

**PAST  
MASTERS**

**252**

**Raoul Whitfield**

**"Saki"**

**Katharine Tynan**

**Dion Fortune**

**Bret Harte**

**Harold Mercer**

**Hermione Templeton**

**Edward Dyson**

**Gilbert Parker**

**and more**

# Past Masters 252

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

6 Mar 2026

## Contents

1: The Parson's Revenge / <i>Edward Dyson</i>	3
2: Resolutions / <i>Harold Mercer</i>	6
3: The Siren / <i>F. Anstey</i>	10
4: Killbohgan and Killboggan / <i>Hermione Templeton</i>	17
5: The Stolen Ingots / <i>R. Austin Freeman</i>	27
6: Old Roses / <i>Sir Gilbert Parker</i>	47
7: The Old Lady Flies / <i>Raoul F. Whitfield</i>	53
8: The Curate of Churnside / <i>Grant Allen</i>	64
9: In The Tules / <i>Bret Harte</i>	86
10: The Red Bracelet / <i>L. T. Meade &amp; Dr. Clifford Halifax</i>	101
11: The Image of the Lost Soul / <i>Saki</i>	125
12: The Heart of a Grand-father / <i>Katharine Tynan</i>	127
13: Mauryeen / <i>Katharine Tynan</i>	135
14: An Australian Ploughman's Story / <i>Anonymous</i>	142
15: Seamew Cavern / <i>Herbert Russell</i>	151
16: Clown of Fate / <i>Ladbroke Black</i>	157
17: The Pool of the Black One / <i>Robert E. Howard</i>	182
18: The Death Hound / <i>Dion Fortune</i>	206

*There's nothing like a 19th Century feud. Nothing like this one, anyway.*

## **1: The Parson's Revenge**

***Edward Dyson (as by Silas Snell)***

1865-1931

*Queenscliff Sentinel (Vic.), 18 Oct 1884*

I WAS a regular church-goer once, and wore black cloth and a sanctimonious countenance; but I never loved parsons. My affections were prejudiced against them by the first one I knew; a lank legged, lank locked purveyor of the comforts of religion, who shepherded the plate and the flock of our little corner of the Lord's vineyard.

He carried the name of Sloppy; and used to make poetry and maliciously mingle it in with the sermons, taking advantage of a sleeping congregation to get off his ineffable rot; and he gave us hell-fire enough at one sitting to cure the worst cold ever mortal man was afflicted with. I used to listen for a while in a dazed sort of way; then my thoughts would wander, and I imagined myself a cherub up aloft, playing chuckstones, and letting paving stones from the streets of the New Jerusalem fall onto Sloppy's glossy skull.

He had a nasty habit of convening meetings, presumably for the purpose of discussing church matters; and then reading his villainous rhymes to the people; and when the women said it was beautiful he would put on a look of vacant imbecility, and gurgle about his muses, while I cowered in a corner and struggled to restrain my murderous inclinations.

But one evening, when he got a crowd of us at the parsonage under the plea of arranging for a little picnic and then started mouthing an "Ode to Misery" of some five hundred verses, I let myself out, and stamped on his hat, threw his "Ode" in the fire, and broke some things, called him names, and knocked his bump of self esteem into a knot against the parlor fender, then left.

His friends advised him to fire a lawsuit into me, but he didn't. His revenge was fiendish; he played off the most malicious trick on me he could possibly light on. Next morning's *Age* contained the following advertisement:

*Wanted by well to do young man, a housekeeper. If satisfied with her after three months' trial, will marry her. Mother in-law no object.*

My name and address were appended to this.

At a glance I recognised the Rev. Sloppy's handiwork. Dim ideas of immediate flit, of barricading my house, or purchasing a reliable bull dog crowded before my dazed vision; but I gave them all up as impracticable, and

determined to see it out if it broke me up like a bomb shell. So I sat down to wait for the inevitable. I had not long to wait.

In about twenty minutes there came a knock, and in ambled a decrepid young thing, with weak curls that ran down from her head like the tendrils of a grape vine. I judged her to be sweet forty five, and she was as homely as a used up crockery crate.

She, said, "He, he he!" and likewise remarked "Good mornin', sir." Then she blushing drew a copy of the ad. from her hat and asked me was that my advertisement, pointing to Sloppy's imposition as if it was, she had come in answer.

I said "Yes, Miss, that is my advertisement; but I think you will hardly suit, You see I want a woman of some experience, plain-looking; and thirty at least. Young and beautiful brides like you are rather risky investments in these days of rampant and costly divorce cases. Do you understand? I am very sorry to have put you to so much trouble. Good day."

The aged damsel took herself away quite pleasant like, and presently somebody hit the door with a brick, and an angular Amazon strode in, dragging a massive trunk and a tow-headed, watery eyed girl along with her. She dumped the trunk in a corner, and seated her daughter on top of it; then, taking off her bonnet she hung it on the chandelier and proceeded to make herself at home.

"Have you come to stop, ma'am?" I asked. "If you have not, will you oblige by stating your business.

"Didn't you advertise for a missus?"

"I did. Are you going to put in for the job?"

"No, but my darter there is."

"Oh I beg pardon! That's your daughter, is it. Doesn't she appear to you to be a little off her dot?"

"Off her dot? You chunk! Why, that gal can make the best pancakes ever you rolled your tongue over, an' she's the most domesticated little thing in the colonies."

"Hum! Those are inducements, certainly; but she won't suit. The advertisement says mother-in-law no object; and you are an object. You can't get over that fact."

Then the Amazon began to argue with her gingham and probed the lobe of my ear off. But it was no go, and after breaking few things, she left, taking her trunk and daughter along, and brushing by a dissipated female who was the next applicant. This sweet creature was dirtily and scantily clad, and smelt strongly of last week's beer. She had a wild countenance and a nose like a blind bile.

I got rid of her for the price of a drink; and for five hours, after I was bombarded with females both old and young, thin and stout, great and small

but one and all outrageously ugly; the unanimity in this line was simply astonishing. I suffered somewhat during those five hours. All the applicants were more or less affectionate, and yearned for something to remember me by some little memento. It generally took the form of a lock of hair which they pulled out to save time, or a scrap of ear.

The widows were particularly affable. The way they mauled me about to get hair from a spot which experience had taught them was extra tender made me long to have a widow of my own.

And, worse still, when I got rid of the hungriest of the crowd, the domesticated young thing, the artist in pancakes, came back with a burglar who pressingly urged me to unlock the door, that he might tear my sanguinary lights out; and then, because I wouldn't, went round the house, breaking windows and informing me before he left that I had better get in a few funeral trappings, as he'd lay me out afore long, by Hades he would.

For months after that memorable day I received many remembrances in the shape of dead cats and offal, which were left on my doorstep by friends. Sloppy knew what he was about when he inserted that advertisement.

His dog was shot one day. Perhaps I don't know anything about it. Perhaps I don't....

---

*A New Year Comedy*

## **2: Resolutions**

*And How They Worked Out*

**Harold Mercer**

1882-1952

*Sun (Sydney) 8 Jan 1933*

"THAT'S another resolution gone! You were not to swear," said my wife sharply.

As a matter of fact it was the tent that had gone in a sudden gust of wind: and as I rushed to fix it, the flap of the canvas smacked me on one side of the face and then on the other, and after that on both sides at once, and tried to strangle me with the loose rope.

I gulped, and, struggling, gained a success. Half-blinded by a spurt of sand blown into my face, I proceeded to feel for the peg and fasten the rope securely.

"Ouch! Oh, you silly fool, that's my leg— not the peg!"

This was from my wife, but it was too late to save her when that fresh gust of wind came. It simply jerked her leg up, and she sat down.

What she did was as disgraceful as her attitude.

"What about your own resolution? The one about not losing your temper?" I sneered.

"The woman who wouldn't lose her temper, having to associate with you. would be an angel in heaven," she said.

"I wish you were!" I retorted. That started it, and it might have gone on for a long time, in spite of my reminders about our resolution that we were to cut out the quarrelling, had she not noticed something that caused her to splutter amazingly. As a matter of fact, I had noticed something myself: it was distinctly uncomfortable.

"You've been sitting in the butter!" she gurgled.

"That's a hell of a funny thing to laugh at!" I yelled, grabbing at the mixture of butter, the water in which it had been placed, and the sand that had been ground into it that decorated the seat of my pants. "You were a damn fool to place the stuff there."

"It was the cool side of the tent," she laughed. And then she suddenly stopped. I'd managed to detach a mass of the uncomfortable stuff and tried to fling it away, but it left my fingers unwillingly, and the wind, catching it, flung it fair into Amelia's face.

My wife is a bad-tempered woman. She didn't laugh— perhaps because she could not see herself. And she seemed to object to my laughing. Her sense of humor is one-sided. She wasn't able to say too much; that was one thing!

"Dragging me out— on a fool excursion like this— when I could have — been home— comfortably!" she spluttered.

"I like that!" I returned, warmly. "Wasn't it you who said we'd start the New Year better if we went out into the wide-open spaces and enjoyed Heaven's free air?— with all its flies and mosquitoes," I added bitterly. "We'd had a good experience of them, and there was more to come—"

"And look at your wide open spaces! So many tents that you can't walk out of your own without falling over a guy rope belonging to someone else's. And the peaceful serenity— four gramophones, half a dozen ukuleles and a saxophone going, now. with. I suppose more to follow when things get fairly going, and the people come back from the surf."

"If you'd had the sense to bring out our gramophone—"

"Yes, and hump it myself, from the car— like I have had to hump every thing! I wouldn't have agreed to coming out at all if I'd known I had to be a blasted camel!"

"And I wouldn't have come, either, if I'd known that the man I was married to was such a fool that he'd pitch our first camp right over an ants' nest! The children and I are going to suffer from those bites for days."

"Who got the worst of them?" I demanded. "Wasn't it me that had to move the blooming stuff, and fix the wretched tent again?"

"You've no idea the amusement you're giving the neighbors," she remarked, suddenly tranquil.

"To blazes with the neighbors—"

Abruptly I realised that she was right. Although it struck me bitterly that if we had stayed at home we could have had as big a row as we liked without the neighbors being able to listen in— at least, not so well.

Well, as we'd fooled ourselves into this fool idea of the open life, got up early when we would have been more comfortable in bed, quarrelled over the packing, humped heavy loads, fallen over rocks and tree roots in the search for suitable camping spots, and been bitten by ants, flies, and other insects, it was up to us to make the best of things, and not instead, make ourselves a free show for the neighbors.

So in our bathing togs we went down to the beach to join the kids, and got sunburnt and stung by blue-bottles and dumped, and covered with sand. it was Amelia who experienced the worst dumper and was worst stung; and she started to blame me for everything.

"You made a resolution not to accuse me unless you can prove—" I began.

"I can always prove everything, I say," she said.

"You made a resolution not to tell lies," I remarked, drily.

"A nice sort of man you are, to talk about lies!" she said suddenly. "And look at the place you've brought us to! Nice neighbors for your wife. That bold-

looking woman we passed on the way from the beach, with the bathing suit that looks as if it was made for a child of six! And that larrikin- looking husband, of hers!"

Fortunately, Amelia was in the mood for sleep. Usually I like her best when she is asleep. Her slumber left me with lime on my hands, so I had a wander. The people Amelia had declared to be larrikins proved to be not half-bad when happened to stumble upon their camp. It was unfortunate that the kiddies should get hungry and tired of the surf, and come back clamoring for food. They woke Amelia, and she started to look for me. She found me, too—unfortunately.

"You always liked low company, Herbert," she said acidly. "Drinking beer with people like that! Anyway, your resolution—"

"Blow the resolution." I retorted. I was reaching the limit.

"Wow!"

I regard it as fortunate that Amelia was bitten by a snake at that moment. Her squeals roused the campers nearby, and created a welcome diversion. Of course, it proved not to be a snake, but merely some thorns against which she had run her ankle. It put her off the thread of her resentment.

The children's hunger, anyway, demanded some attention: and I was busy burning myself and getting the smoke in my eyes in order to provide the smoky tea we subsequently drank. Then it was that a discovery was made.

"You're an idiot. Amelia!" I said. "You make a resolution not to use the tin-opener so much and the first thing you suggest is an excursion when the tin-opener may be legitimately used. But you don't bring the damned thing!"

"It's your fault. You did the packing."

We reminded each other, severely, about the resolution about quarrelling before the children (which had seemed rather superfluous, seeing that we had resolved to have no more quarrels), and settled down to enjoy a tea in spite of the absence of butter and the sand on everything. The tins were opened with a borrowed implement.

After tea we were so tired that we didn't notice the mosquitoes— for a time. They noticed us, however, and appreciated our company. Amelia was just telling me that I was a fool not to have thought of bringing some citronella, when the rain came. It didn't last long, but it was heavy while it did last, and, with that strong gust of wind, it made a wreck of our camp.

As drenched, we crawled from under the fallen canvas, Amelia announced firmly that we were going home.

I wasn't sorry, although I had to be a camel again, and my wife continued the all-inclusive conversation most of the way home, and I was stung once again— by the garage-man from whom I had to get some juice. But Amelia was really

tired when we arrived, and on my leaving her in the bedroom, saying I was going to fix the car, she merely grunted sleepily.

I knew there was a bucks' party on at Jenkins's flat nearby. Things were quite gay. I had made a resolution about staying out late, but practically all the other resolutions had gone, so why worry about that? Still a man has to go home to his wife sometimes.

"OH, HERB, how early you are up!" said my wife radiantly, as she woke when I entered the bedroom. "So you have kept that resolution about getting up early. I'm afraid I haven't, but I was so tired "

"I'll get the breakfast," I said hurriedly, astonished at her pleasantness, and anxious that she should not observe my state.

"Oh, you dear!" she said. "The outing must have, done you as much good as it has done me! Wasn't it beautiful? We'll go out again at the next weekend."

But that's one resolution I've made that I'm going to keep— that we won't!

---

### 3: The Siren

*F. Anstey*

1856-1934

*The Graphic, Summer 1882*

LONG LONG AGO, a siren lived all alone upon a rocky little island far out in the Southern Ocean. She may have been the youngest and most beautiful of the original three sirens, driven by her sisters' jealousy, or her own weariness of their society, to seek this distant home; or she may have lived there in solitude from the beginning.

But she was not unhappy; all she cared about was the admiration and worship of mortal men, and these were hers whenever she wished, for she had only to sing, and her exquisite voice would float away over the waters, until it reached some passing vessel, and then every one that heard was seized instantly with the irresistible longing to hasten to her isle and throw himself adoringly at her feet.

One day as she sat upon a low headland, looking earnestly out over the sparkling blue-green water before her, and hoping to discover the peak of some far-off sail on the hazy sea-line, she was startled by a sound she had never heard before— the grating of a boat's keel on the pebbles in the little creek at her side.

She had been too much absorbed in watching for distant ships to notice that a small bark had been gliding round the other side of her island, but now, as she glanced round, she saw that the stranger who had guided it was already jumping ashore and securing his boat.

Evidently she had not attracted him there, for she had been too indolent to sing of late, and he did not seem even to have seen her, or to have landed from any other motive than curiosity.

He was quite young, gallant-looking and sunburnt, with brown hair curling over his forehead, an open face and honest grey eyes. And as she looked at him, the fancy came to her that she would like to question him and hear his voice; she would find out, if she could, what manner of beings these mortals were over whom she possessed so strange a power.

Never before had such a thought entered her mind, notwithstanding that she had seen many mortals of every age and rank, from captain to the lowest galley slave; but then she had only seen them under the influence of her magical voice, when they were struck dumb and motionless, after which— except as proofs of her power— they did not interest her.

But this stranger was still free— so long as she did not choose to enslave him; and for some reason she did not choose to do so just yet.

As he turned towards her, she beckoned to him imperiously, and he saw the slender graceful figure above for the first time,—the fairest maiden his eyes had

ever beheld, with an unearthly beauty in her wonderful dark blue eyes, and hair of the sunniest gold,— he stood gazing at her in motionless uncertainty, for he thought he must be cheated by a vision.

He came nearer, and, obeying a careless motion of her hand, threw himself down on a broad shelf of rock a little below the spot where she was seated; still he did not dare to speak lest the vision should pass away.

She looked at him for some time with an innocent, almost childish, curiosity shining under her long lashes. At last she gave a low little laugh: 'Are you *afraid* of me?' she asked; 'why don't you speak? but perhaps,' she added to herself, 'mortals *cannot* speak.'

'I was silent,' he said, 'lest by speaking I should anger you— for surely you must be some goddess or sea-nymph?'

'Ah, you *can* speak!' she cried. 'No, I am no goddess or nymph, and you will not anger me— if only you will tell me many things I want to know!'

And she began to ask him all the questions she could think of: first about the great world in which men lived, and then about himself, for she was very curious, in a charmingly wilful and capricious fashion of her own.

He answered frankly and simply, but it seemed as if some influence were upon him which kept him from being dazzled and overcome by her loveliness, for he gave no sign as yet of yielding to the glamour she cast upon all other men, nor did his eyes gleam with the despairing adoration the siren knew so well.

She was quick to perceive this, and it piqued her. She paid less and less attention to the answers he gave her, and ceased at last to question him further.

Presently she said, with a strange smile that showed her cruel little teeth gleaming between her scarlet lips, 'Why don't you ask me who *I* am, and what I am doing here alone? do not you care to know?'

'If you will deign to tell me,' he said.

'Then I will tell you,' she said; 'I am a siren— are you not afraid *now*?'

'Why should I be afraid?' he asked, for the name had no meaning in his ears.

She was disappointed; it was only her voice— nothing else, then— that deprived men of their senses; perhaps this youth was proof even against that; she longed to try, and yet she hesitated still.

'Then you have never heard of me,' she said; 'you don't know why I sit and watch for the great gilded ships you mortals build for yourselves?'

'For your pleasure, I suppose,' he answered. 'I have watched them myself many a time; they are grand as they sweep by, with their sharp brazen beaks cleaving the frothing water, and their painted sails curving out firm against the sky. It is good to hear the measured thud of the great oars and the cheerful cries of the sailors as they clamber about the cordage.'

She laughed disdainfully. 'And you think I care for all that!' she cried. 'Where is the pleasure of looking idly on and admiring?— that is for them, not for me.'

As these galleys of yours pass, I sing—and when the sailors hear, they must come to me. Man after man leaps eagerly into the sea, and makes for the shore— until at last the oars grind and lock together, and the great ship drifts helplessly on, empty and aimless. I like that.'

'But the men?' he asked, with an uneasy wonder at her words.

'Oh, they reach the shore— some of them, and then they lie at my feet, just as you are lying now, and I sing on, and as they listen they lose all power or wish to move, nor have I ever heard them speak as you speak; they only lie there upon the sand or rock, and gaze at me always, and soon their cheeks grow hollower and hollower, and their eyes brighter and brighter— and it is I who make them so!'

'But I see them not,' said the youth, divided between hope and fear; 'the beach is bare; where, then, are all those gone who have lain here?'

'I cannot say,' she replied carelessly; 'they are not here for long; when the sea comes up it carries them away.'

'And you do not care!' he cried, struck with horror at the absolute indifference in her face; 'you do not even try to keep them here?'

'Why should I care?' said the siren lightly; 'I do not want them. More will always come when I wish. And it is so wearisome always to see the same faces, that I am glad when they go.'

'I will not believe it, siren,' groaned the young man, turning from her in bitter anguish; 'oh, you cannot be cruel!'

'No, I am not cruel,' she said in surprise. 'And why will you not believe me? It is true!'

'Listen to me,' he said passionately: 'do you know how bitter it is to die,— to leave the sunlight and the warm air, the fair land and the changing sea?'

'How can I know?' said the siren. 'I shall never die— unless— unless something happens which will never be!'

'You will live on, to bring this bitterness upon others for your sport. We mortals lead but short lives, and life, even spent in sorrow, is sweet to most of us; and our deaths when they come bring mourning to those who cared for us and are left behind. But you lure men to this isle, and look on unmoved as they are borne away!'

'No, you are wrong,' she said; 'I am not cruel, as you think me; when they are no longer pleasant to look at, I leave them. I never see them borne away. I never thought what became of them at last. Where are they now?'

'They are dead, siren,' he said sadly, 'drowned. Life was dear to them; far away there were women and children to whom they had hoped to return, and who have waited and wept for them since. Happy years were before them, and to some at least— but for you— a restful and honoured old age. But you called them, and as they lay here the greedy waves came up, dashed them from these

rocks and sucked them, blinded, suffocating, battling painfully for breath and life, down into the dark green depths. And now their bones lie tangled in the sea-weed, but they themselves are wandering, sad, restless shades, in the shadowy world below, where is no sun, no happiness, no hope— but only sighing evermore, and the memory of the past!

She listened with drooping lids, and her chin resting upon her soft palm; at last she said with a slight quiver in her voice, 'I did not know—I did not mean them to die. And what can I do? I cannot keep back the sea.'

'You can let them sail by unharmed,' he said.

'I cannot!' she cried. 'Of what use is my power to me if I may not exercise it? Why do you tell me of men's sufferings— what are they to me?'

'They give you their lives,' he said; 'you fill them with a hopeless love and they die for it in misery— yet you cannot even pity them!'

'Is it love that brings them here?' she said eagerly. 'What is this that is called love? For I have always known that if I ever love— but then only— I must die, though what love may be I know not. Tell me, so that I may avoid it!'

'You need not fear, siren,' he said, 'for, if death is only to come to you through love, you will never die!'

'Still, I want to know,' she insisted; 'tell me!'

'If a stranger were to come some day to this isle, and when his eyes meet yours, you feel your indifference leaving you, so that you have no heart to see him lie ignobly at your feet, and cannot leave him to perish miserably in the cold waters; if you desire to keep him by your side— not as your slave and victim, but as your companion, your equal, for evermore— that will be love!'

'If that is love,' she cried joyously, 'I shall indeed never die! But that is not how men love *me*?'

 she added.

'No,' he said; 'their love for you must be some strange and enslaving passion, since they will submit to death if only they may hear your voice. That is not true love, but a fatal madness.'

'But if mortals feel love for one another,' she asked, '*they* must die, must they not?'

'The love of a man for a maiden who is gentle and good does not kill— even when it is most hopeless,' he said; 'and where she feels it in return, it is well for both, for their lives will flow on together in peace and happiness.'

He had spoken softly, with a far away look in his eyes that did not escape the siren.

'And you love one of your mortal maidens like that?' she asked. 'Is she more beautiful than I am?'

'She is mortal,' he said, 'but she is fair and gracious, my maiden; and it is she who has my love, and will have it while I live.'

'And yet,' she said, with a mocking smile, 'I could make you forget her.'

Her childlike waywardness had left her as she spoke the words, and a dangerous fire was shining in her deep eyes.

'Never!' he cried; 'even you cannot make me false to my love! And yet,' he added quickly, 'I dare not challenge you, enchantress that you are; what is my will against your power?'

'You do not love me yet,' she said; 'you have called me cruel, and reproached me; you have dared to tell me of a maiden compared with whom I am nothing! You shall be punished. I will have you for my own, like the others!'

'Siren,' he pleaded, seizing one of her hands as it lay close to him on the hot grey rock, 'take my life if you will— but do not drive away the memory of my love; let me die, if I must die, faithful to her; for what am I, or what is my love, to you?'

'Nothing,' she said scornfully, and yet with something of a caress in her tone, 'yet I want you; you shall lie here, and hold my hand, and look into my eyes, and forget all else but me.'

'Let me go,' he cried, rising, and turning back to regain his bark; 'I choose life while I may!'

She laughed. 'You have no choice,' she said; 'you are mine!' she seemed to have grown still more radiantly, dazzlingly fair, and presently, as the stranger made his way to the creek where his boat was lying, she broke into the low soft chant whose subtle witchery no mortals had ever resisted as yet.

He started as he heard her, but still he went on over the rocks a little longer, until at last he stopped with a groan, and turned slowly back; his love across the sea was fading fast from his memory; he felt no desire to escape any longer; he was even eager at last to be back on the ledge at her feet and listen to her for ever.

He reached it and sank down with a sigh, and a drowsy delicious languor stole over him, taking away all power to stir or speak.

Her song was triumphant and mocking, and yet strangely tender at times, thrilling him as he heard it, but her eyes only rested now and then, and always indifferently, upon his upturned face.

He wished for nothing better now than to lie there, following the flashing of her supple hands upon the harp-strings and watching every change of her fair face. What though the waves might rise round him and sweep him away out of sight, and drown her voice with the roar and swirl of waters? it would not be just yet.

And the siren sang on; at first with a cruel pride at finding her power supreme, and this youth, for all his fidelity, no wiser than the rest; he would waste there with yearning, hopeless passion, till the sight of him would weary her, and she would leave him to drift away and drown forgotten.

Yet she did not despise him as she had despised all the others; in her fancy his eyes bore a sad reproach, and she could look at him no longer with indifference.

Meanwhile the waves came rolling in fast, till they licked the foot of the rock, and as the foam creamed over the shingle, the siren found herself thinking of the fate which was before him, and, as she thought, her heart was wrung with a new strange pity.

She did not want him to be drowned; she would like him there always at her feet, with that rapt devotion upon his face; she almost longed to hear his voice again— but that could never be!

And the sun went down, and the crimson flush in the sky and on the sea faded out, the sea grew grey and crested with the white billows, which came racing in and broke upon the shore, roaring sullenly and raking back the pebbles with a sharp rattle at each recoil. The siren could sing no longer; her voice died away, and she gazed on the troubled sea with a wistful sadness in her great eyes.

At last a wave larger than the others struck the face of the low cliff with a shock that seemed to leave it trembling, and sent the cold salt spray dashing up into the siren's face.

She sprang forward to the edge and looked over, with a sudden terror lest the ledge below should be bare— but her victim lay there still, bound fast by her spell, and careless of the death that was advancing upon him.

Then she knew for the first time that she could not give him up to the sea, and she leaned down to him and laid one small white hand upon his shoulder. 'The next wave will carry you away,' she cried, trembling; 'there is still time; save yourself, for I cannot let you die!'

But he gave no sign of having heard her, but lay there motionless, and the wind wailed past them and the sea grew wilder and louder.

She remembered now that no efforts of his own could save him— he was doomed, and she was the cause of it, and she hid her face in her slender hands, weeping for the first time in her life.

The words he had spoken in answer to her questions about love came back to her: 'It was true, then,' she said to herself; 'it is love that I feel for him. But I cannot love— I must not love him— for if I do, my power is gone, and I must throw myself into the sea!'

So she hardened her heart once more, and turned away, for she feared to die; but again the ground shook beneath her, and the spray rose high into the air, and then she could bear it no more—whatever it cost her, she must save him—for if he died, what good would her life be to her?

'If one of us must die,' she said, 'I will be that one. I am cruel and wicked, as *he* told me; I have done harm enough!' and bending down, she wound her arms round his unconscious body and drew him gently up to the level above.

'You are safe now,' she whispered; 'you shall not be drowned—for I love you. Sail back to your maiden on the mainland, and be happy; but do not hate me for the evil I have wrought, for suffering and death have come to me in my turn!'

The lethargy into which he had fallen left him under her clinging embrace, and the sad, tender words fell almost unconsciously upon his dulled ears; he felt the touch of her hair as it brushed his cheek, and his forehead was still warm with the kiss she had pressed there as he opened his eyes— only to find himself alone.

For the fate which the siren had dreaded had come upon her at last; she had loved, and she had paid the penalty for loving, and never more would her wild, sweet voice beguile mortals to their doom.

---

## 4: Killbohgan and Killboggan

*Hermione Templeton*

Hermione Templeton Kavanagh, 1861-1933

*McClure's Magazine* Oct 1906

ONCE upon a time, and a black-fortuned, potato-blighted time it was, there lived near the town of Clonmel, in the beautiful County of Tipperary, a sober-minded farmer named Jerry O'Flynn.

Of cattle or horses or sheep or goats or any four-footed beasts, Jerry had none, saving and barring a beautiful white pig which he had picked up at his own threshold on a blustery evening in April, when it was a little, stray, shivering, pink-nosed bonive.

Well, that same pig grew and grew, fat and silky and good-natured, till it was the pride and the pleasure of the family to currycomb him, to wash him, to feed him, and to rub his fine broad back. And when the time came for him to go the way of all pigs, Jerry's thatched roof covered as sore-hearted a family as dwelt in all Ireland. However, the piteous law which compels the strong to prey upon the weak, was in this instance considered to be inexorable; so, the evening before the day of execution, Jerry repaired to a secluded spot behind the high, black, turf stack and there, with his own unwilling hands, arranged the grim paraphernalia for the morrow's tragedy. When this dismal work was finished, the honest fellow had not enough courage left to carry himself back to the cottage, there to face the accusing eyes of his children; so he slunk over to the stile in the lane and stood with his right arm thrown listlessly about the hedge post, lost in troubled contemplation of the unconscious and confiding victim who stretched himself luxuriously in the grass at his master's feet.

So preoccupied was the lad with his bothersome thoughts, that he failed to notice the hasty approach of good-natured old Mrs. Clancey, and he answered her cheery "God save ye" with a half-frightened start.

"I've come to tell ye, Jerry agra," the excited woman panted, "that there's a letther— a big blue letther— from Amerikay— waitin' for ye down in the town; and the postmaster (bad cess to him) wouldn't let me have it to bring to you. He even rayfused to open it for me, so I might bring ye the news who it was from. The curse of the crows light on him!" She spoke with such hearty bitterness as to suggest a keenly disappointed curiosity.

"Thank ye, and thank ye ag'in for your throuble, Mrs. Clancey! You're sure the letther was from Amerikay?"

"Oh, faith I am; the postmaster hilt it up, an' more than a dozen of us saw the postmark."

"My, but that's quare," muttered Jerry. "I have no one in Amerikay who could be afther sending me a letther, barrin' me Uncle Dan, and Dan's dead an'

gone, Heaven rest him, these two years. I'm bilin' to know who the letther's from, but I can't go afther it the morrow bekase," and he sighed deeply, "we've set that day for the killin' of Char-les, the pig there. And it's a red-handed murdherer I feel meself already, Mrs. Clancey ma'am."

Well, at these words, strange as it may seem, Char-les gave a startled grunt, rose to his fat haunches, and threw a look of such resentful surprise from under his white eyelashes, first at Jerry, and then at Mrs. Clancey, that the old woman, with a muttered "God save us, will ye look at that now," shrank back a pace from the stile.

"I wouldn't kill that pig, Jerry O'Flynn," says she, with a wag of her forefinger. "I wouldn't kill that pig if he was as full of goold suverings as the Bank of England, Ireland, and Scotland put together, so I wouldn't!"

The smouldering trouble in Jerry's gray eyes deepened, and he sucked hard at his empty, black pipe.

"And why wouldn't ye, Mrs. Clancey ma'am? What raysons have ye agin him?" asked Jerry, peering anxiously at her from under the rim of his old caubeen. Mrs. Clancey deliberately folded her arms in her shawl, and came a step nearer the stile.

"Well, first and foremost," says she, "he is a shupernatural baste, and there's a knowlegeableness in the cock of his white eye when he turns it on me that makes me shiver, so it does. Just look at him sittin' there now! Look at the saygacious twisht of the tail of him. I'll warrant he ondherstands every worrud we're thinkin', let alone sayin'— conshuming to him."

Jerry threw an apprehensive eye over his shoulder at the pig who now sat with his back toward them, solemnly twisting his tail first this way, then that. But for all his seeming indifference, there was such a subtle suggestion of listening in the twitch of the beast's ears and the hump of his broad shoulders, that Jerry placed a cautious hand to his mouth when he whispered, "Do ye think so, Mrs. Clancey? No, no, it's only just the natural cultivaytion of the baste. Though I'll not deny that Char-les has sometimes the look of a Christian on him. Then, again, his ways are so friendly and polite that it goes sore agin me heart to lift a hand till him, so, it does. Sure, pigs have feelings as well as you or I, and you wouldn't like to be kilt yourself, Mrs. Clancey, I'm thinkin'."

The unhappy personal comparison offended Mrs. Clancey's ever-sensitive dignity, so with head askew and tight lips she replied, "If I wor a pig, which Heaven forbid, I hope I'd be philosopher enough to be satisfied with me station in loife. Pigs were born to be kilt; how else could they be turned into things needful? 'Tis the least they can expect."

"Thru fer ye!" apologetically sighed Jerry. "And to substantiate what ye're sayin', there's the rint long due, an' Christmas almost on top of us, and the childher needin' shoes, an' herself fairly perishin' for a bit of a bonnet; an' look

at him! There sits tay, an' bonnet, an' shoes, an' rint, an' lashin's an' lavin's of tabaccy; and here am I wid an empty poipe, too tindherhearted to transmogrify the baste. What'll I do at all, at all?"

"Faith, I dunno, Jerry me bouchal. It's beyant me," replied Mrs. Clancey, turning to go. "But"— and a sudden thought halted her—"tomorrow is market day at Clonmel, and if that same Char-les wor my pig, I'd have him halfway there before the sun stuck a leg over the mountain, an' I'd sell him widout the flutter of an eyelid. By that manes, ye'd shift the raysponsibility onto himself. And if Char-les is half as wise as he purtinds to be, lave him alone, but he'll take care of himself."

With a self-satisfied toss of her head and a cheerful "Good night," the wise woman took herself hurriedly up the road.

Jerry leaned heavily on the stile and gazed with unseeing eyes at the brown shawl fast disappearing in the shadows, until he was startled by two short, indignant grunts at his side. Looking quickly around, he met the reproachful eyes of the pig gazing steadfastly up at him.

"Arrah, don't be blaming me, Char-les, me poor lad! Don't look at me that way! Me heart's fair broke, so it is. Haven't I raised you since you were the size of that hand? An' a sociabler, civiler-mannered baste I niver saw. Musha, I wisht you were a cow, so I do; then you wouldn't be a pig an' have to be kilt. Heigh, ho! Sorrows the day! Come along up with me, agra, an' we'll have a petatie."

That night, long after the hearth was swept and the childer and herself were in bed, Jerry sat with his chin in his hands, gazing moodily into the smoldering turf. The heavy task of the morrow drove all wish for the bed from his mind, so the leaden-hearted lad decided to sit up until morning— the better to get an early start.

As thus he waited, the stillness of the night grew heavier and heavier around him, broken only by the spluttering of the ash-covered turf at his feet, and he felt the darkness of the room creeping up from behind, and pressing down upon his shoulders like a great cloak.

The expiring rush light on the old oak mantel above his head struggled feebly with the strangling shadows as it burned itself to the very rim of the tall brass candlestick. But the contest proved a hopeless one, and so at last, with one despairing spurt of yellow flame, the vanquished light sank gurgling and choking out of sight. Jerry marked how its soul, in one slender, wavering spire of gray smoke, crept softly upward and disappeared. With a little shivering shrug, the lad drew his stool closer into the hearth. "Someone stepped over me grave sartin that time," he complained. "My, but isn't this a murdherin' shuperstitious night?"

And the turf fire at his feet— sure, never before had its dull red caverns held so many weird and grotesque phantoms; an old woman with a bundle of sticks

on her back glowed for an instant there, then suddenly changed and sank into a body stretched out on a low bier. And then the body rose slowly upright and stood a tall, long-faced, hunchbacked man who soon spread and spread, and then crumbled into a pack of running hounds. Jerry's fascinated eyes watched the pack until, with a sharp crackle and a little hiss of flame, the hounds dropped into an open sea of gray ashes. As they disappeared, a sudden chill filled the whole room, and on that instant, loud and shrill, Phelim, the old black cock, crowed from his perch outside the door— a most unlucky sign before midnight, as everyone knows. Jerry flung a startled look at the clock. Its two warning fingers pointed the hour of midnight. He hastily drew himself together on the stool, counting the slow, heavy strokes and dreading he knew not what. The last chime of the old clock was yet tingling through the room, when Jerry heard (and his heart turned to jelly at the sound) a strange, weird voice calling from outside under the window.

"Jerry! Jerry! Jerry O'Flynn!" wailed the voice. "Why don't you open the dure?"

But Jerry never moved; he sat with stiffened hair and wild, straining eyes fixed on the black windowpanes.

"Jerry! Jerry!" demanded the voice, now harsh and commanding. "I ask you once more, will you open?"

Slowly, like one asleep, Jerry arose and step by step, retreated backward till his groping hands touched the wall behind him. There with parted, dry lips, and trembling knees, he waited.

The clock had ticked five times— he timed it by his beating heart— when, without so much as a bolt being drawn, the door swung wide open, and from the blackness without, what should step boldly over the threshold but Char-les the pig. Not as he was wont to come, mind you, with friendly grunt and careless swagger, but silent, and stern, and masterful. He marched into the room, over to the fireplace, and sat himself upright in quiet dignity upon the stool that Jerry had just left. Jerry never moved a muscle, but stood frozen with surprise and growing resentment that Char-les, the pig, should give himself so many airs and make himself so free about the house.

The beast never deigned so much as a side look at his master but, wriggling himself into a comfortable position on the stool, he opened his mouth and, in a gruff patronizing way, began to speak. At the sound of the strange voice, all the boy's fears rushed back on him.

"Jerry O'Flynn," said the pig, "what are ye afeared of? Come over and sit on that stool ferninst me, an' don't stand there shiverin' and shaken' like a cowardly bosthoon!"

"I'm not afeared," quavered Jerry as he sidled over and seated himself gingerly on the very edge of the stool. "But may I ax yez a fair, civil question?" says he.

"You may not," snapped Char-les. "You're here now to do as you're bid, and not to be axin' questions."

At this unheard-of impudence, Jerry's anger got the better of his fright. "As I'm bid!" he spluttered, thumping his knee. "What do you mane? Am n't I the masther?"

"Masther! Ho, ho! Masther! Be-dad, will ye listen to that!" roared the pig. "Why you dundherheaded omadhaun, who has been currycombing me, an' brushing me down all these months, an' who has been working for me early and late in the fields, to get butthermilk an' petaties for me brakwusts, I'd like to know! Masther indeed! Let me hear no more of that," grunted the pig, crossing his legs as he spoke. Jerry scratched his head in furious bewilderment.

"Tundher an' turf!" he gasped. "Thru for ye, Char-les! I never thought of it that way. But thin, me lad, the rayson ye got such grand care was because I intinded to—" He stopped short, frightened out of his seven senses by a quiet look in the pig's eye.

"Intended to what?" asked Char-les calmly.

"Nawthin'," mumbled Jerry.

"Umph!" the pig grunted. "Fill the poipe and hand it over to me, and pay attention, for I've something to tell you. You know by this time, I suppose, that it's no ord'nary baste you have ferninst ye; an' I want ye to undherstand," says he, pointing to his pipe, "that tomorrow mornin', whin ye're takin' me to market, you'll be thtravelin' in much betther company than I'll be in."

"Well, who and what are ye at all, at all?" demanded Jerry.

The pig leaned over and got a coal for his pipe. "Listen, and I'll expatiate," he puffed. "You must know that I am Killbohgan, the ould ancient Milesian maygician who, in an unlucky moment, had the comeither put on him by Killboggan, an oulder an' a trifle ancienther enchanter; and who, to escape from the parsecutions of Killboggan, changed himself into a hare."

"Oh, by the powers!" cried Jerry, slapping his knee with his hand. "The first hard worruk ye'll do in the mornin' will be to go out an' change me flock of ducks intil a herd of cows, so it will."

"Oh, you poor man," sighed the magician. "There was a time when such a thrick 'us be only sport and game for me. But wirrasthru, that was hundherds of years ago. I once changed a hill of red ants into a dhrove of wild ulephants to plaze one of me sick childher. But Killboggan has dhrawn all the power from me now, an' I used the last spell I had that midnight whin I changed meself into a wee white bonive before your own horse-pitiful dure."

The pig scratched his ear reflectively with the stem of his pipe, and smiled, and shook his head sadly when Jerry remarked: "I always knew there was something shuperior in your charackther, Char-les."

"Be that as it may be," continued Char-les, "as I was sayin': afther I had changed meself intil a hare, what did the bliggard Killboggan do but turn himself intil a hound, and for years and years, he hunted me from one end of Ireland ground to the other. One day, as we were goin' lickety splicket up the Giant's Causeway, the villain nearly had me by the hind leg, and findin' meself in such a duspurate amplush, I quick turned meself intil a herring an' dhropped intil the say.

"Well, anyway, it wasn't a minute till Killboggan had metamurphied himself intil a whale, and, by the mortal man, came splashing in afther me. And so, for hundherds of years, we'd been rummagin' and rampagin' from one ind of the everlastin' salt says to the other, till on Chewsdays last April, Ned Driscoll, who was out fishing for herrings, caught me in his net. An' as he was passin' your door that same night, I slipped out of his basket an' turned meself into a purty white bonive in the road beyant."

"Well, well, d'ye mind that," exclaimed Jerry. "Wondhers'll never sayse. And you can't gainsay, Char-les, but what you've got the best of good thratement."

"It's the truth you're spakin'," nodded the pig. "And now to prove me gratitude, I'll show ye a way to fill your pockets with goold. Whenever you need a little money, just take me to the nearest fair and sell me for the best price ye can get. Then go your ways, and never fear, but I'll be back to ye safe an' sound by cockcrow."

In his excitement over this prospect, Jerry lost sight entirely of the sheer dishonesty of the plan. "Oh, by the powers," he exalted, "the goose that laid the goolden egg is a mere flaybite by comparison to you!"

"There's only one thing ye must be careful of," said the magician, raising his pipe warningly to his nose, "and that one thing is this: you are on no account to sell me to a dark, long-faced man with a hump on his back, for that'll be the tarnation schaymer of the worruuld, Killboggan. But see, the day is breaking! Tie the rope to me leg, and off to Clonmel with us."

Jerry took the sociable creature at his word, and down the road they put. But the journey was so delayed by wonderful tales of goints and of magicians and by some fine old ballads that Char-les sang as they sat under a hedge to rest, that it was the middle of the forenoon before they found themselves in the busy marketplace of the fair. At once, Jerry was hailed on all sides, and it wasn't long till he was offered two pounds for his fine pig. Almost immediately aftherwards, Red Shaun, the drover, raised the bid to two pounds ten.

"No," cried Jerry. "I'll not take a penny less than three pound. And it's ashamed I am to part with him for that. Here you, Wullum!" he called to his first

cousin, William Hagen, who stood by. "There's a letter for me in the post office byant. Do you hold Char-les here till I go for it."

He slipped the rope into William's hand and was off like a shot. It wasn't two minutes till he was back again with the letter in his pocket. There stood William, a glad smile on his round, red face, and four gold sovereigns shining in his open palm. But the pig was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Char-les?" shouted Jerry, a cold fear gripping his heart.

"Char-les is gone," chuckled William, "but here's the price of him; and a pound more than you axed for the lazy baste."

"Who bought him?" demanded Jerry anxiously. "Tell me quick, who bought him?"

"Sorra, do I know who the long-faced, black, ould targer was? But he seemed mighty glad to get the pig at four pounds and was in a great hurry to be away with himself."

Jerry tried to speak, but his voice at first failed him. "Did the schaymer have a hump on his back, I dunno?" he managed at last to gasp.

"No less," answered William, "a hump like a camel's. But what's come over ye, man? You're as white as a ghost."

