Go now!"

OF COURSE you understood right along that every woman reserves the right to change her mind. A week passed, the luster faded from Rex's gazelle eyes and sinister shadows grew beneath them; another week and the peach-glow fled from the velvet cheeks; a third week and lines of suffering appeared about the Cupid's bow mouth; a fourth week and Reginald de Courcey was only a haggard shadow of himself. At the end of the sixth week he passed under the care of a specialist, his health shattered, a sacrifice to the torture of unrequited affection. At the end of the eighth week Martha Pike changed her mind; it was the only way to preserve his beauty.

And so they were married and lived happily ever after.

20: The River of Hate

Achmed Abdullah

Alexander Nicholayevitch Romanoff, 1881-1945

To-day's Housewife, Oct 1918.

"The Wrath of the Thunder Gods," the Kafiri hillmen called the river that dropped to the western plains of Afghanistan and over into soft Persia in a succession of overlapping falls like the feathers on the breast of a pouter pigeon, while the Afghan nobles who, armed with the great, carved seal of the Governor of Kabul, came there to levy the quota of young men for the Emir's army, called it the "River of Hate."

And Kafiri, as well as Afghans, spoke the truth.

For, during three months of the year, the North wind was riding a wracked sky and met the shock of the racing, roaring river, and the thunder crashed from the high ranges, splintering the young pines, occasionally taking toll of human life; and it was hate, even more than the swirling breadth of the river, which divided the villages that squatted on either bank.

South of the river, the Red Village lay spotted and threatening, like a tiger asleep in the sun, while North the flat-roofed houses of the White Village seemed snowflakes dropped on slabs of sullen granite as sullen as the temper of the people when they looked across and saw the men of the Red Village sweep the whirlpool of the Black Rock with crude, effective net traps made of jungly rattan and hempen ropes; when they saw the catch of fat, blue-scaled, red-eyed khirli fish drawn up on the bank and flopping in the quivering light like dusky flecks of sunshine.

The Black Rock was the fortune of the Red Village. Forming the end and pinnacle of a chain of ragged, slippery stones that spanned three-fourths of the river's breadth and rose and fell to the rise and fall of the water, it was within fifteen feet of the southern bank, and in winter, when rain had been heavy in the mountains and the River of Hate surged up a man's height in a couple of hours, it acted like a natural dam.

But in summer, when, freed from snow, the higher range limned ghostly out of the purple-gray distance and drought shrunk the river, the Black Rock peaked to a height of thirty feet and caused the water to drop into a great whirlpool, not far from the Red Village, where it blossomed like a gigantic waxen flower.

Too, it is in summer that the khirli fish, obeying their ancient tribal customs, come from their spawning, and when they return down the River of Hate on their way to the Persian Gulf, they are tired and weary with the many miles. So they lie down to rest in the bottom of the whirlpool of the Black Rock where the fishing rights, by immemorial law, antedating the law of the Koran, belong to the people of the Red Village; and the villagers catch them and feast, while the men

of the White Village bemoan their fate and take the name of Allah— and if the Afghan priests be not listening the names— of various heathen gods decidedly in vain.

But they do not fight the people of the Red Village, except with an occasional stone or stick hurled from ambush and not meant to kill. For a law is a law.

WHEN, after seven years' service in the Emir's army— during which he had learned to shoot straight, to substitute a tall black fur cap, worn rakishly over the right ear, for the greasy shawl turban of the Kafiri, to embroider his rough hill diction with flowery Persian metaphor, and to ogle the women in the bazaars— Ebrahim Asif received word that his father, Sabihhudin Achmat, had died, and that he was now chief of the White Village, he went straight to the Governor of Kabul and asked to be released from service.

"My people are clamoring for me," he added in a lordly manner.

The Governor saw before him a young man, not over twenty-five, of a supple sweep of shoulders, a great, crunching reach of arms, a massive chest, and a dead-white, hawkish face that rose up from a black, pointed beard like a sardonic Chinese vignette. He thought to himself that here was a Kafiri, a turbulent pagan hillman indeed; but that seven years in Kabul must have put the Afghan brand upon his soul, and that he might be a valuable ally if ever his lawless tribesmen should give trouble— perhaps, only Allah knew! as a raiding vanguard accompanying an invading British or Russian column, as the little, sniveling, dirt-nosing jackals accompany the tiger.

"Your prayer is granted, Ebrahim Asif," the Governor said. "Return to your own people— a chief. And—" he smiled, "also remember that you are an Afghan, and no longer a lousy hillman!"

"Yes, Excellency!" said Ebrahim Asif.

On the second day out of Kabul he was back over the borders of his own country. On the third, he saw the faint, silvery gray mountain, flung like a cloud against the sky, that marked the western limit of the White Village.

On the morning of the fourth, he was sitting on a raised earthen platform in the communal council hut of the village where his ancestors had been hereditary rulers since before the shining adventure of Shikandar Khan, he whom the Christians call Alexander the Macedonian, his rifle across his knees, and a naked, pot-bellied boy of ten fanning him with a silver-handled yak tail, stolen during some raid into Tibet. He was holding a perfumed, daintily embroidered handkerchief to his nose.

On the bare mud floor, below the platform, squatted the men of the village, some thirty in number, in a confused heap of sun-and-dirt-browned arms, legs and patched multi-colored garments.

Ebrahim Asif, remembering the days of his childhood when his father had occupied the seat of chief which today was his, turned slightly to the left.

Directly in front of him squatted an old man whose name was Jarullah. His face was like a gnarled bit of deodar wood beneath a thatch of bristly, reddish hair.

Ebrahim Asif pointed at him.

"Jarullah," he said, "you are the oldest. Let me hear what wisdom, if any, the many years have brought you."

"It is not money we want," muttered Jarullah.

Then, embarrassed he knew not why, he checked himself. His roving eyes sought his knees and he coughed apologetically, until a young man, lean, red-haired, with pock-marked vulpine features and bold gray eyes, stepped forward, pushed Jarullah unceremoniously aside, and squatted down in his place.

Over his shoulder, he pointed through the doorway, at the River of Hate, and the hissing whirlpool of the Black Rock, and beyond, at the Red Village, that seemed stiff and motionless in the quivering heat as if forged out of metal. Only at the bank were signs of life— the men pulling in the nets sagging with their shimmering load. Occasionally, a high-pitched, exultant yell drifted thinly across.

"Our bellies are empty, Chief," the young man whose name was Babar, said sulkily, "while they—" he spat— "the people of the Red Village—"

Ebrahim Asif rose, picked up his rifle by the shoulder strap, and walked toward the door.

"The old feud, eh?" he asked. "The feud over a potful of stinking khirli fish? By the teeth of the Prophet— on whom peace— I shall spice their mid-day meal with a couple of bullets and a rich sluicing of blood!"

But Jarullah stepped into his path and laid a trembling hand on his shoulder.

"There is the law, Chief!" he cried in a cracked, excited whine. "The fishing rights of the southern bank belong to the Red Village. Remember the law of the Kafiri!"

"There is no law for Afghans," smiled Ebrahim Asif.

"Right!" shrieked the old man. "There is indeed no law for Afghans! But you are a Kafiri, Chief. You must keep sacred the ancient law of the tribes—" and an angry, clucking chorus rose from the squatting clansmen.

"The ancient law! The ancient law!"

Ebrahim Asif was utterly astonished.

Quite instinctively he had picked up his rifle. Quite instinctively he had decided to send a few bullets whizzing to the opposite shore. It would be perfectly safe. For the only firearms that ever came into Kafiristan were those of the Emir's ruffianly soldiers, soldiers either on active duty or, like himself,

released from service, and he knew that for many years past no man of the Red Village had been drafted into the army.

Thus he was perfectly safe in announcing his presence to them with a charge of lead and, later on, of coming to terms: a fair half of the khirli catch to his own village— otherwise bullets and blood.

It was simple— as sublimely simple, as sublimely brutal as his whole philosophy of life.

But they had spoken about the law— the ancient law—

The young man with the pock-marked, vulpine face— Babar— had seemed the most manly of them all.

"What do you say, Babar?" he asked, and the other mumbled piously, "It is the law. The fishing rights of the southern bank belong to the Red Village."

Ebrahim Asif shook his head. He stalked through the doorway, while the villagers looked after him, stolid, sullen. He walked up to the River of Hate.

The men of the Red Village were still fishing, peace ful, undisturbed, serenely safe. One looked up, squinted against the light with sharp, puckered eyes, and seemed to see the rifle in Ebrahim Asif's hand. But he paid no attention to it. To him, too, there was the ancient law.

And, suddenly, out of the nowhere, a heavy weight dropped on Ebrahim Asif's soul.

"Yes," he murmured, "there is the law— for us Kafiri—" and he tossed the rifle into the swirling, foaming water.

LATE THAT NIGHT, as he sat alone in his father's hut, which was now his, scraps of memory came to him. Piece by piece he put them together.