For answer, Jerry pushed William aside and dashed madly into the surging crowd; and for the rest of the day, he searched every nook and corner for some trace of the lost Char-les, but in vain. It was well on to midnight when, footsore and sorry-hearted, the remorseful lad lifted the latch of his own cottage door. As he did, the breath almost left him, for there on the same stool, just as before, sat Char-les. But not altogether the same either, for instead of the usual jolly expression worn by the pig, there was now on his countenance a settled look of hopeless dejection. And Jerry noticed also that, although the pig's body was as big as ever, his sides were almost transparent. Indeed, the tongs leaning against the wall, near where the creature sat, were quite visible through the poor fellow's ribs.

As Jerry walked slowly toward the fireplace, the pig addressed him, and the sad tremble in his voice went straight to his master's heart.

"I'm dead now; now I'm dead, Jerry," wailed the pig. "I wrastled with that scoundhrel Killboggan till tin minutes ago, and his spells and charrums have me melted away to a lookingglass image of meself. Oh me, oh my, oh me, oh my! By accident, I got him down at last and managed to escape and fly to you. But he's comin'. He'll be here in a minute, and then goodbye forever to the raynowned Killbohgan. I can do no more. I'll vanish entirely."

"Och, what a murderin' pity," mourned Jerry, wringing his hands. "Is there no help for you?"

"There's only one poor chanst in all the worruld," moaned Char-les, "but I don't think you'd be ayquil to the task. If you could manage to stuff a handful of

salt into Killboggan's mouth, that'd put an end to his powers and his persecutions. I'd soon grow fat again. But sure, what's the use of talkin'— Oh, by this and that, here he is!"

The pig made a jump and a mad scramble for the other room and dived under the bed, and Jerry barely had time to snatch a fistful of salt from a crock on the dresser shelf, when the kitchen door flew open, and in strode a tall, humpbacked man with the longest, darkest face Jerry had ever seen.

"You have that villain Killboggan here somewhere, an' you'd better let me have him at once," croaked the dark man in a deep, harsh voice. He stood wide on his legs in the middle of the floor. "Ha, there he is, skulkin' under the bed. Wait till I have him out and finish him here ferinst ye."

With these words, the magician made a bolt for the other room, but as he did, Jerry, with a courage which has since become the settled boast of all his descendants, gave a quick spring and landed fair and square on the ugly intruder's back. And then began a struggle which, for noise and destruction, has never been equaled, before or since, in any respectable man's kitchen. With his left arm clasped tight about the long, bony neck, Jerry strove with his right hand to thrust the fistful of salt into the villain's mouth.

Round and round spun the magician, as fast as any top, striving desperately meanwhile to avoid the handful of salt which Jerry just as desperately was endeavoring to make him swallow. From one end of the kitchen to the other they whirled, Jerry's legs flying out behind him like a couple of flails and sweeping everything in their way. Down went the table, up in the air flew the two stools, crash went the poor old clock, and, with one wild sweep, the two dignified brass candlesticks flew madly off the mantel. And then, saddest of all to relate, swish, crack! went Jerry's two legs against the churn-dasher, and the five gallons of fresh, sweet buttermilk spread like a white sheet over the floor.

"Oh, ye murdherin' thafe of the worruld! Oh, me two misfortunate legs!" roared Jerry. He gave the magician such a poke in the back with his knee as to drive for an instant every whiff of breath out of the rascal's body.

"Huroo! Huroo!" shouted Killboggan's smothered voice from under the bed.

At that, the frantic enchanter changed his tactics. He now stood in the middle of the floor, bending his body up and down with the greatest rapidity, so that Jerry fluttered back and forth like a shirt on a clothesline in windy weather.

The brave man, however, never weakened his hold, and Killboggan soon found out that this plan was useless, too. So what does the rascalion of an enchanter do but begin backing rapidly toward the fireplace.

"Oh, murdher in Irish, this is where the spalpeen's got me," groaned poor Jerry, twisting a frightened eye over his shoulder at the turf fire.

"Keep a firm grip on him, whatever happens," encouraged the invisible Killboggan. "Ye're doin' foine."

Whether Killboggan intended to seat the poor lad on the live coals will never be known. At any rate, if such was his uncharitable intention, the maddened wizard miscalculated the direction, and instead of finding the fireplace, he succeeded only in banging the heroic Jerry against the wall with a terrible thump.

Hard as it was on the poor lad's bones, that same bump proved to be Jerry's salvation; for the rattling jar of it loosened the big, heavy picture of Dan'l O'Connell which hung enshrined on the whitewashed wall above them, and, as though of its own volition, down came Dan'l crash on Killboggan's head. The glass was smashed into smithereens, and the heavy frame hung itself round the neck of the bewildered magician like an ox yoke.

And that wasn't the best of it, either, for at this same moment, Killboggan's two feet slipped in the buttermilk, and down he went on his back to the floor like a load of turf. The grunt the fallen wizard let out of him could have been heard in the seven corners of the parish. There was an exultant "Hooroo!" from under the bed, and the next instant, Jerry, gasping and spluttering, was seated on the black lad's chest, striving still with might and main to pry open the long jaws and to crush the handful of salt through the scraggly yellow teeth.

Slowly the great jaws opened, and our hayro was making haste to poke in the saving salt, when suddenly a hand caught him from behind, and a familiar voice spoke in his ear.

"Get up out of that. I'm ashamed of ye. What are ye doin' to that stool?" It was his wife, Katie, who spoke.

But Jerry, breathing hard, still clung desperately to Killboggan, until looking more closely, what was his surprise and consternation to find that the wizard had some way changed himself into one of their own three-legged stools!

Jerry rose slowly to his stiffened knees and looked about him in great bewilderment, as well he might; for, wonder of wonders, there was no sign whatever in the room of the late desperate struggle. From his old place on the wall, Dan'l O'Connell, unharmed, smiled down lofty and serene upon the neatly set kitchen, while upright and solemn, the dark churn stood in its own quiet corner by the dresser. Indeed, there was not an article of furniture out of its place, and Jerry, as he knelt, looked round in vain for the sign of a single drop of buttermilk on the floor.

"Where's Killboggan?" he gasped, as he struggled to his feet.

"Kill who?" laughed Katie in stitches. "I've seen no Killboggan or Killhoggan, or Kill anybody else, aither. But you and that bliggard Char-les should be halfway to Clonmel by this time."

"Char-les, Char-les," Jerry repeated mournfully, wagging his head. "Sure, Char-les is gone, Katie, an' we'll never see the poor hayro ag'in."

"Won't we, then," laughed Katie. "Quit dhramin', avourneen, an' see who's lookin' in the door at ye."

Jerry looked as he was bidden, and there, with his head poked over the threshold, to his master's infinite amazement, stood Char-les, fat and comfortable-looking as ever, with a roguish smile in his eye which said plain as spoken words: "The top o' the mornin' to ye." It was already bright daylight.

"Take ye're bite of breakwus, darlin'," coaxed Katie, "an' the two of yez be off, but mind ye, don't sell the pig for a penny less than three pound."

"Sell him! Katie— Sell him!— I wouldn't part with Char-les for any money." At that, he up and told her all that had happened during the wonderful night, and he wound up by saying: "It may have been a dhrame, an' thin again, it may have been a wision, but dhrame or wision, I'll take no chances in having the vartuous Killbohgan murdhered."

"At laste," insisted Katie, "Mrs. Clancey an' the letther is no shupernatural wision, so take the road in your hands an' bring us back worrud of it."

And so, indeed, Jerry did, and toward evening, back he came, only the top of his hat visible over the stack of bundles he carried. With dancing feet and clapping hands, the children opened wide the door, and Jerry marched proudly in and began to unload. A bonnet box with a bonnet in it that dazzled Katie's eyes; ten yards of calico; eight yards of beautiful red flannel; two pounds of good black tea; three pairs of shoes for the children. "God bless thim," and a great package of tobacco and a fine new pipe for himself.

"Me Uncle Dan in Amerikay isn't dead afther all, Katie," he exulted, "and to prove it, he put tin pounds in the letther; an' afther buyin' all ye tould me to and lashins more, I paid the rint, thanks be, and I have still a matther of four pounds tin tucked safe an' deep in the bottom of me breeches pocket."

## 5: The Stolen Ingots

**R. Austin Freeman**

1862-1943

*Pearson's Magazine*, July 1922

Collected in *Dr. Thorndyke's Case-Book*, 1923 (US *Blue Scarab*, 1924)

"IN MEDICO-LEGAL PRACTICE," Thorndyke remarked, "one must be constantly on one's guard against the effects of suggestion, whether intentional or unconscious. When the facts of a case are set forth by an informant, they are nearly always presented, consciously or unconsciously, in terms of inference. Certain facts, which appear to the narrator to be the leading facts, are given with emphasis and in detail, while other facts, which appear to be subordinate or trivial, are partially suppressed. But this assessment of evidential value must never be accepted. The whole case must be considered and each fact weighed separately, and then it will commonly happen that the leading fact turns out to be the one that had been passed over as negligible."

The remark was made apropos of a case, the facts of which had just been stated to us by Mr. Halethorpe, of the Sphinx Assurance Company. I did not quite perceive its bearing at the time, but looking back when the case was concluded, I realized that I had fallen into the very error against which Thorndyke's warning should have guarded me.

"I trust," said Mr. Halethorpe, "that I have not come at an inconvenient time. You are so tolerant of unusual hours—"

"My practice," interrupted Thorndyke, "is my recreation, and I welcome you as one who comes to furnish entertainment. Draw your chair up to the fire, light a cigar and tell us your story."

Mr. Halethorpe laughed, but adopted the procedure suggested, and having settled his toes upon the kerb and selected a cigar from the box, he opened the subject of his call.

"I don't quite know what you can do for us," he began, "as it is hardly your business to trace lost property, but I thought I would come and let you know about our difficulty. The fact is that our company looks like dropping some four thousand pounds, which the directors won't like. What has happened is this:

"About two months ago the London House of the Akropong Gold Fields Company applied to us to insure a parcel of gold bars that were to be consigned to Minton and Borwell, the big manufacturing jewellers. The bars were to be shipped at Accra and landed at Bellhaven, which is the nearest port to Minton and Borwell's works. Well, we agreed to underwrite the risk— we have done business with the Akropong people before— and the matter was settled. The bars were put on board the *Labadi* at Accra, and in due course were landed at Bellhaven, where they were delivered to Minton's agents. So far, so good. Then

came the catastrophe. The case of bars was put on the train at Bellhaven, consigned to Anchester, where Mintons have their factory. But the line doesn't go to Anchester direct. The junction is at Garbridge, a small country station close to the river Crouch, and here the case was put out and locked up in the station-master's office to wait for the Anchester train. It seems that the station-master was called away and detained longer than he had expected, and when the train was signalled he hurried back in a mighty twitter. However, the case was there all right, and he personally superintended its removal to the guard's van and put it in the guard's charge. All went well for the rest of the journey. A member of the firm was waiting at Anchester station with a closed van. The case was put into it and taken direct to the factory, where it was opened in the private office— and found to be full of lead pipe."

"I presume," said Thorndyke, "that it was not the original case."

"No," replied Halethorpe, "but it was a very fair imitation. The label and the marks were correct, but the seals were just plain wax. Evidently the exchange had been made in the station-master's office, and it transpires that although the door was securely locked, there was an unfastened window which opened on to the garden, and there were plain marks of feet on the flower-bed outside."

"What time did this happen?" asked Thorndyke.

"The Anchester train came in at a quarter past seven, by which time, of course, it was quite dark."

"And when did it happen?"

"The day before yesterday. We heard of it yesterday morning."

"Are you contesting the claim?"

"We don't want to. Of course, we could plead negligence, but in that case I think we should make a claim on the railway company. But, naturally, we should much rather recover the property. After all, it can't be so very far away."

"I wouldn't say that," said Thorndyke. "This was no impromptu theft. The dummy case was prepared in advance, and evidently by somebody who knew what the real case was like, and how and when it was to be despatched from Bellhaven. We must assume that the disposal of the stolen case has been provided for with similar completeness. How far is Garbridge from the river?"

"Less than half a mile across the marshes. The detective-inspector— Badger, I think you know him— asked the same question."

"Naturally," said Thorndyke. "A heavy object like this case is much more easily and inconspicuously conveyed by water than on land. And then, see what facilities for concealment a navigable river offers. The case could be easily stowed away on a small craft, or even in a boat; or the bars could be taken out and stowed amongst the ballast, or even, at a pinch, dropped overboard at a marked spot and left until the hue and cry was over."

"You are not very encouraging," Halethorpe remarked gloomily. "I take it that you don't much expect that we shall recover those bars."

"We needn't despair," was the reply, "but I want you to understand the difficulties. The thieves have got away with the booty, and that booty is an imperishable material which retains its value even if broken up into unrecognizable fragments. Melted down into small ingots, it would be impossible to identify."

"Well," said Halethorpe, "the police have the matter in hand— Inspector Badger, of the C.I.D., is in charge of the case— but our directors would be more satisfied if you would look into it. Of course we would give you any help we could. What do you say?"

"I am willing to look into the case," said Thorndyke, "though I don't hold out much hope. Could you give me a note to the shipping company and another to the consignees, Minton and Borwell?"

"Of course I will. I'll write them now. I have some of our stationery in my attaché case. But, if you will pardon my saying so, you seem to be starting your inquiry just where there is nothing to be learned. The case was stolen after it left the ship and before it reached the consignees— although their agent had received it from the ship."

"The point is," said Thorndyke, "that this was a preconcerted robbery, and that the thieves possessed special information. That information must have come either from the ship or from the factory. So, while we must try to pick up the track of the case itself, we must seek the beginning of the clue at the two ends— the ship and the factory— from one of which it must have started."

"Yes, that's true," said Halethorpe. "Well, I'll write those two notes and then I must run away; and we'll hope for the best."

He wrote the two letters, asking for facilities from the respective parties, and then took his departure in a somewhat chastened frame of mind.

"Quite an interesting little problem," Thorndyke remarked, as Halethorpe's footsteps died away on the stairs, "but not much in our line. It is really a police case— a case for patient and intelligent inquiry. And that is what we shall have to do— make some careful inquiries on the spot."

"Where do you propose to begin?" I asked.

"At the beginning," he replied. "Bellhaven. I propose that we go down there to-morrow morning and pick up the thread at that end."

"What thread?" I demanded. "We know that the package started from there. What else do you expect to learn?"

"There are several curious possibilities in this case, as you must have noticed," he replied. "The question is, whether any of them are probabilities. That is what I want to settle before we begin a detailed investigation."

"For my part," said I, "I should have supposed that the investigation would start from the scene of the robbery. But I presume that you have seen some possibilities that I have overlooked."

Which eventually turned out to be the case.

"I think," said Thorndyke as we alighted at Bellhaven on the following morning, "we had better go first to the Customs and make quite certain, if we can, that the bars were really in the case when it was delivered to the consignees' agents. It won't do to take it for granted that the substitution took place at Garbridge, although that is by far the most probable theory." Accordingly we made our way to the harbour, where an obliging mariner directed us to our destination.

At the Custom House we were received by a genial officer, who, when Thorndyke had explained his connection with the robbery, entered into the matter with complete sympathy and a quick grasp of the situation.

"I see," said he. "You want clear evidence that the bars were in the case when it left here. Well, I think we can satisfy you on that point. Bullion is not a customable commodity, but it has to be examined and reported. If it is consigned to the Bank of England or the Mint, the case is passed through with the seals unbroken, but as this was a private consignment, the seals will have been broken and the contents of the case examined. Jeffson, show these gentlemen the report on the case of gold bars from the *Labadi*."

"Would it be possible," Thorndyke asked, "for us to have a few words with the officer who opened the case? You know the legal partiality for personal testimony."

"Of course it would. Jeffson, when these gentlemen have seen the report, find the officer who signed it and let them have a talk with him."

We followed Mr. Jeffson into an adjoining office where he produced the report and handed it to Thorndyke. The particulars that it gave were in effect those that would be furnished by the ship's manifest and the bill of lading. The case was thirteen inches long by twelve wide and nine inches deep, outside measurement; and its gross weight was one hundred and seventeen pounds three ounces, and it contained four bars of the aggregate weight of one hundred and thirteen pounds two ounces.

"Thank you," said Thorndyke, handing back the report. "And now can we see the officer— Mr. Byrne, I think— just to fill in the details?"

"If you will come with me," replied Mr. Jeffson, "I'll find him for you. I expect he is on the wharf."

We followed our conductor out on to the quay among a litter of cases, crates and barrels, and eventually, amidst a battalion of Madeira wine casks, found the officer deep in problems of "content and ullage," and other customs

mysteries. As Jeffson introduced us, and then discreetly retired, Mr. Byrne confronted us with a mahogany face and a truculent blue eye.

"With reference to this bullion," said Thorndyke, "I understand that you weighed the bars separately from the case?"

"Oi did," replied Mr. Byrne.

"Did you weigh each bar separately?"

"Oi did not," was the concise reply.

"What was the appearance of the bars— I mean as to shape and size? Were they of the usual type?"

"Oi've not had a great deal to do with bullion," said Mr. Byrne, "but Oi should say that they were just ordinary gold bars, about nine inches long by four wide and about two inches deep."

"Was there much packing material in the case?"

"Very little. The bars were wrapped in thick canvas and jammed into the case. There wouldn't be more than about half an inch clearance all round to allow for the canvas. The case was inch and a half stuff strengthened with iron bands."

"Did you seal the case after you had closed it up?"

"Oi did. 'Twas all shipshape when it was passed back to the mate. And Oi saw him hand it over to the consignees' agents; so 'twas all in order when it left the wharf."

"That was what I wanted to make sure of," said Thorndyke; and, having pocketed his notebook and thanked the officer, he turned away among the wilderness of merchandise.

"So much for the Customs," said he. "I am glad we went there first. As you have no doubt observed, we have picked up some useful information."

"We have ascertained," I replied, "that the case was intact when it was handed over to the consignees' agents, so that our investigations at Garbridge will start from a solid basis. And that, I take it, is all you wanted to know."

"Not quite all," he rejoined. "There are one or two little details that I should like to fill in. I think we will look in on the shipping agents and present Halethorpe's note. We may as well learn all we can before we make our start from the scene of the robbery."

"Well," I said. "I don't see what more there is to learn here. But apparently you do. That seems to be the office, past those sheds."

The manager of the shipping agent's office looked us up and down as he sat at his littered desk with Halethorpe's letter in his hand.

"You've come about that bullion that was stolen," he said brusquely. "Well, it wasn't stolen here. Hadn't you better inquire at Garbridge, where it was?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Thorndyke. "But I am making certain preliminary inquiries. Now, first, as to the bill of lading. Who has that— the original, I mean?"

"The captain has it at present, but I have a copy."

"Could I see it?" Thorndyke asked.

The manager raised his eyebrows protestingly, but produced the document from a file and handed it to Thorndyke, watching him inquisitively as he copied the particulars of the package into his notebook.

"I suppose," said Thorndyke as he returned the document, "you have a copy of the ship's manifest?"

"Yes," replied the manager, "but the entry in the manifest is merely a copy of the particulars given in the bill of lading."

"I should like to see the manifest, if it is not troubling you too much."

"But," the other protested impatiently, "the manifest contains no information respecting this parcel of bullion excepting the one entry, which, as I have told you, has been copied from the bill of lading."

"I realize that," said Thorndyke; "but I should like to look over it, all the same."

Our friend bounced into an inner office and presently returned with a voluminous document, which he slapped down on a side-table.

"There, sir," he said. "That is the manifest. This is the entry relating to the bullion that you are enquiring about. The rest of the document is concerned with the cargo, in which I presume you are not interested."

In this, however, he was mistaken; for Thorndyke, having verified the bullion entry, turned the leaves over and began systematically, though rapidly, to run his eye over the long list from the beginning, a proceeding that the manager viewed with frenzied impatience.

"If you are going to read it right through, sir," the latter observed, "I shall ask you to excuse me. Art is long but life is short," he added with a sour smile.

Nevertheless he hovered about uneasily, and when Thorndyke proceeded to copy some of the entries into his notebook, he craned over and read them without the least disguise, though not without comment.

"Good God, sir!" he exclaimed. "What possible bearing on this robbery can that parcel of sciveloes have? And do you realize that they are still in the ship's hold?"

"I inferred that they were, as they are consigned to London," Thorndyke replied, drawing his finger down the "description" column and rapidly scanning the entries in it. The manager watched that finger, and as it stopped successively at a bag of gum copal, a case of quartz specimens, a case of six-inch brass screw-bolts, a bag of beni-seed and a package of kola nuts, he breathed hard and muttered like an angry parrot. But Thorndyke was quite unmoved. With calm

deliberation he copied out each entry, conscientiously noting the marks, descriptions of packages and contents, gross and net weight, dimensions, names of consignors and consignees, ports of shipment and discharge, and, in fact, the entire particulars. It was certainly an amazing proceeding, and I could make no more of it than could our impatient friend.

At last Thorndyke closed and pocketed his note-book, and the manager heaved a slightly obtrusive sigh. "Is there nothing more, sir?" he asked. "You don't want to examine the ship, for instance?" The next moment, I think, he regretted his sarcasm, for Thorndyke inquired with evident interest: "Is the ship still here?"

"Yes," was the unwilling admission. "She finishes unloading here at midday to-day and will probably haul into the London Docks to-morrow morning."

"I don't think I need go on board," said Thorndyke, "but you might give me a card in case I find that I want to."

The card was somewhat grudgingly produced, and when Thorndyke had thanked our entertainer for his help, we took our leave and made our way towards the station.

"Well," I said, "you have collected a vast amount of curious information, but I am hanged if I can see that any of it has the slightest bearing on our inquiry."

Thorndyke cast on me a look of deep reproach. "Jervis!" he exclaimed, "you astonish me; you do, indeed. Why, my dear fellow, it stares you in the face!"

"When you say 'it,'" I said a little irritably, "you mean— — ?"

"I mean the leading fact from which we may deduce the *modus operandi* of this robbery. You shall look over my notes in the train and sort out the data that we have collected. I think you will find them extremely illuminating."

"I doubt it," said I. "But, meanwhile, aren't we wasting a good deal of time? Halethorpe wants to get the gold back; he doesn't want to know how the thieves contrived to steal it."

"That is a very just remark," answered Thorndyke. "My learned friend displays his customary robust common sense. Nevertheless, I think that a clear understanding of the mechanism of this robbery will prove very helpful to us, though I agree with you that we have spent enough time on securing our preliminary data. The important thing now is to pick up a trail from Garbridge. But I see our train is signalled. We had better hurry."

As the train rumbled into the station, we looked out for an empty smoking compartment, and having been fortunate enough to secure one, we settled ourselves in opposite corners and lighted our pipes. Then Thorndyke handed me his notebook and as I studied, with wrinkled brows, the apparently disconnected entries, he sat and observed me thoughtfully and with the faintest suspicion of a smile. Again and again I read through those notes with ever-dwindling hopes of extracting the meaning that "stared me in the face." Vainly did I endeavour to

connect gum copal, scrivelloes or beni-seed with the methods of the unknown robbers. The entries in the notebook persisted obstinately in remaining totally disconnected and hopelessly irrelevant. At last I shut the book with a savage snap and handed it back to its owner.

"It's no use, Thorndyke," I said. "I can't see the faintest glimmer of light."

"Well," said he, "it isn't of much consequence. The practical part of our task is before us, and it may turn out a pretty difficult part. But we have got to recover those bars if it is humanly possible. And here we are at our jumping-off place. This is Garbridge Station— and I see an old acquaintance of ours on the platform."

I looked out, as the train slowed down, and there, sure enough, was no less a person than Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department.

"We could have done very well without Badger," I remarked.

"Yes," Thorndyke agreed, "but we shall have to take him into partnership, I expect. After all, we are on his territory and on the same errand. How do you do, Inspector?" he continued, as the officer, having observed our descent from the carriage, hurried forward with unwonted cordiality.

"I rather expected to see you here, sir," said he. "We heard that Mr. Halethorpe had consulted you. But this isn't the London train."

"No," said Thorndyke. "We've been to Bellhaven, just to make sure that the bullion was in the case when it started."

"I could have told you that two days ago," said Badger. "We got on to the Customs people at once. That was all plain sailing; but the rest of it isn't."

"No clue as to how the case was taken away?"

"Oh, yes; that is pretty clear. It was hoisted out, and the dummy hoisted in, through the window of the station-master's office. And the same night, two men were seen carrying a heavy package, about the size of the bullion-case, towards the marshes. But there the clue ends. The stuff seems to have vanished into thin air. Of course our people are on the look-out for it in various likely directions, but I am staying here with a couple of plain-clothes men. I've a conviction that it is still somewhere in this neighbourhood, and I mean to stick here in the hope that I may spot somebody trying to move it."

As the inspector was speaking we had been walking slowly from the station towards the village, which was on the opposite side of the river. On the bridge Thorndyke halted and looked down the river and over the wide expanse of marshy country.

"This is an ideal place for a bullion robbery," he remarked. "A tidal river near to the sea and a network of creeks, in any one of which one could hide a boat or sink the booty below tide-marks. Have you heard of any strange craft having put in here?"

"Yes. There's a little ramshackle bawley from Leigh— but her crew of two ragamuffins are not Leigh men. And they've made a mess of their visit— got their craft on the mud on the top of the spring tide. There she is, on that spit; and there she'll be till next spring tide. But I've been over her carefully and I'll swear the stuff isn't aboard her. I had all the ballast out and emptied the lazarette and the chain locker."

"And what about the barge?"

"She's a regular trader here. Her crew— the skipper and his son— are quite respectable men and they belong here. There they go in that boat; I expect they are off on this tide. But they seem to be making for the bawley."

As he spoke the inspector produced a pair of glasses, through which he watched the movements of the barge's jolly-boat, and a couple of elderly fishermen, who were crossing the bridge, halted to look on. The barge's boat ran alongside the stranded bawley, and one of the rowers hailed; whereupon two men tumbled up from the cabin and dropped into the boat, which immediately pushed off and headed for the barge.

"Them bawley blokes seems to be taking a passage along of old Bill Somers," one of the fishermen remarked, levelling a small telescope at the barge as the boat drew alongside and the four men climbed on board. "Going to work their passage, too," he added as the two passengers proceeded immediately to man the windlass while the crew let go the brails and hooked the main-sheet block to the traveller.

"Rum go," commented Badger, glaring at the barge through his glasses; "but they haven't taken anything aboard with them. I could see that."

"You have overhauled the barge, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Yes. Went right through her. Nothing there. She's light. There was no place aboard her where you could hide a split-pea."

"Did you get her anchor up?"

"No," replied Badger. "I didn't. I suppose I ought to have done so. However, they're getting it up themselves now." As he spoke, the rapid clink of a windlass-pawl was borne across the water, and through my prismatic glasses I could see the two passengers working for all they were worth at the cranks. Presently the clink of the pawl began to slow down somewhat and the two bargemen, having got the sails set, joined the toilers at the windlass, but even then there was no great increase of speed.

"Anchor seems to come up uncommon heavy," one of the fishermen remarked.

"Aye," the other agreed. "Got foul of an old mooring maybe."

"Look out for the anchor, Badger," Thorndyke said in a low voice, gazing steadily through his binocular. "It is out of the ground. The cable is up and down and the barge is drifting off on the tide."

Even as he spoke the ring and stock of the anchor rose slowly out of the water, and now I could see that a second chain was shackled loosely to the cable, down which it had slid until it was stopped by the ring of the anchor. Badger had evidently seen it too, for he ejaculated, "Hallo!" and added a few verbal flourishes which I need not repeat. A few more turns of the windlass brought the flukes of the anchor clear of the water, and dangling against them was an undeniable wooden case, securely slung with lashings of stout chain. Badger cursed volubly, and, turning to the fishermen, exclaimed in a rather offensively peremptory tone:

"I want a boat. Now. This instant."

The elder piscator regarded him doggedly and replied: "All right. I ain't got no objection."

"Where can I get a boat?" the inspector demanded, nearly purple with excitement and anxiety.

"Where do you think?" the mariner responded, evidently nettled by the inspector's masterful tone. "Pastrycook's? Or livery stables?"

"Look here," said Badger. "I'm a police officer and I want to board that barge, and I am prepared to pay handsomely. Now where can I get a boat?"

"We'll put you aboard of her," replied the fisherman, "that is, if we can catch her. But I doubt it. She's off, that's what she is. And there's something queer a-going on aboard of her," he added in a somewhat different tone.

There was. I had been observing it. The case had been, with some difficulty, hoisted on board, and then suddenly there had broken out an altercation between the two bargees and their passengers, and this had now developed into what looked like a free fight. It was difficult to see exactly what was happening, for the barge was drifting rapidly down the river, and her sails, blowing out first on one side and then on the other, rather obscured the view. Presently, however, the sails filled and a man appeared at the wheel; then the barge jibed round, and with a strong ebb tide and a fresh breeze, very soon began to grow small in the distance.

Meanwhile the fishermen had bustled off in search of a boat, and the inspector had raced to the bridgehead, where he stood gesticulating frantically and blowing his whistle, while Thorndyke continued placidly to watch the receding barge through his binocular.

"What are we going to do?" I asked, a little surprised at my colleague's inaction.

"What can we do?" he asked in reply. "Badger will follow the barge. He probably won't overtake her, but he will prevent her from making a landing until they get out into the estuary, and then he may possibly get assistance. The chase is in his hands."

"Are we going with him?"

"I am not. This looks like being an all-night expedition, and I must be at our chambers to-morrow morning. Besides, the chase is not our affair. But if you would like to join Badger there is no reason why you shouldn't. I can look after the practice."

"Well," I said, "I think I should rather like to be in at the death, if it won't inconvenience you. But it is possible that they may get away with the booty."

"Quite," he agreed; "and then it would be useful to know exactly how and where it disappears. Yes, go with them, by all means, and keep a sharp look-out."

At this moment Badger returned with the two plain-clothes men whom his whistle had called from their posts, and simultaneously a boat was seen approaching the steps by the bridge, rowed by the two fishermen. The inspector looked at us inquiringly. "Are you coming to see the sport?" he asked.

"Doctor Jervis would like to come with you," Thorndyke replied. "I have to get back to London. But you will be a fair boat-load without me."

This appeared to be also the view of the two fishermen, as they brought up at the steps and observed the four passengers; but they made no demur beyond inquiring if there were not any more; and when we had taken our places in the stern sheets, they pushed off and pulled through the bridge and away down stream. Gradually, the village receded and the houses and the bridge grew small and more distant, though they remained visible for a long time over the marshy levels; and still, as I looked back through my glasses, I could see Thorndyke on the bridge, watching the pursuit with his binocular to his eyes.

Meanwhile the fugitive barge, having got some two miles start, seemed to be drawing ahead. But it was only at intervals that we could see her, for the tide was falling fast and we were mostly hemmed in by the high, muddy banks. Only when we entered a straight reach of the river could we see her sails over the land; and every time that she came into view, she appeared perceptibly smaller.

When the river grew wider, the mast was stepped and a good-sized lug-sail hoisted, though one of the fishermen continued to ply his oar on the weather side, while the other took the tiller. This improved our pace appreciably; but still, whenever we caught a glimpse of the barge, it was evident that she was still gaining.

On one of these occasions the man at the tiller, standing up to get a better view, surveyed our quarry intently for nearly a minute and then addressed the inspector.

"She's a-going to give us the go-by, mister," he observed with conviction.

"Still gaining?" asked Badger.

"Aye. She's a-going to slip across the tail of Foulness Sand into the deep channel. And that's the last we shall see of her."

"But can't we get into the channel the same way?" demanded Badger.

"Well, d'ye see," replied the fisherman, "'tis like this. Tide's a-running out, but there'll be enough for her. It'll just carry her out through the Whitaker Channel and across the spit. Then it'll turn, and up she'll go, London way, on the flood. But we shall catch the flood-tide in the Whitaker Channel, and a rare old job we'll have to get out; and when we do get out, that barge'll be miles away."

The inspector swore long and earnestly. He even alluded to himself as a "blithering idiot." But that helped matters not at all. The fisherman's dismal prophecy was fulfilled in every horrid detail. When we were approaching the Whitaker Channel the barge was just crossing the spit, and the last of the ebb-tide was trickling out. By the time we were fairly in the Channel the tide had turned and was already flowing in with a speed that increased every minute; while over the sand we could see the barge, already out in the open estuary, heading to the west on the flood-tide at a good six knots.

Poor Badger was frantic. With yearning eyes fixed on the dwindling barge, he cursed, entreated, encouraged and made extravagant offers. He even took an oar and pulled with such desperate energy that he caught a crab and turned a neat back somersault into the fisherman's lap. The two mariners pulled until their oars bent like canes; but still the sandy banks crept by, inch by inch, and ever the turbid water seemed to pour up the channel more and yet more swiftly. It was a fearful struggle and seemed to last for hours; and when, at last, the boat crawled out across the spit and the exhausted rowers rested on their oars, the sun was just setting and the barge had disappeared into the west.

I was really sorry for Badger. His oversight in respect of the anchor was a very natural one for a landsman, and he had evidently taken infinite pains over the case and shown excellent judgment in keeping a close watch on the neighbourhood of Garbridge; and now, after all his care, it looked as if both the robbers and their booty had slipped through his fingers. It was desperately bad luck.

"Well," said the elder fisherman, "they've give us a run for our money; but they've got clear away. What's to be done now, mister?"

Badger had nothing to suggest excepting that we should pull or sail up the river in the hope of getting some assistance on the way. He was in the lowest depths of despair and dejection. But now, when Fortune seemed to have deserted us utterly, and failure appeared to be an accomplished fact, Providence intervened.

A small steam vessel that had been approaching from the direction of the East Swin suddenly altered her course and bore down as if to speak us. The fisherman who had last spoken looked at her attentively for a few moments and then slapped his thigh. "Saved, by gum!" he exclaimed. "This'll do your trick, mister. Here comes a Customs cruiser."

Instantly the two fishermen bent to their oars to meet the oncoming craft, and in a few minutes we were alongside, Badger hailing like a bull of Bashan. A brief explanation to the officer in charge secured a highly sympathetic promise of help. We all scrambled up on deck; the boat was dropped astern at the scope of her painter; the engine-room bell jangled merrily, and the smart, yacht-like vessel began to forge ahead.

"Now then," said the officer, as his craft gathered way, "give us a description of this barge. What is she like?"

"She's a small stumpy," the senior fisherman explained, "flying light; wants paint badly; steers with a wheel; green transom with *Bluebell*, *Maldon*, cut in and gilded. Seemed to be keeping along the north shore."

With these particulars in his mind, the officer explored the western horizon with a pair of night-glasses, although it was still broad daylight. Presently he reported: "There's a stumpy in a line with the Blacktail Spit buoy. Just take a look at her." He handed his glasses to the fisherman, who, after a careful inspection of the stranger, gave it as his opinion that she was our quarry. "Probably makin' for Southend or Leigh," said he, and added: "I'll bet she's bound for Benfleet Creek. Nice quiet place, that, to land the stuff."

Our recent painful experience was now reversed, for as our swift little vessel devoured the miles of water, the barge, which we were all watching eagerly, loomed up larger every minute. By the time we were abreast of the Mouse Lightship, she was but a few hundred yards ahead, and even through my glasses, the name *Bluebell* was clearly legible. Badger nearly wept with delight; the officer in charge smiled an anticipatory smile; the deck-hands girded up their loins for the coming capture and the plain-clothes men each furtively polished a pair of handcuffs.

At length the little cruiser came fairly abreast of the barge— not unobserved by the two men on her deck. Then she sheered in suddenly and swept alongside. One hand neatly hooked a shroud with a grappling iron and made fast while a couple of preventive officers, the plain-clothes men and the inspector jumped down simultaneously on to the barge's deck. For a moment, the two bawley men were inclined to show fight; but the odds were too great. After a perfunctory scuffle they both submitted to be handcuffed and were at once hauled up on board the cruiser and lodged in the fore-peak under guard. Then the chief officer, the two fishermen and I jumped on board the barge and followed Badger down the companion hatch to the cabin.

It was a curious scene that was revealed in that little cupboard-like apartment by the light of Badger's electric torch. On each of the two lockers was stretched a man, securely lashed with lead-line and having drawn over his face a knitted stocking cap, while on the little triangular fixed table rested an iron-bound box which I instantly identified by my recollection of the description of

the bullion case in the ship's manifest. It was but the work of a minute to liberate the skipper and his son and send them up, wrathful but substantially uninjured, to refresh on the cruiser; and then the ponderous treasure-chest was borne in triumph by two muscular deck-hands, up the narrow steps, to be hoisted to the Government vessel.

"Well, well," said the inspector, mopping his face with his handkerchief, "all's well that ends well; but I thought I had lost the men and the stuff that time. What are you going to do? I shall stay on board as this boat is going right up to the Custom House in London; but if you want to get home sooner, I dare say the chief officer will put you ashore at Southend."

I decided to adopt this course, and I was accordingly landed at Southend Pier with a telegram from Badger to his head-quarters; and at Southend I was fortunate enough to catch an express train which brought me to Fenchurch Street while the night was still young.

When I reached our chambers, I found Thorndyke seated by the fire, serenely studying a brief. He stood up as I entered and, laying aside the brief, remarked:

"You are back sooner than I expected. How sped the chase? Did you catch the barge?"

"Yes. We've got the men and we've got the bullion. But we very nearly lost both;" and here I gave him an account of the pursuit and the capture, to which he listened with the liveliest interest. "That Customs cruiser was a piece of sheer luck," said he, when I had concluded. "I am delighted. This capture simplifies the case for us enormously."

"It seems to me to dispose of the case altogether," said I. "The property is recovered and the thieves are in custody. But I think most of the credit belongs to Badger."

Thorndyke smiled enigmatically. "I should let him have it all, Jervis," he said; and then, after a reflective pause, he continued: "We will go round to Scotland Yard in the morning to verify the capture. If the package agrees with the description in the bill of lading, the case, as you say, is disposed of."

"It is hardly necessary," said I. "The marks were all correct and the Customs seals were unbroken— but still, I know you won't be satisfied until you have verified everything for yourself. And I suppose you are right."

It was past eleven in the following forenoon when we invaded Superintendent Miller's office at Scotland Yard. That genial officer looked up from his desk as we entered and laughed joyously. "I told you so, Badger," he chuckled, turning to the inspector, who had also looked up and was regarding us with a foxy smile. "I knew the doctor wouldn't be satisfied until he had seen it with his own eyes. I suppose that is what you have come for, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply. "It is a mere formality, of course, but, if you don't mind— —"

"Not in the least," replied Miller. "Come along, Badger, and show the doctor your prize."

The two officers conducted us to a room, which the superintendent unlocked, and which contained a small table, a measuring standard, a weighing machine, a set of Snellen's test-types, and the now historic case of bullion. The latter Thorndyke inspected closely, checking the marks and dimensions by his notes.

"I see you haven't opened it," he remarked.

"No," replied Miller. "Why should we? The Customs seals are intact."

"I thought you might like to know what was inside," Thorndyke explained.

The two officers looked at him quickly and the inspector exclaimed: "But we do know. It was opened and checked at the Customs."

"What do you suppose is inside?" Thorndyke asked.

"I don't suppose," Badger replied testily. "I know. There are four bars of gold inside."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "as the representative of the Assurance Company, I should like to see the contents of that case."

The two officers stared at him in amazement, as also, I must admit, did I. The implied doubt seemed utterly contrary to reason.

"This is scepticism with a vengeance!" said Miller. "How on earth is it possible— but there, I suppose if you are not satisfied, we should be justified— —"

He glanced at his subordinate, who snorted impatiently: "Oh, open it and let him see the bars. And then, I suppose, he will want us to make an assay of the metal."

The superintendent retired with wrinkled brows and presently returned with a screwdriver, a hammer and a case-opener. Very deftly he broke the seals, extracted the screws and prized up the lid of the case, inside which were one or two folds of thick canvas. Lifting these with something of a flourish, he displayed the upper pair of dull, yellow bars.

"Are you satisfied now, sir?" demanded Badger. "Or do you want to see the other two?"

Thorndyke looked reflectively at the two bars, and the two officers looked inquiringly at him (but one might as profitably have watched the expression on the face of a ship's figurehead). Then he took from his pocket a folding foot-rule and quickly measured the three dimensions of one of the bars.

"Is that weighing machine reliable?" he asked.

"It is correct to an ounce," the superintendent replied, gazing at my colleague with a slightly uneasy expression. "Why?"

By way of reply Thorndyke lifted out the bar that he had measured and carrying it across to the machine, laid it on the platform and carefully adjusted the weights.

"Well?" the superintendent queried anxiously, as Thorndyke took the reading from the scale.

"Twenty-nine pounds, three ounces," replied Thorndyke.

"Well?" repeated the superintendent. "What about it?"

Thorndyke looked at him impassively for a moment, and then, in the same quiet tone, answered: "Lead."

"What!" the two officers shrieked in unison, darting across to the scale and glaring at the bar of metal. Then Badger recovered himself and expostulated, not without temper, "Nonsense, sir. Look at it. Can't you see that it is gold?"

"I can see that it is gilded," replied Thorndyke.

"But," protested Miller, "the thing is impossible! What makes you think it is lead?"

"It is just a question of specific gravity," was the reply. "This bar contains seventy-two cubic inches of metal and it weighs twenty-nine pounds three ounces. Therefore it is a bar of lead. But if you are still doubtful, it is quite easy to settle the matter. May I cut a small piece off the bar?"

The superintendent gasped and looked at his subordinate. "I suppose," said he, "under the circumstances— eh, Badger? Yes. Very well, Doctor."

Thorndyke produced a strong pocket-knife, and, having lifted the bar to the table, applied the knife to one corner and tapped it smartly with the hammer. The blade passed easily through the soft metal, and as the detached piece fell to the floor, the two officers and I craned forward eagerly. And then all possible doubts were set at rest. There was no mistaking the white, silvery lustre of the freshly-cut surface.

"Snakes!" exclaimed the superintendent. "This is a fair knock-out! Why, the blighters have got away with the stuff, after all! Unless," he added, with a quizzical look at Thorndyke, "you know where it is, Doctor. I expect you do."

"I believe I do," said Thorndyke, "and if you care to come down with me to the London Docks, I think I can hand it over to you."

The superintendent's face brightened appreciably. Not so Badger's. That afflicted officer flung down the chip of metal that he had been examining, and, turning to Thorndyke, demanded sourly: "Why didn't you tell us this before, sir? You let me go off chivvying that damn barge, and you knew all the time that the stuff wasn't on board."

"My dear Badger," Thorndyke expostulated, "don't you see that these lead bars are essential to our case? They prove that the gold bars were never landed and that they are consequently still on the ship. Which empowers us to detain any gold that we may find on her."

"There, now, Badger," said the superintendent, "it's no use for you to argue with the doctor. He's like a giraffe. He can see all round him at once. Let us get on to the Docks."

Having locked the room, we all sallied forth, and, taking a train at Charing Cross Station, made our way by Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street to Wapping, where, following Thorndyke, we entered the Docks and proceeded straight to a wharf near the Wapping entrance. Here Thorndyke exchanged a few words with a Customs official, who hurried away and presently returned accompanied by an officer of higher rank. The latter, having saluted Thorndyke and cast a slightly amused glance at our little party, said: "They've landed that package that you spoke about. I've had it put in my office for the present. Will you come and have a look at it?"