He remembered how, years ago, when he had been a naked, sun-burned child with a red turban cloth wound about his shaven poll, his father, Sabihhudin Achmat, had been guide to a Kashmiri rajah who had come North to hunt the thick-pelted, broad-headed tigers that drift into Kafiristan in the wake of the Mongolian snows. The rajah had brought a large retinue of servants, and one evening they and their master and his father had whispered together.

They had set to work, under the rajah's guidance. All night they had worked, with little Ebrahim looking on open-mouthed, using odd bits of steel and wire taken from the rajah's voluminous baggage, and wood and stones and spliced ropes and rattan.

About midnight they had sneaked out of the house and through the sleeping village, to the bank of the River of Hate, carrying between them a strange contrivance that seemed round and heavy. Hours later, his father had returned, drenched to the skin, but triumphant.

Today, Ebrahim Asif knew that the strange contrivance the Kashmiri men had fashioned that night and which his father had put in a hole of the Black

Rock, below the surface, was a water wheel to change the main current of the whirlpool, for since then he had seen many such wheels.

And when the next drought had shrunk the river and the khirli fish had returned from their spawning, when the people of the Red Village had swept the whirlpool of the Black Rock, day after day, they had caught no more than a lean handful of skinny, smelly dagger-fish, while the men of the White Village, wondering, yet obeying their chief's command, had gone down to the northern bank where the fishing rights were theirs and had set to work with improvised gear.

The catch had been huge; and for weeks, they had eaten their fill of khirli spiced with turmeric and sesame, while the people on the opposite shore had be moaned their fate and had rubbed empty wrinkled stomachs.

Only the hereditary chief of the Red Village, Yar Zaddiq, a shrewd, elderly man, over six feet in height, with gray hair that had once been reddish-brown, a biting tongue and doubting, deep set eyes, had suspected the hand of man and, late one night, when the water was very low, had swum over to the Black Rock at the risk of his life and had investigated.

He had called for help. The wheel had been torn out, and a few days later, four miles up the river, accompanied by several of his clansmen, he had chanced upon Sabihhudin Achmat and had beaten him terribly.

After that, there had been no more catching of khirli fish on the northern bank, and the old hate of White Village against Red had grown a thousandfold.

THE DAYS that followed were drab and listless.

Ebrahim Asif stalked through the village in his best, most braggart Kabuli manner.

But, for the first time in his life, he was aware of a strange sensation which, had he been a westerner, he would have correctly analyzed as self-consciousness.

He said to himself that these were his people, that they had put their grievances before his feet trusting to his wisdom and strength and their greatest grievance was the matter of the khirli fish, the matter of the River of Hate. Willing and ready he had been to help them, he continued his thoughts angrily, but they had tied his hands with their babble about the ancient tribal laws; he had tossed his rifle into the water— and— what did they want him to do?

They supplied him with food and tobacco and bhang as was his right, since he was their chief. But it was all done grudgingly, as a drab matter of duty.

Yet there was little open complaint; just an undercurrent of muttering and whining. Only the young 1 man, Babar, put it into words one day.

"You are the Chief," he said. "You must help us!"

Simple enough words. But, somehow, they seemed to Ebrahim the final, unbearable stigma.

"Do you want me to attempt the impossible, O Abuser of the Salt, O Son of a Burnt Father?" he cried. "Do you want me to make noises with my ears and catch the wind of heaven with my bare hands, O Cold of Countenance?"— and he beat Babar with the flat of his saber till the blood came.

After that, the people of the village, his own people, trembled when he passed. And in all Kafiristan there was no man more lonely than he.

Thus he took to roaming the hills up and down the River of Hate, climbing to the higher range where, caught in crevices, the snow lay clean and stainless beneath the crisp air, down abrupt precipices, and into thick forests of spruce and beach where the dry leaves lay in intricate, wind-tossed, fox-red patterns fretted with delicate green shadows; and one day, returning past the natural bridge that marked the line between the two villages and where, years earlier, his father had been beaten by Yar Zaddiq, he saw a young girl standing there, poised lightly upon narrow, sandaled feet, and looking out upon the foaming River of Hate.

She turned as she heard his approach and stared at him fearlessly, and he stood still and stared back.

She was sixteen years of age. Her small slender body, just budding into the promise of womanhood beneath the thin, fringed, brown and gray striped fustian robe that covered her from her neck to just below her knees, was perfect in every line. Her parted, braided hair was light brown and as smooth as oil, her eyes were gray with intensely black pupils, and her nose straight and short. There was a sweet curve to her upper lip and a quick, smiling lift at the corners.

The smile rippled into low, gurgling laughter when she saw Ebrahim Asif bow deeply before her with clasped hands, as she had seen the men of her village salaam to the Emir's swashbuckling emissaries.

He straightened up. With unconsciously graceful ease he put his hand on the heavy, carved silver hilt of his sword and looked at her squarely.

And his words, too, were square and clear, yet tinged with a certain reckless, boisterous good humor, a certain swaggering bravado.

"Your name, . Crusher of Hearts!"

Again the girl laughed.

"I am Kurjan," she said. "I am the daughter of Yar Zaddiq, Chief of the Red Village, who, it is told, once gave your father a sound beating."

"Then you know my name?" he rejoined, flushing darkly.

"Evidently, Ebrahim Asif!" came her mocking reply. "The fame of your splendor has traveled many miles, also the tale of how wisely you rule your own people, how you fill their stomachs with khirli fish how they love you, O great Afghan..."

But, suddenly, she checked the flow of words and turned to go when she saw the man's insolent, black eyes fixed upon her with a calm, uncontrolled expression of admiration and desire, and instinctively she drew in her breath and clasped her right hand against her heart, as unhurryingly, he stepped up to her.

"Kurjan, daughter of Yar Zaddiq," he said very gently, "I am not an Afghan, though my dress is that of the Kabuli and though my lips have forgotten the proper twist and click of my native tongue in the many years I have spent away from home. I am a Kafiri, a hillman of hillmen and—" suddenly his voice peaked up to a high, throaty note, like the cry of an eagle circling above a frightened, fluttering song bird "I love like a Kafiri!"

And, before she had time to run or defend herself, his great arms were about her, crushing her against his massive chest so that the long braids of her hair swept the ground behind her.

Very slowly, as if reluctantly, he released her.

"Go back to your father," he continued as she stood there, panting, a rush of unknown sensations, shyness, mixed with fear and a strange, tremulous, paining delight, surging through her body. "Tell him that a man has come to the River of Hate. Tell him that tonight I shall come to his house to demand you as my wife. And— as to you, Crusher of Hearts— tell yourself when you lie on your couch, that I love you— that there is a sweetness and strength in my soul which is known to your soul only!"

And he walked away, his saber clanking behind him; and he did not turn once to look back at her.

Kurjan did not know if it was the strange, sweet shyness which had come to her so abruptly, or fear of her father's terrible, raging temper which sealed her lips. At all events, she did not say a word of what had happened to her when she reached home. Courteously she bowed to her father who was resting his huge old gnarled body on the earthen platform, and stepped through the curtain into the back part of the house where the women crouched over the crimson charcoal balls of the cooking fire.

Thus, hours later, when night had dropped as it does in the hills, quickly, like a black-winged bird, and when Ebrahim Asif had gone up the river, crossed the natural bridge, and passed through the silent Red Village to the house of Yar Zaddiq, he found the latter unprepared for his coming.

But his first words explained the purpose of his visit. "I am Ebrahim Asif, the son of Sabihhudin Achmat, Chief of the White Village," he said with nonchalant dignity. "I have decided that your daughter shall be the mother of my sons. Hasten the wedding, old Chief. For I am an impatient man who does not brook denial or contradiction, and my young blood is sultry with passion."

And, calmly, he squatted down and helped himself to the other's supply of finely shaved bhang, conscious, by the rustle of the curtain that shut off the back part of the house, that Kurjan was looking at him.

She was standing very still, her heart thumping violently. Quickly, imperceptibly, the knowledge floated down upon her that she loved him. Anxiously, she waited for her father's reply.

When Yar Zaddiq looked up his words dropped smooth and even, as stones drop down a glacier.

"So you are Ebrahim Asif—" his lips curled in a crooked smile, exposing the toothless gums stained with opium and tobacco "the son of him whom once I beat grievously with sticks as a dog is beaten with thorn sticks—?"

"You— and your tribesmen! A dozen against one!"

"I could have killed him with my bare hands. I, alone! I was stronger than he!"

"But today you are old— and I am young. Your body is withered, while my body is bossed with muscles as the night sky is with stars," Ebrahim Asif said in a gentle voice, while his fingers toyed with the crimson cord of his sword, an action the significance of which was not lost on the older man.

And so he smiled.

"It is thus," he asked, "your wish to marry my daughter?"

"Yes."

"But— there is the ancient enmity between Red Village and White—"

"Over a potful of stinking khirli fish. I know." Ebrahim Asif waved a great, hairy hand. "But there will be no more babbling and jabbering and foolish quarreling after I have married your daughter. I am my late father's only son, and she " negligently, with his thumb on which shone a star sapphire set in crude silver, he pointed at the curtain where she stood "she is your only child. Let peace be the dowry of our wedding, peace between your village and mine, a forgetting of ancient hatreds, a splitting of future profits. Let us put aside the old enmities as a clean man puts aside soiled linen. In the future we shall divide the khirli catch evenly between your people and mine."