We followed him to his office behind a long row of sheds, where, on a table, was a strong wooden case, somewhat larger than the "bullion" case, while, on the desk a large, many-leaved document lay open.

"This is your case, I think," said the official; "but you had better check it by the manifest. Here is the entry: 'One case containing seventeen and three-quarter dozen brass six-inch by three-eighths screw-bolts with nuts. Dimensions, sixteen inches by thirteen by nine. Gross weight a hundred and nineteen pounds; net weight a hundred and thirteen pounds.' Consigned to 'Jackson and Walker, 593, Great Alie Street, London, E.' Is that the one?"

"That is the one," Thorndyke replied.

"Then," said our friend, "we'll get it open and have a look at those brass screw-bolts."

With a dexterity surprising in an official of such high degree, he had the screws out in a twinkling, and prizing up the lid, displayed a fold of coarse canvas. As he lifted this the two police officers peered eagerly into the case; and suddenly the eager expression on Badger's face changed to one of bitter disappointment.

"You've missed fire this time, sir," he snapped. "This is just a case of brass bolts."

"Gold bolts, Inspector," Thorndyke corrected, placidly. He picked out one and handed it to the astonished detective. "Did you ever feel a brass bolt of that weight?" he asked.

"Well, it certainly is devilish heavy," the inspector admitted, weighing it in his hand and passing it on to Miller.

"Its weight, as stated on the manifest," said Thorndyke, "works out at well over eight and a half ounces, but we may as well check it." He produced from his pocket a little spring balance, to which he slung the bolt. "You see," he said, "it weighs eight ounces and two-thirds. But a brass bolt of the same size would weigh only three ounces and four-fifths. There is not the least doubt that these

bolts are gold; and as you see that their aggregate weight is a hundred and thirteen while the weight of the four missing bars is a hundred and thirteen pounds, two ounces, it is a reasonable inference that these bolts represent those bars; and an uncommonly good job they made of the melting to lose only two ounces. Has the consignee's agent turned up yet?"

"He is waiting outside," replied the officer, with a pleased smile, "hopping about like a pea in a frying-pan. I'll call him in."

He did so, and a small, seedy man of strongly Semitic aspect approached the door with nervous caution and a rather pale face. But when his beady eye fell on the open case and the portentous assembly in the office, he turned about and fled along the wharf as if the hosts of the Philistines were at his heels.

"Of course it is all perfectly simple, as you say," I replied to Thorndyke as we strolled back up Nightingale Lane, "but I don't see where you got your start. What made you think that the stolen case was a dummy?"

"At first," Thorndyke replied, "it was just a matter of alternative hypotheses. It was purely speculative. The robbery described by Halethorpe was a very crude affair. It was planned in quite the wrong way. Noting this, I naturally asked myself: What is the right way to steal a case of gold ingots? Now, the outstanding difficulty in such a robbery arises from the ponderous nature of the thing stolen, and the way to overcome that difficulty is to get away with the booty at leisure before the robbery is discovered— the longer the better. It is also obvious that if you can delude some one into stealing your dummy you will have covered up your tracks most completely; for if that some one is caught, the issues are extremely confused, and if he is not caught, all the tracks lead away from you. Of course, he will discover the fraud when he tries to dispose of the swag, but his lips are sealed by the fact that he has, himself, committed a felony. So that is the proper strategical plan; and, though it was wildly improbable, and there was nothing whatever to suggest it, still the possibility that this crude robbery might cover a more subtle one, had to be borne in mind. It was necessary to make absolutely certain that the gold bars were really in the case when it left Bellhaven. I had practically no doubt that they were. Our visit to the Custom House was little more than a formality, just to give us an undeniable datum from which to make our start. We had to find somebody who had actually seen the case open and verified the contents; and when we found that man— Mr. Byrne— it instantly became obvious that the wildly improbable thing had really happened. The gold bars had already disappeared. I had calculated the approximate size of the real bars. They would contain forty-two cubic inches, and would be about seven inches by three by two. The dimensions given by Byrne— evidently correct, as shown by those of the case, which the bars fitted pretty closely— were impossible. If those bars had been gold, they would have weighed two hundred pounds, instead of the hundred and thirteen pounds

shown on his report. The astonishing thing is that Byrne did not observe the discrepancy. There are not many Customs officers who would have let it pass."

"Isn't it rather odd," I asked, "that the thieves should have gambled on such a remote chance?"

"It is pretty certain," he replied, "that they were unaware of the risk they were taking. Probably they assumed— as most persons would have done— that a case of bullion would be merely inspected and passed. Few persons realize the rigorous methods of the Customs officers. But to resume: It was obvious that the 'gold' bars that Byrne had examined were dummies. The next question was, where were the real bars? Had they been made away with, or were they still on the ship? To settle this question I decided to go through the manifest and especially through the column of net weights. And there, presently, I came upon a package the net weight of which was within two ounces of the weight of the stolen bars. And that package was a parcel of brass screw-bolts— on a homeward-bound ship! But who on earth sends brass bolts from Africa to London? The anomaly was so striking that I examined the entry more closely, and then I found— by dividing the net weight by the number of bolts— that each of these little bolts weighed over half a pound. But, if this were so, those bolts could be of no other metal than gold or platinum, and were almost certainly gold. Also, their aggregate weight was exactly that of the stolen bars, less two ounces, which probably represented loss in melting."

"And the scrivelloes," said I, "and the gum copal and the kola nuts; what was their bearing on the inquiry? I can't, even now, trace any connection."

Thorndyke cast an astonished glance at me, and then replied with a quiet chuckle: "There wasn't any. Those notes were for the benefit of the shipping gentleman. As he would look over my shoulder, I had to give him something to read and think about. If I had noted only the brass bolts, I should have virtually informed him of the nature of my suspicions."

"Then, really, you had the case complete when we left Bellhaven?"

"Theoretically, yes. But we had to recover the stolen case, for, without those lead ingots we could not prove that the gold bolts were stolen property, any more than one could prove a murder without evidence of the death of the victim."

"And how do you suppose the robbery was carried out? How was the gold got out of the ship's strong-room?"

"I should say it was never there. The robbers, I suspect, are the ship's mate, the chief engineer and possibly the purser. The mate controls the stowage of cargo, and the chief engineer controls the repair shop and has the necessary skill and knowledge to deal with the metal. On receiving the advice of the bullion consignment, I imagine they prepared the dummy case in agreement with the description. When the bullion arrived, the dummy case would be concealed on

deck and the exchange made as soon as the bullion was put on board. The dummy would be sent to the strong-room and the real case carried to a prepared hiding-place. Then the engineer would cut up the bars, melt them piecemeal and cast them into bolts in an ordinary casting-flask, using an iron bolt as a model, and touching up the screw-threads with a die. The mate could enter the case on the manifest when he pleased, and send the bill of lading by post to the nominal consignee. That is what I imagine to have been the procedure."

Thorndyke's solution turned out to be literally correct. The consignee, pursued by Inspector Badger along the quay, was arrested at the dock gates and immediately volunteered King's evidence. Thereupon the mate, the chief engineer and the purser of the steamship *Labadi* were arrested and brought to trial; when they severally entered a plea of guilty and described the method of the robbery almost in Thorndyke's words.

---

## 6: Old Roses

*Sir Gilbert Parker*

1862-1932

*Short Stories*, July 1893

Collected in: *Cumner's Son and other South Seas Folk*, 1910

*Canadian Gilbert Parker travelled widely in the South Seas in the 1880s, before settling in the UK where he was elected to Parliament, remaining an MP until 1918. He was made a Baronet in 1900. He was a prolific author of fiction and non-fiction. This is one of several stories resulting from a sojourn in Australia in the 1880s.*

IT WAS A BARREN COUNTRY, and Wadgery was generally shrivelled with heat, but he always had roses in his garden, on his window-sill, or in his button-hole. Growing flowers under difficulties was his recreation. That was why he was called Old Roses. It was not otherwise inapt, for there was something antique about him, though he wasn't old; a flavour, an old-fashioned repose and self-possession. He was Inspector of Tanks for this God-forsaken country. Apart from his duties he kept mostly to himself, though when not travelling he always went down to O'Fallen's Hotel once a day for a glass of whisky and water— whisky kept especially for him; and as he drank this slowly he talked to Victoria Lindley the barmaid, or to any chance visitors whom he knew. He never drank with any one, nor asked any one to drink; and, strange to say, no one resented this. As Vic said: "He was different." Dicky Merritt, the solicitor, who was hail-fellow with squatter, homestead lessee, cockatoo-farmer, and shearer, called him "a lively old buffer." It was he, indeed, who gave him the name of Old Roses. Dicky sometimes went over to Long Neck Billabong, where Old Roses lived, for a reel, as he put it, and he always carried away a deep impression of the Inspector's qualities.

"Had his day," said Dicky in O'Fallen's sitting-room one night, "in marble halls, or I'm a Jack. Run neck and neck with almighty swells once. Might live here for a thousand years and he'd still be the nonesuch of the back-blocks. I'd patent him— file my caveat for him to-morrow, if I could, bully Old Roses!"

Victoria Lindley, the barmaid, lifted her chin slightly from her hands, as she leaned through the opening between the bar and the sitting-room, and said: "Mr. Merritt, Old Roses is a gentleman; and a gentleman is a gentleman till he—"

"Till he humps his bluey into the Never Never Land, Vic? But what do you know about gentlemen, anyway? You were born only five miles from the jumping-off place, my dear."

"Oh," was the quiet reply, "a woman— the commonest woman— knows a gentleman by instinct. It isn't what they do, it's what they don't do; and Old Roses doesn't do lots of things."

"Right you are, Victoria, right you are again! You do Tibbooburra credit. Old Roses has the root of the matter in him— and there you have it."

Dicky had a profound admiration for Vic. She had brains, was perfectly fearless, no man had ever taken a liberty with her, and every one in the Wadgery country who visited O'Fallen's had a wholesome respect for her opinion.

About this time news came that the Governor, Lord Malice, would pass through Wadgery on his tour up the back-blocks. A great function was necessary. It was arranged. Then came the question of the address of welcome to be delivered at the banquet. Dicky Merritt and the local doctor were named for the task, but they both declared they'd only "make rot of it," and suggested Old Roses.

They went to lay the thing before him. They found him in his garden. He greeted them, smiling in his quiet, enigmatical way, and listened. While Dicky spoke, a flush slowly passed over him, and then immediately left him pale; but he stood perfectly still, his hand leaning against a sandal tree, and the coldness of his face warmed up again slowly. His head having been bent attentively as he listened, they did not see anything unusual.

After a moment of inscrutable deliberation, he answered that he would do as they wished. Dicky hinted that he would require some information about Lord Malice's past career and his family's history, but he assured them that he did not need it; and his eyes idled ironically with Dicky's face.

When the two had gone, Old Roses sat in his room, a handful of letters, a photograph, and a couple of decorations spread out before him, his fingers resting on them, his look engaged with a far horizon.

The Governor came. He was met outside the township by the citizens and escorted in— a dusty and numerous cavalcade. They passed the Inspector's house. The garden was blooming, and on the roof a flag was flying. Struck by the singular character of the place Lord Malice asked who lived there, and proposed stopping for a moment to make the acquaintance of its owner; adding, with some slight sarcasm, that if the officers of the Government were too busy to pay their respects to their Governor, their Governor must pay his respects to them. But Old Roses was not in the garden nor in the house, and they left without seeing him. He was sitting under a willow at the billabong, reading over and over to himself the address to be delivered before the Governor in the evening. As he read his face had a wintry and inhospitable look.

The night came. Old Roses entered the dining-room quietly with the crowd, far in the Governor's wake. According to his request, he was given a seat in a distant corner, where he was quite inconspicuous. Most of the men present were in evening dress. He wore a plain tweed suit, but carried a handsome rose in his button-hole. It was impossible to put him at a disadvantage. He looked

distinguished as he was. He appeared to be much interested in Lord Malice. The early proceedings were cordial, for the Governor and his suite made themselves agreeable, and talk flowed amiably. After a time there was a rattle of knives and forks, and the Chairman rose. Then, after a chorus of "hear, hears," there was general silence. The doorways of the room were filled by the women-servants of the hotel. Chief among them was Vic, who kept her eyes fixed on Old Roses. She knew that he was to read the address and speak, and she was more interested in him and in his success than in Lord Malice and his suite. Her admiration of him was great. He had always treated her as though she had been born a lady, and it had done her good.

"And I call upon Mr. Adam Sherwood to speak to the health of His Excellency, Lord Malice."

In his modest corner Old Roses stretched to his feet. The Governor glanced over carelessly. He only saw a figure in grey, with a rose in his button-hole. The Chairman whispered that it was the owner of the house and garden which had interested His Excellency that afternoon. His Excellency looked a little closer, but saw only a rim of iron-grey hair above the paper held before Old Roses' face.

Then a voice came from behind the paper: "Your Excellency—"

At the first words the Governor started, and his eyes flashed searchingly, curiously at the paper that walled the face, and at the iron-grey hair. The voice rose distinct and clear, with modulated emphasis. It had a peculiarly penetrating quality. A few in the room — and particularly Vic— were struck by something in the voice: that it resembled another voice. She soon found the trail. Her eyes also fastened on the paper. Then she moved and went to another door. Here she could see behind the paper at an angle. Her eyes ran from the screened face to that of the Governor. His Excellency had dropped the lower part of his face in his hand, and he was listening intently. Vic noticed that his eyes were painfully grave and concerned. She also noticed other things.

The address was strange. It had been submitted to the Committee, and though it struck them as out-of-the-wayish, it had been approved. It seemed different when read as Old Roses was reading it. The words sounded inclement as they were chiselled out by the speaker's voice. Dicky Merritt afterwards declared that many phrases were interpolated by Old Roses at the moment.

The speaker referred intimately and with peculiar knowledge to the family history of Lord Malice, to certain more or less private matters which did not concern the public, to the antiquity of the name, and the high duty devolving upon one who bore the Earldom of Malice. He dwelt upon the personal character of His Excellency's antecedents, and praised their honourable services to the country. He referred to the death of Lord Malice's eldest brother in Burmah, but he did it strangely. Then, with acute incisiveness, he drew a picture of what a person in so exalted a position as a Governor should be and should

not be. His voice assuredly at this point had a touch of scorn. The aides-de-camp were nervous, the Chairman apprehensive, the Committee ill at ease. But the Governor now was perfectly still, though, as Vic Lindley thought, rather pinched and old-looking. His fingers toyed with a wine-glass, but his eyes never wavered from that paper and the grey hair.

Presently the voice of the speaker changed.

"But," said he, "in Lord Malice we have— the perfect Governor; a man of blameless and enviable life, and possessed abundantly of discreetness, judgment, administrative ability and power; the absolute type of English nobility and British character."

He dropped the paper from before his face, and his eyes met those of the Governor, and stayed. Lord Malice let go a long choking breath, which sounded like immeasurable relief. During the rest of the speech— delivered in a fine-tempered voice— he sat as in a dream, his eyes intently upon the other, who now seemed to recite rather than read. He thrilled all by the pleasant resonance of his tones, and sent the blood aching delightfully through Victoria Lindley's veins.

When he sat down there was immense applause. The Governor rose in reply. He spoke in a low voice, but any one listening outside would have said that Old Roses was still speaking. By this resemblance the girl, Vic, had trailed to others. It was now apparent to many, but Dicky said afterwards that it was simply a case of birth and breeding— men used to walking red carpet grew alike, just as stud-owners and rabbit-catchers did.

The last words of the Governor's reply were delivered in a convincing tone as his eyes hung on Old Roses' face.

"And, as I am indebted to you, gentlemen, for the feelings of loyalty to the Throne which prompted this reception and the address just delivered, so I am indebted to Mr. — Adam Sherwood for his admirable words and the unusual sincerity and eloquence of his speech; and to both you and him for most notable kindness."

Immediately after the Governor's speech Old Roses stole out; but as he passed through the door where Vic stood, his hand brushed against hers. Feeling its touch, he grasped it eagerly for an instant as though he were glad of the friendliness in her eyes.

It was just before dawn of the morning that the Governor knocked at the door of the house by Long Neck Billabong. The door opened at once, and he entered without a word.

He and Old Roses stood face to face. His countenance was drawn and worn, the other's cold and calm. "Tom, Tom," Lord Malice said, "we thought you were dead—"

"That is, Edward, having left me to my fate in Burmah— you were only half a mile away with a column of stout soldiers and hillmen— you waited till my death was reported, and seemed assured, and then came on to England: to take the title, just vacant by our father's death, and to marry my intended wife, who, God knows, appeared to have little care which brother it was! You got both. I was long a prisoner. When I got free, I learned all; I bided my time. I was waiting till you had a child. Twelve years have gone: you have no child. But I shall spare you a while longer. If your wife should die, or you should yet have a child, I shall return."

The Governor lifted his head wearily from the table where he now sat.

"Tom," he said in a low, heavy voice, "I was always something of a scoundrel, but I've repented of that thing every day of my life since. It has been knives— knives all the way. I am glad— I can't tell you how glad— that you are alive."

He stretched out his hand with a motion of great relief. "I was afraid you were going to speak to-night— to tell all, even though I was your brother. You spared me for the sake—"

"For the sake of the family name," the other interjected stonily.

"For the sake of our name. But I would have taken my punishment, in thankfulness, because you are alive."

"Taken it like a man, your Excellency," was the low rejoinder.

He laughed bitterly.

"You will not wipe the thing out, Tom? You will not wipe it out, and come back, and take your own— now?" said the other anxiously.

The other dried the perspiration from his forehead. "I will come back in my own time; and it can never be wiped out. For you shook all my faith in my old world. That's the worst thing that can happen a man. I only believe in the very common people now— those who are not put upon their honour. One doesn't expect it of them, and, unlikely as it is, one isn't often deceived. I think we'd better talk no more about it."

"You mean I had better go."

"I think so. I am going to marry soon."

The other started nervously.

"You needn't be so shocked. I will come back one day, but not till your wife dies, or you have a child, as I said."

The Governor rose to his feet, and went to the door. "Whom do you intend marrying?" he asked in a voice far from vice-regal, only humbled and disturbed.

The reply was instant and keen: "A bar-maid."

The other's hand dropped from the door. But Old Roses, passing over, opened it, and, waiting for the other to pass through, said: "I do not doubt but there will be issue. Good-day, my lord!"

The Governor passed out from the pale light of the lamp into the grey and moist morning. He turned at a point where the house would be lost to view, and saw the other still standing there. The voice of Old Roses kept ringing in his ears sardonically. He knew that his punishment must go on and on; and it did.

Old Roses married Victoria Lindley from "out Tibbooburra way," and there was comely issue, and that issue is now at Eton; for Esau came into his birthright, as he said he would, at his own time. But he and his wife have a way of being indifferent to the gay, astonished world; and, uncommon as it may seem, he has not tired of her.

---

## 7: The Old Lady Flies

*Raoul F. Whitfield*

1896-1945

*Top-Notch, 1 Aug 1927*

RUSS HEALY always insisted that the old girl understood. But Russ was that rare sort of creature— a flyer who was sentimental. Of course, on the face of things, it was sheer rot. A plane is an inanimate object, theoretically— and therefore incapable of understanding. But Russ didn't look at it that way. There was no doubt about the fact that he loved the Jenny.

He'd picked her up right after the war, on a government sale. She hadn't been flown at all, and Russ had worked with her ever since that time. He'd joy-hopped her, taken a chance on air advertising, smoke writing, stunting. He'd even done some air surveying with her, and I think he chased boll weevils, down South, at one time— spraying from the Jenny.

She'd cracked up with him more than once, but Russ would just patch her up— and patch himself up. She wasn't a pretty sight. She was dirty— oil-stained, her wing fabric of varied colors, her struts lacking varnish. She sagged a bit on her under carriage. But her flying wires were right; she was rigged properly for the air. She was slow, of course— powered by an old Hall-Scott engine, and sluggish on the controls, compared to the new ships. Just an old lady, that was all she was— an old lady, still turning a prop and taking the air, but pretty far out of date.

We had eight ships in the circus, and five pilots. That is, we had five fliers who could do more than get off and land. A couple of the grease monkeys could qualify— indeed, had qualified— for a license, but that doesn't make a flyer— not by about a thousand air hours and considerable natural ability. However, when we made the jump from the outskirts of one town to the outskirts of another, the two mechanics each flew a ship, and Bob Brooks, who ran the Brooks' Flying Circus, flew the other. That got the eight ships around, and made a nice showing in the sky.

It was Bob Brooks' wife who started the thing. She was a peach, and Bob was crazy about her. I didn't blame him.

We ran into a streak of tough luck. Charlie Ryan crashed on a landing, and both he and his mechanic, riding in the rear cockpit, were badly smashed up. Then Duke Conroy got in a spin, out of a side-slip— and we had to leave him at the hospital pretty badly hurt.

It was then that Bob's wife had her little say. It was, in effect, that her good-looking husband keep both feet on the ground.

We stayed around Los Angeles, picking up a few movie jobs, and looking at the mountains and the Pacific from the air until the boys came out of the hospital. We lost a little money.

Then Bob Brooks called us into the big tent we slung up on the field in which we were parking, and gave us a little talk. "I'm giving the air the air," he said. "I never did do much but ferry. I've got too much brain." He grinned, and so did we. "And now I'm not even ferrying. So we've got to cut down a bit. We'll drop two ships. Vance Bailey has bought that Standard. Now, about the other—"

Brooks' eyes went to those of Russ Healy, and we knew right away what was coming. It gave me a jolt, because I knew Russ— and I knew the way he felt. And I guess it gave the others a jolt, too.

"About the other," Bob repeated uncomfortably, "I guess we'll have to let the 'Old Lady' go, Russ."

Well, there it was. Russ Healy blinked a couple of times. He's tall and lean, with gray, squinted eyes— and usually there's a tight little smile playing around his lips. But the smile wasn't there now.

Healy shook his head slowly. Then he got a pill from the pack. "If you do," he said very slowly, "I'll just go along with her."

Bob Brooks frowned. "You can have the new Waco, Russ. You can do anything with her. She's got power, climb, dive. She's an easy rider—"

"I'm sticking with the Old Lady," Russ said quietly. "When do you want me to cut loose?"

I saw then that Brooks was getting sore. Russ Healy was a sweet stunt flyer; in fact, he was a good man all around when it came to air stuff. There wasn't much that Russ couldn't do, or hadn't done.

"Look here!" Brooks said. "We can't fly a ship around if there's no one to climb inside and get at the stick. You don't expect me to let a new plane drop— and hang on to a rambling wreck? Why, that Jenny is liable to fall to pieces in the first spin you get her into, and—"

Russ Healy's eyes narrowed. "Think so?" He spoke grimly. "Well, I'll just take her up there now— and loop you ragged, and then I'll come down in the tightest spin—"

"Yes you will! Not with *me*!" Brooks' face was flushed.

"That's right," Russ said grimly. "I forgot you were quitting the air."

It was his tone that did it. And they had both flared, were both pretty hot.

Bob Brooks glared at Russ. "I'm not quitting the air until we hit Tia Juana," the boss said slowly. "I'll fly the Waco down. You can take that wreck of yours— and cut loose, any time you like. What do we owe you?"

Russ Healy smiled. "Not a cent," he said. "I owe *you* fifty bucks— the final payment on that last wreck replacement material for the Old Lady. I'll see that you get it by dark."

Then he turned and walked away.

BOB BROOKS looked at me, shook his head slowly. I was frowning.

The boys were talking together in low tones.

"Not so good, Bob!" I said. "You're cutting loose the most popular guy in the outfit— and just because he sticks by his old bus."

Brooks didn't see it that way. He spoke to the rest of the gang: "We're losing money. I can't fly all the ships we've got. Why should I get rid of the new ones— just because I'm sentimental? This is a business— not a sob factory!"

There was common sense in that. We could see Brooks' side of it. And the sky-riding game hadn't been so good lately— something had to be done.

"I think a lot of Russ Healy," Brooks went on, looking at each one of us in turn. "Even if he did hint that I was showing yellow by sticking on the ground— I like him. Some of you boys talk to him. He could store that ship up at Al Garvin's hangar. Then every month or so I'll give him a day off, and if he's close enough he can come back and pet it."

With that final sarcasm, Bob Brooks walked out of the tent. I chased after him, having just had an idea. They don't come very often, but sometimes they're good when they do come.

"Russ is sore, Bob," I said, "and he owes you fifty bucks. He's going to try to get that fifty. I happen to know that he hasn't got it. And he's going to try to show you up— show you that the Old Lady can still do her stuff. Now— how's he going to do it?"

Bob frowned. "He isn't! He's just talking."

"You know better than that," I replied. "He isn't that kind. I'll tell you what he's going to do— he's going to tackle the 'War Aces' job!"

That got Bob. That job happened to be one which had been turned down by three flying outfits and a half dozen joy-hoppers who were going it alone. A fellow named Conant was directing a picture of war-flying days, and he wanted some crash stuff. He was willing to pay for it, and he didn't expect the pilot to kill himself. But he wanted a crash— and some tight, low spins that wouldn't be easy.

"Russ wouldn't do that job," Bob said. "He's too wise for that."

"But he's sore," I repeated. "It gives him a chance to show you what the Old Lady can do— in the air. And it gives him a chance to hand you the fifty and tell you—"

An exhaust roar cut me short. We both stared toward the dead-line. There was only one ship out of the canvas hangars, and it was the Old Lady, the Jenny.

I swore softly. "Stop him, Bob! Stall him off. He's going to fly over to that field where they're doing the air-shoot on—"

"Come on!" yelled Brooks, and ran toward the ship. I followed. We dodged through the wash of the Old Lady's prop; her engine was being tested with blocks under the wheels. We both climbed up on a wing as Russ Healy cut the throttle and eliminated most of the exhaust roar.

"Forget about that fifty, Russ." Bob Brooks grinned. "We'll call it square. Where are you going—"

Brooks stopped.

There was a faint smile playing about Healy's lips; his eyes were narrowed.

"Get off that wing, Brooks!" Russ' tone was hard. "I'm going to put the Old Lady through some stunts that you'll pay coin to look at! And you'll have your fifty, all right. This old girl has made plenty for you— she'll make that fifty—"

"Forget it!" Bob said. "If you try to do picture stuff with this—"

"Get off that wing!" Russ shouted, his face white. He knew what was coming— what *would* have come. "Get off— or I'll bounce you off. Take those blocks away, Bud!"

"Russ," I yelled desperately, "Bob didn't exactly mean that about the Old Lady. Cool down and—"

The ship rolled forward from the dead-line. I jumped off the trailing edge of the wing. The prop wash caught me and bowled me over a few times. Something battered against me. I sat up to find Bob Brooks sitting beside me. The Old Lady was climbing off the field— cross wind.

We got up and watched her climb. I thought, for a few seconds, that Russ might just take her up a few thousand and do some stunts. But he didn't. He headed her northeast, and flew in a straight line. He didn't even bother to get altitude.

I groaned. "He's heading dead for that field in the hills— where they're making 'War Aces!' He'll kill himself, sure as—"

Bob Brooks swore softly. Then he smiled. "He owes me money on that plane! It'll take time to get cameras set up. They may not be working today. Anyway, it'll all take time. We'll climb in the D.H. 6 and fly over. I'll talk to Conant— he can't use Russ—"

"He'll hand you the fifty and tell you to clear out," I interrupted. "And Russ'll raise the devil if you try to cut in on him."

Bob Brooks groaned. "They'll say I rode him into being bumped off! He'll get all smashed— we've *got* to do something!"

I nodded. "What?" I asked simply. And that was the question.

WE WASTED about five minutes talking the thing over. Al Rodgers and Dave Simmons joined us. Charlie Ryan and Duke Conroy came up. It was Conroy who hit on the idea.

"Russ is a good guy, boss," he said. "He gets heated up easily— but he's all right. I'm not going to stick over here and see him kill himself for the chance of showing you up, and getting fifty bucks. I know this fellow Conant. As long as he shoots the crash— he won't care about Russ. When that fellow Donnelly, who made a living by pulling off crashes for the film gang, got his, did they do any prolonged weeping? They did not. Just business— and he'd signed a paper releasing them from any responsibility, of course. I won't let Russ get hot-headed and bump himself off that way!"

"How," I asked, "are you going to stop it?"

"Not *me*," Conroy said. "*Us!* I could lick Russ if I hadn't just come out of the hospital, maybe— but there would still be the movie gang. There's only one thing to do. We'll *all* fly over there— and raise merry—"

"Great!" I interrupted, and grabbed Bob Brooks by the arm. "But first let's call the Mammoth Film Company— and make sure they're working on air stuff today. They've been shooting some mild flying, even if they couldn't get the crash stuff."

Bob nodded excitedly. "Get the ships out! You call up, Mac. We'll fly five ships over— I'll ride with you, Mac. Hurry it up! They might just happen to be set for the stuff."

There was a gas station about a half mile down the road which ran past the field, and I trotted toward it. The other boys were moving toward the hangars. I chuckled. Russ would be sore, furious— when we flew in and busted things up. And six of us could do it.

It was the only thing to do. I'd heard about Conant. He was an aggressive chap, and he knew his air. He'd flown during the war, and then he'd quit, which showed me that he had brains. It was his job now to get crash scenes for "War Aces"— and he was up against it. It isn't easy to crash a ship, and get away cheerfully.

Donnelly had done it— for about three crashes, wing-overs and stalls. And then the engine had come back on his chest— and he was through.

"War Aces" was a thriller— I knew, because I'd read it. It wasn't exactly highbrow, and it wouldn't take much acting, but it would take some crashing, and some bang-up air stuff. If the movie bunch were working— and I had a hunch that they were— Conant would grab Russ and the Old Lady. And Russ was so sore that he'd forgotten all about himself. That was a cinch. He was like that.

It took me five minutes to get somebody at the picture outfit that knew about the shoot. And they gave me a straight answer. Conant had five cameras out at the field, in the hills back of Hollywood. He had two ships. He was shooting stuff. And the company was still looking for a thrill-man. Did I know of one?

I groaned and hung up. When I got back to the dead-line the ships were out, and being tested at the blocks. I gave Bob the cheerful news. He swore a couple of times.

"When we hit the field we'll set our ship down," he explained. "Look out for holes— they may have been doing some war-time shell-hole stuff. Mac and I will go after Russ— and hang on to him. You fellows get down as soon after us as you can, in case this fellow Conant gets rough with us for breaking up the party. I'll do the talking. If things look tough, you ease up to the Old Lady— and break a connection, Duke."

Duke Conroy grinned. "I'd rather talk with this Conant, but you're the boss."

"Well— let's get up and over there!" Bob said. "I started this mess and I'll finish it! And believe me, when I get Russ Healy back here—"

"I'll feel a lot better!" I interrupted— and meant it.

Then we climbed the five ships, and taxied out. Sixty seconds later we were off the earth— and heading for the field from which they were shooting the "War Aces" stuff. As the D.H. climbed, and I held the joy-stick back a bit from the neutral position, I shook my head slowly. Knowing Russ Healy as well as I did, I could figure trouble ahead and below.

"Unless we wreck things generally," I thought to myself, "the Old Lady flies!"

IT WASN'T HARD to spot the field on which they were making "War Aces"— or at least a part of it. It was a level stretch, between rolling hills. There were shell holes, home-made but real warlike, at one end. At the other end of the stretch there were three ships. Two of them were small, single-seaters. One, I guessed, was a baby Nieuport. Ed Seeley had one of those, but he wasn't doing any crash stuff with it, I knew that.

As we circled over, I saw that they were working on the Old Lady. Probably they were rigging up a couple of dummy guns, or trying to make her look like a D.H. or a bomber of some type. It was hard to figure just what they could make the Old Lady look like— but they do queer things in the movies.

I cut the throttle, and glided down. Bob Brooks yelled at me above the whistling of wind through the flying wires: "We'll be in time! They're trying to camouflage the Old Lady!"

I nodded, and brought the D.H. down into the wind. We made a fair landing, and I taxied around and rolled back toward the three planes.

The crowd was watching me come up, and some of the bunch on the field were staring up at the other boys.

We rolled fairly close to the parked ships, and I cut the switch. Bob and I climbed down, and we were met at the wing tip by a scowling Russ Healy. Beside him was this fellow Conant, short and stocky— and dolled up as though he were going to play a round or two of championship golf.

Brooks grinned. "Hello, boys!" he greeted them. "Just paying you a little visit. Sort of a social call. How's the picture coming along?"

Conant smiled. "It'll be all right now," he said cheerfully. "Healy's going to do some crashes for us— and some war air stuff. If we could work you boys in—" He stopped.

Bob Brooks was shaking his head slowly. "Russ isn't going to do any crashes for you— not in the Old Lady! And you can't work us in, Conant."

Russ Healy swore softly.

Conant looked sort of amused.

There was a crowd of picture people around us by this time, but the other boys were setting their ships down on the field. I wasn't worried much.

"If it's a matter of money—" Conant said.

"It isn't," Brooks interrupted him. Then he grinned.

I could see that Brooks was trying to get out of it peaceably, if he could, and I had my doubts about that.

"You see," Brooks continued, "we sort of like Russ around the outfit. Sometimes he has careless ideas, but he's not doing any crashing for you— get that straight!"

Conant stiffened and smiled in a rather superior manner.

Just then Al Rodgers and Dave Simmons shoved their way to our side.

Bob Brooks grinned. "Did Duke go over to the Old Lady?" he asked Simmons.

Simmons nodded. "With his best pair of pliers," he said cheerfully, and I saw Russ Healy straighten up and his face get hard.

Brooks nodded. "Russ," he said slowly, "suppose you come along back with us. You can ride me back in the Old Lady. Maybe I was a little hasty about that ship. Maybe we can frame some way of taking her—"

"Not a chance!" Russ interrupted hotly. "You fellows clear off this field. If they don't clear off, Conant—"

Conant nodded his head slowly.

I looked at the director, but I spoke to Bob Brooks. "I'll take this little runt," I told him. "And I won't need that set of brass knuckles unless they get to piling on me too thick."

Dave Simmons chuckled. Dave's about the biggest pilot in captivity, and he likes a good, uneven scrap. "I'm glad we came over," he said cheerfully. "Better shoot this stuff, Conant. It'll make good war stuff."

I COULD SEE, by that time, that Conant wasn't a scrapper. He just smiled in a sort of apologetic way.

"If it's any of your business," he said, addressing Brooks, "perhaps it might be advisable to talk things over."

Healy didn't like that. He glared at Bob Brooks, and said: "I owe him fifty dollars, Conant. Give it to him, and take it off my stunt pay."

I expected that.

So did Bob. He shook his head. "I'll have to look up some papers," he replied. "Don't know the exact amount, and, anyway, Healy is under a contract to fly for me— not for himself. We'd have to—"

"I've busted the contract!" Russ Healy exclaimed. "I'll fly any way that I want to fly. The Old Lady's my ship. You say she's no good. I'll show you how good she is— and you'll pay money to see her in the movies—"

"Steady!" Bob interrupted him. "Maybe we'd just better grab him, Mac— what do you think?"

I looked at Russ. He was pretty white around the ears, but he was still able to use his head.

"Better come along, Russ!" It was Simmons who spoke. "If you and your friends hop us, Duke'll clip a few wires with his pliers, and you never will get the Old Lady off— not for a few days, anyway."

Healy glared at Simmons. Then he looked at the director. Conant was smiling cheerfully. There was a peculiar expression in Russ Healy's eyes suddenly. He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he said. "But I'll be back in a few days, Conant— just as soon as I work out fifty bucks' worth of air stuff for the old miser, here."

Conant nodded. "We'll shoot some other scenes in the meantime," he replied, and kept right on smiling. "Don't get hurt, Healy."

I laughed out loud at that one. Conant telling Russ not to get hurt! It was pretty rich.

"I'll ride back with Russ, Mac," the boss told me. "You boys stay down here until we take off."

I nodded and lighted a pill.

Russ followed Bob Brooks along toward the Old Lady.

Conant shrugged his shoulders. "Just one delay after another," he declared. "It's beastly!"

"Sure it is," I agreed. "Times are getting tough when you can't get fellows to kill themselves by crashing planes for a few hundred dollars."

But Conant didn't get sore. He kept right on smiling. And remembering that expression I'd seen in Russ Healy's eyes, I figured that something was up. I tried to dope out just what it would be, as I walked over toward the D.H., but it had me buffaloed.

The Old Lady's appearance sidetracked me. They hadn't had much time, but already they'd mounted two guns on the old Jenny, and there was camouflage paint on her— not yet dry. There wasn't very much of it, but enough to make her look like a different ship. She'd do for a crash, anyway.

Russ was climbing into the front cockpit, and as he squirmed into place back of the stick, he looked at me. He was grinning. Bob Brooks was already seated in the rear cockpit.

I waved a hand and went on toward the D.H. The other boys were already in their planes, or moving toward them.

I hadn't more than snapped the self-starter and let the prop turn over a few times, when the Old Lady, gaudy in her new disguise, took the air. I stared at her. The dummy guns were still in place. I wondered why Bob hadn't raised the devil about that, but I figured he was glad enough to get Russ away so easily.

"He'll have to do *some* talking to keep Russ from coming back!" I thought, as I advanced the throttle a few notches and taxied out into the wind.

"*Something's* funny in this deal. I'm sure of that!"

I'd heard a lot about this fellow Conant, and I *knew* a lot about Russ Healy. Neither of them, from the way I figured it, had run true to form. They'd let us set the ships down there, and deliberately bust up their little party.

They'd taken it pretty calmly, too. Then, there had been that exchange of glances between Conant and Russ Healy. That had counted for something. As I lifted the De Havilland off the field, following the Old Lady, I shook my head. "Something's up— besides some joy-hopping ships!" I said to myself. "But *what?*"

THE ANSWER came when I got up to four thousand feet, and it came so suddenly that I almost let the D.H. slip into a tail-spin. We'd been climbing in a wide circle— the five ships— following the Old Lady. And I guess we'd all been getting a kick out of those two dummy guns and the slapped-on war paint.

All of a sudden the Old Lady stood right up on her tail in a sweet zoom— and laid over on her back! Then she came down in a pretty fair loop!

I had the D.H. out of her way, banking off vertically. As I came around, in a position to get a good look at things, I saw plenty.

There were about a dozen ships in the air. At least four of them were stunting— looping, doing wing-overs, Immelmans, and spins! From two of them came sulphurous trails of yellow, streaming off at an angle. They had guns— and were shooting them!

The Old Lady was going down in a spin, and two planes were following her down, both streaming out yellow trails from their exhausts and spitting red from guns shooting between the synchronized propeller blades! Diving near by was a fourth ship, with a bird standing in the rear cockpit— and turning a crank in a boxlike affair!

Then I got it. Conant and Russ Healy had framed us! They were shooting from the air and from the ground— shooting stuff for the picture! And they were using our five ships!

A screaming, wire-whistling shape dove past the D.H. on the right, and instinctively I banked away. But even as I did so, I got a glimpse of a helmeted figure using a camera. He wasn't cranking it— but I guessed that he had one of the new, electrically driven ones that didn't need it.

I had the D.H. in a spin. Bob Brooks, riding with Russ, being let in for all this frame-up! And the Old Lady doing all of her stuff! No wonder Russ had exchanged glances with Conant!

At three thousand feet I got the D.H. out of the spin, leveled off, and gave her the gun.

There were white bursts in the air, and on the ground below there were more of them. I banked over, looking for the Old Lady. I saw one of the circus ships going down in a steep glide, with a strange plane on her tail. A ship was looping a few thousand feet above me, white bursts on her right. Smoke was drifting all across the sky.

Then I spotted the Old Lady. She was going down toward the field, at the shell-ripped end, with one of the Nieuports I'd seen right behind her. I caught sight of two camera men, shooting up at her as she came down.

I dove the D.H. I was too surprised and too excited to get sore. Anyway, it wouldn't have done any good. The whole thing was plain now. I'd always given Russ credit for having brains, but I'd never given him credit for having this much.

They'd had ships waiting on some other field of course, and Russ had guessed that we'd come after him. When Bob Brooks had said he'd fly back with Russ he'd played right into that pilot's hands. Two birds with one stone! Not only would Brooks sit in on the sky shoot, but he'd be right there for the crash— the big scene that Conant wanted!

I groaned. The D.H. was down pretty low now. I could see a ship diving off to the side of the Old Lady, and in the center of the shell-holed area were two more camera men, waiting to shoot the crash from the ground.

The Old Lady was slipping off on a wing now, and I knew that Russ was trying to hit the spot near the camera men. There was the fellow grinding away from the plane at one side, too— still shooting the fake battle.

I thought of Bob Brooks in the rear cockpit. He was helpless— it wasn't a dual-control ship. Russ had put the Old Lady through every air stunt— and Bob had had to sit there and take it. Now he was in for the crash!

It was a beauty! The Old Lady nosed right into what looked like a fairly deep shell hole. Her propeller splintered, her tail came up. I could hear her wings crackling, with the engine throttled down. Then she tumbled over, upside down— and I groaned and dove the D.H. for a landing.

"The old fool!" I said, and wasn't at all sure that I really meant it.

WHEN I GOT UP beside the Old Lady, Russ Healy was leaning against a wheel and smoking a cigarette. Bob Brooks was limping around, trying out his left leg, and muttering to himself. Conant was standing near by, and scribbling on a piece of oblong paper with a fountain pen.

"Hello there, rough boy!" Russ greeted me cheerfully. His head was bandaged, and a medical-appearing gentleman was putting more white stuff around his left wrist and hand. "Can the Old Lady fly?"

I grunted. She wasn't as complete a wreck as I'd expected to see, and there was a reason. The shell hole was filled with nice, soft sand!

"She *could* fly!" I replied.

Bob Brooks limped over my way. "They put one over on us, Mac!" he said. "They shot all sorts of stuff. They used our planes, their planes— and then even used *me!*"

I couldn't help but grin.

Then the red-faced, golf-togged Conant came over and waved a check toward Bob. "This should help," the director said. "We *had* to have your planes. Can't use all of it, of course. You weren't rigged with guns and stuff. But it'll help— in the flashes. Is it all right?"

Bob took the check, and I looked over his shoulder. We both gasped together. As a check it was a masterpiece.

"It's— all right!" Bob managed to say.

Conant chuckled. "Had to have the stuff!" he said. "Needed our ships— all I could scrape together— for the cameras. Most of them, anyway. Of course, I'll take care of Healy—"

Russ grinned. Then his face sobered. He glared at Bob Brooks.

"How about it?" he asked. "Can the Old Lady fly? Does she get fixed up— and do I sky-ride her with the outfit?"

Bob Brooks looked up at the sky, and I could see that he was thinking back about four and a half minutes— to those stunts. He looked down at Russ Healy again, and nodded his head.

"The Old Lady flies!" he said slowly, and that settled it.