Yar Zaddiq laughed in his throat.

"Ahee!" he cried. "It is I who gives all the dowry. And what will you give, young Chief?"

"I?" Ebrahim Asif raised an eyebrow. "Where hate has died, no room is needed to wield a sword. Where strength goes to the making of peace, no violence is needed to strike a dagger blow. Where quarrel is buried, no fertilizer is needed with which to grow friendship. But— I am an honest man! I shall make the bargain even, so that nobody may complain and that none of your people may say that you are unwise. Your daughter shall be mine! Half the khirli catch shall be my people's. And I, on my part, shall lend to your people the help of

wisdom which I learned amongst the Afghans. And after your death which Allah grant be not for many years— I shall rule both villages."

He rose and bowed with grave courtesy.

"I am an impatient man," he went on. "My heart plays with my passion. Let the wedding be the next time I set foot in the Red Village. Come. Give oath."

He stood still and looked at Yar Zaddiq who, too, had risen. For several seconds, the older man did not speak. His stubborn resolve that never, as long as he was alive, should Ebrahim Asif marry his daughter, that never, until the end of time, should his people cede to the White Village one tenth, not one hundredth part of the fishing rights which were theirs according to the ancient law, stood firm; but his opponent's equal resolve hacked at his faith like a dagger.

"Give oath!" repeated the other, touching the hilt of his sword, and then Yar Zaddiq spoke.

"You shall wed my daughter the next time you set foot in the Red Village," he said solemnly. "I swear it upon the Koran!"

But Ebrahim grinned boyishly.

"And yet I have heard," he said very gently, "that you men of the older generation, converted to Islam at the point of the sword, are not the stout Moslems you claim to be. Thus— swear by the gods of our people, our own people! Swear by the ancient gods of the Kafiri!"

And again he toyed with his sword, and again the old chief, a great bitterness bubbling in his words— for the Moslem oath meant nothing to him— swore that the next time Ebrahim set foot in the Red Village, he should wed Kurjan. By Ogun, god of sunshine, he gave oath, and by the three thunder gods; by Woggun, the god of the mid-week, and by Khanli, the grim god on whose forehead is an ivory horn from which hangs the fates of men; and finally by Gagabudh, the jeweled god of the mountain glens who, alone of all the gods, is immortal and whom even Time cannot slay.

And Ebrahim Asif, well satisfied, went out into the night, courteously avoiding speech with Kurjan though, during the last words, she had stepped fully into the room.

She looked after him. "I shall follow him," she said in a low voice. "I love him. He is brave and arrogant and cruel. There is passion in his heart and strength in his arms. I love him. He is brave."

Quite suddenly, Yar Zaddiq laughed.

"Yes, little daughter," he said. "He is brave. But—" he burst into high-pitched, senile cackle, "it is not wisdom he has learned amongst the Afghans! Not wisdom!"

"Except the wisdom of love!" murmured Kurjan as she left the house and looked into the dark. "The wisdom of love— which is simplicity— and arrogance and strength!"

Love had come to her. She knew the lore of the Red Village and of the White, the old feud, the bitter, sullen enmity; but, somehow, Ebrahim Asif was neither of the Red Village nor of the White. He seemed to her the very spirit of the land, serenely brutal, resolutely pagan to the core of him, but a man!

"A man of men!" she said to him one whirling, golden afternoon when she met him amongst the frayed basalt ridges of the farther hills and lay panting in his crushing embrace. "A man of men— with the bowels of compassion of a striped tiger!"

"You have spoken true words, Dispenser of Delights," Ebrahim Asif agreed naively. "I am indeed a man such as with whom any other chief would be proud to have a quarrel."

"And such as any other woman might—" she slurred and stopped; and he held her close.

"That, too, is the truth, little musk rose," he said calmly. "Often have I dragged my crackling sword through the bazaars of Kabul, and black eyes of Afghan women and maids stared at me through close-meshed veils and, perhaps, there may have been hooded eyelids raised quickly in sign of promise and hope— and— ahee!— reward. But—" and with a great gesture he dismissed the past as if it had never existed "they passed into the dark, like gray djinns of evil. They left no trace, no heartache. There is only you in all the world, heart of my heart, and my soul is a carpet for your little feet. Step on it. Step on it with all your strength! For I am strong, strong!"

"My father, too, is strong. And he hates you. He speaks of you to me— though I do not reply. He curses you—"

"Allah!" Ebrahim Asif laughed and snapped his fingers. "Your father is a barren mule, bragging about the horse, his father. He is a toothless she-wolf— and presently I shall set foot on the soil of the Red Village and claim you."

"When, heart o me?" she whispered.

And the answer came low and triumphant. "Tomorrow, Crusher of Hearts!"

And, the next day, in the White Village, the conches brayed and the gongs were beaten; the young men danced over crossed daggers, and the unmarried girls drowned their heads with the dowers of the hillside and the forest.

For that morning, Ebrahim Asif had called the villagers to full durbar and had given them the good news. There had been uncouth rejoicing.

Only Jarullah had struck a discordant note.

"Beware, young Chief," he had said, following Ebrahim from the council hut. "Yar Zaddiq has a forked tongue. His father was a hyena, and his mother a she-devil," so he warned.

"Possibly," the other had laughed. "But, whatever his ancestry, his curse has not descended to his daughter. She is a precious casket filled with the arts of coquetry. Too, she is strong and well-turned of hip and breast. She will bear me stout men-children."

And now he was in his house, adorning himself as becomes a bridegroom; for he had decided that he would wed Kurjan that very night.

He curled and oiled his beard; he drew broad lines of antimony down his eyelids; he heightened the color of his lips by chewing betel; he stained his fingertips crimson with henna; he wound an enormous green muslin turban around his fur cap; he arranged well the folds of his waistband; he perfumed his body from head to toes with pungent oil of geranium, a small bottle of which had cost him a year's pay to Kabul.

Then he threw a peach-colored silk khalat, embroidered with cunning Persian designs in gold thread, over his broad supple shoulders, picked up his sword, and stepped out on the threshold where Jarullah was squatting.

"Jarullah," he said, "to-morrow morning I bring home the bride. See that a feast is being prepared. I myself shall bring some fat khirli fish, the pick of the catch. As to you, have the women roast a sheep, well stuffed and seasoned with condiments. In there, amongst the boxes I brought from Kabul, you will find many things, spices of India and the far countries, strange sauces, and exquisite Chinese confections compounded of rose leaves and honey. Let the feast be worthy of the bride— and do not steal too much."

Jarullah overlooked the laughing insult of the young chief's last words. He clutched the hem of Ebrahim's khalat. He was terribly in earnest.

"Take care, young master," he whined, "lest evil befall you. You are brave, and trusting. But neither with bravery nor with trust can you knit the riven, lying tongue of such a one as Yar Zaddiq. Take along a dozen stout fighting men. Do not go alone."

Ebrahim smiled as he might at a babbling child.

"What avail is a rotten plow to a sound ox?" he asked casually. "What shall talkers do when there are no listeners? What is the good of lies when truth is the greatest lie?"

With which thoroughly mystifying words, he walked away in the direction of the natural bridge that linked the two villages. Evening was dropping.

Steadily Ebrahim Asif kept on his way, along the northern bank of the river, well within sight of the southern, so that his peach-colored khalat flashed like a flame in the rays of the dying sun; and he laughed softly to himself at the thought that, doubtless, sharp eyes in the Red Village were watching his progress from boulders and trees.

Half a mile below the natural bridge, he disappeared behind the shoulder of a basalt ledge that jutted out from the river and entered a thick clump of dwarf acacia.

Five minutes later, the watchers of the Red Village saw once more the braggart sheen of peach-colored silk— and Yar Zaddiq whispered a last word to the Kafiri who crowded at his heels as jungle wolves to the tiger's kill.

Another ten minutes. The sun was hissing out in a sea of blood. The heavens were melting into a quiet night of glowing dark-violet with a pale moon peaking its lonely horn in the North, and up at the natural bridge where the two villages met, there was the sudden yelling of war cries, the rattle of stones, the throwing of thorn sticks— and, above the noise, Yar Zaddiq's voice stabbed out as, flanked by the pick of his fighting men, he hurled himself upon the peach-colored khalat before its wearer had had time to cross the bridge.

"When you set foot in the Red Village, Ebrahim Asif! I swore it! By the Koran did I give oath, and by the ancient gods of the Kafiri! When you set foot in the Red Village! True I am to the double oath!"— and his stick came down, tearing a great gash in the bridegroom's silken finery, brought from far Kabul.

The men of the Red Village closed in, with exultant, savage shouts.

Night had dropped, suddenly, completely, as it does in the tropics, with a burnouse of black velvet.

Nothing was visible except the shadowy, fantastic outline of a dozen human bodies balled together into a tight knot, heaving, straining, wrestling, pulling down their lonely opponent as hounds pull down a stag.

But the lonely man fought well. Time and again he jerked himself loose. Time and again his sword flashed free and tasted blood.

Time and again he drove his assailants before him towards the boundary of the Red Village.

But always, rallied by Yar Zaddiq's warring shouts, they hurled themselves back at him before he had a chance to cross the line.

And then came the end.

A jagged rock crashed on his head and he fell down, unconscious, bleeding from a dozen flesh wounds, curled up like a sleeping dog, his right hand across his forehead as if to ward off the blows of Fate.

Yar Zaddiq bent over him.

"You are a brave man, Ebrahim Asif," he said quite gently, "and doubtless you were a swashbuckler and a brawler in the tumult of the packed Kabul bazaars! Doubtless the gods have dowered your heart with stanch courage and your body with the strength of bunched muscles! But there is no wisdom in your soul, young Chief. Ahee! Your caution is as uncertain as a Tartar's beard, as rare as wings upon a cat!"

He laughed.

But, with utter, dramatic suddenness, just as the moon stabbed down with a sharp wedge of silvery light that brought the features of the unconscious man into crass relief, his laugh changed to a howl of disappointment and rage, cracked, high-pitched and ludicrous.

He kicked the prostrate form with all his might, turned, and rushed back across the bridge as fast as his gnarled old legs would let him, while his clansmen, wondering, astonished, cluttered after him.

Stumbling, falling, cursing, he ran through the night. His withered lungs beat like a hammer. But he kept on, along the southern bank, towards his house that sprang out at him with warm, golden lights.

With his last ounce of strength he hurtled across the threshold— and there, by the side of Kurjan, one arm around her waist, the other gesturing some flowery words of love he was whispering in her ear, sat Ebrahim Asif, in the ragged clothes of Babar, drenched to the skin, but happy, serene, supremely sure of himself.

Languidly he looked up and greeted the old man who was speechless with rage and fatigue.

"Have the women prepare me a meal," he said, "a khirli fish, carefully boned, and spiced with turmeric, also a goblet of tea, steaming hot. For it was cold swimming the River of Hate above the whirlpool of the Black Rock, and it is not right that the bridegroom should sit shivering at the wedding."

Then, casually, he asked:

"Did you by any chance kill that youth of my village— ah— Babar— who changed clothes with me in the acacia clump below the bridge?"

"No— no—" stammered Yar Zaddiq; and Ebrahim Asif sighed contentedly.

"Good, by Allah and by Allah!" he said. "There are the makings of a man in that youth— once I shall have taught him the shining wisdom I learned at Kabul—"

And, dreamily, with Kurjan's head on his shoulder, he looked through the open door where the night was draping the River of Hate in her trailing cloak of purple and black.

21: The Police Station

Arnold Bennett

1867-1931

The Queen, 15 Sep 1900

LORD TRENT has several times remarked to me that I am a philosopher. And I am one. I have guided my life by four rules: To keep my place, to make others keep theirs, to save half my income, and to beware of women. The strict observance of these rules has made me (in my station) a successful and respected man. Once, and only once, I was lax in my observance, and that single laxity resulted in a most curious and annoying adventure, which I will relate.

It was the fourth rule that I transgressed. I did not beware of a woman. The woman was Miss Susan Berry, lady's maid to the Marchioness of Cockfosters.

The Cockfosters family is a very old one. To my mind its traditions are superior to anything in the peerage of Great Britain; but then I may be prejudiced. I was brought up in the Cockfosters household, first at Cockfosters Castle in Devon, and afterwards at the well-known town house at the south-east corner of Eaton Square.

My father was valet to the old Marquis for thirty years; my mother rose from the position of fifth housemaid to be housekeeper at the Castle. Without ever having been definitely assigned to the situation, I became, as it were by gradual attachment, valet to Lord Trent— eldest son of the Marquis, and as gay and good-natured a gentleman as ever drank brandy-and-soda before breakfast.

When Lord Trent married Miss Edna Stuyvesant, the American heiress, and with some of her money bought and furnished in a superb manner a mansion near the north-west corner of Eaton Square, I quite naturally followed him across the Square, and soon found myself, after his lordship and my lady, the most considerable personage at No. 441. Even the butler had to mind his "p's" and "q's" with me.

Perhaps it was this pre-eminence of mine which led to my being selected for a duty which I never cared for, and which ultimately I asked his lordship to allow me to relinquish— of course he did so. That duty related to the celebrated Cockfosters emeralds. Lady Trent had money (over a million sterling, as his lordship himself told me), but money could not buy the Cockfosters emeralds, and having seen these she desired nothing less fine. With her ladyship, to desire was to obtain. I have always admired her for that trait in her character. Being an American she had faults, but she knew her own mind, which is a great thing; and I must admit that, on the whole, she carried herself well and committed few blunders. She must have been accustomed to good servants.

In the matter of the emeralds, I certainly took her side. Strictly speaking, they belonged to the old Marchioness, but the Marchioness never went into

society; she was always engaged with temperance propaganda, militant Protestantism, and that sort of thing, and consequently never wore the emeralds. There was no valid reason, therefore, why Lady Trent should not have the gratification of wearing them. But the Marchioness, I say it with respect, was a woman of peculiar and decided views. She had, in fact, fads; and one of her fads was the emeralds. She could not bear to part with them. She said she was afraid something might happen to the precious heirlooms.

A prolonged war ensued between the Marchioness and my lady, and ultimately a compromise was effected. My lady won permission to wear the emeralds whenever she chose, but they were always to be brought to her and taken back again by Susan Berry, in whom the Marchioness had more confidence than in anyone else in the world. Consequently, whenever my lady required the emeralds, word was sent across the Square in the afternoon; Susan Berry brought them over, and Susan Berry removed them at night when my lady returned from her ball or reception.

The arrangement was highly inconvenient for Susan Berry, for sometimes it would be very late when my lady came home; but the Marchioness insisted, and since Susan Berry was one of those persons who seem to take a positive joy in martyrising themselves, she had none of my pity. The nuisance was that someone from our house had to accompany her across the Square. Eaton Square is very large (probably the largest in London, but I may be mistaken on such a trivial point); its main avenue is shut in by trees; and at 2 a.m. it is distinctly not the place for an unprotected female in charge of valuable property. Now the Marchioness had been good enough to suggest that she would prefer me to escort her maid on this brief nocturnal journey. I accepted the responsibility, but I did not hide my dislike for it. Knowing something of Miss Berry's disposition, I knew that our household would inevitably begin, sooner or later, to couple our names together, and I was not deceived.

Such was the situation when one night— it was a Whit-Monday, I remember, and about a quarter past one— Lord and Lady Trent returned from an entertainment at a well-known mansion near St. James's Palace. I got his lordship some whisky in the library, and he then told me that I might go to bed, as he should not retire for an hour or so. I withdrew to the little office off the hall, and engaged in conversation with the second footman, who was on duty. Presently his lordship came down into the hall and began to pace about— it was a strange habit of his— smoking a cigarette.

He caught sight of me.

"Saunders," he said, "I told you you could go to bed."

"Yes, my lord."

"Why don't you go?"

"Your lordship forgets the emeralds."

"Ah, yes, of course." He laughed. I motioned to the footman to clear out.

"You don't seem to care for that job, Saunders," his lordship resumed, quizzing me. "Surely Berry is a charming companion. In your place I should regard it as excellent fun. But I have often told you that you have no sense of humour."

"Not all men laugh at the same jokes, my lord," I observed.

As a matter of fact, in earlier and wilder days, his lordship had sometimes thrown a book or a boot at me for smiling too openly in the wrong place.

The conversation might have continued further, for his lordship would often talk with me, but at that moment Susan Berry appeared with the bag containing the case in which were the emeralds.

Lady Trent's own maid was with her, and the two stood talking for an instant at the foot of the stairs, while Lady Trent's maid locked the bag and handed the key to Berry. Heaven knows how long that simple business would have occupied had not the voice of my lady resounded from the first floor, somewhat excitedly calling for her maid, who vanished with a hurried good-night. His lordship had already departed from the hall.

"May I relieve you of the bag, Miss Berry?" I asked.

"Thank you, Mr. Saunders," she replied, "but the Marchioness prefers that I myself should carry it."

That little dialogue passed between us every time the emeralds had to be returned.

We started on our short walk, Miss Berry and I, proceeding towards the main avenue which runs through the centre of the Square east and west. It was a beautiful moonlight night. Talking of moonlight nights, I may as well make my confession at once. The fact is that Miss Berry had indeed a certain influence over me. In her presence I was always conscious of feeling a pleasurable elation— an excitement, a perturbation, which another man might have guessed to be the beginning of love.

I, however, knew that it was not love. It was merely a fancy. It only affected me when I was in her company. When she was absent I could regard her in my mind's eye as she actually was— namely, a somewhat designing young woman, with dark eyes and too much will of her own. Nevertheless, she had, as I say, a certain influence over me, and I have already remarked that it was a moonlight night.

Need I say more? In spite of what I had implied to Lord Trent I did enjoy the walk with Susan Berry. Susan Berry took care that I should. She laid herself out to fascinate me; turning her brunette face up to mine with an air of deference, and flashing upon me the glance of those dark lustrous eyes.