---

## 8: The Curate of Churnside

*Grant Allen*

1848-1899

*The Cornhill Magazine* Sep 1884

Collected in: *Twelve Tales* 1899

WALTER DENE, deacon, in his faultless Oxford clerical coat and broad felt hat, strolled along slowly, sunning himself as he went, after his wont, down the pretty central lane of West Churnside. It was just the idyllic village best suited to the taste of such an idyllic young curate as Walter Dene. There were cottages with low-thatched roofs, thickly overgrown with yellow stonecrop and pink house-leek; there were trellis-work porches up which the scented dog-rose and the fainter honeysuckle clambered together in sisterly rivalry; there were paraged gable-ends of Elizabethan farmhouses, quaintly varied with black oak joists and moulded plaster panels. At the end of all, between an avenue of ancient elm-trees, the heavy square tower of the old church closed in the little vista— a church with a round Norman doorway and dog-tooth arches, melting into Early English lancets in the aisle, and finishing up with a great decorated east window by the broken cross and yew-tree. Not a trace of Perpendicularity about it anywhere, thank goodness: 'for if it were Perpendicular,' said Walter Dene to himself often, 'I really think, in spite of my uncle, I should have to look out for another curacy.'

Yes, it was a charming village, and a charming country; but, above all, it was rendered habitable and pleasurable for a man of taste by the informing presence of Christina Eliot. 'I don't think I shall propose to Christina this week after all,' thought Walter Dene as he strolled along lazily. 'The most delightful part of love-making is certainly its first beginning. The little tremor of hope and expectation; the half-needless doubt you feel as to whether she really loves you; the pains you take to pierce the thin veil of maidenly reserve; the triumph of detecting her at a blush or a flutter when she sees you coming— all these are delicate little morsels to be rolled daintily on the critical palate, and not to be swallowed down coarsely at one vulgar gulp. Poor child, she is on tenter-hooks of hesitation and expectancy all the time, I know; for I'm sure she loves me now, I'm sure she loves me; but I must wait a week yet: she will be grateful to me for it hereafter. We mustn't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; we mustn't eat up all our capital at one extravagant feast, and then lament the want of our interest ever afterward. Let us live another week in our first fool's paradise before we enter on the safer but less tremulous pleasures of sure possession. We can enjoy first love but once in a lifetime; let us enjoy it now while we can, and not fling away the chance prematurely by mere childish haste and girlish precipitancy.' Thinking which thing, Walter Dene halted a moment by the

churchyard wall, picked a long spray of scented wild thyme from a mossy cranny, and gazed into the blue sky above at the graceful swifts who nested in the old tower, as they curved and circled through the yielding air on their evenly poised and powerful pinions.

Just at that moment old Mary Long came out of her cottage to speak with the young parson. 'If ye plaze, Maister Dene,' she said in her native west-country dialect, 'our Nully would like to zee 'ee. She's main ill to-day, zur, and she be like to die a'most, I'm thinking.'

'Poor child, poor child,' said Walter Dene tenderly. 'She's a dear little thing, Mrs. Long, is your Nellie, and I hope she may yet be spared to you. I'll come and see her at once, and try if I can do anything to ease her.'

He crossed the road compassionately with the tottering old grandmother, giving her his helping hand over the kerbstone, and following her with bated breath into the close little sickroom. Then he flung open the tiny casement with its diamond-leaded panes, so as to let in the fresh summer air, and picked a few sprigs of sweetbriar from the porch, which he joined with the geranium from his own button-hole to make a tiny nosegay for the bare bedside. After that, he sat and talked awhile gently in an undertone to pale, pretty little Nellie herself, and went away at last promising to send her some jelly and some soup immediately from the vicarage kitchen.

'She's a sweet little child,' he said to himself musingly, 'though I'm afraid she's not long for this world now; and the poor like these small attentions dearly. They get them seldom, and value them for the sake of the thoughtfulness they imply, rather than for the sake of the mere things themselves. I can order a bottle of calf's-foot at the grocer's, and Carter can set it in a mould without any trouble; while as for the soup, some tinned mock turtle and a little fresh stock makes a really capital mixture for this sort of thing. It costs so little to give these poor souls pleasure, and it is a great luxury to oneself undeniably. But, after all, what a funny trade it is to set an educated man to do! They send us up to Oxford or Cambridge, give us a distinct taste for Aeschylus and Catullus, Dante and Milton, Mendelssohn and Chopin, good claret and *olives farcies*, and then bring us down to a country village, to look after the bodily and spiritual ailments of rheumatic old washer-women! If it were not for poetry, flowers, and Christina, I really think I should succumb entirely under the infliction.'

'He's a dear, good man, that he is, is young passon,' murmured old Mary Long as Walter disappeared between the elm-trees; 'and he do love the poor and the zick, the same as if he was their own brother. God bless his zoul, the dear, good vulla, vor all his kindness to our Nully.'

Halfway down the main lane Walter came across Christina Eliot. As she saw him she smiled and coloured a little, and held out her small gloved hand prettily.

Walter took it with a certain courtly and graceful chivalry. 'An exquisite day, Miss Eliot,' he said; 'such a depth of sapphire in the sky, such a faint undertone of green on the clouds by the horizon, such a lovely humming of bees over the flickering hot meadows! On days like this, one feels that Schopenhauer is wrong after all, and that life is sometimes really worth living.'

'It seems to me often worth living,' Christina answered; 'if not for oneself, at least for others. But you pretend to be more of a pessimist than you really are, I fancy, Mr. Dene. Any one who finds so much beauty in the world as you do can hardly think life poor or meagre. You seem to catch the loveliest points in everything you look at, and to throw a little literary or artistic reflection over them which makes them even lovelier than they are in themselves.'

'Well, no doubt one can increase one's possibilities of enjoyment by carefully cultivating one's own faculties of admiration and appreciation,' said the curate thoughtfully; 'but, after all, life has only a few chapters that are thoroughly interesting and enthralling in all its history. We oughtn't to hurry over them too lightly, Miss Eliot; we ought to linger on them lovingly, and make the most of their potentialities; we ought to dwell upon them like "linked sweetness long drawn out." It is the mistake of the world at large to hurry too rapidly over the pleasantest episodes, just as children pick all the plums at once out of the pudding. I often think that, from the purely selfish and temporal point of view, the real value of a life to its subject may be measured by the space of time over which he has managed to spread the enjoyment of its greatest pleasures. Look, for example, at poetry, now.'

A faint shade of disappointment passed across Christina's face as he turned from what seemed another groove into that indifferent subject; but she answered at once, 'Yes, of course one feels that with the higher pleasures at least; but there are others in which the interest of plot is greater, and then one looks naturally rather to the end. When you begin a good novel, you can't help hurrying through it in order to find out what becomes of everybody at last.'

'Ah, but the highest artistic interest goes beyond mere plot interest. I like rather to read for the pleasure of reading, and to loiter over the passages that please me, quite irrespective of what goes before or what comes after; just as you, for your part, like to sketch a beautiful scene for its own worth to you, irrespective of what may happen to the leaves in autumn, or to the cottage roof in twenty years from this. By the way, have you finished that little water-colour of the mill yet? It's the prettiest thing of yours I've ever seen, and I want to look how you've managed the light on your foreground.'

'Come in and see it,' said Christina. 'It's finished now, and, to tell you the truth, I'm very well pleased with it myself.'

'Then I know it must be good,' the curate answered; 'for you are always your own harshest critic.' And he turned in at the little gate with her, and entered the village doctor's tiny drawing-room.

Christina placed the sketch on an easel near the window— a low window opening to the ground, with long lithe festoons of faint-scented jasmine encroaching on it from outside— and let the light fall on it aslant in the right direction. It was a pretty and a clever sketch certainly, with more than a mere amateur's sense of form and colour; and Walter Dene, who had a true eye for pictures, could conscientiously praise it for its artistic depth and fulness. Indeed, on that head at least, Walter Dene's veracity was unimpeachable, however lax in other matters; nothing on earth would have induced him to praise as good a picture or a sculpture in which he saw no real merit. He sat a little while criticising and discussing it, suggesting an improvement here or an alteration there, and then he rose hurriedly, remembering all at once his forgotten promise to little Nellie. 'Dear me,' he said, 'your daughter's picture has almost made me overlook my proper duties, Mrs. Eliot. I promised to send some jelly and things at once to poor little Nellie Long at her grandmother's. How very wrong of me to let my natural inclinations keep me loitering here, when I ought to have been thinking of the poor of my parish!' And he went out with just a gentle pressure on Christina's hand, and a look from his eyes that her heart knew how to read aright at the first glance of it.

'Do you know, Christie,' said her father, 'I sometimes fancy when I hear that new parson fellow talk about his artistic feelings, and so on, that he's just a trifle selfish, or at least self-centred. He always dwells so much on his own enjoyment of things, you know.'

'Oh no, papa,' cried Christina warmly. 'He's anything but selfish, I'm sure. Look how kind he is to all the poor in the village, and how much he thinks about their comfort and welfare. And whenever he's talking with one, he seems so anxious to make you feel happy and contented with yourself. He has a sort of little subtle flattery of manner about him that's all pure kindness; and he's always thinking what he can say or do to please you, and to help you onward. What you say about his dwelling on enjoyment so much is really only his artistic sensibility. He feels things so keenly, and enjoys beauty so deeply, that he can't help talking enthusiastically about it even a little out of season. He has more feelings to display than most men, and I'm sure that's the reason why he displays them so much. A ploughboy could only talk enthusiastically about roast beef and dumplings; Mr. Dene can talk about everything that's beautiful and sublime on earth or in heaven.'

Meanwhile, Walter Dene was walking quickly with his measured tread— the even, regular tread of a cultivated gentleman— down the lane toward the village grocer's, saying to himself as he went, 'There was never such a girl in all

the world as my Christina. She may be only a country surgeon's daughter— a rosebud on a hedgerow bush— but she has the soul and the eye of a queen among women for all that. Every lover has deceived himself with the same sweet dream, to be sure— how over-analytic we have become nowadays, when I must needs half argue myself out of the sweets of first love!— but then they hadn't so much to go upon as I have. She has a wonderful touch in music, she has an exquisite eye in painting, she has an Italian charm in manner and conversation. I'm something of a connoisseur, after all, and no more likely to be deceived in a woman than I am in a wine or a picture. And next week I shall really propose formally to Christina, though I know by this time it will be nothing more than the merest formality. Her eyes are too eloquent not to have told me that long ago. It will be a delightful pleasure to live for her, and in order to make her happy. I frankly recognise that I am naturally a little selfish— not coarsely and vulgarly selfish; from that disgusting and piggish vice I may conscientiously congratulate myself that I'm fairly free; but still selfish in a refined and cultivated manner. Now, living with Christina and for Christina will correct this defect in my nature, will tend to bring me nearer to a true standard of perfection. When I am by her side, and then only, I feel that I am thinking entirely of her, and not at all of myself. To her I show my best side; with her, that best side would be always uppermost. The companionship of such a woman makes life something purer, and higher, and better worth having. The one thing that stands in our way is this horrid practical question of what to live upon. I don't suppose Uncle Arthur will be inclined to allow me anything, and I can't marry on my own paltry income and my curacy only. Yet I can't bear to keep Christina waiting indefinitely till some thick-headed squire or other chooses to take it into his opaque brain to give me a decent living.'

From the grocer's the curate walked on, carrying the two tins in his hand, as far as the vicarage. He went into the library, sat down by his own desk, and rang the bell. 'Will you be kind enough to give those things to Carter, John?' he said in his bland voice; 'and tell her to put the jelly in a mould, and let it set. The soup must be warmed with a little fresh stock, and seasoned. Then take them both, with my compliments, to old Mary Long the washerwoman, for her grandchild. Is my uncle in?'

'No, Master Walter,' answered the man— he was always 'Master Walter' to the old servants at his uncle's— 'the vicar have gone over by train to Churminster. He told me to tell you he wouldn't be back till evening, after dinner.'

'Did you see him off, John?'

'Yes, Master Walter. I took his portmantew to the station.'

'This will be a good chance, then,' thought Walter Dene to himself. 'Very well, John,' he went on aloud: 'I shall write my sermon now. Don't let anybody come to disturb me.'

John nodded and withdrew. Walter Dene locked the door after him carefully, as he often did when writing sermons, and then lit a cigar, which was also a not infrequent concomitant of his exegetical labours. After that he walked once or twice up and down the room, paused a moment to look at his parchment-covered Rabelais and Villon on the bookshelf, peered out of the dulled glass windows with the crest in their centre, and finally drew a curious bent iron instrument out of his waistcoat pocket. With it in his hands, he went up quietly to his uncle's desk, and began fumbling at the lock in an experienced manner. As a matter of fact, it was not his first trial of skill in lockpicking; for Walter Dene was a painstaking and methodical man, and having made up his mind that he would get at and read his uncle's will, he took good care to begin by fastening all the drawers in his own bedroom, and trying his prentice hand at unfastening them again in the solitude of his chamber.

After half a minute's twisting and turning, the wards gave way gently to his dexterous pressure, and the lid of the desk lay open before him. Walter Dene took out the different papers one by one— there was no need for hurry, and he was not a nervous person— till he came to a roll of parchment, which he recognised at once as the expected will. He unrolled it carefully and quietly, without any womanish trembling or excitement— 'Thank Heaven,' he said to himself, 'I'm above such nonsense as that'— and sat down leisurely to read it in the big, low, velvet-covered study chair. As he did so, he did not forget to lay a notched foot-rest for his feet, and to put the little Japanese dish on the tiny table by his side to hold his cigar ash. 'And now,' he said, 'for the important question whether Uncle Arthur has left his money to me, or to Arthur, or to both of us equally. He ought, of course, to leave at least half to me, seeing I have become a curate on purpose to please him, instead of following my natural vocation to the Bar; but I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he had left it all to Arthur. He's a pig-headed and illogical old man, the vicar; and he can never forgive me, I believe, because, being the eldest son, I wasn't called after him by my father and mother. As if that was my fault! Some people's ideas of personal responsibility are so ridiculously muddled.'

He composed himself quietly in the armchair, and glanced rapidly at the will through the meaningless preliminaries till he came to the significant clauses. These he read more carefully. 'All my estate in the county of Dorset, and the messuage or tenement known as Redlands, in the parish of Lode, in the county of Devon, to my dear nephew, Arthur Dene,' he said to himself slowly: 'Oh, this will never do.' 'And I give and bequeath to my said nephew, Arthur Dene, the sum of ten thousand pounds, three per cent. consolidated annuities, now

standing in my name'— 'Oh, this is atrocious, quite atrocious! What's this?' 'And I give and bequeath to my dear nephew, Walter Dene, the residue of my personal estate'— 'and so forth. Oh no. That's quite sufficient. This must be rectified. The residuary legatee would only come in for a few hundreds or so. It's quite preposterous. The vicar was always an ill-tempered, cantankerous, unaccountable person, but I wonder he has the face to sit opposite me at dinner after that.'

He hummed an air from Schubert, and sat a moment looking thoughtfully at the will. Then he said to himself quietly, 'The simplest thing to do would be merely to scrape out or take out with chemicals the name Arthur, substituting the name Walter, and *vice versâ*. That's a very small matter; a man who draws as well as I do ought to be able easily to imitate a copying clerk's engrossing hand. But it would be madness to attempt it now and here; I want a little practice first. At the same time, I mustn't keep the will out a moment longer than is necessary; my uncle may return by some accident before I expect him; and the true philosophy of life consists in invariably minimising the adverse chances. This will was evidently drawn up by Watson and Blenkiron, of Chancery Lane. I'll write to-morrow and get them to draw up a will for me, leaving all I possess to Arthur. The same clerk is pretty sure to engross it, and that'll give me a model for the two names on which I can do a little preliminary practice. Besides, I can try the stuff Wharton told me about, for making ink fade, on the same parchment. That will be killing two birds with one stone, certainly. And now if I don't make haste I shan't have time to write my sermon.'

He replaced the will calmly in the desk, fastened the lock again with a delicate twirl of the pick, and sat down in his armchair to compose his discourse for to-morrow's evensong. 'It's not a bad bit of rhetoric,' he said to himself as he read it over for correction, 'but I'm not sure that I haven't plagiarised a little too freely from Montaigne and dear old Burton. What a pity it must be thrown away upon a Churnside congregation! Not a soul in the whole place will appreciate a word of it, except Christina. Well, well, that alone is enough reward for any man.' And he knocked off his ash pensively into the Japanese ashpan.

During the course of the next week Walter practised diligently the art of imitating handwriting. He got his will drawn up and engrossed at Watson and Blenkiron's (without signing it, *bien entendu*); and he spent many solitary hours in writing the two names 'Walter' and 'Arthur' on the spare end of parchment, after the manner of the engrossing clerk. He also tested the stuff for making the ink fade to his own perfect satisfaction. And on the next occasion when his uncle was safely off the premises for three hours, he took the will once more deliberately from the desk, removed the obnoxious letters with scrupulous care, and wrote in his own name in place of Arthur's, so that even the engrossing clerk himself would hardly have known the difference. 'There,' he said to himself

approvingly, as he took down quiet old George Herbert from the shelf and sat down to enjoy an hour's smoke after the business was over, 'that's one good deed well done, anyhow. I have the calm satisfaction of a clear conscience. The vicar's proposed arrangement was really most unfair; I have substituted for it what Aristotle would rightly have called true distributive justice. For though I've left all the property to myself, by the unfortunate necessity of the case, of course I won't take it all. I'll be juster than the vicar. Arthur shall have his fair share, which is more, I believe, than he'd have done for me; but I hate squalid money-grubbing. If brothers can't be generous and brotherly to one another, what a wretched, sordid little life this of ours would really be!'

Next Sunday morning the vicar preached, and Walter sat looking up at him reflectively from his place in the chancel. A beautiful clear-cut face, the curate's, and seen to great advantage from the doctor's pew, set off by the white surplice, and upturned in quiet meditation towards the elder priest in the pulpit. Walter was revolving many things in his mind, and most of all one adverse chance which he could not just then see his way to minimise. Any day his uncle might take it into his head to read over the will and discover the— ah, well, the rectification. Walter was a man of too much delicacy of feeling even to think of it to himself as a fraud or a forgery. Then, again, the vicar was not a very old man after all; he might live for an indefinite period, and Christina and himself might lose all the best years of their life waiting for a useless person's natural removal. What a pity that threescore was not the utmost limit of human life! For his own part, like the Psalmist, Walter had no desire to outlive his own highest tastes and powers of enjoyment. Ah, well, well, man's prerogative is to better and improve upon nature. If people do not die when they ought, then it becomes clearly necessary for philosophically-minded juniors to help them on their way artificially.

It was an ugly necessity, certainly; Walter frankly recognised that fact from the very beginning, and he shrank even from contemplating it; but there was no other way out of the difficulty. The old man had always been a selfish bachelor, with no love for anybody or anything on earth except his books, his coins, his garden, and his dinner; he was growing tired of all except the last; would it not be better for the world at large, on strict utilitarian principles, that he should go at once? True, such steps are usually to be deprecated; but the wise man is a law unto himself, and instead of laying down the wooden, hard-and-fast lines that make conventional morality so much a rule of thumb, he judges every individual case on its own particular merits. Here was Christina's happiness and his own on the one hand, with many collateral advantages to other people, set in the scale against the feeble remnant of a selfish old man's days on the other. Walter Dean had a constitutional horror of taking life in any form, and especially of shedding blood; but he flattered himself that if anything of the sort became

clearly necessary, he was not the man to shrink from taking the needful measures to ensure it, at any sacrifice of personal comfort.

All through the next week Walter turned over the subject in his own mind; and the more he thought about it, the more the plan gained in definiteness and consistency as detail after detail suggested itself to him. First he thought of poison. That was the cleanest and neatest way of managing the thing, he considered; and it involved the least unpleasant consequences. To stick a knife or shoot a bullet into any sentient creature was a horrid and revolting act; to put a little tasteless powder into a cup of coffee and let a man sleep off his life quietly was really nothing more than helping him involuntarily to a delightful euthanasia. 'I wish any one would do as much for me at his age, without telling me about it,' Walter said to himself seriously. But then the chances of detection would be much increased by using poison, and Walter felt it an imperative duty to do nothing which would expose Christina to the shock of a discovery. She would not see the matter in the same practical light as he did; women never do; their morality is purely conventional, and a wise man will do nothing on earth to shake it. You cannot buy poison without the risk of exciting question. There remained, then, only shooting or stabbing. But shooting makes an awkward noise, and attracts attention at the moment; so the one thing possible was a knife, unpleasant as that conclusion seemed to all his more delicate feelings.

Having thus decided, Walter Dene proceeded to lay his plans with deliberate caution. He had no intention whatsoever of being detected, though his method of action was simplicity itself. It was only bunglers and clumsy fools who got caught; he knew that a man of his intelligence and ability would not make such an idiot of himself as— well, as common ruffians always do. He took his old American bowie-knife, bought years ago as a curiosity, out of the drawer where it had lain so long. It was very rusty, but it would be safer to sharpen it privately on his own hone and strop than to go asking for a new knife at a shop for the express purpose of enabling the shopman afterwards to identify him. He sharpened it for safety's sake during sermon-hour in the library, with the door locked as usual. It took a long time to get off all the rust, and his arm got quickly tired. One morning as he was polishing away at it, he was stopped for a moment by a butterfly which flapped and fluttered against the dulled window-panes. 'Poor thing!' he said to himself, 'it will beat its feathery wings to pieces in its struggles'; and he put a vase of Venetian glass on top of it, lifted the sash carefully, and let the creature fly away outside in the broad sunshine. At the same moment the vicar, who was strolling with his King Charlie on the lawn, came up and looked in at the window. He could not have seen in before, because of the dulled and painted diamonds.

'That's a murderous-looking weapon, Wally,' he said, with a smile, as his glance fell upon the bowie and hone. 'What do you use it for?'

'Oh, it's an American bowie,' Walter answered carelessly. 'I bought it long ago for a curiosity, and now I'm sharpening it up to help me in carving that block of walnut wood.' And he ran his finger lightly along the edge of the blade to test its keenness. What a lucky thing that it was the vicar himself, and not the gardener! If he had been caught by anybody else the fact would have been fatal evidence after all was over. 'Méfiez-vous des papillons,' he hummed to himself, after Béranger, as he shut down the window. 'One more butterfly, and I must give up the game as useless.'

Meanwhile, as Walter meant to make a clean job of it— hacking and hewing clumsily was repulsive to all his finer feelings— he began also to study carefully the anatomy of the human back. He took down all the books on the subject in the library, and by their aid discovered exactly under which ribs the heart lay. A little observation of the vicar, compared with the plates in Quain's *Anatomy*, showed him precisely at what point in his clerical coat the most vulnerable interstice was situated. 'It's a horrid thing to have to do,' he thought over and over again as he planned it, 'but it's the only way to secure Christina's happiness.' And so, by a certain bright Friday evening in August, Walter Dene had fully completed all his preparations.

That afternoon, as on all bright afternoons in summer, the vicar went for a walk in the grounds, attended only by little King Charlie. He was squire and parson at once in Churnside, and he loved to make the round of his own estate. At a certain gate by Selbury Copse the vicar always halted to rest awhile, leaning on the bar and looking at the view across the valley. It was a safe and lonely spot. Walter remained at home (he was to take the regular Friday evensong) and went into the study by himself. After a while he took his hat, not without trembling, strolled across the garden, and then made the short cut through the copse, so as to meet the vicar by the gate. On his way he heard the noise of the Dennings in the farm opposite, out rabbit-shooting with their guns and ferrets in the warren. His very soul shrank within him at the sound of that brutal sport. 'Great heavens!' he said to himself, with a shudder; 'to think how I loathe and shrink from the necessity of almost painlessly killing this one selfish old man for an obviously good reason, and those creatures there will go out massacring innocent animals with the aid of a hideous beast of prey, not only without remorse, but actually by way of amusement! I thank Heaven I am not even as they are.' Near the gate he came upon his uncle quietly and naturally, though it would be absurd to deny that at that supreme moment even Walter Dene's equable heart throbbed hard, and his breath went and came tremulously. 'Alone,' he thought to himself, 'and nobody near; this is quite providential,' using even then, in thought, the familiar phraseology of his profession.

'A lovely afternoon, Uncle Arthur,' he said as composedly as he could, accurately measuring the spot on the vicar's coat with his eye meanwhile. 'The valley looks beautiful in this light.'

'Yes, a lovely afternoon, Wally, my boy, and an exquisite glimpse down yonder into the churchyard.'

As he spoke, Walter half leaned upon the gate beside him, and adjusted the knife behind the vicar's back scientifically. Then, without a word more, in spite of a natural shrinking, he drove it home up to the haft, with a terrible effort of will, at the exact spot on the back that the books had pointed out to him. It was a painful thing to do, but he did it carefully and well. The effect of Walter Dene's scientific provision was even more instantaneous than he had anticipated. Without a single cry, without a sob or a contortion, the vicar's lifeless body fell over heavily by the side of the gate. It rolled down like a log into the dry ditch beneath. Walter knelt trembling on the ground close by, felt the pulse for a moment to assure himself that his uncle was really dead, and having fully satisfied himself on this all-important point, proceeded to draw the knife neatly out of the wound. He had let it fall in the body, in order to extricate it more easily afterward, and not risk pulling it out carelessly so as to get himself covered needlessly by tell-tale drops of blood, like ordinary clumsy assassins. But he had forgotten to reckon with little King Charlie. The dog jumped piteously upon the body of his master, licked the wound with his tongue, and refused to allow Walter to withdraw the knife. It would be unsafe to leave it there, for it might be recognised. 'Minimise the adverse chances,' he muttered still; but there was no inducing King Charlie to move. A struggle might result in getting drops of blood upon his coat, and then, great heavens, what a terrible awakening for Christina! 'Oh, Christina, Christina, Christina,' he said to himself piteously, 'it is for you only that I could ever have ventured to do this hideous thing.' The blood was still oozing out of the narrow slit, and saturating the black coat, and Walter Dene with his delicate nerves could hardly bear to look upon it.

At last he summoned up resolution to draw out the knife from the ugly wound, in spite of King Charlie; and as he did so, oh, horror! the little dog jumped at it, and cut his left fore-leg against the sharp edge deep to the bone. Here was a pretty accident indeed! If Walter Dene had been a common heartless murderer he would have snatched up the knife immediately, left the poor lame dog to watch and bleed beside his dead master, and skulked off hurriedly from the mute witness to his accomplished crime. But Walter was made of very different mould from that; he could not find it in his heart to leave a poor dumb animal wounded and bleeding for hours together, alone and untended. Just at first, indeed, he tried sophisticatedly to persuade himself his duty to Christina demanded that he should go away at once, and never mind the sufferings of a mere spaniel; but his better nature told him the next moment

that such sophisms were indefensible, and his humane instincts overcame even the profound instinct of self-preservation. He sat down quietly beside the warm corpse. 'Thank goodness,' he said, with a slight shiver of disgust, 'I'm not one of those weak-minded people who are troubled by remorse. They would be so overcome by terror at what they had done that they would want to run away from the body immediately, at any price. But I don't think I *could* feel remorse. It is an incident of lower natures—natures that are capable of doing actions under one set of impulses, which they regret when another set comes uppermost in turn. That implies a want of balance, an imperfect co-ordination of parts and passions. The perfect character is consistent with itself; shame and repentance are confessions of weakness. For my part, I never do anything without having first deliberately decided that it is the best or the only thing to do; and having so done it, I do not draw back like a girl from the necessary consequences of my own act. No fluttering or running away for me. Still, I must admit that all that blood does look very ghastly. Poor old gentleman! I believe he really died almost without knowing it, and that is certainly a great comfort to one under the circumstances.'

He took King Charlie tenderly in his hands, without touching the wounded leg, and drew his pocket handkerchief softly from his pocket. 'Poor beastie,' he said aloud, holding out the cut limb before him, 'you are badly hurt, I'm afraid; but it wasn't my fault. We must see what we can do for you.' Then he wrapped the handkerchief deftly around it, without letting any blood show through, pressed the dog close against his breast, and picked up the knife gingerly by the reeking handle. 'A fool of a fellow would throw it into the river,' he thought, with a curl of his graceful lip. 'They always dredge the river after these incidents. I shall just stick it down a hole in the hedge a hundred yards off. The police have no invention, dull donkeys; they never dredge the hedges.' And he thrust it well down a disused rabbit burrow, filling in the top neatly with loose mould.

Walter Dene meant to have gone home quietly and said evensong, leaving the discovery of the body to be made at haphazard by others, but this unfortunate accident to King Charlie compelled him against his will to give the first alarm. It was absolutely necessary to take the dog to the veterinary at once, or the poor little fellow might bleed to death incontinently. 'One's best efforts,' he thought, 'are always liable to these unfortunate *contretemps*. I meant merely to remove a superfluous person from an uncongenial environment; yet I can't manage it without at the same time seriously injuring a harmless little creature that I really love.' And with one last glance at the lifeless thing behind him, he took his way regretfully along the ordinary path back towards the peaceful village of Churnside.

Halfway down the lane, at the entrance to the village, he met one of his parishioners. 'Tom,' he said boldly, 'have you seen anything of the vicar? I'm

afraid he's got hurt somehow. Here's poor little King Charlie come limping back with his leg cut.'

'He went down the road, zur, 'arf an hour zince, and I arn't zeen him afterwards.'

'Tell the servants at the vicarage to look around the grounds, then; I'm afraid he has fallen and hurt himself. I must take the dog at once to Perkins's, or else I shall be late for evensong.'

The man went off straight towards the vicarage, and Walter Dene turned immediately with the dog in his arms into the village veterinary's.

THE SERVANTS from the vicarage were not the first persons to hit upon the dead body of the vicar. Joe Harley, the poacher, was out reconnoitring that afternoon in the vicar's preserves; and five minutes after Walter Dene had passed down the far side of the hedge, Joe Harley skulked noiselessly from the orchard up to the gate of the covert by Selbury Copse. He crept through the open end by the post (for it was against Joe's principles under any circumstances to climb over an obstacle of any sort, and so needlessly expose himself), and he was just going to slink off along the other hedge, having wires and traps in his pocket, when his boot struck violently against a soft object in the ditch underfoot. It struck so violently that it crushed in the object with the force of the impact; and when Joe came to look at what the object might be, he found to his horror that it was the bruised and livid face of the old parson. Joe had had a brush with keepers more than once, and had spent several months of seclusion in Dorchester Gaol; but, in spite of his familiarity with minor forms of lawlessness, he was moved enough in all conscience by this awful and unexpected discovery. He turned the body over clumsily with his hands, and saw that it had been stabbed in the back once only. In doing so he trod in a little blood, and got a drop or two on his sleeve and trousers; for the pool was bigger now, and Joe was not so handy or dainty with his fingers as the idyllic curate.

It was an awful dilemma, indeed, for a confirmed and convicted poacher. Should he give the alarm then and there, boldly, trusting to his innocence for vindication, and helping the police to discover the murderer? Why, that would be sheer suicide, no doubt; 'for who but would believe,' he thought, 'twas me as done it?' Or should he slink away quietly and say nothing, leaving others to find the body as best they might? That was dangerous enough in its way if anybody saw him, but not so dangerous as the other course. In an evil hour for his own chances Joe Harley chose that worse counsel, and slank off in his familiar crouching fashion towards the opposite corner of the copse.

On the way he heard John's voice holloaing for his master, and kept close to the hedge till he had quite turned the corner. But John had caught a glimpse of

him too, and John did not forget it when, a few minutes later, he came upon the horrid sight beside the gate of Selbury Copse.

Meanwhile Walter had taken King Charlie to the veterinary's, and had his leg bound and bandaged securely. He had also gone down to the church, got out his surplice, and begun to put it on in the vestry for evensong, when a messenger came at hot haste from the vicarage, with news that Master Walter must come up at once, for the vicar was murdered.

'Murdered!' Walter Dene said to himself slowly half aloud; 'murdered! how horrible! Murdered!' It was an ugly word, and he turned it over with a genuine thrill of horror. That was what they would say of him if ever the thing came to be discovered! What an inappropriate classification!

He threw aside the surplice, and rushed up hurriedly to the vicarage. Already the servants had brought in the body, and laid it out in the clothes it wore, on the vicar's own bed. Walter Dene went in, shuddering, to look at it. To his utter amazement, the face was battered in horribly and almost unrecognisably by a blow or kick! What could that hideous mutilation mean? He could not imagine. It was an awful mystery. Great heavens! just fancy if any one were to take it into his head that he, Walter Dene, had done *that*— had kicked a defenceless old gentleman brutally about the face like a common London ruffian! The idea was too horrible to be borne for a moment. It unmanned him utterly, and he hid his face between his two hands and sobbed aloud like one broken-hearted. 'This day's work has been too much for my nerves,' he thought to himself between the sobs; 'but perhaps it is just as well I should give way now completely.'

That night was mainly taken up with the formalities of all such cases; and when at last Walter Dene went off, tired and nerve-worn, to bed, about midnight, he could not sleep much for thinking of the mystery. The murder itself didn't trouble him greatly; that was over and past now, and he felt sure his precautions had been amply sufficient to protect him even from the barest suspicion; but he couldn't fathom the mystery of that battered and mutilated face! Somebody must have seen the corpse between the time of the murder and the discovery! Who could that somebody have been? and what possible motive could he have had for such a horrible piece of purposeless brutality?

As for the servants, in solemn conclave in the hall, they had unanimously but one theory to account for all the facts: some poacher or other, for choice Joe Harley, had come across the vicar in the copse, with gun and traps in hand. The wretch had seen he was discovered, had felled the poor old vicar by a blow in the face with the butt-end of his rifle, and after he fell, fainting, had stabbed him for greater security in the back. That was such an obvious solution of the difficulty, that nobody in the servants' hall had a moment's hesitation in accepting it.

When Walter heard next morning early that Joe Harley had been arrested overnight, on John's information, his horror and surprise at the news were wholly unaffected. Here was another new difficulty, indeed. 'When I did the thing,' he said to himself, 'I never thought of that possibility. I took it for granted it would be a mystery, a problem for the local police (who, of course, could no more solve it than they could solve the *pons asinorum*), but it never struck me they would arrest an innocent person on the charge instead of me. This is horrible. It's so easy to make out a case against a poacher, and hang him for it, on suspicion. One's whole sense of justice revolts against the thing. After all, there's a great deal to be said in favour of the ordinary commonplace morality: it prevents complications. A man of delicate sensibilities oughtn't to kill anybody; he lets himself in for all kinds of unexpected contingencies, without knowing it.'

At the coroner's inquest things looked very black indeed for Joe Harley. Walter gave his evidence first, showing how he had found King Charlie wounded in the lane; and then the others gave theirs, as to the search for and finding of the body. John in particular swore to having seen a man's back and head slinking away by the hedge while they were looking for the vicar; and that back and head he felt sure were Joe Harley's. To Walter's infinite horror and disgust, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against the poor poacher. What other verdict could they possibly have given in accordance with such evidence?

The trial of Joe Harley for the wilful murder of the Reverend Arthur Dene was fixed for the next Dorchester Assizes. In the interval, Walter Dene, for the first time in his placid life, knew what it was to undergo a mental struggle. Whatever happened, he could not let Joe Harley be hanged for this murder. His whole soul rose up within him in loathing for such an act of hideous injustice. For though Walter Dene's code of morality was certainly not the conventional one, as he so often boasted to himself, he was not by any means without a code of morals of any sort. He could commit a murder where he thought it necessary, but he could not let an innocent man suffer in his stead. His ethical judgment on that point was just as clear and categorical as the judgment which told him he was in duty bound to murder his uncle. For Walter did not argue with himself on moral questions: he perceived the right and necessary thing intuitively; he was a law to himself, and he obeyed his own law implicitly, for good or for evil. Such men are capable of horrible and diabolically deliberate crimes; but they are capable of great and genuine self-sacrifices also.

Walter made no secret in the village of his disinclination to believe in Joe Harley's guilt. Joe was a rough fellow, he said, certainly, and he had no objection to taking a pheasant or two, and even to having a free fight with the keepers; but, after all, our game-laws were an outrageous piece of class legislation, and

he could easily understand how the poor, whose sense of justice they outraged, should be so set against them. He could not think Joe Harley was capable of a detestable crime. Besides, he had seen him himself within a few minutes before and after the murder. Everybody thought it such a proof of the young parson's generous and kindly disposition; he had certainly the charity which thinketh no evil. Even though his own uncle had been brutally murdered on his own estate, he checked his natural feelings of resentment, and refused to believe that one of his own parishioners could have been guilty of the crime. Nay, more, so anxious was he that substantial justice should be done the accused, and so confident was he of his innocence, that he promised to provide counsel for him at his own expense; and he provided two of the ablest barristers on the Western circuit.

Before the trial, Walter Dene had come, after a terrible internal struggle, to an awful resolution. He would do everything he could for Joe Harley; but if the verdict went against him, he was resolved, then and there, in open court, to confess, before judge and jury, the whole truth. It would be a horrible thing for Christina; he knew that: but he could not love Christina so much, 'loved he not honour more'; and honour, after his own fashion, he certainly loved dearly. Though he might be false to all that all the world thought right, it was ingrained in the very fibre of his soul to be true to his own inner nature at least. Night after night he lay awake, tossing on his bed, and picturing to his mind's-eye every detail of that terrible disclosure. The jury would bring in a verdict of guilty: then, before the judge put on his black cap, he, Walter, would stand up, and tell them that he could not let another man hang for his crime; he would have the whole truth out before them; and then he would die, for he would have taken a little bottle of poison at the first sound of the verdict. As for Christina— oh, Christina!— Walter Dene could not dare to let himself think upon that. It was horrible; it was unendurable; it was torture a thousand times worse than dying: but still, he must and would face it. For in certain phases, Walter Dene, forger and murderer as he was, could be positively heroic.

The day of the trial came, and Walter Dene, pale and haggard with much vigil, walked in a dream and faintly from his hotel to the court-house. Everybody present noticed what a deep effect the shock of his uncle's death had had upon him. He was thinner and more bloodless than usual, and his dulled eyes looked black and sunken in their sockets. Indeed, he seemed to have suffered far more intensely than the prisoner himself, who walked in firmer and more erect, and took his seat doggedly in the familiar dock. He had been there more than once before, to say the truth, though never before on such an errand. Yet mere habit, when he got there, made him at once assume the hang-dog look of the consciously guilty.

Walter sat and watched and listened, still in a dream, but without once betraying in his face the real depth of his innermost feelings. In the body of the court he saw Joe's wife, weeping profusely and ostentatiously, after the fashion considered to be correct by her class; and though he pitied her from the bottom of his heart, he could only think by contrast of Christina. What were that good woman's fears and sorrows by the side of the grief and shame and unspeakable horror he might have to bring upon his Christina? Pray Heaven the shock, if it came, might kill her outright; that would at least be better than that she should live long years to remember. More than judge, or jury, or prisoner, Walter Dene saw everywhere, behind the visible shadows that thronged the court, that one persistent prospective picture of heartbroken Christina.

The evidence for the prosecution told with damning force against the prisoner. He was a notorious poacher; the vicar was a game-preserve. He had poached more than once on the ground of the vicarage. He was shown by numerous witnesses to have had an animus against the vicar. He had been seen, not in the face, to be sure, but still seen and recognised, slinking away, immediately after the fact, from the scene of the murder. And the prosecution had found stains of blood, believed by scientific experts to be human, on the clothing he had worn when he was arrested. Walter Dene listened now with terrible, unabated earnestness, for he knew that in reality it was he himself who was upon his trial. He himself, and Christina's happiness; for if the poacher were found guilty, he was firmly resolved, beyond hope of respite, to tell all, and face the unspeakable.

The defence seemed indeed a weak and feeble theory. Somebody unknown had committed the murder, and this somebody, seen from behind, had been mistaken by John for Joe Harley. The blood-stains need not be human, as the cross-examination went to show, but were only known by counter-experts to be mammalian— perhaps a rabbit's. Every poacher— and it was admitted that Joe was a poacher— was liable to get his clothes blood-stained. Grant they were human, Joe, it appeared, had himself once shot off his little finger. All these points came out from the examination of the earlier witnesses. At last, counsel put the curate himself into the box, and proceeded to examine him briefly as a witness for the defence.

Walter Dene stepped, pale and haggard still, into the witness-box. He had made up his mind to make one final effort 'for Christina's happiness.' He fumbled nervously all the time at a small glass phial in his pocket, but he answered all questions without a moment's hesitation, and he kept down his emotions with a wonderful composure which excited the admiration of everybody present. There was a general hush to hear him. Did he see the prisoner, Joseph Harley, on the day of the murder? Yes, three times. When was the first occasion? From the library window, just before the vicar left the house.

What was Joseph Harley then doing? Walking in the opposite direction from the copse. Did Joseph Harley recognise him? Yes, he touched his hat to him. When was the second occasion? About ten minutes later, when he, Walter, was leaving the vicarage for a stroll. Did Joseph Harley then recognise him? Yes, he touched his hat again, and the curate said, 'Good morning, Joe; a fine day for walking.' When was the third time? Ten minutes later again, when he was returning from the lane, carrying wounded little King Charlie. Would it have been physically possible for the prisoner to go from the vicarage to the spot where the murder was committed, and back again, in the interval between the first two occasions? It would not. Would it have been physically possible for the prisoner to do so in the interval between the second and third occasions? It would not.

'Then in your opinion, Mr. Dene, it is physically impossible that Joseph Harley can have committed this murder?'

'In my opinion, it is physically impossible.'

While Walter Dene solemnly swore amid dead silence to this treble lie, he did not dare to look Joe Harley once in the face; and while Joe Harley listened in amazement to this unexpected assistance to his case— for counsel, suspecting a mistaken identity, had not questioned him too closely on the subject— he had presence of mind enough not to let his astonishment show upon his stolid features. But when Walter had finished his evidence in chief, he stole a glance at Joe; and for a moment their eyes met. Then Walter's fell in utter self-humiliation; and he said to himself fiercely, 'I would not so have debased and degraded myself before any man to save my own life— what is my life worth to me, after all?— but to save Christina, to save Christina, to save Christina! I have brought all this upon myself for Christina's sake.'

Meanwhile, Joe Harley was asking himself curiously what could be the meaning of this new move on parson's part. It was deliberate perjury, Joe felt sure, for parson could not have mistaken another person for him three times over; but what good end for himself could parson hope to gain by it? If it was he who had murdered the vicar (as Joe strongly suspected), why did he not try to press the charge home against the first person who happened to be accused, instead of committing a distinct perjury on purpose to compass his acquittal? Joe Harley, with his simple everyday criminal mind, could not be expected to unravel the intricacies of so complex a personality as Walter Dene's. But even there, on trial for his life, he could not help wondering what on earth young parson could be driving at in this business.

The judge summed up with the usual luminously obvious alternate platitudes. If the jury thought that John had really seen Joe Harley, and that the curate was mistaken in the person whom he thrice saw, or was mistaken once only out of the thrice, or had miscalculated the time between each occurrence,

or the time necessary to cover the ground to the gate, then they would find the prisoner guilty of wilful murder. If, on the other hand, they believed John had judged hastily, and that the curate had really seen the prisoner three separate times, and that he had rightly calculated all the intervals, then they would find the prisoner not guilty. The prisoner's case rested entirely upon the *alibi*. Supposing they thought there was a doubt in the matter, they should give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt. Walter noticed that the judge said in every other case, 'If you believe the witness So-and-so,' but that in his case he made no such discourteous reservation. As a matter of fact, the one person whose conduct nobody for a moment dreamt of calling in question was the real murderer.

The jury retired for more than an hour. During all that time two men stood there in mortal suspense, intent and haggard, both upon their trial, but not both equally. The prisoner in the dock fixed his arms in a dogged and sullen attitude, the colour half gone from his brown cheek, and his eyes straining with excitement, but showing no outward sign of any emotion except the craven fear of death. Walter Dene stood almost fainting in the body of the court, his bloodless fingers still fumbling nervously at the little phial, and his face deadly pale with the awful pallor of a devouring horror. His heart scarcely beat at all, but at each long slow pulsation he could feel it throb distinctly within his bosom. He saw or heard nothing before him, but kept his aching eyes fixed steadily on the door by which the jury were to enter. Junior counsel nudged one another to notice his agitation, and whispered that that poor young curate had evidently never seen a man tried for his life before.

At last the jury entered. Joe and Walter waited, each in his own manner, breathless for the verdict. 'Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of wilful murder?' Walter took the little phial from his pocket, and held it carefully between his finger and thumb. The awful moment had come; the next word would decide the fate of himself and Christina. The foreman of the jury looked up solemnly, and answered with slow distinctness, 'Not guilty.' The prisoner leaned back vacantly, and wiped his forehead; but there was an awful cry of relief from one mouth in the body of the court, and Walter Dene sank back into the arms of the bystanders, exhausted with suspense and overcome by the reaction. The crowd remarked among themselves that young Parson Dene was too tender-hearted a man to come into court at a criminal trial. He would break his heart to see even a dog hanged, let alone his fellow-Christians. As for Joe Harley, it was universally admitted that he had had a narrow squeak of it, and that he had got off better than he deserved. The jury gave him the benefit of the doubt.

As soon as all the persons concerned had returned to Churnside, Walter sent at once for Joe Harley. The poacher came to see him in the vicarage library. He

was elated and coarsely exultant with his victory, as a relief from the strain he had suffered, after the manner of all vulgar natures.

'Joe,' said the clergyman slowly, motioning him into a chair at the other side of the desk, 'I know that after this trial Churnside will not be a pleasant place to hold you. All your neighbours believe, in spite of the verdict, that you killed the vicar. I feel sure, however, that you did not commit this murder. Therefore, as some compensation for the suffering of mind to which you have been put, I think it well to send you and your wife and family to Australia or Canada, whichever you like best. I propose also to make you a present of a hundred pounds, to set you up in your new home.'

'Make it five hundred, passon,' Joe said, looking at him significantly.

Walter smiled quietly, and did not flinch in any way. 'I said a hundred,' he continued calmly, 'and I will make it only a hundred. I should have had no objection to making it five, except for the manner in which you ask it. But you evidently mistake the motive of my gift. I give it out of pure compassion for you, and not out of any other feeling whatsoever.'

'Very well, passon,' said Joe sullenly, 'I accept it.'

'You mistake again,' Walter went on blandly, for he was himself again now. 'You are not to accept it as terms; you are to thank me for it as a pure present. I see we two partially understand each other; but it is important you should understand me exactly as I mean it. Joe Harley, listen to me seriously. I have saved your life. If I had been a man of a coarse and vulgar nature, if I had been like you in a similar predicament, I would have pressed the case against you for obvious personal reasons, and you would have been hanged for it. But I did not press it, because I felt convinced of your innocence, and my sense of justice rose irresistibly against it. I did the best I could to save you; I risked my own reputation to save you; and I have no hesitation now in telling you that to the best of my belief, if the verdict had gone against you, the person who really killed the vicar, accidentally or intentionally, meant to have given himself up to the police, rather than let an innocent man suffer.'

'Passon,' said Joe Harley, looking at him intently, 'I believe as you're tellin' me the truth. I zeen as much in that person's face afore the verdict.'

There was a solemn pause for a moment; and then Walter Dene said slowly, 'Now that you have withdrawn your claim as a claim, I will stretch a point and make it five hundred. It is little enough for what you have suffered. But I, too, have suffered terribly, terribly.'

'Thank you, passon,' Joe answered. 'I zeen as you were turble anxious.'

There was again a moment's pause. Then Walter Dene asked quietly, 'How did the vicar's face come to be so bruised and battered?'

'I stumbled up agin 'im accidental like, and didn't know I'd kicked 'un till I'd done it. Must 'a been just a few minutes after you'd 'a left 'un.'

'Joe,' said the curate in his calmest tone, 'you had better go; the money will be sent to you shortly. But if you ever see my face again, or speak or write a word of this to me, you shall not have a penny of it, but shall be prosecuted for intimidation. A hundred before you leave, four hundred in Australia. Now go.'

'Very well, passon,' Joe answered; and he went.

'Pah!' said the curate with a face of disgust, shutting the door after him, and lighting a perfumed pastille in his little Chinese porcelain incense-burner, as if to fumigate the room from the poacher's offensive presence. 'Pah! to think that these affairs should compel one to humiliate and abase oneself before a vulgar clod like that! To think that all his life long that fellow will virtually know— and misinterpret— my secret. He is incapable of understanding that I did it as a duty to Christina. Well, he will never dare to tell it, that's certain, for nobody would believe him if he did; and he may congratulate himself heartily that he's got well out of this difficulty. It will be the luckiest thing in the end that ever happened to him. And now I hope this little episode is finally over.'

When the Churnside public learned that Walter Dene meant to carry his belief in Joe Harley's innocence so far as to send him and his family at his own expense out to Australia, they held that the young parson's charity and guilelessness was really, as the doctor said, almost Quixotic. And when, in his anxiety to detect and punish the real murderer, he offered a reward of five hundred pounds from his own pocket for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the criminal, the Churnside people laughed quietly at his extraordinary childlike simplicity of heart. The real murderer had been caught and tried at Dorchester Assizes, they said, and had only got off by the skin of his teeth because Walter himself had come forward and sworn to a quite improbable and inconclusive *alibi*. There was plenty of time for Joe to have got to the gate by the short cut, and that he did so everybody at Churnside felt morally certain. Indeed, a few years later a blood-stained bowie-knife was found in the hedge not far from the scene of the murder, and the gamekeeper 'could almost 'a took his Bible oath he'd zeen just such a knife along o' Joe Harley.'

That was not the end of Walter Dene's Quixotisms, however. When the will was read, it turned out that almost everything was left to the young parson; and who could deserve it better, or spend it more charitably? But Walter, though he would not for the world seem to cast any slight or disrespect upon his dear uncle's memory, did not approve of customs of primogeniture, and felt bound to share the estate equally with his brother Arthur. 'Strange,' said the head of the firm of Watson and Blenkiron to himself, when he read the little paragraph about this generous conduct in the paper; 'I thought the instructions were to leave it to his nephew Arthur, not to his nephew Walter; but there, one forgets and confuses names of people that one does not know so easily.' 'Gracious goodness!' thought the engrossing clerk; 'surely it was the other way on. I

wonder if I can have gone and copied the wrong names in the wrong places?' But in a big London business, nobody notes these things as they would have been noted in Churnside; the vicar was always a changeable, pernickety, huffy old fellow, and very likely he had had a reverse will drawn up afterwards by his country lawyer. All the world only thought that Walter Dene's generosity was really almost ridiculous, even in a parson. When he was married to Christina, six months afterwards, everybody said so charming a girl was well mated with so excellent and admirable a husband.

And he really did make a very tender and loving husband and father. Christina believed in him always, for he did his best to foster and keep alive her faith. He would have given up active clerical duty if he could, never having liked it (for he was above hypocrisy), but Christina was against the project, and his bishop would not hear of it. The Church could ill afford to lose such a man as Mr. Dene, the bishop said, in these troubled times; and he begged him as a personal favour to accept the living of Churnside, which was in his gift. But Walter did not like the place, and asked for another living instead, which, being of less value—'so like Mr. Dene to think nothing of the temporalities,'—the bishop even more graciously granted. He has since published a small volume of dainty little poems on uncut paper, considered by some critics as rather pagan in tone for a clergyman, but universally allowed to be extremely graceful, the perfection of poetical form with much delicate mastery of poetical matter. And everybody knows that the author is almost certain to be offered the first vacant canonry in his own cathedral. As for the little episode, he himself has almost forgotten all about it; for those who think a murderer must feel remorse his whole life long, are trying to read their own emotional nature into the wholly dispassionate character of Walter Dene.

---

## 9: In The Tules

**Bret Harte**

1836-1902

*The Strand Magazine* Dec 1895

HE HAD NEVER SEEN a steamboat in his life. Born and reared in one of the Western Territories, far from a navigable river, he had only known the "dugout" or canoe as a means of conveyance across the scant streams whose fordable waters made even those scarcely a necessity. The long, narrow, hooded wagon, drawn by swaying oxen, known familiarly as a "prairie schooner," in which he journeyed across the plains to California in '53, did not help his conception by that nautical figure. And when at last he dropped upon the land of promise through one of the Southern mountain passes he halted all unconsciously upon the low banks of a great yellow river amidst a tangled brake of strange, reed-like grasses that were unknown to him. The river, broadening as it debouched through many channels into a lordly bay, seemed to him the *Ultima Thule* of his journeyings. Unyoking his oxen on the edge of the luxuriant meadows which blended with scarcely any line of demarcation into the great stream itself, he found the prospect "good" according to his lights and prairial experiences, and, converting his halted wagon into a temporary cabin, he resolved to rest here and "settle."

There was little difficulty in so doing. The cultivated clearings he had passed were few and far between; the land would be his by discovery and occupation; his habits of loneliness and self-reliance made him independent of neighbors. He took his first meal in his new solitude under a spreading willow, but so near his natural boundary that the waters gurgled and oozed in the reeds but a few feet from him. The sun sank, deepening the gold of the river until it might have been the stream of Pactolus itself. But Martin Morse had no imagination; he was not even a gold-seeker; he had simply obeyed the roving instincts of the frontiersman in coming hither. The land was virgin and unoccupied; it was his; he was alone. These questions settled, he smoked his pipe with less concern over his three thousand miles' transference of habitation than the man of cities who had moved into a next street. When the sun sank, he rolled himself in his blankets in the wagon bed and went quietly to sleep.

But he was presently awakened by something which at first he could not determine to be a noise or an intangible sensation. It was a deep throbbing through the silence of the night— a pulsation that seemed even to be communicated to the rude bed whereon he lay. As it came nearer it separated itself into a labored, monotonous panting, continuous, but distinct from an equally monotonous but fainter beating of the waters, as if the whole track of the river were being coursed and trodden by a multitude of swiftly trampling

feet. A strange feeling took possession of him— half of fear, half of curious expectation. It was coming nearer. He rose, leaped hurriedly from the wagon, and ran to the bank. The night was dark; at first he saw nothing before him but the steel-black sky pierced with far-spaced, irregularly scattered stars. Then there seemed to be approaching him, from the left, another and more symmetrical constellation— a few red and blue stars high above the river, with three compact lines of larger planetary lights flashing towards him and apparently on his own level. It was almost upon him; he involuntarily drew back as the strange phenomenon swept abreast of where he stood, and resolved itself into a dark yet airy bulk, whose vagueness, topped by enormous towers, was yet illuminated by those open squares of light that he had taken for stars, but which he saw now were brilliantly lit windows.

Their vivid rays shot through the reeds and sent broad bands across the meadow, the stationary wagon, and the slumbering oxen. But all this was nothing to the inner life they disclosed through lifted curtains and open blinds, which was the crowning revelation of this strange and wonderful spectacle. Elegantly dressed men and women moved through brilliantly lit and elaborately gilt saloons; in one a banquet seemed to be spread, served by white-jacketed servants; in another were men playing cards around marble-topped tables; in another the light flashed back again from the mirrors and glistening glasses and decanters of a gorgeous refreshment saloon; in smaller openings there was the shy disclosure of dainty white curtains and velvet lounges of more intimate apartments.

Martin Morse stood enthralled and mystified. It was as if some invisible Asmodeus had revealed to this simple frontiersman a world of which he had never dreamed. It was *the* world— a world of which he knew nothing in his simple, rustic habits and profound Western isolation—sweeping by him with the rush of an unknown planet. In another moment it was gone; a shower of sparks shot up from one of the towers and fell all around him, and then vanished, even as he remembered the set piece of "Fourth of July" fireworks had vanished in his own rural town when he was a boy. The darkness fell with it too. But such was his utter absorption and breathless preoccupation that only a cold chill recalled him to himself, and he found he was standing mid-leg deep in the surge cast over the low banks by this passage of the first steamboat he had ever seen!

He waited for it the next night, when it appeared a little later from the opposite direction on its return trip. He watched it the next night and the next. Hereafter he never missed it, coming or going— whatever the hard and weary preoccupations of his new and lonely life. He felt he could not have slept without seeing it go by. Oddly enough, his interest and desire did not go further. Even had he the time and money to spend in a passage on the boat, and thus actively realize the great world of which he had only these rare glimpses, a

certain proud, rustic shyness kept him from it. It was not *his* world; he could not affront the snubs that his ignorance and inexperience would have provoked, and he was dimly conscious, as so many of us are in our ignorance, that in mingling with it he would simply lose the easy privileges of alien criticism. For there was much that he did not understand, and some things that grated upon his lonely independence.

One night, a lighter one than those previous, he lingered a little longer in the moonlight to watch the phosphorescent wake of the retreating boat. Suddenly it struck him that there was a certain irregular splashing in the water, quite different from the regular, diagonally crossing surges that the boat swept upon the bank. Looking at it more intently, he saw a black object turning in the water like a porpoise, and then the unmistakable uplifting of a black arm in an unskillful swimmer's overhand stroke. It was a struggling man. But it was quickly evident that the current was too strong and the turbulence of the shallow water too great for his efforts. Without a moment's hesitation, clad as he was in only his shirt and trousers, Morse strode into the reeds, and the next moment, with a call of warning, was swimming toward the now wildly struggling figure. But, from some unknown reason, as Morse approached him nearer the man uttered some incoherent protest and desperately turned away, throwing off Morse's extended arm.

Attributing this only to the vague convulsions of a drowning man, Morse, a skilled swimmer, managed to clutch his shoulder, and propelled him at arm's length, still struggling, apparently with as much reluctance as incapacity, toward the bank. As their feet touched the reeds and slimy bottom the man's resistance ceased, and he lapsed quite listlessly in Morse's arms. Half lifting, half dragging his burden, he succeeded at last in gaining the strip of meadow, and deposited the unconscious man beneath the willow tree. Then he ran to his wagon for whisky.

But, to his surprise, on his return the man was already sitting up and wringing the water from his clothes. He then saw for the first time, by the clear moonlight, that the stranger was elegantly dressed and of striking appearance, and was clearly a part of that bright and fascinating world which Morse had been contemplating in his solitude. He eagerly took the proffered tin cup and drank the whisky. Then he rose to his feet, staggered a few steps forward, and glanced curiously around him at the still motionless wagon, the few felled trees and evidence of "clearing," and even at the rude cabin of logs and canvas just beginning to rise from the ground a few paces distant, and said, impatiently:

"Where the devil am I?"

Morse hesitated. He was unable to name the locality of his dwelling-place. He answered briefly:

"On the right bank of the Sacramento."

The stranger turned upon him a look of suspicion not unmingled with resentment. "Oh!" he said, with ironical gravity, "and I suppose that this water you picked me out of was the Sacramento River. Thank you!"

Morse, with slow Western patience, explained that he had only settled there three weeks ago, and the place had no name.

"What's your nearest town, then?"

"Thar ain't any. Thar's a blacksmith's shop and grocery at the crossroads, twenty miles further on, but it's got no name as I've heard on."

The stranger's look of suspicion passed. "Well," he said, in an imperative fashion, which, however, seemed as much the result of habit as the occasion, "I want a horse, and mighty quick, too."

"H'ain't got any."

"No horse? How did you get to this place?"

Morse pointed to the slumbering oxen.

The stranger again stared curiously at him. After a pause he said, with a half-pitying, half-humorous smile: "Pike— aren't you?"

Whether Morse did or did not know that this current California slang for a denizen of the bucolic West implied a certain contempt, he replied simply:

"I'm from Pike County, Mizzouri."

"Well," said the stranger, resuming his impatient manner, "you must beg or steal a horse from your neighbors."

"Thar ain't any neighbor nearer than fifteen miles."

"Then send fifteen miles! Stop." He opened his still clinging shirt and drew out a belt pouch, which he threw to Morse. "There! there's two hundred and fifty dollars in that. Now, I want a horse. Sabe?"

"Thar ain't anyone to send," said Morse, quietly.

"Do you mean to say you are all alone here?"

"Yes."

"And you fished me out— all by yourself?"

"Yes."

The stranger again examined him curiously. Then he suddenly stretched out his hand and grasped his companion's.

"All right; if you can't send, I reckon I can manage to walk over there tomorrow."

"I was goin' on to say," said Morse, simply, "that if you'll lie by tonight, I'll start over sunup, after puttin' out the cattle, and fetch you back a horse afore noon."

"That's enough." He, however, remained looking curiously at Morse. "Did you never hear," he said, with a singular smile, "that it was about the meanest kind of luck that could happen to you to save a drowning man?"

"No," said Morse, simply. "I reckon it orter be the meanest if you *didn't*."

"That depends upon the man you save," said the stranger, with the same ambiguous smile, "and whether the *saving* him is only putting things off. Look here," he added, with an abrupt return to his imperative style, "can't you give me some dry clothes?"

Morse brought him a pair of overalls and a "hickory shirt," well worn, but smelling strongly of a recent wash with coarse soap. The stranger put them on while his companion busied himself in collecting a pile of sticks and dry leaves.

"What's that for?" said the stranger, suddenly.

"A fire to dry your clothes."

The stranger calmly kicked the pile aside.

"Not any fire tonight if I know it," he said, brusquely. Before Morse could resent his quickly changing moods he continued, in another tone, dropping to an easy reclining position beneath the tree, "Now, tell me all about yourself, and what you are doing here."

Thus commanded, Morse patiently repeated his story from the time he had left his backwoods cabin to his selection of the river bank for a "location." He pointed out the rich quality of this alluvial bottom and its adaptability for the raising of stock, which he hoped soon to acquire. The stranger smiled grimly, raised himself to a sitting position, and, taking a penknife from his damp clothes, began to clean his nails in the bright moonlight—an occupation which made the simple Morse wander vaguely in his narration.

"And you don't know that this hole will give you chills and fever till you'll shake yourself out of your boots?"

Morse had lived before in aguish districts, and had no fear.

"And you never heard that some night the whole river will rise up and walk over you and your cabin and your stock?"

"No. For I reckon to move my shanty farther back."

The man shut up his penknife with a click and rose.

"If you've got to get up at sunrise, we'd better be turning in. I suppose you can give me a pair of blankets?"

Morse pointed to the wagon. "Thar's a shakedown in the wagon bed; you kin lie there." Nevertheless he hesitated, and, with the inconsequence and abruptness of a shy man, continued the previous conversation.

"I shouldn't like to move far away, for them steamboats is pow'ful kempany o' nights. I never seed one afore I kem here," and then, with the inconsistency of a reserved man, and without a word of further preliminary, he launched into a confidential disclosure of his late experiences. The stranger listened with a singular interest and a quietly searching eye.

"Then you were watching the boat very closely just now when you saw me. What else did you see? Anything before that— before you saw me in the water?"

"No— the boat had got well off before I saw you at all."

"Ah," said the stranger. "Well, I'm going to turn in." He walked to the wagon, mounted it, and by the time that Morse had reached it with his wet clothes he was already wrapped in the blankets. A moment later he seemed to be in a profound slumber.

It was only then, when his guest was lying helplessly at his mercy, that he began to realize his strange experiences. The domination of this man had been so complete that Morse, although by nature independent and self-reliant, had not permitted himself to question his right or to resent his rudeness. He had accepted his guest's careless or premeditated silence regarding the particulars of his accident as a matter of course, and had never dreamed of questioning him. That it was a natural accident of that great world so apart from his own experiences he did not doubt, and thought no more about it. The advent of the man himself was greater to him than the causes which brought him there. He was as yet quite unconscious of the complete fascination this mysterious stranger held over him, but he found himself shyly pleased with even the slight interest he had displayed in his affairs, and his hand felt yet warm and tingling from his sudden soft but expressive grasp, as if it had been a woman's. There is a simple intuition of friendship in some lonely, self-abstracted natures that is nearly akin to love at first sight. Even the audacities and insolence of this stranger affected Morse as he might have been touched and captivated by the coquetries or imperiousness of some bucolic virgin. And this reserved and shy frontiersman found himself that night sleepless, and hovering with an abashed timidity and consciousness around the wagon that sheltered his guest, as if he had been a very Corydon watching the moonlit couch of some slumbering Amaryllis.

He was off by daylight— after having placed a rude breakfast by the side of the still sleeping guest— and before midday he had returned with a horse. When he handed the stranger his pouch, less the amount he had paid for the horse, the man said curtly:

"What's that for?"

"Your change. I paid only fifty dollars for the horse."

The stranger regarded him with his peculiar smile. Then, replacing the pouch in his belt, he shook Morse's hand again and mounted the horse.

"So your name's Martin Morse! Well— goodby, Morsey!"

Morse hesitated. A blush rose to his dark cheek. "You didn't tell me your name," he said. "In case—"

"In case I'm *wanted*? Well, you can call me Captain Jack." He smiled, and, nodding his head, put spurs to his mustang and cantered away.

Morse did not do much work that day, falling into abstracted moods and living over his experiences of the previous night, until he fancied he could almost

see his strange guest again. The narrow strip of meadow was haunted by him. There was the tree under which he had first placed him, and that was where he had seen him sitting up in his dripping but well-fitting clothes. In the rough garments he had worn and returned lingered a new scent of some delicate soap, overpowering the strong alkali flavor of his own. He was early by the river side, having a vague hope, he knew not why, that he should again see him and recognize him among the passengers. He was wading out among the reeds, in the faint light of the rising moon, recalling the exact spot where he had first seen the stranger, when he was suddenly startled by the rolling over in the water of some black object that had caught against the bank, but had been dislodged by his movements. To his horror it bore a faint resemblance to his first vision of the preceding night. But a second glance at the helplessly floating hair and bloated outline showed him that it was a *dead* man, and of a type and build far different from his former companion. There was a bruise upon his matted forehead and an enormous wound in his throat already washed bloodless, white, and waxen. An inexplicable fear came upon him, not at the sight of the corpse, for he had been in Indian massacres and had rescued bodies mutilated beyond recognition; but from some moral dread that, strangely enough, quickened and deepened with the far-off pant of the advancing steamboat. Scarcely knowing why, he dragged the body hurriedly ashore, concealing it in the reeds, as if he were disposing of the evidence of his own crime. Then, to his preposterous terror, he noticed that the panting of the steamboat and the beat of its paddles were "slowing" as the vague bulk came in sight, until a huge wave from the suddenly arrested wheels sent a surge like an enormous heartbeat pulsating through the sedge that half submerged him. The flashing of three or four lanterns on deck and the motionless line of lights abreast of him dazzled his eyes, but he knew that the low fringe of willows hid his house and wagon completely from view. A vague murmur of voices from the deck was suddenly overridden by a sharp order, and to his relief the slowly revolving wheels again sent a pulsation through the water, and the great fabric moved solemnly away. A sense of relief came over him, he knew not why, and he was conscious that for the first time he had not cared to look at the boat.

When the moon arose he again examined the body, and took from its clothing a few articles of identification and some papers of formality and precision, which he vaguely conjectured to be some law papers from their resemblance to the phrasing of sheriffs' and electors' notices which he had seen in the papers. He then buried the corpse in a shallow trench, which he dug by the light of the moon. He had no question of responsibility; his pioneer training had not included coroners' inquests in its experience; in giving the body a speedy and secure burial from predatory animals he did what one frontiersman would do for another— what he hoped might be done for him. If his previous

unaccountable feelings returned occasionally, it was not from that; but rather from some uneasiness in regard to his late guest's possible feelings, and a regret that he had not been here at the finding of the body. That it would in some way have explained his own accident he did not doubt.

The boat did not "slow up" the next night, but passed as usual; yet three or four days elapsed before he could look forward to its coming with his old extravagant and half-exalted curiosity— which was his nearest approach to imagination. He was then able to examine it more closely, for the appearance of the stranger whom he now began to call "his friend" in his verbal communings with himself— but whom he did not seem destined to again discover; until one day, to his astonishment, a couple of fine horses were brought to his clearing by a stock-drover. They had been "ordered" to be left there. In vain Morse expostulated and questioned.

"Your name's Martin Morse, ain't it?" said the drover, with business brusqueness; "and I reckon there ain't no other man o' that name around here?"

"No," said Morse.

"Well, then, they're *yours*."

"But who sent them?" insisted Morse. "What was his name, and where does he live?"

"I didn't know ez I was called upon to give the pedigree o' buyers," said the drover dryly; "but the horses is 'Morgan,' you can bet your life." He grinned as he rode away.

That Captain Jack sent them, and that it was a natural prelude to his again visiting him, Morse did not doubt, and for a few days he lived in that dream. But Captain Jack did not come. The animals were of great service to him in "rounding up" the stock he now easily took in for pasturage, and saved him the necessity of having a partner or a hired man. The idea that this superior gentleman in fine clothes might ever appear to him in the former capacity had even flitted through his brain, but he had rejected it with a sigh. But the thought that, with luck and industry, he himself might, in course of time, approximate to Captain Jack's evident station, *did* occur to him, and was an incentive to energy. Yet it was quite distinct from the ordinary working man's ambition of wealth and state. It was only that it might make him more worthy of his friend. The great world was still as it had appeared to him in the passing boat— a thing to wonder at— to be above— and to criticize.

For all that, he prospered in his occupation. But one day he woke with listless limbs and feet that scarcely carried him through his daily labors. At night his listlessness changed to active pain and a feverishness that seemed to impel him toward the fateful river, as if his one aim in life was to drink up its waters and bathe in its yellow stream. But whenever he seemed to attempt it, strange dreams assailed him of dead bodies arising with swollen and distorted lips to

touch his own as he strove to drink, or of his mysterious guest battling with him in its current, and driving him ashore. Again, when he essayed to bathe his parched and crackling limbs in its flood, he would be confronted with the dazzling lights of the motionless steamboat and the glare of stony eyes— until he fled in aimless terror. How long this lasted he knew not, until one morning he awoke in his new cabin with a strange man sitting by his bed and a Negress in the doorway.

"You've had a sharp attack of 'tule fever,'" said the stranger, dropping Morse's listless wrist and answering his questioning eyes, "but you're all right now, and will pull through."

"Who are you?" stammered Morse feebly.

"Dr. Duchesne, of Sacramento."

"How did you come here?"

"I was ordered to come to you and bring a nurse, as you were alone. There she is." He pointed to the smiling Negress.

"Who ordered you?"

The doctor smiled with professional tolerance. "One of your friends, of course."

"But what was his name?"

"Really, I don't remember. But don't distress yourself. He has settled for everything right royally. You have only to get strong now. My duty is ended, and I can safely leave you with the nurse. Only when you are strong again, I say— and *he* says— keep back farther from the river."

And that was all he knew. For even the nurse who attended him through the first days of his brief convalescence would tell him nothing more. He quickly got rid of her and resumed his work, for a new and strange phase of his simple, childish affection for his benefactor, partly superinduced by his illness, was affecting him. He was beginning to feel the pain of an unequal friendship; he was dimly conscious that his mysterious guest was only coldly returning his hospitality and benefits, while holding aloof from any association with him— and indicating the immeasurable distance that separated their future intercourse. He had withheld any kind message or sympathetic greeting; he had kept back even his *name*. The shy, proud, ignorant heart of the frontiersman swelled beneath the fancied slight, which left him helpless alike of reproach or resentment. He could not return the horses, although in a fit of childish indignation he had resolved not to use them; he could not reimburse him for the doctor's bill, although he had sent away the nurse.

He took a foolish satisfaction in not moving back from the river, with a faint hope that his ignoring of Captain Jack's advice might mysteriously be conveyed to him. He even thought of selling out his location and abandoning it, that he might escape the cold surveillance of his heartless friend. All this was

undoubtedly childish— but there is an irrepressible simplicity of youth in all deep feeling, and the worldly inexperience of the frontiersman left him as innocent as a child. In this phase of his unrequited affection he even went so far as to seek some news of Captain Jack at Sacramento, and, following out his foolish quest, even to take the steamboat from thence to Stockton.

What happened to him then was perhaps the common experience of such natures. Once upon the boat the illusion of the great world it contained for him utterly vanished. He found it noisy, formal, insincere, and— had he ever understood or used the word in his limited vocabulary— *vulgar*. Rather, perhaps, it seemed to him that the prevailing sentiment and action of those who frequented it— and for whom it was built— were of a lower grade than his own. And, strangely enough, this gave him none of his former sense of critical superiority, but only of his own utter and complete isolation. He wandered in his rough frontiersman's clothes from deck to cabin, from airy galleries to long saloons, alone, unchallenged, unrecognized, as if he were again haunting it only in spirit, as he had so often done in his dreams.

His presence on the fringe of some voluble crowd caused no interruption; to him their speech was almost foreign in its allusions to things he did not understand, or, worse, seemed inconsistent with their eagerness and excitement. How different from all this were his old recollections of slowly oncoming teams, uplifted above the level horizon of the plains in his former wanderings; the few sauntering figures that met him as man to man, and exchanged the chronicle of the road; the record of Indian tracks; the finding of a spring; the discovery of pasturage, with the lazy, restful hospitality of the night! And how fierce here this continual struggle for dominance and existence, even in this lull of passage. For above all and through all he was conscious of the feverish haste of speed and exertion.

The boat trembled, vibrated, and shook with every stroke of the ponderous piston. The laughter of the crowd, the exchange of gossip and news, the banquet at the long table, the newspapers and books in the reading-room, even the luxurious couches in the staterooms, were all dominated, thrilled, and pulsating with the perpetual throb of the demon of hurry and unrest. And when at last a horrible fascination dragged him into the engine room, and he saw the cruel relentless machinery at work, he seemed to recognize and understand some intelligent but pitiless Moloch, who was dragging this feverish world at its heels.

Later he was seated in a corner of the hurricane deck, whence he could view the monotonous banks of the river; yet, perhaps by certain signs unobservable to others, he knew he was approaching his own locality. He knew that his cabin and clearing would be undiscernible behind the fringe of willows on the bank, but he already distinguished the points where a few cottonwoods struggled into

a promontory of lighter foliage beyond them. Here voices fell upon his ear, and he was suddenly aware that two men had lazily crossed over from the other side of the boat, and were standing before him looking upon the bank.

"It was about here, I reckon," said one, listlessly, as if continuing a previous lagging conversation, "that it must have happened. For it was after we were making for the bend we've just passed that the deputy, goin' to the stateroom below us, found the door locked and the window open. But both men— Jack Despard and Seth Hall, the sheriff— weren't to be found. Not a trace of 'em. The boat was searched, but all for nothing. The idea is that the sheriff, arter getting his prisoner comf'ble in the stateroom, took off Jack's handcuffs and locked the door; that Jack, who was mighty desp'rate, bolted through the window into the river, and the sheriff, who was no slouch, arter him. Others allow—for the chairs and things was all tossed about in the stateroom—that the two men clinched *thar*, and Jack choked Hall and chucked him out, and then slipped cl'ar into the water himself, for the stateroom window was just ahead of the paddle box, and the cap'n allows that no man or men could fall afore the paddles and live. Anyhow, that was all they ever knew of it."

"And there wasn't no trace of them found?" said the second man, after a long pause.

"No. Cap'n says them paddles would hev' just snatched 'em and slung 'em round and round and buried 'em way down in the ooze of the river bed, with all the silt of the current atop of 'em, and they mightn't come up for ages; or else the wheels might have waltzed 'em way up to Sacramento until there wasn't enough left of 'em to float, and dropped 'em when the boat stopped."

"It was a mighty fool risk for a man like Despard to take," resumed the second speaker as he turned away with a slight yawn.

"Bet your life! but he was desp'rate, and the sheriff had got him sure! And they *do* say that he was superstitious, like all them gamblers, and allowed that a man who was fixed to die by a rope or a pistol wasn't to be washed out of life by water."

The two figures drifted lazily away, but Morse sat rigid and motionless. Yet, strange to say, only one idea came to him clearly out of this awful revelation—the thought that his friend was still true to him— and that his strange absence and mysterious silence were fully accounted for and explained. And with it came the more thrilling fancy that this man was alive now to HIM alone.

*He* was the sole custodian of his secret. The morality of the question, while it profoundly disturbed him, was rather in reference to its effect upon the chances of Captain Jack and the power it gave his enemies than his own conscience. He would rather that his friend should have proven the proscribed outlaw who retained an unselfish interest in him than the superior gentleman who was coldly wiping out his gratitude. He thought he understood now the reason of his

visitor's strange and varying moods— even his bitter superstitious warning in regard to the probable curse entailed upon one who should save a drowning man. Of this he recked little; enough that he fancied that Captain Jack's concern in his illness was heightened by that fear, and this assurance of his protecting friendship thrilled him with pleasure.

There was no reason now why he should not at once go back to his farm, where, at least, Captain Jack would always find him; and he did so, returning on the same boat. He was now fully recovered from his illness, and calmer in mind; he redoubled his labors to put himself in a position to help the mysterious fugitive when the time should come. The remote farm should always be a haven of refuge for him, and in this hope he forbore to take any outside help, remaining solitary and alone, that Captain Jack's retreat should be inviolate. And so the long, dry season passed, the hay was gathered, the pasturing herds sent home, and the first rains, dimpling like shot the broadening surface of the river, were all that broke his unending solitude. In this enforced attitude of waiting and expectancy he was exalted and strengthened by a new idea. He was not a religious man, but, dimly remembering the exhortations of some camp meeting of his boyhood, he conceived the idea that he might have been selected to work out the regeneration of Captain Jack. What might not come of this meeting and communing together in this lonely spot? That anything was due to the memory of the murdered sheriff, whose bones were rotting in the trench that he daily but unconcernedly passed, did not occur to him. Perhaps his mind was not large enough for the double consideration. Friendship and love— and, for the matter of that, religion— are eminently one-ideaed.

But one night he awakened with a start. His hand, which was hanging out of his bunk, was dabbling idly in water. He had barely time to spring to his middle in what seemed to be a slowly filling tank before the door fell out as from that inward pressure, and his whole shanty collapsed like a pack of cards. But it fell outwards, the roof sliding from over his head like a withdrawn canopy; and he was swept from his feet against it, and thence out into what might have been another world! For the rain had ceased, and the full moon revealed only one vast, illimitable expanse of water! It was not an overflow, but the whole rushing river magnified and repeated a thousand times, which, even as he gasped for breath and clung to the roof, was bearing him away he knew not whither. But it was bearing him away upon its center, for as he cast one swift glance toward his meadows he saw they were covered by the same sweeping torrent, dotted with his sailing hayricks and reaching to the wooded foothills. It was the great flood of '54. In its awe-inspiring completeness it might have seemed to him the primeval Deluge.

As his frail raft swept under a cottonwood he caught at one of the overhanging limbs, and, working his way desperately along the bough, at last

reached a secure position in the fork of the tree. Here he was for the moment safe. But the devastation viewed from this height was only the more appalling. Every sign of his clearing, all evidence of his past year's industry, had disappeared. He was now conscious for the first time of the lowing of the few cattle he had kept as, huddled together on a slight eminence, they one by one slipped over struggling into the flood. The shining bodies of his dead horses rolled by him as he gazed. The lower-lying limbs of the sycamore near him were bending with the burden of the lighter articles from his overturned wagon and cabin which they had caught and retained, and a rake was securely lodged in a bough. The habitual solitude of his locality was now strangely invaded by drifting sheds, agricultural implements, and fence rails from unknown and remote neighbors, and he could faintly hear the far-off calling of some unhappy farmer adrift upon a spar of his wrecked and shattered house. When day broke he was cold and hungry.

Hours passed in hopeless monotony, with no slackening or diminution of the waters. Even the drifts became less, and a vacant sea at last spread before him on which nothing moved. An awful silence impressed him. In the afternoon rain again began to fall on this gray, nebulous expanse, until the whole world seemed made of aqueous vapor. He had but one idea now— the coming of the evening boat, and he would reserve his strength to swim to it. He did not know until later that it could no longer follow the old channel of the river, and passed far beyond his sight and hearing. With his disappointment and exposure that night came a return of his old fever. His limbs were alternately racked with pain or benumbed and lifeless. He could scarcely retain his position— at times he scarcely cared to— and speculated upon ending his sufferings by a quick plunge downward. In other moments of lucid misery he was conscious of having wandered in his mind; of having seen the dead face of the murdered sheriff, washed out of his shallow grave by the flood, staring at him from the water; to this was added the hallucination of noises. He heard voices, his own name called by a voice he knew— Captain Jack's!

Suddenly he started, but in that fatal movement lost his balance and plunged downward. But before the water closed above his head he had had a cruel glimpse of help near him; of a flashing light— of the black hull of a tug not many yards away— of moving figures— the sensation of a sudden plunge following his own, the grip of a strong hand upon his collar, and— unconsciousness!

When he came to he was being lifted in a boat from the tug and rowed through the deserted streets of a large city, until he was taken in through the second-story window of a half-submerged hotel and cared for. But all his questions yielded only the information that the tug— a privately procured one, not belonging to the Public Relief Association— had been dispatched for him

with special directions, by a man who acted as one of the crew, and who was the one who had plunged in for him at the last moment. The man had left the boat at Stockton. There was nothing more? Yes!— he had left a letter. Morse seized it feverishly. It contained only a few lines:

We are quits now. You are all right. I have saved *you* from drowning, and shifted the curse to my own shoulders. Good-by.

Captain Jack.

The astounded man attempted to rise— to utter an exclamation— but fell back, unconscious.

Weeks passed before he was able to leave his bed— and then only as an impoverished and physically shattered man. He had no means to restock the farm left bare by the subsiding water. A kindly train-packer offered him a situation as muleteer in a pack train going to the mountains— for he knew tracks and passes and could ride. The mountains gave him back a little of the vigor he had lost in the river valley, but none of its dreams and ambitions. One day, while tracking a lost mule, he stopped to slake his thirst in a waterhole—all that the summer had left of a lonely mountain torrent. Enlarging the hole to give drink to his beast also, he was obliged to dislodge and throw out with the red soil some bits of honeycomb rock, which were so queer-looking and so heavy as to attract his attention. Two of the largest he took back to camp with him. They were gold! From the locality he took out a fortune. Nobody wondered. To the Californian's superstition it was perfectly natural. It was "nigger luck"— the luck of the stupid, the ignorant, the inexperienced, the nonseeker— the irony of the gods!

But the simple, bucolic nature that had sustained itself against temptation with patient industry and lonely self-concentration succumbed to rapidly acquired wealth. So it chanced that one day, with a crowd of excitement-loving spendthrifts and companions, he found himself on the outskirts of a lawless mountain town. An eager, frantic crowd had already assembled there— a desperado was to be lynched! Pushing his way through the crowd for a nearer view of the exciting spectacle, the changed and reckless Morse was stopped by armed men only at the foot of a cart, which upheld a quiet, determined man, who, with a rope around his neck, was scornfully surveying the mob, that held the other end of the rope drawn across the limb of a tree above him. The eyes of the doomed man caught those of Morse— his expression changed— a kindly smile lit his face— he bowed his proud head for the first time, with an easy gesture of farewell.

And then, with a cry, Morse threw himself upon the nearest armed guard, and a fierce struggle began. He had overpowered one adversary and seized

another in his hopeless fight toward the cart when the half-astonished crowd felt that something must be done. It was done with a sharp report, the upward curl of smoke and the falling back of the guard as Morse staggered forward *free*—with a bullet in his heart. Yet even then he did not fall until he reached the cart, when he lapsed forward, dead, with his arms outstretched and his head at the doomed man's feet.

There was something so supreme and all-powerful in this hopeless act of devotion that the heart of the multitude thrilled and then recoiled aghast at its work, and a single word or a gesture from the doomed man himself would have set him free. But they say— and it is credibly recorded— that as Captain Jack Despard looked down upon the hopeless sacrifice at his feet his eyes blazed, and he flung upon the crowd a curse so awful and sweeping that, hardened as they were, their blood ran cold, and then leaped furiously to their cheeks.

"And now," he said, coolly tightening the rope around his neck with a jerk of his head— "Go on, and be damned to you! I'm ready."

They did not hesitate this time. And Martin Morse and Captain Jack Despard were buried in the same grave.

---

## 10: The Red Bracelet

**L. T. Meade and Dr. Clifford Halifax**

1844-1914 & 1860-1921

*The Strand Magazine* May 1895

*"Dr Clifford Halifax" was Edgar Beaumont, a doctor who used the "Halifax" pseudonym for a series of short story collaborations with L T Meade; and was also name of the fictional medical detective in the series. The stories were collected in two volumes:*

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor, 1894

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor, Series 2, 1896

ONE morning, just at the close of my hours of consultation, my servant introduced into my consulting-room a tall, good-looking, middle-aged man. His name was Stafford. I had never seen him before. His face was slightly bronzed, and looked as if it had been much exposed to wind and weather. He had keen blue eyes, a frank expression of mouth, and a hearty manner which impressed me favourably. I motioned him to a chair and inquired what I could do for him. He looked at me for a moment or two without replying. I saw that he was taking my measure; I also noticed that there was considerable anxiety in his eyes. After a time he spoke abruptly.

"I fear I have come here on a wild-goose chase."

"Perhaps you will allow me to decide that," I answered, with a smile.

"Yes, he continued; "of course, you are the one to decide. I had better tell you what I want at once— I am not here on my own account— I have a daughter—" Here he broke off abruptly, and taking his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped the moisture from his brow. As he did so he sighed.

"Your daughter is ill, and you want me to see her?" I interrogated.

"I want you to see her, certainly, but she is not ill," he answered, springing suddenly to his feet— "that is, not ill in the ordinary sense of the word. I don't suppose anything can be done— still, I have heard a great deal of you. You have a facility for helping people out of difficulties. The facts of the case are briefly these: My girl— she is my only child— is blind, she is affected with congenital blindness. I have taken her to the best oculists in Europe, and they all alike regard her case as hopeless."

"I am sorry to say that I agree with them," I interrupted. ' Congenital blindness is, as a rule, hopeless. It arises, in all probability, from some defect in the construction of the eye. The optic nerve, or some other important part of the wonderful mechanism of sight, is omitted. I shall be glad to help you, but in the first place I am not a specialist, and—"

"I have not come to ask you to help me in the matter of the blindness," said Mr. Stafford. "My daughter is so accustomed to this that she scarcely feels her defect. She has been splendidly trained, and can do almost every single thing

that a person with full sight can attempt — she rides, she walks, she rows like any other girl; as to her music, it is wonderful. But, there, I must come to the point."

"Is your daughter in town?" I interrupted.

"No, she is in the country. We live in Yorkshire. Molly hates town. The atmosphere of a town has a particularly irritating effect upon her nerves. Her mother and I can seldom get her to visit London with us."