She started by sympathising with me in the matter of the butler. This was, I now recognise, very clever of her, for the butler has always been a sore point

with me. I began to think (be good enough to remember the moonlight and the trees) that life with Susan Berry might have its advantages.

Then she turned to the topic of her invalid sister, Jane Mary, who was lame and lived in lodgings near Sloane Street, and kept herself, with a little aid from Susan, by manufacturing artificial flowers. For a month past Miss Berry had referred regularly to this sister, who appeared to be the apple of her eye. I had no objection to the topic, though it did not specially interest me; but on the previous evening Miss Berry had told me, with a peculiar emphasis, that her poor dear sister often expressed a longing to see the famous Cockfosters emeralds, and that she resided quite close too. I did not like that.

To-night Miss Berry made a proposition which alarmed me. "Mr. Saunders," she said insinuatingly, "you are so good-natured that I have almost a mind to ask you a favour. Would you object to walking round with me to my sister's— it is only a few minutes away— so that I could just give her a peep at these emeralds. She is dying to see them, and I'm sure the Marchioness wouldn't object. We should not be a quarter of an hour away."

My discretion was aroused. I ought to have given a decided negative at once; but somehow I couldn't, while Susan was looking at me.

"But surely your sister will be in bed," I suggested.

"Oh, no," with a sigh. "She has to work very late— very late indeed. And besides, if she is, I could take them up to her room. It would do her good to see them, and she has few pleasures."

"The Marchioness might not like it," I said, driven back to the second line of fortification. "You know your mistress is very particular about these emeralds."

"The Marchioness need never know," Susan Berry whispered, putting her face close up to mine. "No one need know, except just us two."

The accent which she put on those three words "just us two," was extremely tender.

I hesitated. We were already at the end of the Square, and should have turned down to the left towards Cockfosters House.

"Come along," she entreated, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"Well, you know—" I muttered, but I went along with her towards Sloane Street. We passed Eaton Place.

"Really, Miss Berry" I began again, collecting my courage.

Then there was a step behind us, and another hand was placed on my shoulder. I turned round sharply. It was a policeman. His buttons shone in the moonlight.

"Your name is Charles Saunders," he said to me; "and yours Susan Berry," to my companion.

"True," I replied, for both of us.

"I have a warrant for your arrest."

"Our arrest?"

"Yes, on a charge of attempting to steal some emeralds, the property of the Marquis of Cockfosters."

"Impossible," I exclaimed.

"Yes," he sneered, "that's what they all say."

"But the emeralds are here in this bag."

"I know they are," he said. "I've just copped you in time. But you've been suspected for days."

"The thing is ridiculous," I said, striving to keep calm. "We are taking the emeralds back to Lady Cockfosters, and—"

Then I stopped. If we were merely taking the emeralds back to Lady Cockfosters, that is, from one house in Eaton Square to another house in Eaton Square, what were we doing out of the Square?

I glanced at Susan Berry. She was as white as a sheet. The solution of the puzzle occurred to me at once. Susan's sister was an ingenious fiction. Susan was a jewel thief, working with a gang of jewel thieves, and her request that I would accompany her to this mythical sister was part of a plan for stealing the emeralds.

"At whose instance has the warrant been issued?" I asked.

"The Marquis of Cockfosters."

My suspicions were only too well confirmed. I did not speak a word to Susan Berry. I could not. I merely looked at her.

"You'll come quietly to the station?" the policeman said.

"Certainly," I replied. "As for us, the matter can soon be cleared up. I am Lord Trent's valet, No. 441, Eaton Square, and he must be sent for."

"Oh, must he!" the constable jeered. "Come on. Perhaps you'd prefer a cab."

A four-wheeler was passing. I myself hailed the sleepy cabman, and we all three got in. The policeman prudently took the bag from Susan's nerveless hands. None of us spoke. I was too depressed, Susan was probably too ashamed, and the constable was no doubt too bored.

After a brief drive we drew up. Another policeman opened the door of the cab, and over the open portal of the building in front of us I saw the familiar blue lamp, with the legend "Metropolitan Police" in white letters. The two policemen carefully watched us as we alighted, and escorted us up the steps into the station. Happily, there was no one about; my humiliation was abject enough without that.

Charles Saunders a prisoner in a police station! I could scarcely credit my senses. One becomes used to a police station— in the newspapers; but to be inside one— that is' different, widely different.

The two policemen took us into a bare room, innocent of any furniture save a wooden form, a desk, a chair, some printed notices of rewards offered, and an

array of handcuffs and revolvers on the mantelpiece. In the chair, with a big book in front of him on the desk, sat the inspector in charge. He was in his shirt-sleeves.

"A hot night," he said, smiling, to the policeman.

I silently agreed. It appeared that we were expected.

They took our full names, our addresses and occupations, and then the inspector read the warrant to us. Of course, it didn't explain things in the least. I began to speak.

"Let me warn you," said the inspector, "that anything you say now may be used against you at your trial."

My trial!

"Can I write a note to Lord Trent?" I asked, nettled.

"Yes, if you will pay for a cab to take it."

I threw down half-a-crown, and scribbled a line to my master, begging him to come at once. "The constable must search you," the inspector said, when this was done and the first policeman had disappeared with the note.

"I will save him the trouble," I said proudly, and I emptied my pockets of a gold watch and chain, a handkerchief, two sovereigns, a sixpence, two halfpennies, a bunch of keys, my master's linen book, and a new necktie which I had bought that very evening; of which articles the inspector made an inventory.

"Which is the key of the bag ? " asked the inspector. The bag was on the desk in front of him, and he had been trying to open it.

"I know nothing of that," I said.

"Now you, Susan Berry, give up the key," the inspector said, sternly, turning to her.

For answer Susan burst into sobs, and flung herself against my breast. The situation was excessively embarrassing for me. Heaven knows I had sufficient reason to hate the woman, but though a thief, she was in distress, and I must own that I felt for her.

The constable stepped towards Susan.

"Surely," I said, " you have a female searcher?"

"A female searcher! Ah, yes!" smiled the inspector, suddenly suave. " Is she here, constable?"

"Not now, sir; she's gone."

"That must wait, then. Take them to the cells."

"Sorry, sir, all the cells are full. Bank Holiday drunks."

The inspector thought a moment.

"Lock 'em up in the back room," he said. "That'll do for the present. Perhaps the male prisoner may be getting an answer to his note soon. After that they'll have to go to Vine Street or Marlborough."

The constable touched his helmet, and marched us out. In another moment we were ensconced in a small room, absolutely bare of any furniture, except a short wooden form. The constable was locking the door when Susan Berry screamed out: "You aren't going to lock us up here together in the dark?"

"Why, what do you want? Didn't you hear the cells are full?"

I was profoundly thankful they were full. I did not fancy a night in a cell.

"I want a candle," she said, fiercely.

He brought one, or rather half of one, stuck in a bottle, and placed it on the mantelpiece. Then he left us.

Again I say the situation was excessively embarrassing. For myself, I said nothing. Susan Berry dropped on the form, and hiding her face in her hands, gave way to tears without any manner of restraint. I pitied her a little, but that influence which previously she had exercised over me was gone. "Oh, Mr. Saunders," she sobbed, "what shall we do?" And as she spoke she suddenly looked up at me with a glance of feminine appeal. I withstood it.

"Miss Berry," I said severely, "I wonder that you can look me in the face. I trusted you as a woman, and you have outraged that trust. I never dreamed that you were—that you were an adventuress. It was certainly a clever plot, and but for the smartness of the police I should, in my innocence, have fallen a victim to your designs. For myself, I am grateful to the police. I can understand and excuse their mistake in regarding me as your accomplice. That will soon be set right, for Lord Trent will be here. In the meantime, of course, I have been put to considerable humiliation. Nevertheless, even this is better than having followed you to your 'sister's'. In your 'sister's' lodging I might have been knocked senseless, or even murdered. Moreover, the emeralds are safe."

She put on an innocent expression, playing the injured maiden.

"Mr. Saunders, you surely do not imagine—"

"Miss Berry, no protestations, I beg. Let me say now that I have always detected in your character something underhand, something crafty."

"I swear—" she began again.

"Don't trouble," I interrupted her icily, "for I shall not believe you. This night will certainly be a warning to me."

With that I leaned my back against the mantelpiece, and abandoned myself to gloomy thought. It was a moment for me of self-abasement. I searched my heart, and I sorrowfully admitted that my predicament was primarily due to disobeying that golden rule—beware of women. I saw now that it was only my absurd fancy for this wicked creature which had led me to accept the office of guarding those emeralds during their night-passage across Eaton Square. I ought to have refused in the first place, for the job was entirely outside my functions; strictly, the butler should have done it.

And this woman in front of me— this Susan Berry, in whom the old Marchioness had such unbounded trust! So she belonged to the confraternity of jewel thieves— a genus of which I had often read, but which I had never before met with. What audacity such people must need in order to execute their schemes!