"What are her special symptoms?" I asked.

"In the ordinary sense she is not ill at all. She sleeps well, eats well, and enjoys life to the full."

"What are you uneasy about, then?" I asked.

"What am I uneasy about? I'll tell you. You must know that our child is the heiress of great wealth. I am a rich man, and she inherits all I possess. About two months ago, a man who went by the name of Winchester took up his abode in our village. He stayed at the 'White Hart' and spent the greater part of his time fishing. No one knew anything about him. He was tall, good-looking, and about fifty years of age. On a near view his eyes repelled you— they were too close together, and had an ugly expression in them. In an evil moment my little girl made his acquaintance. He had the luck to save her life. You may think I ought to be grateful for this, but upon my honour, whatever he did in the first instance, I don't think I could feel a sense of gratitude towards that man. Well, I'll tell you how they came to know each other. I mentioned that the girl could ride— she can, as if she had the keenest sight under Heaven. She was fond of having a gallop across the moors on her mare, of course accompanied by someone.

"One afternoon, a little more than a month ago, the mare took fright and ran off with her. The brute made straight for the line of rail. I don't know what might have happened had not Winchester suddenly appeared and caught the mare by her bridle just as the groom came galloping up. Yes, I acknowledge that it was a brave act, and of course I had to thank the fellow, and to make his acquaintance. He called at our place, and from the very first I noticed that he had an extraordinary influence over my child. My belief is that he hypnotized her almost directly.

"To make a long story short, this fellow, old enough to be her father, has had the presumption to propose for my girl, and she is so desperately in love with him, that if I don't give my consent to the marriage her health, reason, or even perhaps her life itself, may be endangered."

"You use strong expressions," I answered. "May I ask what you expect me to do in the case?"

"I want you to open my child's mental eyes, in some way or other, in order that she may see this man as he really is. It is a craze— a regular craze— with

the girl. Winchester hasn't a penny; he only wants the child for her money. Do you think he would saddle himself with a blind wife if he didn't want her gold?"

"Perhaps not," I answered; "and yet I have known blind girls very attractive." The father gave an impatient sigh.

"My child would be a lovely creature if her eyes were right. The sightless balls are well formed, the eyelashes black and long, and the eyelids well open; but the eyes are covered with a thick film, and this film gives to her face a peculiarly strange, and even startling, appearance. I know Winchester doesn't care a bit for her except for her gold, and I'm determined he sha'n't have her."

"I am truly sorry for you," I answered, "but I must frankly say I am puzzled to know how to help you. How is it possible for me to influence your daughter, when I don't even know her?"

Stafford gave me a hopeless gaze.

"I thought you might suggest something," he said. "I have heard of you from several friends. I tell you the man has hypnotized my girl, and what I want you to do is to hypnotize her in another direction. Now, can you, and will you?"

"I am afraid you ask for an impossibility," I replied. "You will forgive me for saying that I think the matter simple enough. It is plainly your duty to remove your daughter from the immediate vicinity of this man. You don't like him, you think his object in paying his addresses unworthy, you have but to be firm, to refuse your consent to the marriage, to take your child away, and the influence which Winchester exercises over her will be weakened and will gradually die out."

When I said this, Stafford shook his head— he walked across the room, turned his back on me, and gazed out of the window.

His manner annoyed me, and I spoke with some slight irritation.

"Surely you, as Miss Stafford's father, can forbid the union?" I said. "Surely you have trained your child to obey you?"

"I have, Dr. Halifax; a sweeter and more obedient child never lived until she met this fellow. I must tell you frankly, however, that now I have lost all power over her. Molly has told both her mother and me that she will marry Basil Winchester whether we wish it or not. Our wishes, our distress, have not the slightest power over her. We consider her, in short, scarcely responsible for her actions. The man's influence is the strangest thing I have ever seen. I believe he can hypnotize her even from a distance, and he is so clever that if we take her to the other end of the world, he will contrive to follow us."

"Well," I said, "as you cannot influence Miss Stafford to yield to your wishes, had you not better try the other way round. You think that Winchester wants your daughter for her gold. Can you not inform him that if he marries her without your permission, you will cut her off with the proverbial shilling?"

Stafford shrugged his shoulders, and gave a grim smile.

"I might say so twenty times," he replied, "but Winchester would not believe me. He would know, what is a fact, that whatever the child did, I could not be unkind to her. The fact is, she is the apple of her mother's eye and mine. At the present moment she is simply lost to us: she is deaf to our entreaties. She thinks of nothing morning, noon, or night but this man, who has contrived to get such an appalling power over her. I tell you what it is, Dr. Halifax, I have such a dislike to the fellow that I would rather see my only child in her grave than his wife, and yet I feel that if something is not done at once he will contrive to accomplish the marriage."

"The case is a strange one," I said; "still—"

"You will do something for us, won't you? I have come up to London on purpose to consult you."

"You are very good, but you place more faith in me than I deserve."

"You do acknowledge that there is a power in hypnotism?" asked Stafford.

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, can't one hypnotist counter- balance the will of another, if he happens to have a stronger power?"

"Perhaps so," I replied. "To tell the truth, I have never gone thoroughly into this subject."

"Well, at least, will you do this? Will you come down to Yorkshire and see my girl?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"I do. When can you come?"

"Towards the end of the present week, if that will suit you."

"Admirably. Come on Saturday and stay till Monday. We will speak of you to Molly as a friend, and not address you by your name of doctor."

"As you like," I replied.

"Very well, then— that is happily arranged. Our place is called Mount Stafford, and is situated about five miles out of York. If you will send a telegram to state the hour when you will leave town, I will meet you at York station. I am heartily obliged to you for giving me so much of your time."

On the appointed day I went down to Yorkshire. Stafford met me at the railway station. It only needed one glance at his face to see that something fresh had occurred.

"Thank God you have arrived," he said, taking my hand in his great grip. "Now come along to the carriage."

"Is anything the matter?" I asked, as we hurried across the platform.

"Yes, yes; but I won't wait to tell you here. What a relief it is to see your face. Here we are. Step in, Dr. Halifax. Home, Jenkins, as fast as you can."

The carriage door was opened by a foot man in livery. Immediately afterwards a pair of spirited horses started forward at a quick pace. We had soon left the picturesque city of York behind us.

"What has happened?" I asked, turning to my host.

He took off his hat, and, pulling a hand-kerchief out of his pocket, wiped his over-heated face.

"What do you think?" he exclaimed. "That scoundrel made an appointment no later than yesterday morning to run off with my child. To this last act of wicked folly had he brought the gentlest and most obedient creature that ever breathed. She waited for him in the pine wood at the back of our house for one hour— two hours. It rained— she was wet to the skin. By the merest accident I found her there— she looked like one in a trance. I touched her and called her name. She turned round quickly and told me what she meant to do, just as though it were the most natural thing in the world. I expressed some of my horror to her— I expostulated I appealed to her old affectionate feelings— I might as well have spoken to a stone.

"I am going with him. I shall die without him," she reiterated over and over again.

"There was no shame in her— no sort of sense of guilt. I had finally to bring her back to the house by force. I left her with her mother and went off to the 'White Hart.' You can imagine my feelings. When I inquired for Winchester, I was told that he had left— gone off, bag and baggage, at an early hour that morning— left no address, and owed some debts in the neighbourhood. He has not since been heard of."

"He is a good riddance," I could not help exclaiming.

"Yes, yes; but, Halifax, the child is dying."

"Oh, come; it can't be so bad as that!" I exclaimed.

"But it is— I tell you it is. You don't know the power that man had over her. She was the brightest creature you can possibly imagine ; but, after all, she was not like other girls, and this love affair was not of the ordinary kind. I told you, of course, that it was in my opinion a case of hypnotism from first to last.

"Even in the short month of their intercourse she has changed from a hardy, healthy-looking girl to a mere shadow. Sleep and appetite have failed. The scoundrel won her heart by the most underhand means, and then deliberately forsook her."

"I sympathize with all your feelings with regard to that man," I answered; "but, under the circumstances, he did the best thing he could when he left your daughter."

"You say so, because you have not seen her," replied Stafford. "She has touched no food since yesterday morning— her sleep is more like torpor than

natural slumber. Her low moans would wring anyone's heart. In short, she only takes consolation in one thing."

"What is that?" I asked.

"The fellow gave her a bracelet, which he told her he had hypnotized—it is made of red coral. He had the face to inform the child that when she wore it round her arm she would be able to ascertain his wishes— he said it was a link between her and him. Badly as he has treated her, her overpowering passion for him is beyond all reason— she clings to the bracelet as if it were her life. It is piteous to see her sitting apart from everyone worshipping this silly trinket, and imagining that the scoundrel is communicating with her through it."

"There is no doubt that Winchester's influence has affected Miss Stafford's mind for the time being," I replied. "We must see what can be done to get it into a healthy channel as quickly as possible. As to the bracelet, it is bad for her to have it, and, if possible, it ought to be taken from her."

"There is no use in thinking of that, Halifax. She would find it wherever we put it. Her mother managed to slip it from her arm last night while she slept. Mrs. Stafford took it from the room, and locked it in her own wardrobe. What do you think happened? Molly awoke, felt her arm, found that the bracelet was missing, and walked straight from her own room into ours, approached the wardrobe, placed her hand on the drawer which contained the bracelet, and asked her mother for the key.

" 'I want to get my bracelet out of that drawer, mother,' she said.

" 'How can you possibly know it is there?' asked my wife, quite startled and thrown off her balance by the child's words.

" 'I see a light pointing to the red bracelet,' she answered. 'I shall go mad if I don't have it. Give it to me at once.'

"There was nothing for it but to humour the child— her mother gave her back the bracelet, she pressed it to her lips, sighed with pleasure, and carried it off at once. Well, here we are. You shall see my daughter in a moment or two, Halifax. She knows you are coming. I have told her you are a friend of mine—I have not mentioned the fact of your being a physician. Try and get her confidence, if you can."

The carriage drew up before a tall portico. A footman ran down a flight of steps to open the door. The next moment we were in my friend's entrance-hall.

"Tell your mistress we have arrived," said Stafford, turning to the servant.

The man immediately left the hall, and in a moment Mrs. Stafford came hurrying out of one of the reception-rooms to meet us. She was a tall, dignified-looking woman with a pale face, and large, dark grey eyes. These eyes showed traces now of recent tears.

"How is Molly?" asked Stafford, when he had introduced me to his wife.

"Just the same," answered Mrs. Stafford, with a sigh.

"Have you tried to get her to eat anything?"

"I have, but it is useless," replied the mother. "She pushes all food aside with the extraordinary remark that her throat is closed. She is lying down at present, and when I left her room she had the red bracelet tightly pressed against her cheek. I think she sleeps just now. As I was leaving her room I heard her murmur that terrible man's name."

"Suppose I go up and see her while she sleeps?" I said. "I will be very careful not to arouse her."

Mrs. Stafford gazed at me fixedly.

"Perhaps you forget," she said, "that our poor darling is blind. All you have to do is not to speak. Molly has never seen anything in the whole course of her life. She will not know you are in the room if she does not hear your voice."

"Well, that is all the better," I answered, cheerfully. "I can watch her without her noticing me."

"She is very weak," answered the mother, as she took me upstairs and led me down a corridor to Miss Stafford's room. "Her failure of strength is most remarkable. It is now nearly thirty hours since that man disappeared. Each moment seems to take something from her vitality. I could never have believed that hypnotism was such an awful power if I did not witness its effects upon my child."

"It is a fearful and dangerous power," I replied. "The sooner your daughter is released from its spell, the better."

"Sometimes I fear that it may be necessary for us to find this Basil Winchester," said Mrs. Stafford. "He has exercised this spell over the child: he alone may be able to remove it."

"I hope we may relieve Miss Stafford by some other means," I answered. "The less she sees of Winchester in the future the better— but now let me see her. Is this her room?"

"Yes; let us tread softly— I should like the child to have her sleep out."

We entered a very dainty and prettily furnished girl's room. The last rays of the evening sun were streaming into the chamber, and one of them now fell right across the foot of the bed on which the recumbent figure of a very young and remarkably pretty girl lay. Thick dark lashes shaded the cheeks— the brows were delicate, finely pencilled, and perfectly black. The hair, which was thrown back over the pillows, was abundant, and of the luxurious and curly order. Its shade was of a rich tone of brown, with a slight admixture of red in it the complexion was delicate— the features regular. As I looked for the first time at Molly Stafford, I could not help feeling a distinct pang at my heart. She was an only child— she was the one treasure of this rich and prosperous couple. Without her, of what avail to them would be their house, their lands, their gold? If ever a girl appeared ill unto death, this one did.

There was a transparency about her complexion— a waxlike hue was spread all over her face, which showed me how serious was the drain on her system made by a mysterious and little understood power. I took one of her limp hands in mine, and felt her feeble, fluttering pulse. The other hand was pressed against her cheek. On the wrist of this small right hand I saw the bracelet— the red beads pressed the sleeper's soft cheek, making faint marks there. The mother came up and stood by my side as I gazed. Suddenly bent forward and touched my arm.

"What do you think of her?" she asked, in a whisper of uncontrollable anxiety.

"Hush," I replied. "I will talk to you presently."

As I spoke I bent down over the child, and pushing back the hair from her brow, listened to her hurried breathing. When I did this she suddenly, and without the least warning, opened her eyes wide. The effect was so startling that I stepped back. While she slept I had forgotten the fact of her blindness— now it was abundantly manifest. The opened eyes made such a complete change in her whole appearance that her beauty vanished, giving place to positive ugliness— ugliness of an almost repellent order. The sightless eyes themselves were well formed and of a good size. They were turned now full upon me, and the brows became slightly knit. I had never seen such eyes before. I can only describe them as all white. There was no cornea, no iris, no pupil. The entire eyeball was white, as is the outside margin of the ordinary eye.

"Who touched me?" said the girl, starting up in bed, and covering the wrist on which she wore the bracelet with her other hand. "There is an adverse influence in the room. I won't have anything to do with it. Mother, are you there?"

"I am close to you, my darling."

"But there is someone else in the room— someone who is against me. Who is it?"

"Tell her at once," I said to the mother; "there is no use in deceiving her."

"You can't deceive me even if you try," answered Miss Stafford. As she spoke she flung the bed-clothes aside and sprang out of bed— she had lain down in her dress— she came quickly up to where I was standing.

"Who are you? Tell me at once," she repeated.

"I am a friend of your father's," I answered, "and I hope also to be a friend of yours. Your father and mother have told me that you are in trouble."

"Yes, I am— I am in awful trouble," she answered.

"Well, as I am a doctor, I may be able to do something for you."

She laughed wildly.

"Of all people in the world, I wish least to see a doctor," she answered. "I am not ill— at least, in the ordinary sense. I am in trouble because— because my

heart bleeds— but this comforts me. It is warm— it has life in it— some of his life."

Here she pressed the coral beads passionately to her lips.

"Listen to me," I said, in a firm voice. "You are at present under the influence—"

"Oh, you need not tell me," she interrupted. "I glory in being under Basil Winchester's influence."

"You are at present under the dangerous influence of hypnotism," I answered.

She started violently when I said these words; then, with a swift movement, infinitely touching, went straight up to her mother, and put her arms round her neck.

"Mother, darling, don't let that man say anything more to me," she whispered— "he is a stranger— his influence is adverse— I don't want to get under it— take him away from me, mother."

"You are mistaken, Molly," answered Mrs. Stafford; "this gentleman would not hurt you for the world: he is a friend of ours, Dr. Halifax."

"I don't wish to have anything to do with him. I know what he has come for—he wants to take my bracelet away."

"You are altogether mistaken," I said, coming near her as I spoke. "I faithfully promise not to touch your bracelet, if you will do something for me."

A look of great relief came over her face.

"I will do anything, if I may keep my bracelet."

"On one condition you may keep it."

"What is that?"

"That you eat something which I am going to order for you."

"I can't eat, my throat is closed."

"No, that is folly," I replied. "You are giving way to a feeling of hysteria. This is causing your father and mother great unhappiness. Your throat is not closed, you only imagine it. Mrs. Stafford, will you get your daughter to wash her face and hands and then bring her downstairs to one of the sitting-rooms? You will eat something, Miss Stafford, when I tell you to?" I finally added.

She made no reply, but detaching her arms from her mother's neck, she let them fall to her sides, and followed me with her queer, sightless eyes as I left the room. The terrible eyes seemed to watch me as if they could see. I went immediately downstairs, and in about ten minutes Mrs. Stafford appeared in one of the drawing-rooms, leading her daughter by the hand.

To my astonishment, the girl loosened her clasp of her mother's hand and came straight up to me, exactly as a person with sight would do.

"Here I am," she said. "I promise to obey you if I may keep my bracelet. Now, what am I to do?"

"Take this glass of port wine, and drink it off," I said.

I had asked Stafford to have wine and biscuits in readiness, and I now filled a glass with good old port, and put it into Miss Stafford's hand.

"Drink," I said; "you can do so if you wish."

She didn't even attempt to struggle against my stronger will. Taking the glass, she raised it to her lips and drained off the contents at one draught.

"That is capital," I answered, "now eat this biscuit."

She did so with a sort of queer, desperate haste. When she had finished the first, I gave her another, which was also devoured quickly.

"That will do," I said, when she had finished the second biscuit. "Now sit here— I want to have a talk with you."

"I may keep my bracelet?" she inquired.

"I have said so," I answered. "I hope, before long, that you will give it to me of your own free will, but until that time comes I, for one, will certainly not deprive you of it."

"I believe that you are speaking the truth— I believe that I can trust you," she answered, with a profound sigh of relief.

She sat down on a low seat. The coral bracelet was on her left wrist; she stroked the red beads tenderly with the fingers of her right hand. As she did so, pleased smiles began to flit across her worn, little face.

"I am better for my food," she said, after a pause.

"Of course you are," I answered. "It was very silly of you to refuse to eat. You must have another meal presently, but not just yet."

She raised her head and gave me one of her sightless gazes; alarm became manifest in her face.

"I don't believe I shall be able to eat any more," she said; "my throat is getting that dreadful closed feeling again."

"You won't feel your throat troubling you when I wish you to eat," I said.

"But, surely, doctor, you are not going to hypnotize me?"

"I am not," I answered.

"Then why do you suppose that I shall obey you?"

"Because I intend to exercise my strong will over yours— yours is just now weakened by sorrow."

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, "by terrible, maddening grief."

"You have parted for the time being with common-sense," I continued, taking no apparent notice of her anguish. "I mean to bring that precious possession back to you."

I spoke so far in the driest way, but then, seeing how weak was, I allowed some of the sympathy which I really felt to get into my voice.

"I pity you sincerely," I said. "It is possible that I may be able to help you, if we can have a little talk alone. May I see Miss Stafford for a few moments by herself?" I continued, turning to the parents.

"Certainly," said Stafford. He and his wife had been watching us with the most intense anxiety. They now left the room. Molly took no notice of their departure. She sat huddled up near a fire, which was not unpleasant on this late autumn day. Her sightless eyes seemed to watch the flames as they flickered.

"Do you know that there is a fire in the grate?" I asked, suddenly.

"Yes," she replied.

"You doubtless feel the warmth?" I continued.

"I feel the warmth," she answered, "but that is not all. I have a sensation when my eyes are fixed on a fire, or on the sun, as if at any moment I were going to understand the full meaning of light. I have had that strange sensation all my life. I daresay most blind people know it."

"Possibly," I replied ; "you were born blind, were you not?"

"Yes, but pray don't talk about my blindness now, it is incurable ; my eyes are not made the same way as other people's. That which gives sight has been denied them."

"So I have heard," I answered, briefly.

"Don't let us talk of it now. I don't miss what I never had; but, oh, my God, my God, I miss one thing inexpressibly."

Here she clasped her hands so tightly together, that the delicate blue veins started into view. She stood up and gave utterance to a low and bitter cry.

"You know what has happened?" she said, turning swiftly round to me. "The man I love has left me."

"I know," I answered— "your father has told me. You see, he is not a good man."

"What does that matter? He is necessary to me."

"Do you really love him?" I asked. My words evidently surprised her; she paused in thought.

"I can't tell you whether I love him or not," she said at last. "I can only repeat that he is necessary to me. I have only known him for a little over a month, and during that short time he has become an essential part of my life. All the rest of the world may go, but if he remains, I shall be happy. He has gone, and the world is dark— dark as my sightless eyes. Oh, this agony will kill me. I feel as if my heart were bleeding inside— it will soon bleed itself to death."

The poor girl gave utterance to a terrible groan as she spoke— she sank back into a chair, her face looked ghastly.

"If this man were back with you, you would be happy?" I asked.

"My heart would stop bleeding."

"But, answer me, would you be happy?"

"I don't— quite— know." She brought out these words with startling distinctness.

"When people love, and are together, they are generally happy," I said.

"I have heard so," she replied. "I never thought that love— love of this sort— could come into the life of a blind girl. It came, but I don't think my sensations were ever those of happiness. I can't tell you what I really felt. An irresistible and great force surrounded me. I knew that I had no will apart from that of Basil Winchester's. Anything he told me, I did— even if he asked me to do wrong, I did it. My father and mother were opposed to our marriage, but I cared nothing for their opposition. I lived— I live— only for him. He has gone now, and— I am dying— it is as if the sun had set."

"You ought not to speak in that way— think of your parents."

She shook her head.

"It is useless," she murmured.

"They love you dearly."

"I know that, but the knowledge of their love doesn't affect me in any way."

"Don't you love them in return?"

"No, I don't think I love anyone. The only emotion my heart is capable of is of a great, passionate, starved yearning to be with Basil Winchester."

"Suppose you found out that Winchester was not a good man— that he was, in short, a scoundrel?"

"I should not care— he would still be Basil Winchester to me."

Beads of perspiration were standing out on her forehead. As she spoke, she panted. I saw that I must not question her further.

"Well," I said, in a soothing tone, "you have my promise not to take your bracelet from you— that is, if you will continue to eat when I think it necessary to give you food."

"I will do anything if you will leave me my bracelet. I am certain that, without it, I shall lose my senses."

She began again to stroke the beads with her thin fingers. As she did so, a look of calm returned to her face.

"This bracelet is part of the man I love," she said. "When I press it to my cheek, I experience a very strange sensation. I feel as if cords were drawing me to where my lover is. I feel as if I must arise, and go to him— then I seem to hear his voice telling me to stay where I am— I try to be patient— I endure— but the drops of blood come from my heart all the time. My starved heart is dying. Dr. Halifax, can anything be done for me?"

"Certainly," I answered; "what you need more than anything else just at present is quiet sleep— you have talked quite enough. I am going to ask your mother to put you to bed, and then I will give you something to make you sleep."

"But my bracelet?"

"You have my promise that it shall not be touched. Now, I am going to speak to your mother."

I left the room— Mrs. Stafford was waiting for me in the ante-room.

"The strain and excitement are considerable," I said. "I can't conceal from you that the case is one of great anxiety. The hypnotist has exercised his wicked power to the full. I by no means despair, however, and the first thing necessary to be done, is to get your daughter to have a long, refreshing sleep. Will you see that she goes to bed at once, Mrs. Stafford? When she is comfortably in bed, I want to give her a composing draught."

Mrs. Stafford hurried off to obey my orders. In half an hour the exhausted girl was lying between the sheets. I took a draught which I had specially prepared to her bedside.

"Drink this at once," I said.

I was glad to find that my voice had already considerable power over her. The moment I spoke, she raised herself obediently on her elbow. I put the glass containing the medicine in her hand—she drained off the dose.

"Now you are certain to have a pleasant sleep," I said. "I am going to sit with you until I find that you are in refreshing slumber."

I took my seat by the bedside. Miss Stafford closed her eyes immediately. In less than ten minutes she was in the land of dreams.

The rest of the evening passed quietly. Soon after dinner Mrs. Stafford went up to her daughter's room. She was absent for nearly an hour ; when she returned there was an excited, triumphant expression on her face.

"What has happened, Mary?" asked her husband.

"I think I have done a good thing," she replied. "I have got rid of the coral bracelet at last."

I started up in annoyance. "Have you really taken the bracelet from Miss Stafford's arm?" I said. "If so, I must ask you to put it back at once."

Mrs. Stafford gazed at me in astonishment.

"I don't understand you," she said. "The influence of that bracelet has been most pernicious— I removed it just now when the child was in such heavy sleep that she did not in the least notice what I was doing."

"I promised Miss Stafford that she might keep the bracelet," I repeated.

"Will you kindly give it to me, and I will slip it back again?"

Mrs. Stafford looked startled and distressed. "But I can't," she replied. "I was wondering where to hide it, for Molly's instinct about recovering it has been marvellous. As I was hurrying downstairs, one of the servants came to tell me that a gipsy woman, whom I know very well, was waiting in the lower hall to speak to me. It occurred to me that I would give her the bracelet. I did so; she slipped it on her baby's arm, and left Mount Stafford some minutes ago."

Mrs. Stafford had scarcely said these words, and I had no time to reply, when a slight noise near the door caused us all to turn our heads. To our astonishment and dismay, Molly Stafford, in her long white night-gown, entered the room. She was staring straight before her with her queer, sightless eyes. She walked across the room in the direction of an open window. One glance into her face showed me that she was walking in her sleep.

"Hush," I whispered to the parents, "we must not awaken her— let us follow her." She stepped over the window-sill and went out into the starlit night. Straight up the avenue she went— her rich hair fell over her neck and shoulders—her feet were bare, and I wondered that the pain of walking on the gravel did not awaken her. We all followed her at a little distance. Presently she paused at a wicket gate which led up to one of the lodges; she opened the gate quickly, and with a decided push; walked up the narrow path, and lifting the latch of the door entered. There was a bright light inside; the lodge-keeper and his wife were sitting over their supper, and in one corner I saw to my astonishment the dark face of a woman who evidently must have been a gipsy. A baby sat on her knee. On the baby's arm dangled the coral bracelet.

With a warning gesture Mr. and Mrs. Stafford enjoined silence on the amazed group. Miss Stafford walked quickly to the child, snatched the bracelet from its arm, slipped it on her own, and left the cottage as abruptly and noiselessly as she had entered. As quickly as she had left the house, she now returned to it, entered the drawing-room by the open window, crossed the room, and went straight upstairs to her own bedroom. She lay down in bed with a sigh of relief, folded the bed-clothes around her, and clasped her recovered treasure to her cheek.

The whole occurrence must have been a dream to her, and she would not in all probability know anything about it when she awoke.

"I should like to watch by her for the present," I said to the mother.

"I will share your watch," she replied.

The sick girl slept far into the night. As the hours went by her condition satisfied me less and less. The sleeping draught I had given her had produced heavy slumber, but there was no doubt, from her restless movements and her heavy groans, that her mind was awake and active. Few doctors believe in the well-known phrase, "a broken heart," but if anyone were likely to die of this malady, the girl over whom I was now watching would be the one. Her blindness and her peculiarly nervous and highly strung temperament would all conduce to this effect. Amongst the many victims of hypnotism, there would be no sadder case than that of Molly Stafford, unless I could devise some means for her relief. Up to that moment no light dawned upon me, but I waited in hope.

About three in the morning, the sick girl awoke. She opened her sightless eyes, and in her own peculiar fashion turned them immediately upon the person

nearest to her. I happened to be that person. She looked at me without speaking— presently she put out the hand on which she wore the bracelet and touched my coat-sleeve.

"You are there?" she said, in a whisper.

"Yes," I answered.

"Why do you watch me?"

"Because you are ill," I replied. "Now, I am going to give you something to eat."

"My throat is closed," she began.

"I am not going to listen to that sort of nonsense," I answered. As I spoke I motioned to Mrs. Stafford—she approached the bedside with a cup of strong beef-tea. I took the cup in one hand, and putting my other hand under the girl's shoulder, raised her to a semi-sitting position.

"Drink this at once," I said.

For a moment she seemed to shrink into herself, but then, making an effort, she held up her lips obediently. I held the cup to them— she emptied the contents, lying back again on her pillow with a sigh.

"Now you are going to sleep again," I said. "Give me your hand."

"No," she answered, "you will hypnotize me; Basil used to hold my hand when he wanted me to do what he wished— I don't wish anyone else to hold my hand."

"I promise not to hypnotize you," I answered, "but I should like to hold your hand for a few moments, for I think it will help you to sleep."

"I want to rest," she answered, in a low voice— "I am tired— tired to death!"—as she spoke, she slipped her little hand into mine.

For the first few moments she was restless, then she quieted down; she had nearly dropped off to sleep, when she raised herself to say a few words.

"I don't feel the dreadful, drawing sensation so badly now," she whispered. Then her eyes closed in slumber.

When she was quite sound asleep, I motioned to Mrs. Stafford to take my place by the bedside, and softly left the room.

I had thought hard while she slept— an idea had come to me at last.

Stafford was waiting for me downstairs; he was far too anxious to go to bed.

"Well," he said, when he saw me, "what do you make of the case?"

"It is serious," I answered. "It would be wrong for me to tell you anything else, but I don't consider it hopeless."

"What do you mean? Can you do anything to counteract the terrible influence under which our child is lying?"

"At present I am not quite certain," I answered. "The right thing— the only thing to do will be, by some means or other, to divert your daughter's thoughts into a completely new channel. Her illness is due to a strange and overstrained

condition of the imagination. All her thoughts are turned inwards. Her blindness adds much to this condition. If I could only give her back her sight!"

Stafford laughed, hoarsely.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "even doctors can't do impossibilities—remember, the child was born blind."

"I know," I answered. I did not add any more.

"Her mother and I have taken Molly to nearly every oculist in Europe," continued Stafford. "One and all pronounce the case hopeless. A glance ought to show you, Halifax, that the eyes are not properly formed— there is no coloured part— the entire eye is white."

"Yes," I answered again. I was silent for a few minutes, thinking deeply; then I spoke.

"With your permission, Mr. Stafford, I should like to examine your daughter's eyes very carefully by full daylight. I have doubtless no right to differ from my brother doctors, but I have noticed a strange peculiarity about your child, which I have never seen before in a blind person. She is stone blind, but she turns her eyes fully upon the person she is speaking to. She confessed to me also that in strong light, such as bright fire-light or the full rays of the sun, she has a sensation which she thinks must resemble the feelings of those who see light. I own that I have very little to go upon, but I shall not be satisfied with regard to the condition of your daughter's eyes until I have examined them for myself."

My words could scarcely fail to excite Stafford— his eyes sparkled, his voice shook. "You speak in a strange way," he said, "and I am the last to put an obstacle in your path, but for God's sake don't arouse a hope in that poor child which can never be realized."

"In her present condition, even the presence of such a hope for a few hours can be nothing but beneficial," I answered. "When I examine her eyes it will be necessary for me to ask her a few questions. If I am right— if there are really perfect eyes behind the curtains which now shroud them— I am firmly convinced that your girl will be completely cured from the strange infatuation under which she labours. The effect of hypnotism is overpowering to some natures. Your daughter was an easy victim. I can scarcely think of that scoundrel with patience, but if Miss Molly can get back her sight, I am convinced that all will be well with her."

"I should think so," exclaimed Stafford. "To think of Molly with eyes like other girls' is too great a hope to be realized quickly."

"Don't build on it," I answered, "but allow me to examine the eyes as soon and as thoroughly as possible."

The day which was now about to dawn was Sunday.

Soon after eleven o'clock Miss Stafford softly entered the room where I was sitting. I did not know that she was awake, and could not help starting when I saw her. She was dressed in white, and looked very young, beautiful, and child-like. A glance, however, at her sightless eyes changed the beauty into ugliness. Oh, that I could but remove the hideous veil which covered them. She came into the room with a gliding, graceful motion peculiarly her own, and as was her wont, came straight up to me as though she saw me. She put out her hand and spoke in a low, musical voice.

"I feel a little better," she said. "That last sleep refreshed me. You soothed me when you held my hand. I don't think any the less of Basil— the links between us are still complete, but I am less restless when you are by."

"That is right," I answered, in a cheerful tone. "Please remember what I told you yesterday— the man whom you call Basil Winchester has hypnotized you. I am not going to hypnotize you, but I am going to exercise my will over yours."

"You have done so already," she answered. "I eat when you tell me; I sleep when you wish me to; I don't feel wicked when I am with you. I even begin, just a little, a very little, to take an interest in my father and mother again. Basil used to make all the rest of the world a blank. He always stood himself in a wonderful light, but beyond him was darkness."

"You talk of light," I said, suddenly; "what do you know about it?"

A wave of colour rushed up to her pale cheeks.

"Nothing really," she replied, "and yet a great deal. I am always imagining what light is like. On a sunshiny day nothing gives me such pleasure as to go out and gaze directly up to where the great heat comes from. I seem to see light then. I know well it is only seeming, for I shall never see light, but I picture what it is like."

"I wish you would try to describe your picture," I said.

"It is difficult," she answered, "for of course you know I have no knowledge of colour. I can best describe what I fancy light to be by telling you what noises are to me. Do you know the clashing sound of a full string band? Bright light seems somewhat to resemble that. Twilight is like the slow movement in one of Mendelssohn's 'Songs Without Words,' and darkness resembles the 'Dead March.' Oh, I know I am talking nonsense."

"Not at all," I replied; "you describe your sensations wonderfully. Now come and stand in this sunshine, and tell me what you feel."

To my surprise, she went immediately and stood by the window. The noonday sun was pouring a great flood of light into the room.

"How did you guess that the sunshine was here?" I asked.

"I heard the noise of the string band," she answered; "now I feel the heat on my face. Oh, I have a rapturous moment— it is almost as if I must burst some veil at any instant, and really see."

"Stay still for an instant," I said; "I should like to look into your eyes."

"Don't, they are terrible to look at."

"They are peculiar; now stand perfectly still while I examine them."

She stood as motionless as a statue. The sightless balls were turned full upon me—I examined them carefully. The white sclerotic membrane completely covered the entire ball, but where the cornea ought to be in the ordinary eye, I noticed a very slight bulging. That was enough.

"Thank you, Miss Stafford," I said to her; "that will do for the present."

She replied, in a fretful tone.

"I wish you hadn't looked at my eyes," she said. "Many doctors have done so already. I have had many brief moments of hope, but they have always been extinguished in despair. You are not an oculist. Why did you raise hopes that can never be realized?"

"How do you know they can never be realized?" I said.

"How do I know?" she answered. "I have got no eyes in the ordinary sense."

"It would make you very happy to see like other people?" I continued, after a pause.

"Happy," she answered; "it is unkind of you even to speak of it."

She stood perfectly still, while large tears gathered in her sightless eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"I can't bear it," she said, after a pause; "no one knows what the longing for light has been to me. There have been moments, but that was before I knew Basil, when I even wished to die, because I believed that afterwards I should see."

"Come over here," I said, taking her hand. "Sit down, I have something to say. I have just looked at your eyes, and an idea which occurred to me last night has been very much strengthened. Now you must stay quite calm while I speak to you. Your blindness is of a very peculiar and uncommon type. I don't now that it can be cured."

"Cured," she exclaimed. "You speak as if there were a possibility. Oh, Dr. Halifax, do you dare to give me hope?"

"Yes," I answered, slowly, "I do. You are blind— you are afflicted with congenital blindness, but nevertheless I believe there is a chance of your sight being restored. Now I will tell you frankly what my idea is. I think— remember, it is only conjecture after all; but I am strongly inclined to believe that you possess perfect eyes under the thick membrane which now covers them. My reasons for this idea are twofold. First, you have a conception of light, which a totally blind person who has never seen does not as a rule possess. Second, your sensations are intensified when you look full up at the sun, or when you gaze at a very bright fire. This would be scarcely likely to be the case if the organs of vision were altogether absent. I have a third reason for my hope. Where the

cornea ought to exist in the normal eye, you have a very slight bulging. In short, my hope with regard to your recovery of sight is sufficiently strong to induce me to ask you to consent to a slight operation. If, after all, my hopes are false, you will be no worse off than you are at present. If, on the other hand, I am right—

"Yes, if you are right?" exclaimed Molly— she grasped my hand, holding it with the strength of iron. "If you are right?" she repeated.

"If I am right," I said, quietly, " you will see as well as any other person."

"Oh, merciful and kind God," she ex- claimed—she covered her face with her trembling hands— "then I shall see Basil! Oh, I can scarcely dare to think of this rapture."

"I am going to speak to your parents now," I said; "stay quietly here until I return to you."

I left her and went to seek Stafford, who was wandering restlessly about, evidently waiting for me.

" Well," he said, when he saw me— "well, did you examine her eyes?"

"I did— let us come into this room, I want to talk to you."

Stafford drew me into his smoking-room. Mrs. Stafford was there— she looked even more excited than her husband.

"My husband has told me all about your extraordinary thought, Dr. Halifax," she said. "Have you looked at our child's eyes? Is there a vestige of hope?"

"There is," I replied. "I have examined your daughter's eyes very carefully. Their condition is peculiar— the sclerotic membrane covers the entire eyeball. The present condition of the eyes points to hopeless congenital blindness; nevertheless, I am not without hope. In examination I noticed a bulging where the cornea ought to be. My hope is that there is a perfect eye behind the membrane which now completely covers the whole ball. I have told my hope to your daughter."

"You have told Molly? How cruel of you," exclaimed Mrs. Stafford.

"No," I answered, "if you saw Miss Stafford now, you would not think what I have done cruel. She is so excited—so lifted out of herself—that, for the time, at least, she has almost forgotten the strange craze which is over her. She will willingly submit to an operation."

" An operation? We ought not to risk it," said the mother.

"There is no risk," I answered. "At the worst the slight scar which I shall make will quickly heal, and the eye will be no worse than it is now. At the best— remember all that that includes— sight!"

"Oh, dare we think of anything so joyous?" said Mrs. Stafford.

"Allow me to perform the operation," I said, going up to her. "I am not a rash man; believe me, I would not advise this if I did not think there was a fair hope of success."

"Suppose you are wrong: the child will then be in a worse condition than ever."

"Even if I am wrong, that will not be the case," I replied. "The thread of her present thoughts will have been broken if only for a few hours. That fact alone will be greatly to her benefit. If I am the means of restoring her sight to her, I am fully convinced that the spell under which she now labours will vanish."

"You are right," said Stafford, who had not spoken a word up to this point.

"Mary, my dear, we will allow our good friend to have his way. If the operation is successful, we shall have our child as we never had her yet; remember, too, that if by any chance she is permitted to see Winchester's face, her love for him must vanish on the spot—those sinister eyes of his would repel anyone."

"She does not love him now," I interrupted. "What she feels is not love. She is hypnotized. The restoration of sight will make such a complete revolution in her whole being, that I doubt if the man could hypnotize her again even if he tried. She will soon forget this strange and terrible episode in her life. In short, I believe in the acquisition of sight as a complete cure."

"We will make up our minds to the operation," said Stafford. "Am I not right?" he added, turning to his wife.

"Yes, we will consent," she answered.

I looked at her when she spoke— her face was as white as a sheet, but her eyes blazed with light and colour. I noticed for the first time the strong likeness between mother and daughter. In the case of the mother, however, the eyes were of the deepest, clearest grey— scintillating eyes, full of light and expression. I thought of the blind girl's charming face, and wondered what it would look like if it could ever be lit up with eyes like her mother's. The thought cheered me, and strengthened my resolve to do my utmost for Miss Stafford.

"Very well," I said ; " I have your consent to perform the operation. In order to get the necessary instruments, I will take the next train to London. I can return here at an early hour to-morrow, and will operate on one eye immediately."

"Will the operation be painful?" asked Mrs. Stafford. "Will it be necessary for you to use chloroform?"

"No; I shall put cocaine into the eye— don't be alarmed, Miss Stafford will feel no pain. I shall only operate on one eye at a time. A very slight incision will enable me to confirm my theory, or to see that it 's hopeless. While I am absent, please talk frankly about the operation. Induce your daughter to eat and drink plenty ; get her to bed early to-night ; do everything to keep up her strength. I will go back to say a word to her now."

I re-entered the drawing-room. Miss Stafford was sitting just where I had left her —her hands were crossed on her lap—the right hand clasped the red

bracelet, which encircled the left-hand wrist. She knew my footstep, and looked up with a face of expectation.

"Well?" she said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Good news," I replied, cheerfully. "Your father and mother consent to the operation. I am going to town by the next train and will return with my instruments to-morrow. Keep up your courage— by this time to-morrow we shall know whether the precious gift of sight is to be yours or not."

"If you fail, I shall die," she answered, speaking in a low and intense voice.

"No," I replied, "even if I fail, you will be too brave, too good, deliberately to throw away your life. Try to think now of success, not failure—try to think of what life may be yours if you can see like other girls."

She sighed ; there was hope, even joy, in that sigh. I hurriedly left her. The next day, at an early hour, I was back again at Mount Stafford. The operation which I meant to perform was quite simple in character, and I did not require any help. I suggested to Mr. and Mrs. Stafford that it would be best for me to be alone with my patient.

"She feels the presence of anyone so intensely," I said, "that she will be less nervous, and will keep more quiet, if I am alone with her."

The father and mother agreed to this suggestion, and decided to wait in the outer drawing- room. I placed Miss Stafford in a chair facing the window.

"Now, you must keep up your courage," I said. "I shall operate to-day on your right eye. You must keep perfectly quiet. This will be easy— for you won't feel the slightest pain."

"I could even bear pain with the great hope of sight before me," she answered.

I saw that she was in a state of tense and rapt excitement. She had strung herself up to bear anything.

"You will feel no pain," I said, taking her hand as I spoke.

Her pulse was fluttering, but not weak and fitful like yesterday. I supported her head with props, and then dropped the cocaine into the eye. After waiting until complete insensibility was produced, I quickly began to operate. I carefully divided the sclerotic at the upper part of the eyeball, just where I had seen the bulging, such as there is at the edge of the cornea in the normal eye. After dividing the sclerotic, I made a small flap, which I raised. It did not need my patient's sudden exclamation to tell me that I was right in my conjecture, and that there was under the thick membrane a cornea intact and transparent. To dissect off the whole of the fibrous curtain which covered this cornea was but the work of a few minutes.

After her first cry, Miss Stafford did not utter a sound. But when I had finished she started up and looked wildly around her.

"I see," she exclaimed— "I see! How queer everything is— how confusing— I would almost rather be in the dark again. I feel as if mountains were surrounding me. I don't know where I am— all is hopeless confusion. I see— oh, I am glad, I am glad; but I can't use my sight. Now that I have it, I don't know what to do with it."

As she uttered these last words, she fell back in her chair in a semi-conscious state.

I applied restoratives, and then carefully bound up the wounded eye.

The shock and joy were almost too much for her in her weak state. I had her taken straight to bed. I gave her a composing draught, and she fell quickly asleep. Having seen her in a satisfactory slumber, I hurried downstairs to speak to her father.

"Your girl will have as beautiful and perfect eyes as anyone need care to possess," I said. "I will operate on the left eye in a week's time. For the present, the right eye must be kept bandaged, but the bandagee may be removed in a day or two. She will then have to learn to see just as if she were an infant."

"What do you mean?" asked Stafford.

"What I say," I replied; "your daughter cannot focus at present. She has no idea of distance— she must learn to use her sight just as a baby does."

"But she possesses eyes," said the mother, who had followed me into the room. "Oh, Dr. Halifax, how can we thank you?"