But then the game was high. The Cockfosters emeralds were worth, at a moderate estimate, twelve thousand pounds. There are emeralds and emeralds, the value depends on the colour; these were the finest Colombian stones, of a marvellous tint, and many of them were absolutely without a flaw. There were five stones of seven carats each, and these alone must have been worth at least six thousand pounds. Yes, it would have been a great haul, a colossal haul.

Time passed, the candle was burning low, and there was no sign of Lord Trent. I went to the door and knocked, first gently, then more loudly, but I could get no answer. Then I walked about the room, keeping an eye on Susan Berry, who had, I freely admit, the decency to avoid my gaze. I was beginning to get extremely tired. I wished to sit down, but there was only one form; Susan Berry was already upon it, and, as I said before, it was a very short form. At last I could hold out no longer. Taking my courage in both hands, I sat down boldly at one end of the form. It was a relief to me. Miss Berry sighed. There were not six inches between us. The candle was low in the socket, we both watched it. Without a second's warning the flame leapt up and then expired. We were in the dark. Miss Berry screamed, and afterwards I heard her crying. I myself made no sign. Fortunately the dawn broke almost immediately.

By this time I was getting seriously annoyed with Lord Trent. I had served him faithfully, and yet at the moment of my genuine need he had not come to my succour. I went again to the door and knocked with my knuckles. No answer. Then I kicked it. No answer. Then I seized the handle and violently shook it. To my astonishment the door opened. The policeman had forgotten to lock it.

I crept out into the passage, softly closing the door behind me. It was now quite light. The door leading to the street was open, and I could see neither constables nor inspector. I went into the charge room; it was empty. Then I proceeded into the street. On the pavement a piece of paper was lying. I picked it up; it was the note which I had written to Lord Trent.

A workman happened to be loitering along a road which crossed this street at right angles. I called out and ran to him.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "why all the officers have left the police station?"

"Look 'ere, matey." he says, " you get on 'ome; you've been making a. night of it, that's wot you 'ave."

"But, seriously," I said.

Then I saw a policeman at a distant corner. The workman whistled, and the policeman was obliging enough to come to us.

" 'Ere's a cove wants to know why all the police 'as left the police station," the workman said.

"What police station?" the constable said sharply.

"Why, this one down here in this side-street," I said, pointing to the building. As I looked at it I saw that the lamp which I had observed on the previous night no longer hung over the doorway.

The constable laughed good-humouredly.

"Get away home," he said.

I began to tell him my story.

"Get away home," he repeated— gruffly this time, "or I'll run you in."

"All right." I said huffily, and I made as if to walk down the other road. The constable and the workman grinned to each other and departed. As soon as they were out of sight, I returned to my police station.

It was not a police station! It was merely a rather large and plain-fronted empty house, which had been transformed into a police station, for one night only, by means of a lamp, a desk, two forms, a few handcuffs, and some unparalleled cheek. Jewel thieves they were, but Susan Berry was not among them. After all Susan Berry probably had an invalid sister named Jane Mary.

The first policeman, the cabman, the second policeman, the inspector— these were the jewel thieves, and Susan Berry and I (and of course the Marchioness) had been the victims of as audacious and brilliant a robbery as was ever planned. We had been robbed openly, quietly, deliberately, with the aid of a sham police station. Our movements must have been watched for weeks. I gave my meed of admiration to the imagination, the skill, and the *sangfroid* which must have gone to the carrying out of this coup.

Going back into the room where Susan Berry and I had spent the night hours, I found that wronged woman sweetly asleep on the form, with her back against the wall. I dared not wake her. And so I left her for the present to enjoy some much-needed repose. I directed my steps in search of Eaton Square, having closed the great door of my police station.

At length I found my whereabouts, and I arrived at No. 441 at five o'clock precisely. The morning was lovely. After some trouble I roused a housemaid, who let me in. She seemed surprised, but I ignored her. I went straight upstairs and knocked at my master's door. To wake him had always been a difficult matter, and this morning the task seemed more difficult than ever.

At last he replied sleepily to my summons.

"It is I— Saunders— your lordship."

"Go to the devil, then."

"I must see your lordship instantly. Very seriously."

"Eh, what ? I'll come in a minute," and I heard him stirring, and the voice of Lady Trent.

How should I break the news to him? What would the Marchioness say when she knew? Twelve thousand pounds' worth of jewels is no trifle. Not to mention my gold watch, my two sovereigns, my sixpence, and my two halfpennies. And also the half-crown which I had given to have the message despatched to his lordship. It was the half-crown that specially rankled.

Lord Trent appeared at the door of his room, arrayed in his crimson dressing-gown.

"Well, Saunders, what in the name of?"

"My lord," I stammered, and then I told him the whole story.

He smiled, he laughed, he roared.

"I daresay it sounds very funny, my lord," I said, " but it wasn't funny at the time, and Lady Cockfosters won't think it very funny."

"Oh, won't she! She will. No one will enjoy it more. She might have taken it seriously if the emeralds had been in the bag, but they weren't."

"Not in the bag, my lord!"

"No. Lady Trent's maid ran off with the bag, thinking that your mistress had put the jewels in it. But she had not. Lady Trent came to the top of the stairs to call her back, as soon as she found the bag gone, but you and Berry were out of the house. So the emeralds stayed here for one night. They are on Lady Trent's dressing-table at the present moment. Go and get a stiff whisky, Saunders. You need it. And then may I suggest that you should return for the sleeping Berry? By the way, the least you can do is to marry her, Saunders."

"Never, my lord!" I said with decision. "I have meddled sufficiently with women."

22: The Berwick Burr

William Crawford Honeyman

(as by "James M'Govan")

1845–1919

In: *Traced and tracked, or, Memoirs of a city detective*, 1886

THE FIRST TIME my attention was directed to Will Smeaton was by a telegram from a Border town which described his appearance, and stated— a little late, however— that he had escaped in the direction of Edinburgh. The message called for Smeaton's arrest on suspicion of a very deliberate attempt at murder, the victim being a sweetheart named Jessie Aimers. The full particulars followed the telegram, and they seemed to leave little doubt of Smeaton's guilt.

Jessie Aimers was a girl of superior education, a teacher in the town, and greatly beloved by all. She and Smeaton had been brought up at the same school, but with very different results— for he had become a kind of coarse dare-devil, a brass-finisher by trade, with a strong inclination for salmon poaching; while Jessie grew up refined, modest, and gentle.

What possible bond of love could exist between two such natures? is the question which naturally rises to one's lips; yet, with that tantalizing contrariety which humanity seems to revel in, the answer was only that such love did exist, and in no common degree of strength.

The question was asked and echoed by all the townsfolk, and debated and wondered over, but the only decision was that Jessie Aimers was foolish to lavish her love on such a worthless object, and very much to be pitied on that account. Simple, short-sighted townsfolk! Jessie's love was her life, her breath, the very pulse of her heart. To give up that would have been simply to lie down in the grave.

The circumstances under which the attempt at murder was said to have been made were these: Jessie Aimers had left her home about dusk on a fine October evening to meet her lover, who was positively forbidden her father's house. They had met at some appointed spot, and were seen about an hour later wandering slowly up by the riverside. Smeaton appeared to be in a bad temper, for he was talking loudly and hotly.

Jessie was answering gently and pleadingly. It was then quite dark, but they were readily recognized by their voices. Further up the river, and but a short time after, a great scream was heard, and very soon Smeaton was seen returning along the path alone, in great haste, and so intent on his own thoughts that he passed an intimate acquaintance close enough to brush his sleeve, silent as a ghost.

Smeaton had gone straight home, but stayed there only long enough to get some money and his watch, and then made his way to the railway station and took a ticket for Edinburgh.

It was the manner in which this ticket was procured which first excited suspicion. Smeaton did not go to the ticket window himself, but skulked at the other end of the station, while he sent a boy whom he had hailed for the purpose to get the ticket.

The boy was known, and the ticket clerk— astonished at him taking such a long journey— refused to give the ticket till he admitted that he was acting not for himself but for Will Smeaton.

The boy probably made no mention of the circumstance to Smeaton, for when the ticket clerk went over the train helping to examine the tickets, and came upon Smeaton in an obscure corner, he said to him laughingly—

"Are ye feared to come for the ticket yoursel'?" whereat the passenger looked horribly scared and taken aback, so much so that he was unable to find voice to reply before the ticket clerk was gone.

While this had been taking place, some young fellows were making a queer catch on the river. They were salmon poachers, and were hurriedly making a cast of a net at a shady part of the stream after seeing the watchers safely out of sight, when suddenly one of them cried out—

"Pull in! pull in! we've gotten as bonnie a beast as ever was ta'en oot the water. I saw the white glisk o' her as she tried to skirt roond outside the net, but we've gotten her! The sly witch is hidin' at the bottom, but ye'll see her in a meenit!"

Very much more quickly and rashly than paid salmon laborers the others rushed the ends of the close meshed net ashore, agreeing the while that if it was but a single fish, it was a sixty or seventy pounder at least, and in a moment or two had landed the bonnie white fish— sweet Jessie Aimers, with her light dress clinging close to her slight figure, her eyes closed as in death, and her white face gleaming up at them like a shining moon out of the dense gloom.

"Giude save us, it's a wuman! drooned! deid!" the scared poachers cried in a breath, and by a common impulse they were near dropping her and the net, and taking at once to their heels.

But one more sharp-sighted than the rest, bending down, noticed first that there was a wound on the white brow, which was bleeding, and next that the features were familiar to him.

"Dog on it, lads, if it's no bonnie Jessie Aimers!"

Exclamations of incredulity and horror ran round the group, and it was only on one striking a match and holding the light close to the cold face that they were convinced of the truth.

They stood there, silent and sorrowful, and with watchers and their own dangers far from their thoughts, and then one threw out a wonder as to how Jessie had got into the water.

"Fell in, maybe," suggested one.

"Or jumped in, mair likely," said another.

"The puir thing has been fretting her life away for Wull Smeaton. I aye thought it wad come to this. She was far owre gude for him."

Maybe he helped her in," darkly suggested a third. "I've seen them often walking here thegither, and he's a perfect brute when he's in a passion. He wad ding her in as sune as look at her."

This last suggestion found most acceptance. These men knew Smeaton thoroughly— his fiery temper, brutal strength, and impulsive ferocity— and had little doubt but his hand had sent the poor girl to her watery grave. Their only difficulty was how to act in the dilemma.

One thought that it would be safest, in order to avoid awkward questioning by those in authority, to quietly slip the body into the water again, stow away their net in its usual hiding-place, and drop work for the night; but this proposal was not well received, for Jessie was a general favorite, and was admired from a distance by the roughest in the place. While they stood thus in doubt one of them suddenly exclaimed—

"Deid folk dinna bleed! She's mybe living yet— let's gie the puir thing a chance—row her on the grass— lift up her airms—dae onything that's like to bring her roond."

The result of this electrifying speech was that the whole gang lent a hand in the rough and ready means of restoration, and, with such good ellect, that very shortly the supposed drowned girl gave signs of life, though not of consciousness.

Thus encouraged, the men made a litter of their coats, and ran with her to the nearest cottage, where she was put to bed, and tended and nursed as carefully as if she had been in her own home.

Jessie's parents were sent for and informed as gently as possible of the accident, and their first exclamation on reaching their daughter's side was— "Oh, the villain! this is Smeaton's wark."

Jessie was able to recognize her father, and smile faintly when he took her hand in his own, but she was too weak to give any account of the accident or crime till next morning.

By that time the flight of Smeaton had been discovered, and telegrams despatched ordering his arrest and detention; and when Jessie woke she found not only the lieutenant of police, but a Magistrate at her bedside ready to hear her statement and act upon her charge.

Then they all were surprised to And that Jessie had no charge to make. She would not, by as much as a look, admit that Smeaton had thrown her into the water, or even struck her so as to cause her to fall in or receive the wound on her temple. How had the accident happened then?

"I must have fallen in," said Jessie, after a long pause, and with tears in her eyes.

"Yes, you must have fallen in," impatiently interposed her father, who positively hated her lover, or you could never have been picked out; but was the falling in purely accidental? Surely, Jessie, I have trained you well enough in truthfulness to be able to rely on your answer in a matter of life and death?"

"Yes, father, dear," meekly answered Jessie, with fresh tears. "I will always be truthful. But I cannot answer every question. I would rather die and be at rest."

"If this wretch attempted to drown you— to take your life— do you think you are doing right to screen him from the just punishment of his crime?" sternly observed her father.

"Will would never attempt to do such a thing," warmly answered the girl. "He has faults— though not so many as people imagine— but that he would never do. It is not in his nature."

"The police are after him now, and likely to get him, and when he is tried you will be forced to speak the truth," said her father; "you will be the principal witness, and if you do not speak the whole truth you will be sent to prison yourself."

"I will never say anything against him though they cut me in pieces," said Jessie, with a deep sigh. "Why did they take me out of the river? It would have been better to let me lie than torture me with questions."

As Jessie's condition was still precarious it was decided to let the matter rest for a little, and meanwhile make every effort to capture Smeaton, trusting to Jessie becoming less reticent, or other evidence turning sufficient to secure his conviction.

On the same forenoon that Jessie was thus questioned I was going along a street near Nicholson street with my thoughts about as far from this case as the moon is from the sun.

As yet I had only the brief telegram to guide me, and that contained but a meager description of the man. He was said to be a native of Berwick; of medium height; and to have curly hair of a sandy hue, and a florid complexion, and to be rather muscular and firmly built. These points might suit a dozen out of every hundred one might meet in passing along the street, and the description interested me so little that the actual features had at the moment all but left my memory.

What invisible finger is it that guides many of our sudden impulses? When I entered that street I had no intention whatever of visiting a pawnbroker's, but when I came to one of their prominent signs I turned into the stair and ascended it, as gravely as if I had gone south for another purpose than to visit that particular establishment.

I had been there the day before looking for some trinkets which were reported stolen, and as I entered the thought struck me that I might ask for them again as an excuse for my reappearance.

I was in no hurry, however, and as I could hear that there were some customers in before me, I simply took my stand inside one of the little boxes, and nodded to the proprietor to intimate that I should wait my turn.

For the benefit of those lucky mortals who have never been forced to enter such a place, I may explain that these boxes ran along in front of the counter, and are chiefly useful for hiding one customer from another. Once shut in, you are screened from every eye but that sharp million-power magnifier owned by the proprietor or his assistant.

As soon as I was shut in I noticed that the box next to me was occupied by a male customer, who was busy extolling the value and powers of a silver lever which he was trying to pledge.

The pawnbroker was quite willing to take the watch, but, as is usual in such cases, the point on which they disagreed was the sum to be advanced on the pledge. The argument was not particularly interesting to me, and I gradually left it behind in my thoughts while I revelled in the queer brogue of the stranger.

It was a rich and musical twang to my ears, and when the man came to any word with the K in it— such as " tr-r-r-ain "— he rolled that R out into about a thousand, with a rich swell which made one imagine he enjoyed it.

I was puzzled for a moment or two to decide on the exact locality of the dialect— though I have often boasted that I can tell the dialects of Scotland and a good part of England to within thirty miles of the exact spot on simply bearing them spoken.

"The man is from Newcastle," I rather hastily decided: then came a slight mental demur at the decision. There were slight points of difference and many strong points of resemblance. I listened for a little longer, and then smiled out at my own slowness and stupidity.

"I might have known that tongue at the first sentence," was my mental exclamation. "It's the Berwick burr."

While this analysis was going on in my mind the haggling over the watch was concluded by the stranger accepting a loan of thirty shillings on the pledge, and a ticket was rapidly filled up to that effect till it came to the important question—

"What name?"

There was a pause before the answer came, and when it was spoken there was much in the careless tone which implied that too much reliance was not be placed on the truthfulness of the reply.

"Oh, say John Smith."

"I can't take it at all unless you give me your real name," said the pawnbroker, sharply. I have no doubt my presence put a little edge on him. "How am I to know," he virtuously added, "that the watch is not stolen?"

"Stolen?" echoed the stranger, warmly. "Man, there's the name of the man I bought it frae," and he turned out a watch-paper inserted under the back. I could not see the name, but I did make out the words "Berwick-on-Tweed."

"I'm no a thief— I'm a brass founder to trade," continued the man, with energy, "and I expect to lift it again in a week or two."

"A brass founder?" I thought, with a start. "I wonder if his name is Smeaton?"

While I was wondering the bargain was concluded, and the money paid over, and then the man left. I left my box at the same moment, and we moved out together.

"It's a nice morning," he said, and I returned the greeting.

When we reached the street he turned northwards, and I decided that that was my way too.

"I heard you say you are a brass founder," I remarked. "You'll be looking for a job?"

No, he didn't think he was— he meant to lie quiet for a little.

"Oh, indeed?— got into trouble, I suppose," I returned, with interest. "Well, man," I abided, in a confidential whisper, "I know a place where your dearest friends couldn't get at you. You'd be safer there than anywhere. Care to go?"

He wasn't sure. He didn't mind going, but he did not promise to stay there. He was glad of company, however, and offered to treat me to some drink. I was in a hurry, and begged to be excused.

"You belong to Berwick?" I said decidedly.

He looked startled and troubled.

"Who said that? How do you know?" he stammered.

"I know the Berwick burr, and you've got it strong," I quietly answered.

"I haven't been in Berwick for mony a year," he said firmly.

"I thought that— that's what puzzled me for a while— you've got a touch of Coldstream or Kelso on your tongue," I coolly remarked.

He stared at me in evident consternation, and getting a trifle pale, but made no reply. I had been studying his appearance, and from that moment felt almost certain of my man.

I conducted him by North College Street, down College Wynd, chatting familiarly all the way, but never extracting from him his real name. I took him

that way to convey to him the idea that he was going to some low "howlf," in which a man in trouble might burrow safely, and was pleased to note that, as the route became more disreputable, his spirits rose. He evidently did not know the city, and that circumstance aided me. I turned up the Fishmarket Close, and into the side entrance to the Central.