The second operation was performed as successfully as the first, and in a month's time from the date of the last operation, Molly Stafford could use her new possession with tolerable freedom. The eyes were beautiful: clear grey like the mother's, with black rims. They transformed her face, making it a specially lovely one.

A FEW WEEKS later, as I was about to leave my consulting-room after my morning's work, Stafford was announced. He came into the room in a hurry, and with signs of agitation on his face. He held in his hand a little box, which he laid on the table.

"How are you, Halifax?" he said, grasping my hand in his great grip. "I won't take up more than a moment or two of your valuable time. I have come with news."

"What is it?" I asked. "I hope nothing bad has happened. How is my patient?"

"In perfect and blooming health."

"Something has disturbed you, however," I continued, giving him a keen glance; "what is it?"

"Yes," continued Stafford, "I am both disturbed and relieved. I hurried up to town on purpose to tell you. What do you think happened yesterday?"

"How can I tell?" I said.

"Molly sees as perfectly as I do," said Stafford. "Her joy in her new possession is beyond all words. Since the date of the first operation she never once mentioned Winchester's name. Her mother and I hoped she had completely forgotten him, but we did not fail to remark that she still wore the coral bracelet."

"I should take no notice of that," I interrupted.

"Well, let me proceed. She wore the coral bracelet day and night, but she never spoke of the man. Yesterday she went out accompanied by a girl, who is a great friend of hers. This girl, Miss Henderson, is the daughter of our next-door neighbour. She told us exactly what occurred. They were walking in the pine wood, chatting, as girls will, when who should appear directly in their path but that scoundrel, Winchester! He came up to Molly and tried to take her hands.

"She started back in amazement.

" 'Pray don't touch me,' she said. 'I don't know who you are.'

"He laughed and spoke in that confoundedly seductive voice of his.

" 'I am the man whom you love— Basil Winchester,' he said. 'I have come to explain why I could not meet you six weeks Can I see you alone?'

" 'You, Basil Winchester?' exclaimed Molly. She looked full at him with an expression of puzzled incredulity. Then her voice took a half frightened, half scornful tone. 'You must be mistaken,' she said. 'I could never, never at any moment have loved a man like you.'

"Before he could utter a word, she turned from him and fled back to the house. She rushed into her mother's presence, flung her arms round her neck, and burst into tears.

" 'Mother,' she exclaimed, 'I met a dreadful man in the wood just now. He told me his name was Basil Winchester. He said that I— I loved him once.'

" 'But you don't love him now, my darling," said her mother, soothing and kissing her.

" 'I could never have loved that man, mother,' said Molly. 'I have a dim remembrance of an awful time, when someone of the name had a terrible power over me; but it could not have been that man, mother. I looked in his face, and I saw his ugly soul.'

"Miss Henderson came in just then and gave us a full account of the interview. The moment Molly fled from him, Winchester left the pine wood. Perhaps you think that is the end, but there is more to follow. Two hours afterwards the news reached us that the fellow had been arrested. The fact is the police had been wanting him for a couple of months. His reason for deserting Molly on that first occasion was fear of arrest. He ventured back hoping to secure his prize, the spell was broken, and he saw he could do nothing

with the child. He was arrested on a grave charge of forgery, and is now in York Gaol awaiting his trial."

As Stafford said these last words, he sank back in a chair in manifest agitation.

"When I think of my child's narrow escape, I can't help shuddering, even now," he said.

"She has escaped, and now all is well," I answered.

"Yes, all is well. We have our child as we never thought to have her— beautiful, perfect, with eyes as lovely as her mother's. By the way, she told me to give you this."

When Stafford left me, I opened the little parcel. It contained— the red coral bracelet.

---

## 11: The Image of the Lost Soul

*Saki*

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

*The Westminster Gazette*, 14 Sep 1901

THERE WERE a number of carved stone figures placed at intervals along the parapets of the old Cathedral; some of them represented angels, others kings and bishops, and nearly all were in attitudes of pious exaltation and composure. But one figure, low down on the cold north side of the building, had neither crown, mitre, nor nimbus, and its face was hard and bitter and downcast; it must be a demon, declared the fat blue pigeons that roosted and sunned themselves all day on the ledges of the parapet; but the old belfry jackdaw, who was an authority on ecclesiastical architecture, said it was a lost soul. And there the matter rested.

One autumn day there fluttered on to the Cathedral roof a slender, sweet-voiced bird that had wandered away from the bare fields and thinning hedgerows in search of a winter roosting-place. It tried to rest its tired feet under the shade of a great angel-wing or to nestle in the sculptured folds of a kingly robe, but the fat pigeons hustled it away from wherever it settled, and the noisy sparrow-folk drove it off the ledges. No respectable bird sang with so much feeling, they cheeped one to another, and the wanderer had to move on.

Only the effigy of the Lost Soul offered a place of refuge. The pigeons did not consider it safe to perch on a projection that leaned so much out of the perpendicular, and was, besides, too much in the shadow. The figure did not cross its hands in the pious attitude of the other graven dignitaries, but its arms were folded as in defiance and their angle made a snug resting-place for the little bird. Every evening it crept trustfully into its corner against the stone breast of the image, and the darkling eyes seemed to keep watch over its slumbers. The lonely bird grew to love its lonely protector, and during the day it would sit from time to time on some rainshoot or other abutment and trill forth its sweetest music in grateful thanks for its nightly shelter. And, it may have been the work of wind and weather, or some other influence, but the wild drawn face seemed gradually to lose some of its hardness and unhappiness. Every day, through the long monotonous hours, the song of his little guest would come up in snatches to the lonely watcher, and at evening, when the vesper-bell was ringing and the great grey bats slid out of their hiding-places in the belfry roof, the bright-eyed bird would return, twitter a few sleepy notes, and nestle into the arms that were waiting for him. Those were happy days for the Dark Image. Only the great bell of the Cathedral rang out daily its mocking message, "After joy ... sorrow."

The folk in the verger's lodge noticed a little brown bird flitting about the Cathedral precincts, and admired its beautiful singing. "But it is a pity," said they, "that all that warbling should be lost and wasted far out of hearing up on the parapet." They were poor, but they understood the principles of political economy. So they caught the bird and put it in a little wicker cage outside the lodge door.

That night the little songster was missing from its accustomed haunt, and the Dark Image knew more than ever the bitterness of loneliness. Perhaps his little friend had been killed by a prowling cat or hurt by a stone. Perhaps ... perhaps he had flown elsewhere. But when morning came there floated up to him, through the noise and bustle of the Cathedral world, a faint heart-aching message from the prisoner in the wicker cage far below. And every day, at high noon, when the fat pigeons were stupefied into silence after their midday meal and the sparrows were washing themselves in the street-puddles, the song of the little bird came up to the parapets— a song of hunger and longing and hopelessness, a cry that could never be answered. The pigeons remarked, between mealtimes, that the figure leaned forward more than ever out of the perpendicular.

One day no song came up from the little wicker cage. It was the coldest day of the winter, and the pigeons and sparrows on the Cathedral roof looked anxiously on all sides for the scraps of food which they were dependent on in hard weather.

"Have the lodge-folk thrown out anything on to the dust-heap?" inquired one pigeon of another which was peering over the edge of the north parapet.

"Only a little dead bird," was the answer.

There was a crackling sound in the night on the Cathedral roof and a noise as of falling masonry. The belfry jackdaw said the frost was affecting the fabric, and as he had experienced many frosts it must have been so. In the morning it was seen that the Figure of the Lost Soul had toppled from its cornice and lay now in a broken mass on the dust-heap outside the verger's lodge.

"It is just as well," cooed the fat pigeons, after they had peered at the matter for some minutes; "now we shall have a nice angel put up there. Certainly they will put an angel there."

"After joy ... sorrow," rang out the great bell.

## 12: The Heart of a Grand-father

*Katharine Tynan*

1859-1931

*The Strand Magazine* Jan 1905

*The Queenslander*, 25 Mar 1905

"LET ME HEAR NO MORE of this folly, Rupert," the Judge had said. "I will never give my consent. Let there be an end of it!"

It was a good many years ago, eight at least, since the words had been spoken. The Judge had been in his dressing-room, making ready for a dinner party. He was a very busy man, and the son who was proud of him had snatched at the minutes of the day when they might be together. During the season the Judge dined out most evenings of the week. If, as it happened that evening, his only son's social engagements lay in another direction, Rupert was sure to be found in the Judge's dressing-room, talking over the events of the day, while the Judge tied his white tie and got into a swallow-tail, usually in a violent hurry because he had sat so late. Between the shaving and the brushing and the donning of evening clothes— that evening the services of a valet were dispensed with— Rupert's love affair was put out of court by his father.

"Let me hear no more of it," he had said; and the ivory pallor of his face had no accession of colour, the lines of his handsome mouth closed till the lips were hardly visible, the curiously-piercing bright gray eyes were inflexible to the boy to whom he had never refused anything from his cradle.

During the day knowledge of Rupert's infatuation for the poor daughter of a country vicar had come to his father. He was not angry with Rupert. Lads would have their follies, he thought, with fond contemptuousness. Only— it must go no farther; there must be an end of it. He never doubted that he would be obeyed. When had he and Rupert not seen things from the same standpoint?

If he had noticed the set look of the young face that was so startlingly like his own— as he might have noticed it in the glass— his opinion regarding the finality of his decision would, perhaps, have undergone a change. But he had always been accustomed to imposing his will upon more than his immediate circle. Fortunately he was too big a man to be a tyrant, and the will was generally for the good of those concerned. And, to be sure, he and Rupert had always seen eye to eye. There had never been a more devoted father and son. They didn't talk much about it; but the Judge knew his son's pride in any love for him as the son knew his father's satisfaction in him.

That matter of Miss Conyers in time passed from the Judge's mind. At the moment it had startled him; but then he had taken the reasonable view. Hot-headed, generous lads like Rupert must have their impracticable follies. He didn't want twenty-three to have the wisdom of fifty. And the boy had not

protested. There had not been another word about it. After all, Rupert had seen that his father knew best for him. What was the attraction between girl and boy, the mere passing folly, as compared with the love which had been father's and mother's love to Rupert all his days?

However, as the years passed, the Judge had one cause of dissatisfaction with his otherwise wholly satisfactory son. Rupert showed himself curiously indifferent, or at best merely friendly, to all women. The Judge did not like it. He had made his way from the comparatively humble position of the son of a country solicitor to almost the top of the tree. As the years passed his honours and eminence grew with them. He had accepted a title. He was now Lord Lethwayt. In course of time the title would come to Rupert. The Judge had an oddly human desire— or it would have seemed oddly human to those who called him a man of steel and adamant— to hold his grandson in his arms before he died. He wanted to know that the title he had created and made greatly significant was going to be handed on. Beyond that he had an unexpected fondness for children. To children, and to dogs and horses, the Judge ceased to be a terrible person.

Rupert had shown no leaning for the profession of the law. He was a soldier, in a smart cavalry regiment which had its quarters between London and Windsor. He had done very decently in his profession, and had won his company in the ordinary way; but he had seen little service. There had been piping times of peace for so long that people had forgotten what war was like.

The Judge had been saving for his only son. When Rupert succeeded to the title he would have plenty of money to keep it up with. Sandridge Park, the Judge's seat, was one of the prettiest places of its size in England. There was also the house in Portman-square. All those years mothers and daughters alike had been ready to smile on Rupert Lethwayt; but, so far as the father could, see, he never so much as flirted. It was very disappointing for the founder of his own fame, who desired a grandson to carry on the glories of the name he had made honourable.

Then came a little cloud from the dark places of the earth, which was to grow till it lay over England like a shadow. Calamity followed calamity, till it seemed as though every soldier the country possessed must be put into the fighting line. But the hot days of summer had come before Rupert's regiment was ordered to the seat of war.

For some time the regiment had been awaiting orders. It was a glorious June. The weather had come that makes men think of the sea with longing.

On the west coast of England there is a little cove which the tripper has not yet discovered. There the Judge and his son had spent many a happy vacation while Rupert was a small boy. But of late years the Judge had not revisited

Haworth Cove; he was getting on in years now, and took the cure at a German spa year after year with assiduity.

This summer he was not so well. He would not have acknowledged for worlds how his son's regiment being ordered out weighed on his mind. Why, if Rupert were killed— so many eldest and only sons were being killed every day, and Rupert was sure to be found in the fighting line— if Rupert were killed it would be an end of everything. He would be a lonely, heart-broken old man, the first and the last Baron Lethwayt.

The papers mentioned that Lord Lethwayt was absent from the Bench owing to indisposition. Lord Lethwayt, in his library at Portman-square, was writing a letter to his son:—

*My Dear Boy,*

*I'm off work and liverish. I am running down for a few days to Haworth, and propose that you shall join me there. You will have no difficulty in getting a week's leave. It will be like the old days.*

*Your affectionate father, LETHWAYT."*

*P.S.— I go by the 10 train from Paddington to-morrow morning.*

The letter did not reach Captain the Hon. Rupert Lethwayt, for the excellent reason that he had already left his quarters for a week's leave. Nor did he see that paragraph in the papers about his father's indisposition, else he would have been disquieted.

When the Judge had finished the letter and affixed his big, old-fashioned seal he sat staring at it for a moment, during which he looked oddly unhappy for a man of steel and adamant. His old grievance of Rupert's aversion to matrimony came into his mind, and following the train of thought he remembered Rupert's one love affair, the love affair which he had nipped in the bud so remorselessly nearly a decade of years ago. For the first time in his life he wondered if he had been right to act as he did. He might have seen the girl, at all events. And she was well-born, the eldest daughter of a poor scholar with a houseful of children. He might have seen her. To be sure, he had had other views for Rupert. But then Rupert had set them at naught. The Lady Floras and Lady Hildas of those days whom he had thought of as worthy mates for his boy, and certain, one or the other, to please his fancy, had become wives of other men and mothers of their children. If Rupert had married Agnes Conyers she might have given him half-a-dozen children by this time, grandchildren for the Judge.

"It is a bad thing to have all your eggs in one basket," the Judge said, drearily, aloud, in the splendid dim room.

He caught the 10 train at Paddington next day. As he bustled along the platform, where people stared and pointed him out to each other— the

illustrated papers had made his face well known— he looked about him for Rupert with a chill sense of disappointment. Rupert had always been punctual when it was a question of their meeting. Supposing he had not been able to get leave! There had been no answer to the letter. Then their few days' holiday together must be given up, and there might never again be a chance; their times together might be over in this world.

The Judge sighed impatiently as he followed his manservant along the line of carriages. Then for an instant he smiled. It was at the sight of a first-class carriage filled to overflowing, it seemed, with babies and nurses. There were really five children and two nurses, but there were innumerable small packages, and spades and pails, and luncheon-baskets and picture-books, and a small yelping dog. The children were crowding over each other to look out of the carriage windows. A small, bullet-headed boy about 6 years old caught the Judge's eye. His face was like a small dark peach. He had a remarkably sturdy air, as though he viewed the world as a thing for his delight, and he smiled and waved his hand to the Judge. The Judge smiled back at him.

"We're going to the sea," said the boy. "Don't you wish you were going too?"

"Don't be so forward, Master Jim." said the prim head nurse, pulling him back.

The Judge would have pursued the acquaintance if he had not caught sight of his son in the next carriage.

"So glad you were able to come, my boy," he called out, exuberantly glad that he was not going to be disappointed of those few days after all; he only realised as his heart bounded up how great the disappointment would have been. "I was afraid you couldn't get leave after all when I didn't meet you at the booking office. Hot, isn't it? It will be good at Haworth these days."

The manservant was putting in his small luggage. There was a boy with a tray of papers at the carriage-door. In the bustle of getting in and settling, the Judge did not notice the consternation on his son's face, nor the rapid telegraphy of the eyes that passed between him and a young lady who sat in the corner of the carriage, partly hidden behind a ladies' paper. In this moment of joyous excitement the Judge did not remember that the young lady had been sitting opposite to Rupert when he first caught sight of him. If he had remembered he would have thought it obliging of her to have made room for him so rapidly, getting into the farthest corner of the carriage and gathering her belongings to her as though there was not, according to the railway company's estimate, still three empty seats to be filled.

Certainly the young lady effaced herself as much as possible. She might hardly have existed for all the hindrance she was to Rupert and his father during the four hours' journey. Once the Judge, glancing her way, casually caught sight of a rounded cheek like a peach, not altogether unlike the cheek of his young

friend next door. For the moment she had lowered the paper, and there was a dimple playing charmingly in her cheek. The Judge had been talking of the children in the next carriage. Then while he glanced at her in his abrupt way the paper went up again; and the dimple was hidden.

When at last they reached Haworth, Rupert left the carriage so hurriedly as to amaze his father. The Judge having looked after him for a moment with some surprise, waited, and helped the young lady to alight. He was the most punctilious of old-fashioned gentlemen, and fumed a little as he went after his son, having left the young lady amid her belongings on the platform, the centre of the group of children from the next carriage.

"Odd that she should not have travelled with them," he thought to himself. "Their eldest sister, perhaps, or perhaps a young aunt. Hardly their mother. She didn't look as if she couldn't bear the chatter of children either."

For by this time he knew more of his late travelling companion than the dimple. He had a memory of a vivacious and charming face, with beautiful brown eyes and the most lovely brunette colouring. She was really very like the small boy in the next carriage at whom the Judge had looked so enviously.

He grumbled as he met Rupert half-way down the platform, and yielded up his bag to him. Rupert answered something vaguely about having had to send a telegram to some one or other.

"The fly from the Jolly Waggoner is outside," he said with an air of hurry and perturbation. "I have asked old John to collect the luggage. I thought we might walk over the sandhills; I am stiff, being cooped up so long."

The Judge had no objection. He was a believer in regular exercise, and while he was in town might be met any morning of the year in the Row on his chestnut, at hours when other men were turning over sleepily before awaking.

Still he hesitated after he had greeted old John, the coachman from the Waggoner.

"Hadn't we better wait and assist that young lady with the children? I don't see anything here for her. She may be rather stranded."

"Oh, come on, you Quixotic person," cried Rupert, thrusting an arm through his father's. "As a matter of fact you are hindering her. Old John has to leave her at her lodgings as soon as he has done with us."

"Why not leave her first?"

"Very well, sir. Indeed, for the matter of that, if we walk, John can drop our bags as he passed by the Waggoner. John drive the lady and children over; we'll walk. Come along, sir."

The Judge, as a matter of fact, wanted to stay and make better acquaintance with the children, but his son hustled him along just before the shouting and joyous group emerged from the door of the railway station. Master Jim was dancing along with his hand in Gregory the porters hand, and as he came he

shouted a greeting to old John. The sound of the exhilarating little voice followed the Judge and his son as they climbed the hill.

"They seem to have been here before," said the Judge.

"Very probably."

"I hope the place hasn't grown much. It must be a good many years since we were here together."

"There is a range of low cottages down by the coastguards', and a couple of bungalows on the cliff. The great world has not yet found out Haworth."

"Ah!" The Judge glanced sharply at his son. "I didn't know you were at Haworth since we were here together, Rupert."

"Last year, when you were at Schwallenbach."

Captain Rupert looked confused. What had come to the boy, the Judge asked wonderingly. He had always been able to read him like a book. No secrets between them ever. Other men's sons might be sealed books to their fathers. Not Rupert. They saw eye to eye: they felt heart to heart.

"I am glad the place is yet unspoilt," the Judge went on after a second's pause. "I am glad we can be here together for these few days in quietness."

They turned to other topics. As they crossed the hill the fly with the lady and children passed them by. The small boy shouted a greeting which the Judge took to be to himself, and raised his hat to the youngster with a delighted eye. As the carriage went on out of sight he sighed, and Rupert looked at him curiously. It was the first time he had heard his father sigh.

Mrs. Shadbolt, at the Jolly Waggoner, welcomed them with beaming deference and had an excellent lunch ready for them. When they had finished it the Judge got up and announced his intention of taking a walk on the beach.

"I'll follow you presently, sir," Rupert said. "I've a letter to write."

"Already?"

"A business letter." Rupert looked down.

"Very well, my lad. Only, join me as soon as you can. We must be together as much as possible this time."

The Judge laid a hand in unwonted demonstration on his son's shoulder.

"We have always been every thing to each other," he said, affectionately.

Then he took his Panama hat and sallied forth. Demonstrations were not in his way, and he felt shy over this one.

He had hardly passed out of sight when there was a ragged boy in the doorway with a telegram for the captain. It was addressed to Rose Cottage, but the urchin, who was an old friend of Rupert's, had known that he was at the Waggoner and taken the message there.

Rupert tore the telegram open. It was a message of recall. The regiment had got its marching orders. He must come back as soon as possible.

"It will be a blow to the Judge," he said, aloud. "He was counting on our holiday. I shall have to own up sooner than I thought."

He thrust the telegram into his breast pocket and followed his father. As he came down the little path over the cliffs he was suddenly aware of the Judge as the centre of a merry group. The Judge was positively buried half-way up his chest in sand. The children who had travelled with them in the morning were walling him up, carrying small spadefuls of sand and beating it down about him with great energy. The young lady was sitting under a Japanese umbrella, apparently engaged in needlework. For the moment the nurses had vanished.

The Judge looked up and saw his son, and shook himself free from his grave of sand. He shouted to Rupert cheerfully as he came to meet him. For a moment the small boy capered at his heels till he was recalled by his mother.

"Come and play with the young rascals," said the Judge, shaking the sand out of his well-fitting gray coat and trousers. He was laughing like a boy. "I don't know when I've enjoyed such a game. Why— what's the matter, Rupert?"

"I've something to tell you, sir." Rupert put his hand through his father's arm and drew him away with him.

The Judge stiffened suddenly; for a second his piercing eye was clouded.

"You've had the recall," he said quietly.

"It's boots and saddle with us, father. We sail next week."

"When must you go?— from here, I mean?"

"I think I can stay till to-morrow."

They walked up the cliff path in silence. The path wound through a little glade of tiny bracken. They were alone, surrounded by the little heights. A skylark hung above them motionless in an ecstasy of song.

"It's hard," said the Judge; and they turned and faced each other. "Deuced hard, my boy. Why didn't you give me a grandson to console me? That little chap down on the beach— he flung his arm about my neck and rubbed his cheek against mine. I felt I'd have given the world if he were my own. If I'd had grandchildren this wouldn't have been so bitter."

Up the path in the little cliff came Master Jim, escaped unnoticed from his mother. As he came on the father and son in the little glade he launched himself upon them with a shout of delight.

"Rascal!" cried the Judge, straddling the path to intercept him.

"Daddy!" said Master Jim, trying to pass him by to reach Rupert.

"That isn't your daddy, boy," shouted the Judge, swinging the glowing small creature to his shoulder. "I wish to heaven it was!"

"Will you ever forgive us, father?" Rupert said. "I have been a married man for eight years. He is your grandson. We called him James after you. It was no use. I should never have married any woman but Agnes; and you would not hear of it."

The Judge stared at him in stupefaction. Then he set down the child between them and looked at him as though he could not believe his own good fortune.

"I ought to have known it, boy," he said, "if only because my heart went out to him. He is like you, and he is like his mother, too. Married all those years! Heavens! I think you and she have something to forgive me, too."

"Come and comfort her," Rupert said. "I leave her and them to you, sir. You will take care of each other."

"My grandson!" the Judge repeated, incredulously, as he looked down at the small boy, who was quiet for the moment wondering over this seriousness of his elders. "And there are two more boys. The name is not likely to die out. Come, lad, let us go to my daughter."

He swung the child once again to his shoulder, where the little brown arm went round his massive head. Then they went back down the cliff path together.



## 13: Mauryeen

*Katharine Tynan*

*Great Southern Herald (West Aust) 30 May 1908*  
(and several other Australian rural newspapers)

AGAINST CON DALY'S LITTLE GIRL there was never a word spoken in the island. Con had been well liked, God rest his soul! but the man was drowned nigh upon twenty years ago. There was some old tragic tale about it— how he had volunteered to swim with a rope round his waist to a ship breaking up a few yards from the rocks in a sea that a gannet could scarcely live upon. He had pushed aside the men who remonstrated with him, turning on them a face ghastly in the moonlight.

'Stand aside, men!' he cried, 'and if I fail see the girsha.' He was the strongest man in all the island, and as much at home in the water as a porpoise. They saw his sleek head now and again flung out of the trough of the waves, and his huge shoulders labouring against the might of the storm. Then suddenly the rope they were folding fell slack in their hands— they said afterwards it had snapped on a jagged razor of rock— and the man disappeared.

A day or two later his battered and bruised body was flung on the bathing strand, where in summer the city ladies take their dip in the sea. He was buried with some of the drowned sailors he had tried to rescue, and an iron cross put at his head by the fishermen. But for a long time there was a talk that the man had gone to meet his death gladly, had for some reason or another preferred death to life; but people were never quite sure if there was anything in it.

People had looked askance at Ellen Daly, Con's wife, before that, though to her husband she was the apple of his eye. She had been a servant on the mainland when Con Daly met and married her, and he had never seemed to have any friends. She had been handsome in her day, at least, so some people thought; but there were women in the island who said they never could abide her, with her pale face and sneering smile, and her eyes that turned green as a cat's when she was angry. How ever, she never tried to ingratiate herself with the women; if the men admired her it was much as she asked. When she liked she could be fascinating enough. She bewitched Mrs. Wilkinson, the housekeeper at the Hall, into taking her on whenever his lordship filled the house with gentlemen, and an extra hand was needed. She was deft and clever, and could be insinuating when it served her purpose. But the friendship of the island women she had never desired, and when her husband was drowned there was no fisher-wife to go and sit with her in the desolate house. An the years went by her good looks went with them. She yellowed, and her malevolent eyes took on red rims round their greenness; while her dry lips, parted over her

marling teeth, looked more ill than they had been when they were ripe and ruddy.

The neighbours were kind by stealth to Con's girsha. There were long days of her childhood, when her mother was at work in the Hall, and the child was locked in the empty cottage; but many was the kind word through the-window from the women as they assed up and down; and now and again a hot griddle-cake, or some little dainty of the kind, was passed through to the child as she sat, so dull and lonely, on her little creepy stool.

Poor little Mauryeen! she was a child with social instincts, and often, often she used to wonder in those lonely hours why she might not be out with the other children, playing at shop in the crevices of the rocks, or wading for cookies, or dancing round in a ring to the sing-song of 'Green Gravel!' or playing at 'High Gates.' Her mother coldly discouraged any friendship with the children of her foes; and little Mauryeen grew up a silent child, with something more delicate and refined about her than the other children, with somehow the air of a little lady.

But Mauryeen was not her mother's child to be without a will of her own. As she grew from childhood to girlhood she began to assert herself, and though her mother tried hard to break her spirit she did not succeed. After a time she seemed to realise that here was something she had not counted upon, and to submit, since she could not hope to fight it. All the more she hated the girl whom she could not rule, hated her so furiously that the glitter of her eyes as she looked at her from the chimney corner was oftentimes murderous. And little by little, Mauryeen grew to be friends with all the fishing village.

All the same, though she asserted herself, the girl did her duty bravely and humbly. Any mother of them all would have been proud to own Mauryeen. When her mother had employment at the Hall, Mauryeen took care of the house, and having cleaned and tidied it to her heart's content, sat in the sun at her knitting till Ellen Daly came home to find a comfortable meal prepared for her. The woman's one good quality was that she always been a good housewife, and the girl took after her. Then, when her mother was at home, Mauryeen went out sewing to the houses of the few gentry who lived on the hill; and the house was well kept and comfortable, though an unnatural hatred sat beside the hearth.

The neighbours pitied and praised Mauryeen all the more. They used to wonder how long it would last, the silent feud between mother and daughter, especially as Mauryeen was so capable and clever that she might for the asking join even Mrs. Wilkinson's band of hand-maidens.

The girl meanwhile throve as happily as though she lived in the very sunshine of love, rather than in this malignant atmosphere. She saw little of her mother. The hours when they were under one roof were few; and across the

threshold she found abundant kindness and praise. Mauryeen was small and graceful, with the olive-tinted fairness which had been her mother's in her best days. But Mauryeen's blue eyes were kindly, and her lips smiled, and her soft voice was gentle. She had a pretty way of decking herself which the fisher-girls could never come by. Mauryeen is a pink cotton frock, with a spray of brown sea-weed in her belt, might have passed for one of the young ladies who visited at the Hall. If the other girls copied her pretty tricks of decoration, they carried the tame air of the mere copyist.

But no one grudged Mauryeen her charm she was so kind and gentle, and she had always the tragedy of that ghastly old mother of hers to stir pity for her. Then, too, she always seemed so anxious that the other girls should look well, and so willing to take trouble to this end that no one could envy her own prettiness.

There came a time when a young man of the island, Randal Burke by name, declared to Mauryeen that her voice could coax the birds off the trees, and that her head when he listened was like the prettiest bird's head, all covered with golden feathers.' She had, indeed, a very pretty way of listening, with her head on one side and her eyes bright and attentive. Mauryeen was used to compliments, could usually hold her own in a bit of light love-making; but it was remarkable that at this speech of Randal Burke's she went pale. She always turned pale where another girl would have blushed.

Mauryeen's was a sudden and rapid wooing. The young fellow was fairly independent, possessing a little bit of land with his cottage as well as a boat. His mother was one of the most prosperous women of the island, and had, been in days gone by Ellen Daly's bitterest enemy. But for all that welcomed Mauryeen tenderly as a daughter.

There was a terrible to-do when Mauryeen told her mother of her intentions. She turned so livid that Mauryeen, for all her brave heart, was frightened, and faltered. The old woman choked and gasped with the whirlwind of passion that possessed her. As soon as she could speak she hissed out:

'The day you marry him I curse you and him, your house, your marriage, and every child born of you!'

Mauryeen's righteous anger rose and shook her too like a whirlwind, but it drove out fear.

'And if you do, you wicked woman,' she said, "it's not me it'll harm. Do you think God will listen to the like of you, or let harm befall me and mine because of your curse?'

For a day or two after Mauryeen's defiance, her mother brooded in quietness, only now and again turning on her daughter those terrible green eyes. No word passed between the two, and meanwhile Randal Burke was hastening the preparations for the marriage by every means in his power. Father

Tiernay had 'called them' at the Mass three Sundays running. The priest was greatly phased with the marriage. Mauryeen was a pet lamb of his flock, and he deeply disliked and distrusted her mother.

It was the feast-day of the year on the island, a beautiful, bright, sunny June day. On the plateau the men played at the hurley and putting the stone, and there was a tug of-war for married men and single, and after that for the women, amid much jollity and laughter. Above the plateau the hill doped, and that long sunny dope was the place from which tike girls and women looked on at the prowess of their male kind. That day put of all the year there was a general picnic on the hill, and meals were eaten and the long day spent out of doors till the dews came on the grass.

Now one of the events was a rowing contest, and the course was right under the hill slope. Father Tiernay every year gave a money prize for the winner, and the distinction in itself was ardently coveted. Randal Burke was rowing against an other young fisherman, and it was not easy to forecast the winner, both men were so strong, so, practised, and so eager for the contest.

The race had. begun, and the people on the hillside were standing: up in their excitement, watching the boats which were nearly dead level. Mauryeen stood by Randal's mother with one hand thrust childishly within her arm and the other shading her eyes from the bright sun. Suddenly the people were startled by the sound of running feet, and all looking in one direction they saw Mauryeen's mother coming, without bonnet or cloak, her face working with passion, and her hands clenched. The people fell back before her. She had an evil reputation, and for a minute or two they thought she had gone mad. Mauryeen, who did not fall back with the others, found herself standing in the centre of an empty space, while her mother panted before her, struggling for words. All the women-folk behind pressed together and craned over each other's shoulders, half alarmed, and half curious.

At last the woman found her breath. She pointed a yellow finger at the girl, who stood before her with her head proudly lifted, and her eyes amazed but fearless.

'Look at her,' shrieked the beldame, 'all of you, and you, Kate Burke, that boasts your family's the oldest on the island. Och, the good ould ancient blood! Look at her, for her blood's ancients still. Do yez see anything of Ton Daly in her?

'Look at her!' again shrieked the hoarse voice. 'D'yez know where she gets her pride and the courage to dare me? She gets it from her father, the ould lord. Con Daly had never act nor part in her.'

A scream, the like of which the island had never heard, broke from Mauryeen's lips. It was such a cry as if body and soul were being rant asunder. With the scream she flung her arms above her head. The little ground, closing

round her awe-stricken, looked to see her fall face downward to the group. But with a wild movement of her arms, as if she swept the whole world out of her path, she find down the hill towards the village. Ellen Daly had vanished. No one had seen her go. And down in the dancing bay at their feet Randal Burke proudly shot ahead of his opponent and won the race.

The girl meanwhile had fled on and on with only the blind instinct to hide her disgrace. The village was empty of all but the sick and the bedridden. There was not an eye on Mauryeen Daly as she fled by the open doors. With a mechanical instinct she turned in at the door of her mother's house. The cool darkness of it after the glare outside was grateful to her. She closed the door, and barred it. Then she turned into a room off the kitchen, her own little room, where there was a picture of the Mother of Sorrows with seven swords through her heart, and dropped on the floor before the picture with an inarticulate moaning.

She lay there, half-unconscious, and only feeling her misery dully. On the wall hung her blue cashmere dress, in which she was to have been married a day or two later. On the chest of drawers was a box containing the little wreath and veil her mother-in-law had presented her with. But she saw none of these things with her mouth and eyes against the floor.

She came back to life presently, hearing her name called. The voice had called many times before she heard it. Now it was imperative, almost sharp in its eagerness. 'Open, acushla, open, or I burst the door!' It was Randal's voice, and she advanced a step or two, groping with outstretched hands, and a wild look of fear in her dilated eyes. Then she heard the door straining and creaking, and a man panting, striving out side. In a little while, almost before she had time to stand clear of it, the door rattled on the floor, and her lover leapt into the cabin.

She put out her hands to fence him off, swaying blindly towards the wall. He sprang to her with a soft murmur of pity, and was just in time to catch her as her senses left her, and she lay a limp and lifeless thing in his arms.

Father Tiernay was standing at his window over a surpassingly fair plain of sea, with silver-green islands. He was glad the people had so fine a day for their sports. In the afternoon he would be with them, to distribute prizes and congratulate the winners, and to add to the general enjoyment by his presence; but this morning he was alone, except for his deaf old house keeper, and Jim the sacristan, who was too dignified to be out on the Fair Will with the others. He priest's look of perplexity deepened as he watched someone climbing the steep hill to his house.

'It looks like Cody's ghost carrying his wife's body,' he muttered to himself. The figure or figures came nearer. At last his reverence took in what he saw, and made but one or two steps to the hall-door.

'Come in here,' he said, asking no questions like a practical man, and indeed for a few minutes the young fisherman was incapable of answering any. It was not until the priest had forced some brandy between the girl's lips when they had laid her on a sofa, and her breath came fluttering back, that Father Tiernay drew the lover aside into the window recess, and learnt in a few words what had happened.

'She's so proud, my little girl,' pleaded the lover. 'She won't live under the shame of it unless your reverence 'ud help us out of it. Couldn't your reverence say the words over us? We've been called three times, and I've the ring in my pocket. Oh, 'twas well that unnatural woman calculated her time when our happiness was at the full. Couldn't your reverence do it for us?' he said again in a wheedling tone.

His reverence looked at him thoughtfully. Then he drew out his watch.

'Yes,' he said, 'there's time enough, and I think you're right, my lad. Just step outside while I speak to her, for I see she's coming to.'

The young man whispered, 'God bless you, father! If I waited till to-morrow I'd never not the ring on her. I know the pride of her. And then he went out obediently.

No one knew how Father Tiernay persuaded Mauryeen. But a little while later a very pale bride stood up at the altar of Columb Island chapel and was married, with Father Tiernay's housekeeper and the sacristan for witnesses.

When they were married Father Tiernay said to the bridegroom, 'Take her home by the back road. You won't meet a soul, and I'll tell the people when I join them what has been done. But above all, impress on her that the story's a wicked lie.'

So Maureen went home with her husband to his little cottage on the cliffs. And in the afternoon, when Father Tiernay came to distribute the prizes and merry-make with his people, he raised his hand for silence and addressed them.

'Children,' he said, 'I hear there has been a grave scandal among you, and a great sin committed before you this day. The wicked sought to crush the innocent, as I believe, by bearing false witness; but the wicked has not triumphed. A few hours ago I made Randal Burke and Mauryeen Daly man and wife. And I give you solemn warning that the one who gives ear and belief to the story of the miserable woman who dishonoured herself to crush her innocent flesh and blood shares in that unnatural guilt.'

So after a time Mauryeen crept back to the sunshine, and let herself be persuaded that her mother was mad. No one on the island saw Ellen Daly again, though it was known that she had crossed to the mainland by the afternoon ferry. She never came back, and there are some in the island who believed she had sold her soul to the devil, and that he had claimed her fulfilment of the compact. But Mauryeen is an honest man's wife, and what ever people may

conjecture in their inmost hearts as to the truth or falsity of her mother's tale they say nothing, for did not Father Tiernay declare such gossip to be a sin? Yet for all that Mauryeen's ways are finer and gentler than those of any woman on the island.

---

## 14: An Australian Ploughman's Story

*Anonymous*

*Household Words*, April 6, 1850

*"Household Words" was the weekly magazine edited by Charles Dickens, which ran from March 1850 to May 1859.*

IN RED HOT HASTE to get out of a Colonial town— where the life was too much like what I had sailed eighteen thousand miles to avoid,— I agreed to my Mr. Gumscrew's terms without debate. Board and lodging for self and horse, undertaking to do the light work of the farm for twelve months without wages. On these conditions I took up my abode in a wooden hut thatched with bark, on which any well-bred short-horn would have looked with contempt. The sun and moon shone clearly through the chinks between the weather boards; my bedstead was a bullock's hide stretched over four posts driven into the ground, a slip of green hide hanging from wall to wall, formed at once my clothes-horse and chest of drawers.

To the great contempt of my companion and fellow lodger, the overseer, I did put up a shelf for a few of my books, and drive in a nail for a small shaving glass, although not then able to boast a beard. The floor was of clay, variegated with large holes where the morning broom had swept too hard. The fire-place, built of unhewn stone, formed a recess half the size of our apartment. The kitchen was detached, and although small, rather better constructed than our chief hut, for the cook built it himself, and being an 'old hand' took pains with his special domain.

If I had been ordered into such a dog-kennel in England how I should have grumbled, and devoured my heart, in vain complainings; but now— it was my own choice, I had *hope before me*,— the glorious climate, the elastic atmosphere made chinks and cracks in walls of no consequence; and when inclined to grumble, I thought of the dark den-like lawyer's office in which I had wearied away the last six months of my European life.

After a few days spent in cantering round the neighbourhood, I was ready to commence my light 'duties.'

Returning home one evening I stopped my horse to look at our ploughman breaking up a fine piece of alluvial flat, which had recently been cleared and fenced in. He had ten pair of oxen and a heavy swing plough at work. There was a man to help him to drive, but his voice was as good as his hands, and it was a pleasure to see him, as he turned up a broad furrow of virgin soil, and halted his team, and lifted the big plough over the roots of the stumps that dotted the paddock, as if it had been a feather weight. Our ploughman, Jem Carden— Big Jem he was commonly called— was a specimen of English peasantry such as we

don't often see in Australia, tall, though a round shouldered stoop took off something from his height, large limbed but active, with a curly fair-haired bullet head, light-blue good-natured eyes, and hooked nose, large mouth full of good teeth, a solid chin, a colour which hard work and Australian sun could not extract, and an expression of respectful melancholy good nature that at once prepossessed me in his favour. He was then in the prime of life, a perfect master of every kind of rural work, ploughing, sowing, reaping, mowing, thatching, breaking-in, and driving bullocks and horses, and not less an adept in all Colonial pursuits, for he could do as much with a saw, an auger, an axe, and an adze as a European workman with a complete chest of tools. He was a very good fellow, too, always ready to help any one at a pinch; when the stockman broke his leg he walked twenty miles through the rain, a tropical rain in bucketfuls, although they had fought the day before about a dog of Jem's, the stockman had been ill using; and yet Big Jem was a convict, or speaking colonially, 'a prisoner.'

About a year after my arrival at the Station, Mr. Gumscrew having purchased a large herd of cattle a bargain from a person living some 200 miles from us, in the Mochi district, where all the grass was burned up, determined on sending me for them, as there was little doing at Springhill, and left me to choose any one I pleased to accompany me. I chose Carden.

We got our horses into the paddock close to the hut overnight; the next morning, at sunrise, buckled a blanket, a couple of shirts, a bag of tea and sugar, a quart pot, and a pair of hobbles to my saddle, and started in high spirits.

Now, living in the Bush, and especially while travelling, there is not the same distance between a master and well-behaved man, although a prisoner, as in towns. From the first I was interested in the ploughman, so I took the opportunity of this expedition to learn more about him.

We travelled all day from sunrise to sundown, seldom going off a walk, at which our horses could do nearly five miles an hour: toward evening we tried to strike some station or shepherd's hut, the whereabouts of which Jem generally knew by the mixture of experience and instinct that constitute a perfect Bushman; if we could not light upon a hut we camped down near a waterhole, lighted a fire on some hollow fallen gum-tree, hobbled out our horses on the pasture near, put the quart pots to boil, the damper (flour cake) in the ashes to bake, and smoked our pipes until all was ready; then rolling up each in his blanket, slept soundly on the bare ground.

I think it was on the third day that we came upon a long stretch of open undulating country, where the grass scarcely gave back a sound to our horses' feet. I dropped the reins on my little mare's neck, and began to fill my pipe; but seeing Carden's pipe still stuck in his straw hat, I knew he must be bankrupt in a Bushman's greatest luxury, so handed him my pouch, and said, 'Come, ride

along side me, and tell me how you came here; for I cannot imagine how so honest a fellow ever got into trouble.'

'Master,' he answered, 'I'll tell you all the truth; but give me a little time, for my heart's full, and it will take us a good three hours to get across these plains.' So we paced on in silence for the space of one pipe, when he spoke again, and said, 'Master, excuse me, but I'm not much of a scholar, and if you would read me a chapter from this book, it would do me a power o' good. I try sometimes myself to spell it out, but somehow I can't see the letters "plain.'" His eyes were full of tears as he timidly handed a black clasped copy of the Bible.

There was something painful in the emotion and humbleness of a strong man before me a stripling alone with him in a desert.

I took the book from him; on the flyleaf was written, 'Lucy Carden on her Marriage from her friend and pastor the Rev. Charles Calton,' and turning it over it opened at the 51st Psalm: instinctively, I began to read aloud, until I came to the 17th verse, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' At these words my companion wept aloud, and murmured, 'Oh, my poor wife'— and I, too, I knew not why, also wept.

Then we rode on in silence for some time; from a confused reverie I was awakened by my companion saying in a hoarse voice, 'Master, I am ready— I can tell you my story now.