"What kind o'a place is this?" he asked, staggered at the width and spaciousness of the stair.

"It's the place I told you of," I carelessly answered, taking care to make him move up the stairs in front of me. I saw his step become more faltering and unsteady, and when we reached the door of the "reception room,"

I knew by his ghastly pallor that the truth had flashed upon him. "Straight in there, Smeaton," I said, as his eye fell on me. "This is an unexpected pleasure to both of us."

He looked at me like a trapped tiger, and I fully expected him to make a dash and dive for liberty.

"What's your name?" he almost groaned.

"M'Govan."

"The devil!" he ungratefully exclaimed, and then I led him in, and accommodated him with a seat. He became fearfully agitated, and at length blurted out—

"If anything has happened to the girl, I'm not to blame for it."

He did not once seem to think of denying his identity, and yet till that moment I was anything but certain that I had the right man. He seemed a desperate, callous and daring fellow, and but for the canny way in which he had been led to the place would, I felt sure, have given a world of trouble to capture.

But once fairly limed, he became but a quaking coward. I did not understand his terror till I learned that he did not know that Jessie Aimers had been rescued, and her life saved.

There was a visionary gallows before the villain at the moment seen only by himself. We were smiling all round, but there wasn't a ghost of a smile left in him.

After he had emitted a very brief declaration, he was locked up; and next day a man came through and took him back to the town he had left so suddenly. Jessie Aimers still persisted in her silence, and the only charge which could justify Smeaton's detention was one of salmon poaching.

The evidence took some time to collect, and when the trial came on, Jessie Aimers was just able to drag herself out of bed and be present. Smeaton was found guilty, and fined heavily, with an alternative of imprisonment, which every one said would be his reward.

But to the astonishment of all, and the disgust of Jessie's father, the fine was paid.

No one but Smeaton then knew that the money had been furnished by Jessie Aimers; and yet, when the brute was set at liberty, and she waited at the Court entrance to see him and speak with him as he passed out, he was seen by many to push the loving girl violently from him and walk off with a servant girl of evil reputation named Dinah King.

Jessie pressed back the rising tears, and was able to draw on a faint smile before she was joined by her father.

Her father had almost to carry her home, and every one looking on that pale face and drooping form, declared that Jessie was not long for this world.

Some months after the trial, the house where Dinah King served was broken into and robbed. Although the plunder was mostly of a kind not easily hidden or carried away no trace of it was got, and the thieves were never heard of.

After a decent interval Dinah discovered that the work of that house was too heavy for her, and gave notice to leave. When she did go, she left the town, and Smeaton went with her.

Had she gone alone, perhaps no suspicion would have been aroused, but his reputation was already tainted, and the result was another intimation tons to look after the pair, as it was rumored that they had gone to Edinburgh.

The very day on which this message arrived, a young lady appeared at the Office asking for me, and giving her name as Miss Aimers. As she appeared weak and faint, she was allowed to await my arrival.

When I saw her face my first thought was— "How young and how sweet to have death written on her face!" Yes, death was written there— in the pale, sunken cheeks and waxy lips; in the deep, lustrous eyes, and in the gasping and panting for breath which necessitated every sentence uttered being broken in two.

A word or two introduced her, and then I distinctly recalled the former case with Smeaton, and a thrill of pity ran through me as I looked on that wistful face and eager pair of eyes and listened to her story.

"Everyone is prejudiced against him, but my whole heart is wrapped up in him," she said with strange calmness. "Look at me. I am dying. I know it, and yet I am calm and fearless. I could even be happy were it not for him, and the thought of him being lost to me through all eternity.

"I could not exist in Heaven sundered from him. It would not be Heaven to me. Oh, sir! you have seen much misery and much wickedness, but you know that a woman is not always blind even when she loves with all her soul. He is not so bad; but he is easily influenced and led away. If he is taken and put in prison, through that fearful woman, will you remember that? And if I should not be allowed to see him, or if I am taken away before then, will you give him a message from me?"

I bowed, for I could not speak.

"Tell him I have never lost faith in the goodness of his heart; that I shall love him forever, and that Heaven will never be Heaven to me without him beside me. Will you tell him to think of that— sometimes— when he is alone; and of the sweet happy hours we spent together when we were but boy and girl, full of innocent glee and love, before he was contaminated and led away? Oh, if God would only grant me a little time longer on earth— a little time— just enough to see poor Will led back to the right road and safe for Heaven, I could lay my head down and say— 'Take me. Lord Jesus, take me home.' "

"You may be quite sure that time will be granted you for all that God needs you to do on earth," I softly returned. "He will not take you till your work is done."

I spoke with her for some time, going over many points in her history already partly known to me, but I found that she would not breathe one word against the man.

She would not admit that in a fit of passion he had thrown her into the river, or that she owed to that immersion her present feeble condition; she would not listen with patience to one slighting expression or word of demur; her whole soul was wrapped up in him, and no tender, pure-soiled mother could have yearned over her child more eagerly than she did over the man whose very name I could scarcely utter with patience.

When she was gone I drew a long breath, and mentally wished that I might get my clutches on Smeaton firmly enough to treat him to a good long sentence of penal servitude.

I felt as if that would relieve my mind a bit.

A day or two later I came on Dinah and her companion, and took them without trouble, but they had not an article about them which could connect them with the robbery at Dinah's last place. After a short detention they were released, and I hoped that they would take fright and leave the city.

During my short acquaintance with Dinah it struck me that she was a great deal worse than her companion. "She is of the stuff that jail birds are made of, and a bad one at that," was my reflection, and I remember thinking that it would certainly not be long before I heard of her again, supposing they favored the city much longer with their presence.

I saw them occasionally after that, and noted the general decay in their appearance, and guessed at their means of living, but never managed to get near them. One evening I was surprised by a visit from Dinah at the Central. She looked savage and sullen— a perfect fiend.

"You want to take Will Smeaton?" she abruptly began. "I know you do, for you've been after him often enough."

"I would rather take you," was my cold reply, and I spoke the truth.

She affected to take the remark as a joke, and laughed savagely— having the merriment all to herself. Then she revealed her message. Smeaton and another were to break into a shop in the New Town by getting through a hatch, creeping along the roof, and thence descending through an unoccupied flat, and so reaching the workrooms and shop,

"You've quarreled with him, and this is your revenge, I suppose?" was my remark when she had finished: but Dinah's reply cannot be written down.

My only regret at the moment was that I could not warn Smeaton of his danger. Dinah went back and had dinner and supper with the man she had betrayed— actually broke bread with him and smiled in his face, and appeared more loving than she had showed herself for weeks.

A woman when good can be holier, purer, and more strong in her devotion and love than a man; but, when she is bad, the depths of iniquity which she can reach have never been touched by mortal man.

I sent over a posse of men one by one to the marked establishment, and when Smeaton and his companion appeared and ascended the stairs I followed, and so closed up the retreat.

They were not long gone. We heard the alarm, and some shouting and struggling, and soon saw Smeaton come scrambling out at the window on the roof by which he had entered, and come flying along the slates towards the hatch.

As he got close my head popped out in front of him, and he started— staggered back with an oath— lost his footing, and vanished over the edge of the roof. He was picked up on the pavement below, very much injured and quite senseless, and borne on a shutter to the Infirmary, while his captured companion was marched over to the Office and locked up.

Dinah, in ferocious joy over Smeaton's accident, got drunk and abusive, and was taken to the cells next day. Smeaton remained for the most part unconscious during two days and nights.

Towards the close of the second day a cab drove up to the Infirmary gate, and out of it stepped a young girl, so pale and feeble that every one thought it was a patient instead of a visitor who had arrived.

It was Jessie Aimers, who had risen from bed and taken that long journey the moment she heard of the accident. She was helped into the ward, and sat therewith Smeaton's hand in her own till evening, when he opened his eyes for a moment and hazily recognized her.

"Oh, Jessie, I'll never rise off this bed," he feebly exclaimed; and then, as her warm tears rained down on his cheeks, and her lips were pressed to his own, he said: "Dinna! dinna dae that! I dinna deserve it. Pray for me, Jessie, lass; it's a' I can ask o' ye now."

A screen had been put up round the bed, shutting them off from the gaze of the other patients; and inside of that the nurses glanced occasionally. They remained there, whispering and communing till Smeaton relapsed again.

Towards morning there was a cry, loud and piercing, behind the screen, but the night nurse was out of the ward at the moment. When she appeared one of the patients spoke of the cry, and the nurse looked in on the pair.

Jessie lay across the bed with her arms clasped tight about the patient, and her face hid in his bosom. Smeaton's face was marble-like, his eyes half open and fixed. The nurse knew that look at a glance, and called to her companion that Smeaton was dead, and she feared the young girl had fainted.

Gently they tried to disengage the clasping fingers that they might raise her and restore her to consciousness, but the deathly coldness of the thin hand caused them to start back and exchange a look of inquiry and alarm. They bent over her, they listened, all was still— still as the grave, still as eternity. Jessie was dead.

End