'I WAS BORN in a village in Hampshire, the youngest of a large family— the son of labouring people. As soon as I had strength and voice enough, I was sent into the fields to scare the birds from the corn, and at eight years old, I began to drive plough for my father, so I got very little schooling but what I picked up in the winter evenings at a school kept by an old pensioned soldier. To tell the truth, I never liked my books when I was young, for which now I have often need to be sorry. But I was a strong hearty lad, and no out-door work came amiss to me. As soon as I could stand to them, I took hold of the stilts of the plough, and by the time I was sixteen, I could do a man's day's work.

'When I was seventeen I won a great ploughing-match. Among the young gentlemen that came to see it was our young Squire, that owned nearly all the parish. He had just left College, and come into his fortune, for his father had been dead a many years. He was so much pleased with what he saw at the ploughing-match, that he determined to take the Home Farm into his own hands, and nothing would serve him but that I must be his head ploughman; indeed, I believe if I had understood writing and cyphering, he would have made me his bailiff,— for he was a young gentleman that nothing could stop when he took a fancy into his head. I mind well when he sent me off at twelve o'clock at night to London in his own carriage to buy a team of Suffolk Punches, he had heard of from a gentleman that was dining with him. Well, this made a man of

me at once. I was as tall as I am now, and I'm afraid I grew spoiled with so much good. I was courting my Lucy at the time. She was the only daughter of the blacksmith in the next village, and if ever there was an angel she was one. The parson and his daughters noticed her a good deal, because she was clever at her book and sang so sweetly at church. Her father was a drunken old chap; her mother had been dead many years. I used to look out for him when he came down to our village, as he often did to drink and play at bowls, and see him safe over the stiles when he was ill able to walk straight. Many and many a day, after ploughing all day, and supping up my horses, have I walked five miles, half leading, half carrying, old Johnny Dunn, for the sake of five minutes' talk to dear Lucy. Well, one night, in a wet autumn, I was up at the Hall to take the 'Squire's instructions; for he loved, when he had strangers from London, to have me in after dinner, to give me a glass o' wine and make believe of talking farming; old Dunn tried to get home after an evening's bouse by a short cut over a ford I had often led him, missed his footing, and was found by some lads that went next morning to take up their night lines, stone dead— drowned.

'There was poor Lucy left all alone in the world, for her father, who had been a dragoon farrier, and married one of Parson Calton's maid-servants, had no relations in that part of the country.

'I was getting good wages: there was a cottage and garden, belonging to the ploughman of the Home Farm, that I had never taken up, because I had lived with my father. The 'Squire made me many presents, and I had saved a little money, made by working at different things in winter evenings, being always handy with tools. Well, to make a long story short, Lucy found her father had left nothing behind him but a quarter's pension he had not had time to drink, a few pounds due for work, and the furniture of his cottage. She had nobody to take care of her, so we moved the furniture to my cottage, and were married before I was nineteen, and on the day Parson Calton gave her that Bible, that never has left me since I left her. Many people blamed us, and wanted us to wait. I don't think good Mr. Calton quite liked it, but his daughters were well pleased, and gave Lucy her wedding dress. Oh, God, sir, when I think upon those days, on two years that followed, and think of what I am, I wonder how I live and keep my senses. There was not a happier couple or prettier cottage in the county. My working days were not hard, for I had Lucy to welcome me home; and then on Sundays, to see her dressed in her best and walk across the fields to church, and hear her sing! Why, there was not a lady in the county could compare with her, and I have heard many great gentlemen say so.

'I had a child, too, a darling little Lucy. But this was too much happiness to last; we had been married just two years. The 'Squire stopped at our cottage, as he was riding by on his way to London, to settle about a ploughing-match that he had determined to make up for the next week, and talked over a plan for

breaking up a lot of old pasture. A fortnight afterwards the bailiff came down with a letter in his hand, and said with a grave face, "Carden, I have some bad news for you; the 'Squire has determined to give up farming, and is going to foreign parts. I am to discharge all the hinds as soon as I can get a tenant for the farm. You are to be paid up to Christmas, and you may keep the cottage until the farm's let, but I rather think Farmer Bullivant will take it."

'Here was a blow; we had thought ourselves provided for for life, and now we had a home and a living to seek. Farmer Bullivant would not keep me on, I knew well; he had his own ploughman, a relation. Well, we were put to sore straits; but at last I got another place, although at lower wages, some distance from my native village. Hard times came on; wages were lowered again and again; and at the same time a cry rose up round the country against the threshing-machines that were being very much used, and were throwing a good many poor people out of work. The people in England, sir, are not as we are here, sir, a very few words, and one or two desperate fellows can always lead them; they are so ignorant, they are ready for anything when they are badly off.

'I went up one night to get my wages, and behold, when I got me to the farmer's house, the bailiffs were in, and he going to be sold up, and the winter coming on. I walked toward home half mad; passing by a public-house, who should be at the door but the 'Squire's gamekeeper— he kept him on— and he being sorry to see me so downcast, for he was a good kind fellow, though a gamekeeper, would make me take a glass with him; I think I had not been in a public-house since I had been married. The drink and the grief flew up into my head; before I got home, I fell in with a crowd of friends and fellow-labourers holloing and shouting. They had been breaking Farmer Bullivant's threshing-machine, and swore they would not leave one in the county. I began to try to persuade them to go away quietly, but they ended by persuading me; we met a machine, as ill-luck would have it, on the road just turning into Farmer Grinder's stack-yard. We smashed it to pieces; in the middle of the row the soldiers came up. I was taken in the act, with about twenty others; they lodged us in Winchester gaol the same night. The assizes were sitting; they tried us in batches, and found us guilty almost as soon as we came into court. I never saw my poor wife until the moment when the judge sentenced me to transportation for life. I hear her scream often now; I wake with it in the middle of the night. We had no time to get any one to speak to character for us; we had no lawyer or counsellor. Such poor people as we were had no friends of any use. The farmers who knew us were too angry and too frightened— although some of them were the first to speak against the threshing-machines. Good Parson Calton had been away, ill and dying, or I do not think it would have happened. For where are we poor countrymen to look for a friend wiser than ourselves if the Parson or the 'Squire does not stand by us?

'My wife came to see me in prison, and wept so we could not talk much; for it was so quick, so sudden— it seemed like a horrid dream; for me to be a felon— for me, that could not strike a blow against any man, except in fair fight— that never wronged a living soul out of a farthing— to be the same as robbers and murderers! Well, I advised her to get quit of all bits of furniture, and try to get to service, through the Miss Caltons. I knew they were not rich, and could not help except by giving her a good name— by giving a character to the convict's wife! We were to have met again the next day; the poor soul had walked twenty miles to Winchester, and a fruit-woman that was in court took pity on her when she fainted, and gave her half her bed. But the same night I was waked up from the first sound sleep I had had since I was taken, and put into a coach with a lot of others, with a guard of soldiers, and sent off to the hulks; and in three days we sailed for Botany Bay, as they called it in England. Oh, sir, that time was terrible. There were many on board that thought the punishment a pleasure voyage. They had no wives, no children to love. They had no good name to lose; they had not lived in one parish to know and love every stick and stone in it. They boasted of their villany, and joked at the disgraceful dress; they only found fault with the food, and the labour of helping to stow the ship; I did not care for the food or the work. They made me a constable on the voyage, and I landed with a good character from the surgeon in charge. I was assigned straight away to Major Z— — . You must have heard, sir, what a terrible man he was. A rich man that had forgotten he had once been poor. He had more cattle and stock of all kinds than he could count; he starved us, he cursed us, and very few Mondays passed that he didn't take up five or six for a flogging. But he was very glad to get me and three or four of the same lot, for it was not often such regular first-rate husbandmen came into the colony, so we were better treated than many. For in those times, if masters could be hard where they took a spite, still prisoners had a good chance of getting on. Well, my spirits rose and I began to have some hope when I found that, with good luck, I might have my "ticket," that would give liberty in the colony, in seven years, and when I saw so many who had been prisoners riding about in their carriages, or driving teams of their own, as good as the 'Squire's. Indeed, those that had good masters got on very well, but it was commonly thought that Major Z— never parted with a good man if he could help it. He was sure to make up some charge and get him flogged, so as to put off the time for his getting a *ticket of leave*.

'I had driven oxen at home and soon got into the ways of the colony, when, one day, the master came down to see a new piece of land I had been breaking up near a house he was building, and was so pleased that he began to talk quite kindly, although every second word was an oath, and asked me all about myself. Well, I told him, and made bold to say that, as he was going to build a large

dairy, if he would send for my wife and child we would serve him for any wages he choose, all the days of our lives. He turned on me like a tiger, he cursed me, he told me he wanted no women or brats on his estate, no canting saints, no parsons, all he wanted was men that could work, and work they should. "If, you fool," he said, "you had asked for a gallon of rum among the gang you might have had it, and drowned all your troubles, but I'll have no women here, wives or no wives."

'I think at that moment Satan took possession of me. I was ready to do anything for my liberty, or to be free from my tyrant, and there were tempters enough all round me. A few days afterwards one of my fellow servants, an old hand, who had heard the last part of my master's speech, came to me in the evening, and, after telling me that he supposed I had found out that nothing was to be got by fair means, that my master was a rogue, in fact that every one was a rogue who was not a fool, he began to hint that he could tell me a way to get my wife out and my liberty too. I swallowed the bait, I listened; then he went on to show how with money anything could be done in the colony, told me instances of tickets and conditional pardons, besides escapes managed by bribing, and then, when I was thoroughly poisoned, he swore me to secrecy and explained how, out of a thousand bullocks, a few pair would never be missed; so that all I had to do when I took a bullock team to Sydney was to yoke an extra pair of young bullocks, making ten or twelve pair, instead of eight or ten— a butcher, near where the drays generally stood, was all ready prepared to take and pay for, as many pair of bullocks as I chose to drive in. They were worth from 10*l.* to 12*l.* each, and I was to have 6*l.* for every pair.

'I refused point blank. "Well," he said, "I rely on your honour not to peach." He knew he had caught me. My master took an early opportunity of having me flogged on a charge of insolence; the magistrates were two friends who had been dining with him. My tempter came to me again, and, on the next opportunity, I drove in the bullocks and became a *thief*. Having begun I could not stop; my tempter became my tyrant; to drown care I began to drink and to associate with the old hands, and then the money, for which I had resigned body and soul, melted away. What I saved up I knew not what to do with, and so I went on getting worse and worse, until one day, just as I was driving a pair of young heifers into the butcher's yard, I was arrested, tried, and convicted on the evidence of my fellow-servant, who, having been found out in another robbery, saved himself by turning on me. I was sentenced to three years hard labour in an iron gang on the Blue mountains. What I suffered in those three years no tongue can tell. I was coupled with a wretch who had been a thief from his childhood, a burglar, and a murderer, but there was one man, a political prisoner sentenced to the iron gang for striking his overseer, who saved me, and spoke words of comfort to me; my term was shortened a year for rescuing a

gentleman from a bush ranger, and Major Z— — having left the colony, I was assigned to my present master. In another year I shall have my ticket, but what I shall do heaven only knows. I have had one letter from my wife; she was living as dairy-maid with one of the Miss Caltons, who had married a country gentleman; they were very good to her, and I think her letter, full of good words, helped to save me from total ruin. But you, sir, are almost the only gentleman that has spoken a kind word to me in the Colony. We live like beasts of the field, working and well-fed, but nothing more. On many stations the prisoners don't even know when Sunday comes round, and we die like dogs.'

Here he paused: and I felt so much affected by his melancholy story, that I could not at the time answer him, or offer any words of comfort.

IN MY VARIOUS WANDERINGS I lost sight of Carden for two or three years; but one day as I was going down to Sydney with a mob of horses of my own for sale, at a roadside inn I met Jem Carden, at the head of a party of splitters and fencers doing some extensive work in the neighbourhood on a new station; he was looking thin, haggard, nervous, and was evidently ashamed to meet me. In fact he was only just recovering from a drunken spree; I taxed him with his folly; he owned it, and showed me the cause. He could earn with ease at piece-work, from 5/. to 8/. a week, building stations and stockyards. Twice he had saved, and paid into the hands of apparently respectable parties, 40/., to remit for the passage of his wife and daughter. The first time the dashing Mr. W— — was insolvent two days after receiving the money. In the second instance he was kept nine months in suspense, and then learned from England by letter and in the Sydney list of bankrupts, that he had been again swindled. 'And what,' he asked, when he had concluded this tale of pitiful, contemptible robbery, 'what can a poor fellow do but drink his cares away, when all striving to be honest and happy is in vain!'

I thought, but did not say, how uneven were the laws that sent Jem to the iron gang for stealing a bullock, and had no punishment for those who devoured his hard earnings, and laughed at him from their carriages. Thank God, a better system has been established, and government now charges itself with the passage money of poor men's relations.

But barren sympathy was of little use, so I turned to the ploughman, and said, 'What money have you left?' 'About 10/. in the landlord's hands; he's an honest man, although a publican.' 'And what are you to have from this contract?' 'My share will be over 40/., and I can get it done in less than six weeks, working long hours.' 'Then hand me over the 10/., give me your solemn promise not to touch anything stronger than Bushman's tea for twelve months, and to let me have 30/. out of your contract when I return this way, and I will send the money for you.'

To cut this long story short, I put the business in the hands of my excellent friend B—, one of the modern race of Australians, wealthy, warm-hearted, and liberal, who was on his way to England. Within a year the ploughman embraced his wife; they returned with me to my station, they passed some years with me, and some eventful scenes, before the district round me was settled. They have now a station and farm of their own; they are growing rich, as all such industrious people do in Australia, but they have not forgotten that they once were poor. If you need a subscription for a church, a school, or a sick emigrant, you may go to Mr. Carden, safe of a generous answer. It is Mr. Carden now; and perhaps that fine little boy may sit a native Representative in an Australian Parliament. A tall youth who rides beside him, is not his son but the orphan child of a poor prisoner, whom he adopted 'to make up in part,' as he expressed it, 'for what happened long ago.'

Lucy Carden, now the mother of a numerous brood of Australians, has grown happy and portly, although you may trace on her mild features the tide marks of past griefs.

The last time I saw them I was on my way to England. 'Oh, sir,' said the happy husband and father, 'tell the wretched and the starving how honest, *sober* labour is sure of a full reward here. Tell them that here poverty may be turned to competence, crime to repentance and happiness. And pray tell the great gentlemen who rule us that we much need both preachers and teachers in this wide Bush of Australia, but that it is *virtuous wives who rule us most*, and in a lovely land make the difference between happiness and misery.'

---

## 15: Seamew Cavern

*Herbert Russell*

Herbert William Henry Russell, 1869-1944

Queenslander, 30 Nov 1918

I SPUN THE COIN in the air and let it fall upon the table. As I had anticipated, it dropped without any responsive ring.

"Bad !" I ejaculated.

A man sitting in the corner of the smoking-room looked up quickly, and exclaimed, "What's that ? A bad piece of money ? Where did you get it ?"

"If you want to know, I picked it up on the esplanade," I answered. "Why?"

I put the bad half-crown back into my pocket, eyeing the stranger meanwhile. He was a man about forty, not ill-looking, but of a somewhat scorbatic complexion, dressed in commonplace clothes.

THE FOLLOWING morning I was talking to one of the boatmen upon the little pier when I saw the man again. He flashed a glance at me out of the corners of his eyes as he passed, and I saw that he recognised me.

"Who is that, William ?" I asked.

"Well, he's a bit of a mystery to us chaps," answered the longshoreman, drying his lips with the end of his scarf. "He's been about here for some weeks. Very fond of fishing. Goes away, of nights to the whiting grounds. That's all right enough. But nobody ever seems to see him come back, or to know whether he catches anything. That's his boat lying off at moorings there, the little centre-board craft."

"What do you think he is, then? A smuggler?" I asked, laughing.

"What's he a-going to smuggle hereabouts ? No, I don't reckon he does any work of that sort. He buys his bait all right, and hangs his lines out to dry."

"It seems to me that there is not one jot of reason for assuming the man to be anything else than a keen amateur fisherman," said I.

IT WAS three or four days after this— I forget exactly— that I hired one of this same waterman's little punts to go for a row. About two miles from the eastern head of the bay within the embrace of which lies the town wherein I was staying is a small, steep islet. The tide plays around it rather strongly, and it is reputed to be both difficult and dangerous to land upon; but, anyhow, I was determined to pull out and have a closer look at Seamew Island.

I noticed as I left the harbour that the centre-board craft to which I have previously referred lay at her moorings.

The islet is about five miles from the town, from which it is hidden around the high bluff of Stork Point. It was somewhere about five o'clock when I had approached Seamew Island and looked for a landing place.

This, however, I could see no indication of. Although there was not much strength in the neap tide, the light swell creamed back from the rocky shore in a moan of surf. I pulled around the islet just clear of this, and was almost giving up the idea of attempting to land when I noticed a kind of streak of smooth water in the wide lacery of froth, indicating the existence of a little channel. This I subsequently discovered to be really a miniature chine, with a few fathoms of shingle beach sloping steeply out of the water.

I headed the punt for this smooth passage, looking over my shoulder at the island as I rowed. Suddenly there was a bump, a sharp rending sound, and the little craft stopped dead as she sank to the under-run of the swell, with a jagged spike of barnacled rock through her bilge.

My best chance was to try and get her clear and beach her, for the tide was falling. By dint of jumping, and pushing with the oars upon the ledge of rock, I got the punt off into deeper water, then standing up astride the main thwart I paddled her into the little cove of which I have spoken. I floundered out, taking the end of the painter with me, which I hitched to a large boulder.

My first impression was that I had come ashore in a cul-de-sac, but, gazing about me whilst I drained the water out of my boots, I detected what appeared to be a kind of trail in the dry gravel above high-water mark. When I came to follow it up, noticing that it was formed by definite human footprints, I found myself stand-ing before a tiny grotto, not more than about three feet high, which bent off sharp at a little distance in. From the character of the place I should say it was a natural cave.

Crouching down, I entered, but on turning the corner I found myself confronted by sheer darkness. It seemed to me that there was a smell as of recently burning wood in the atmosphere of the interior. My curiosity was aroused, and I determined to explore.

Suddenly my head bumped rather smartly into some obstruction. I struck a match and held it up.

To my astonishment, I found that I was up against a door, fitting snugly into a regular frame built against the face of the rock, and secured with a large padlock. This was a very singular experience to be sure, and in the wonderment and, indeed, I might almost say mild excitement caused by it, I forgot all about my plight.

For a long while I sprawled upon the shingle, expending nearly all my matches in surveying the door, its hinges, staple, and ponderous padlock, and speculating as to what story of romance was associated with it. Then a twinge of

cramp in one of my feet recalled the fact that I was marooned, and so I made my way out into the daylight again.

But when I stood up, stretching my limbs and looking about in a blinking way, for the sunshine was still brilliant, I made another startling discovery.

My boat was gone.

Then I realised what had happened. I had grounded the boat upon an oozy patch, and as she lost her water-logged buoyancy with the ebbing of the tide, she had squatted right out of sight. It very promptly occurred to me that if I did not want to spend the night upon Seamew Island I had better take advantage of the two or three remaining hours of daylight to try and attract assistance.

It was no easy matter to scale the cliffs of the little chine, not so much because of the lack of foothold as on account of the difficulty of picking out progressive stepping places. However, I succeeded in gaining a small belt of plateau, beyond which the ground ascended in an easy slope to the summit.

I got but little satisfaction out of my climb. Stork Point loomed in a blue smudge almost merged into the haze, but I collected a few handfuls of parched growth from amongst the sparse vegetation, to which I can give no name, and made a good display of smoke, although I felt the signal would be lost. As I pulled out the box of matches to start this fire, the bad half-crown to which I referred at the opening of this story fell at my feet.

I CANNOT pretend to say how long I had been asleep upon a mossy patch near the brink of the little belt of plateau, but when I awoke the full moon was shining, and I felt cold. Recollection came upon me with a rush.

I was just about to get up and stretch my limbs when I was arrested by the sound of men's voices. I was not left long in uncertainty. One man was asking another whether he had the key, and the man speaking was the same who had accosted me about the bad half-crown. I crawled to the very edge of the cliff and peered over. The moon threw a regular flood of light into the little shine. In the gentle seethe of the surf lay the centre-board boat of mysterious repute, with her mast stepped and her lug lowered into a heap upon her thwarts. Two men were just leaving her, carrying what were manifestly heavy packages, judging from the manner in which they lurched in their gait. One of them I recognised; the other I had never seen before.

The idea came to me in a flash. The tide was now flowing— I could see that the beach was dry right down to the lap of the water. I counted upon the two men having gone into the unknown chamber beyond the locked door I had encountered, and upon their being likely to remain there for some time. With my pulse beating rapidly to a sense of perilous adventure, I began to descend the cliff. I reached the bottom without mishap, and quite noiselessly.

Without pausing a moment I made for the boat. To cast adrift was the work of seconds; coiling the rope as I went I gained the bows of the little craft, jumped inboards, and went right aft so as to lift her forefront off the ground. By the lift she gave to the undulation of the swell I knew that she was afloat. Softly sliding one of her oars along I put it over the side without a splash, felt bottom, and punted the boat astern. When I could no longer feel the ground with the oar I gently pulled her head around, laid hold of the halliards, and hoisted the lug.

The high dawn of a perfect summer's morning was broadening in the sky as I steered the boat into the harbour. The waterman from whom I had hired the lost punt was the first figure I saw, and the immediate question he levelled at me was as to what had become of his craft. I briefly told him my story. Dismay at the loss of the punt gave place to astonishment as I talked.

"I must go and report my act of piracy, and the reason for it, to the Customs," said I. "You had better come with me."

We found a uniformed man, who clearly was not a person of any responsibility. He said that the whole thing sounded to him more like a job for the police; and I felt that he was probably right. On his suggestion the waterman returned to remain in possession of the boat, whilst I went back to the hotel, changed my clothes, got some food and coffee, with the assistance of the night porter, and then made my way to the police station. After I had finished talking to the sergeant in charge he telephoned to the Chief Constable, who said he would come down if I would wait whilst he was dressed.

When he presently arrived and had heard my tale he stroked his moustache in a puzzled way saying he had never heard anything like this before. I answered it seemed pretty clear that there was some mystery which required clearing up; that I had my own suspicions, but preferred not to state them until investigations had been made, and that the obvious thing to do was to return to the island, explore the cavern, and find out what the two men were really up to.

So just as the life of the little town was astir, the Chief Constable and myself, accompanied by four policemen and the waterman, embarked in the centre-board boat. The waterman took a natural professional interest in the smart little craft. When he had finished a lengthy and critical survey of her topsides and rigging, he lifted a loose board near the mast to see what was beneath.

"As pretty a bit of ballast as ever I see," he ejaculated.

"What is it?" I asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Pig lead, small and handy for stowing."

"Can you lift out one of the pigs?" I asked. He did so, and extended it to me. It was about the size of a brick, and weighed as near as I could judge some twenty pounds. I pulled out my knife and scraped the surface.

"This is not ordinary lead ballast," said I. "It is much too hard."

I pulled the bad half-crown from my pocket and laid it on top of the spot I had scraped bright.

"By Jingo, sir! Now I see your drift. And we've had a number of cases of bad money of late. What a discovery!"

AS I PILOTED the boat cautiously into the chine, recollecting my experience of the previous afternoon, I saw the two men standing as motionless as statues near the line of the surf. We grounded the boat, and the chief constable kept his right hand suggestively in his breast pocket.

"May I ask where you found our boat?" said the man who had spoken to me in the smoking-room.

"Perhaps you will answer some of my questions first," said the Chief Constable. "What are you doing on this island?"

"We landed here to wait for daylight before beginning to fish," replied the fellow promptly enough.

"Let us hear what you do in the cavern; what there is that interests you so much in the place behind the locked door?" went on the Chief Constable.

"Place behind the locked door?" repeated the first speaker with a blank stare.

"Oh, come!" said I. "If you will not show it to us, then we must show it to you."

I led the way into the low entrance of the little cavern. The Chief Constable crawled in after me. But when I turned the bend I came almost immediately up against a mass of splintered rock.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Am I mad or dreaming?"

The Chief Constable was silent a minute; then he sniffed and sneezed violently. "Let us get back outside where we can stand up and talk," said he.

This we did. My old acquaintance of the smoking-room eyed us with a leering, ugly grin.

"Well, gentlemen, have you found the place behind the locked door?" he asked.

The Chief Constable stepped right up to him, and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"When did you blow it up, and where did you get the gelatine?" The fellow winced. It was an instantaneous gesture—a heartbeat later he was smiling superciliously. But the revelation had sufficed.

"I suppose you have destroyed either the factory or the store whence these came?" said I, flourishing the bad half-crown under his nose.

"You are making a most serious accusation, and one for which you have not got one atom of proof," he answered soberly enough.

"The ballast in your boat may give us a start in that direction," I replied.

"This is not the time to enter into any discussion," put in the Chief Constable. "Depend upon it a searching inquiry will be made, and if there is no proof of what this gentleman suggests, you will have your remedy. I confess it was a clever scheme to blow up the cavern, and probably you have done it so successfully as to destroy any incriminating evidence which might have existed. Get into the boat, and we will return."

A little more than an hour later we were all back in the town.

THE STRANGEST PART of the whole business was that no amount of inquiry could elicit any discovery as to the antecedents of these two men. They had certainly blown up Seamew Cavern, but nobody either saw or heard them do it. The metal with which their boat was ballasted was proved to be the same as that from which several bad coins that the police recovered in the district were struck.

Goodness knows how much time and money were spent in trying to clear Seamew Cavern, but the explosion had displaced such a great mass of rock, and it was so obvious that a devastating charge would have been placed amid any plant, that the efforts were abandoned as hopeless. Never, perhaps, did such an overwhelming chain of circumstantial evidence fail to lead to justice through inability to establish any one essential legal technicality.

---

## 16: Clown of Fate

*Ladbroke Black*

1877-1940

*The Journal* (Adelaide) 16 Sep 1916

HE CAME INTO the room, his freshly shaven face red and rosy and smiling, a man— as he himself would have expressed it— on the "mouldy" side of 50, with bounce and an air as if he was saying "Here we are again." There was a fire burning in the grate, and the little apartment in the small suburban house was cosy and comfortable.

"Mary!" he called, "the curtain's gone up— the old-established favourite is once more waiting for his breakfast— and jolly peckish, too".

Through the open door came the pleasant aroma of bacon and sausages frying.

"All right, Joe," answered a voice from the kitchen. "The old-established favourite shall have his breakfast in a moment, if only the old-established favourite will have a little patience."

"Right, my dear," he called back, and rubbing his hands together he advanced towards the fire and took up a position immediately in front of it.

It was an odd room— odd in its incongruities. The furniture was strictly suburban, bought on the hire-purchase system from a company that had made a corner in ideal homes, and got rid of second-hand goods at "twice the price they would have been charged for as new.

It had been the poster of this firm that had attracted Mr. Joe Miller when he had embarked on matrimony two years before— a poster describing in vivid colours the— neatest of breakfast rooms, with a wife gracefully, garbed standing in the middle so exactly like Mary that the thing had been settled for Joe Miller. The young husband, however, in the poster, in a morning coat and carrying, a silk hat and a stick, didn't bear the slightest resemblance to Joe Miller himself.

"That's the sort of man you ought to have married, Mary," he protested at the time: "Fancy you falling in love at the age of 22 with a monster like me, that's old enough to be your father!"

The furniture, in Mary's opinion, might not have been quite up to sample, but the glamour of that poster remained with Joe. It was homely, he said; that's what he liked— and he looked round at it now with a satisfaction that two years had by no means blunted.

The rest of the room stood out in glaring contrast with this furniture. On the wall opposite, immediately facing him, was an almost life-size picture in a vast, gilt frame of a clown in full war paint. This was Joe Miller himself; And festooned over this picture was a string of property sausages— the first sausages he had

used when, more than 30 years before, he had tumbled onto the stage as a fully commissioned clown, with a pantomime licence to assault: as many policemen as he liked, and to rob as many perambulators of their babies as he pleased.

There were other memorials of those 30 years of clowning on the walls—memorials that he loved to look at, and to have ever before his eyes. It had been a jolly time, and, from a worldly point of view it had been a prosperous time.

At the age of fifty he had found himself with £2,000 judiciously saved, and this, invested in the London & Suburban Banking Company, brought him in £200 a year.

It had enabled him to marry Mary, whom he had found crying her heart out in the local park, having lost both her father and her mother, and being, quite penniless. He had taken her home to his lodgings, given her into the charge of his landlady, and had proposed to be another father to her. Of course he had fallen in love with her— that to him seemed quite natural— but what amazed, him— and still amazed him— was that she on her part had fallen in love with him.

And so they had dropped the relation of guardian and ward, and married, living comfortably on the £200 a year and such sums as Joe occasionally, earned by busking at the seaside or returning to the boards for the pantomime season.

"Halloa, there's a letter for me!" he exclaimed, as, standing in front of the fire, his eye roamed about the room. He whistled. Immediately a little white terrier, with black patches, came trotting into the room. She was the great-great-granddaughter of the first dog he had performed with in his circus days, and she came across the carpet, sat up on her hind legs, and grinned at him with quite a professional air.

"Fetch it, Tony!" he said, pointing to the letter. The dog jumped on to the chair, at the breakfast table, picked up the letter, and brought it to him.

"Good old girl," he said, patting her on the head. "It's sausages for breakfast, Tiny."

Having given her this piece of interesting information, he looked at the letter, turned it over in his hand, and then tore open the envelope. It was from his bank— not the London & Suburban Bank, —he was only a shareholder in that— but the ordinary bank into which his dividends were paid, and upon which he drew as occasion required. "Halloa!" he exclaimed, a serious expression passing across his face. "What do they mean by this?"

*"We have to inform you that your account is overdrawn for £15. We shall be obliged if you will place it in credit at once."*

"Why, they must have had £100 paid in from the London and Suburban a fortnight ago. Funny!— very funny. Better trot round and see the manager after breakfast."

He had just time to hide the letter in the pocket of his coat as his wife came into the room carrying a tray. "Well, here we are again," she said, with a smile. "Did the old-established favourite get his letter?"

"He did," he answered.

"And what was in it?"

"Only a circular," he replied, "about some new patent rat trap— a rat trap that makes the rats die when they look at it. As we haven't any rats I put it in the fire."

While he was inventing this fable, she had laid the contents of the tray on the table and had taken her seat. "He himself sat down at the opposite table.

"Ah, what did I tell you, Tiny?" he said, turning to the dog. "It's sausages, my girl— not the old stuffed sort, but the real identical article."

He helped his wife, and then proceeded to his own breakfast.

He had hardly eaten more than half a sausage when he put down his knife and fork and looked admiringly across at his wife.

"Anything the matter, Joe?" she said, with an air of innocence, a little blush creeping into her beautiful face. "I was just thinking what on earth such a lovely top-hole, out-and-outer spank-up girl like you wanted to marry a fat old thing like me for."

"Because the real spank-up and the rest of it girl knew that there was only one man in the world for her, and he happened to be Joe Miller," she replied, laughing. He got up from his chair with a bounce, and was over at her side and had his arms round her and was kissing her like a flash of lightning.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "I'm the luckiest man alive. The most beautiful wife in the world, the jolliest little home in the whole of London. Lots of girls wanted to marry me—"

"Oh, I know all about that, thank you," she said, shaking her head at him. "Stage-struck girls who saw you on the stage— silly, stupid things."

"It's funny, you know. Mary," he said, with a puzzled look, "but I can never understand you. I could have understood you taking a kind of liking to me from the front when you saw me behind the foot lights, but that you should like me off the stage— well, it beats me every time."

"You see, I happened to fall in love with the man and not the clown," she said.

"That's the worst of it. I don't believe you care a bit about the clown. Do you know, Mary, I've never seen you once smile when I've been busking on the sands."

"Oh, but I've laughed at you at home," she said.

"Bless you!" he exclaimed, smiling. You're all laughter— all sunshine— everything that is perfect and sweet. I really must."

He was out of his chair again and kissing, her once more. With these, interludes the breakfast was prolonged somewhat.

But at last it was over, and with a pipe between his teeth and a soft felt hat on his head Joe Miller started to leave the house.

"Just going for a little constitutional, Mary," he said, "to get an appetite for dinner. Sha'n't be long. Come along, Tiny."

"Joe," she called out after him, "you might give me a cheque for the coal merchant. We shall have to order another ton, and the last isn't paid for yet."

This request brought back to his mind the mysterious communication he had had from his bank. "All right, Mary," he answered, drawing upon his imagination. "I must go round to the bank and get a new cheque book. I used the last cheque in the old book yesterday." It was a lie, of course, but there was no need to worry Mary. He walked briskly to the bank and asked to see the manager. "I can't understand about this letter of yours," he said. "I can't be overdrawn. There was a hundred pounds of dividends paid in a fortnight ago."

"We haven't any record of that in our books, Mr. Miller," the manager replied.

"But the London and Suburban Bank always pay their dividends into my account every half-year— regular as clockwork. You have a look again; I expect you've lost it in the pence column."

The manager's face was very grave.

"The London and Suburban Banking Company!" he exclaimed. "That explains it, I'm afraid, Mr. Miller."

"Explains what?"

"Explains why you have had no dividends this half-year. Haven't you read it in the papers?"

"I never read anything in the papers except the war news. What have the papers got to do with my dividends?"

"Only that they have been recording for the last fortnight certain facts about the London and Suburban Banking Company. It was a fraud, of course. They took money from the public, and, as long as they could, gave it back to the public at what they called 10 per cent: It couldn't last for ever, and now Montague Ferrers, the founder and promoter of the whole fraud, has cleared off with what was left— quite a tidy sum— running into five figures, and there's a thousand pounds reward for anybody who can find him and hand him over to the police."

Joe stared at the manager for some moments with his mouth open.

"And my two thousand!" he gasped.

"If it was invested in the London and Suburban Banking Company, I'm afraid, Mr. Miller, it's been swallowed up with the rest in the swindle."

Five minutes later Joe Miller tottered out of the bank, feeling somehow as if the whole material world was dissolving beneath his feet. All his savings had gone— all the little capital and the interest on which he lived had vanished into the pockets of Mr. Montague Ferrers and his confederates. He walked dazedly into the local park, and tried to face the situation. He was penniless—absolutely penniless. At 52, after years of hard work and ungrudging devotion to his profession, he had been victimized by a common city shark, and completely ruined. And Mary— it was the thought of his wife that came uppermost after his first rage against Montague Ferrers had somewhat abated. Their little home that he was so proud of would be broken up. It would be almost impossible, he knew, for him to get work. The clown business was not what it was, and the war had practically killed what had remained. He groaned aloud as he thought of Mary and the future. The little dog that had squatted by his side as he sank into a seat rubbed her head concernedly against his -

"We mustn't tell her, Tiny," he said. 'We mustn't see her unhappy. We must might to keep her merry and bright, Tiny, until we're certain that we're beaten. We won't let her be miserable if we can help it."

With this resolve he returned home. Until he reached his own. steps he was grave and preoccupied, but as he slipped his latchkey into the door his expression changed. It was the jolly, good-natured clown who came into the house.

"Did you get that chequebook?" Mary asked him.

"There now, Tiny," he replied, turning round and apostrophizing his dog. "If we didn't forget! Never mind, my dear, the coal merchant will wait for a little while. He knows what good payers we are."

He went whistling into the sitting room and glanced wistfully round the room. They had been good payers— but now? There was a glass over the mantelpiece, and he became conscious that Mary was looking over his shoulder, watching his face. He turned instantly all smiles.

"Getting the dinner ready, Mary? You must count me out, this morning: I've just remembered I've got to go down town. There's something doing at the Olympic. They do say they're going to have a harlequinade this year, and I should like to have a part just to keep me young. Halloa, what's happened to the clock?"

It was a big ornamental clock that stood on the mantelpiece. It had been presented to him by the management and company of a theatre which had witnessed his practical retirement from the stage prior to his marriage.

"It wants winding, I expect," Mary exclaimed.

He went up to the clock, and finding the key began, to wind it. As he did so a thought came to him. They must have money to carry on with. The clock was a valuable one, and might fetch £4 or £5 at the pawnbrokers. But the difficulty was to get it away without exciting Mary's suspicions.

"By Jove, it's broken down for the first time since I've had it!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Mary. I'd better take it down town and have it mended. No use trusting it to any local men. I value that clock, and if it's got to be mended it's got to be mended by the best firm in London."

"How will you get it down?" she asked, after a pause. "I'll carry it down under my arm. I'm not proud, and I'm not particular."

"If you're going up to London, you must change your clothes, Joe. I can't, have my husband-looking like an old figure of fun in those things."

He laughingly kissed her, and going up stairs, returned presently in the blue suit that he kept for occasions of state. "Give us the clock, Mary," he said, "and I'll be off. If I should be a bit late don't sit up for me. The boys may want to give me a good time, not having seen me for so long."

"All right, Joe. I'll have some supper ready in case you want it."

He suddenly remembered that he was a ruined man; that he must bid good-bye to those substantial comforts to which he had been accustomed; then he must begin to economise. It would be just as well to start at once.

"No, don't bother about supper for me," he said. "I'm sure to have something to eat down town. Wish you could come down with me, Mary, but I should have nowhere to put you while I was at the Olympic."

"Oh. I shall be all right, Joe," -she said. "Don't you worry about me. I shall be as happy as the day is long, and happier still when I see you back again." He took the clock from the mantelpiece, and kissing her once more, left the house. He was still smiling as he turned on the pavement and waved his hand to her. It was only when he had got safely round the corner that his face once more expressed the tragic gloom that was lying on his mind. With the clock under his arm he mounted a tram, and, at last reaching the Embankment, made his way to a pawnbroker's in the Strand.

"How much will you give me for this?" he said, placing the clock on the counter. "I want the top price, mind you, or I'll take my custom elsewhere."

The unemotional assistant behind the counter examined the clock carefully.

"Three pounds," he said. Joe Miller was disappointed.

"Must have four, he said. "Why,, that clock's got a history. It's not only a clock—it's an heirloom."

"I don't think," retorted the assistant. "Three pounds or nothing."

In spite of all arguments, Joe had to be content with this sum, and he strode out into the Strand again with, three sovereigns in his pocket. Except for some silver that he had left at home and the few coppers that were-in his pocket, this

represented all the money "he possessed in the world. "Well, it'll keep the wolf from the door for a few days, he exclaimed to himself. He walked eastwards, without any definite object.

Presently he found himself outside Bow Street Police Station. There was a notice board hanging on the wall, and one of these notices attracted his attention. It contained the photograph of a wanted man, and above this picture was printed in large black type the words:—

**£1,000 REWARD**

Joe stared at it for some moments and then lie suddenly recognised the man in the photograph. It was Montague Ferrers— the chief promoter and Organizer of the London and Suburban Bank.

"What if I were to find him," Joe muttered to himself. "I'd be getting some of my own back both ways— half of my money and the man who had swindled me of the rest."

ii

TO A MAN who has nothing to do and has moreover no prospect of getting anything to do, the wildest and most intangible scheme is attractive, simply because it is something to do. The more he thought, about the matter the more it seemed to Joe Miller the very best course he could pursuer to devote his time and energies to discovering the whereabouts of Montague Ferrers, and to earn that reward of a thousand pounds. It was a gamble, of course— a desperate gamble— but for no particular reason that he could think of it seemed to him that his chances were quite, rosy.

He turned away, from the police station, chewing the cud of this problem, and so intent was he upon it that he collided violently a few yards further away with a man coming in the opposite direction.

"I beg your pardon," he said, politely.

"I should think you do," replied the man with whom he collided, gruffly, and then, looking up, he added, in quite a changed voice, "Why, bless my boots and spurs if it isn't Joey!"

"Father!" exclaimed Joey. "How you, old son?"

To a stranger this remark would have been extraordinarily puzzling. The two men were shaking hands with a kind violent affection. They were both oddly alike, with the faces of boys who had never grown up. The one addressed as father, however, had whiter hair, and looked like a baby who had been slightly bitten by the frost of age.

"Well, if this don't beat everything, Joey! Fancy meeting you here." His companion was still shaking his hand, grinning all over his face.

"Not playing this, year, I suppose,

"No such luck," the other answered. "Our turn was almost played out as it was, father, and the war has what you might call put the lid on it."

For close on 20 years Joey and his companion had played the part of clown and pantaloone together, and they still clung to the names which they had used upon the stage— Joe was Joey, and the pantaloone, who in private life was a certain Mr. Mark Stephens, was father.

"Well, it doesn't matter much to us, Joey. We've saved, our bit, and we can like live gentlemen of leisure. How do I look for a gentleman of leisure?" He cocked his hat slightly on one side and stood back.

"You didn't put your money in the London and Suburban Bank, father," the clown remarked grimly.

"You don't mean to say you had all your savings in that swindle!" the other exclaimed.

Joe explained the exact situation— how he had only learnt the disastrous news that morning— how he stood there on the pavement by the side of his old friend, a ruined man. The retired pantaloone was a picture of commiseration.

"If I can do anything, Joey," he said, tapping a voluminous pocket knowingly, "just give it a name, my boy. Glad of the chance."

Joe's eyes glistened.

"That's like you, father: but I'm not going to borrow if I can help, it. You might help me, though, all the-same— you might be able to tell me how you start looking for a man that's wanted. I'm out to find Montague Ferrers, who's gone off with my money, and to earn the thousand that the Government, are offering for his discovery."

The pantaloone screwed up his face and considered thoughtfully for some moment.

"Clues— that's what you want: Joey— something you can get hold of and go step by step until you finally put your foot on him— you take me?"

He illustrated his meaning in pantomimed taking a few stealthy steps down the pavement, and then finally putting his right foot down with a bang as if he had got Montague Ferrers safely under the sole of his boot.

"That's right, father; clues are the thing! But to tell you the truth, I don't know anything about the case. I didn't read it in the papers; the first thing I heard of it was from the manager of the local bank, who broke the news to me by telling me that my account was overdrawn."

The other seized his arm.

"Go and read it up. There's a free library round the corner. They'll have the file of the last fortnight's papers— read it up, and then meet me at Rule's."

Acting on this suggestion, Joe visited the library, and for half an hour read laboriously all the accounts he could find of the London and Suburban smash. It appeared that Mr. Montague Ferrers and three of his fellow-directors, divided the gold that remained in the bank between them, and vanished.

So far, all the information available had come from the Secretary of the company— a Mr. Ernest Stanton— who had spoken freely to a variety of pressmen on the subject. Joey took, a few notes on the back of an envelope, and then, feeling that he was master of all the facts available, joined his old friend at the famous theatrical trysting place in Maiden Lane.

"Now you've got the facts," said the ex-pantaloon, "all you've got to do is to find a clue. How are you going to start?"

"I'm going, to visit this chap Stanton. He knows all about the facts, and he might, I thought, put me on to something which would lead up to what I'm after."

The ex-pantaloon considered for a moment.

"Don't you think you ought to make up a bit, Joey?" he said. "Somehow, you don't look like a detective. What about a pair of whiskers?"

Joey shook his head. "That's where I score, father: Nobody will take me for a detective, so I can go nosing about without anybody getting suspicious."

"Perfectly right—perfectly right!" the other replied. "And now what about this fiver that I've got in my hand, Joey. Aren't you going to put it in your pocket just to keep you warm?"

"No, I'm not, father," he said, getting very red in the face. "Some day, perhaps, I shall want it, and then I'll ask you for it."

The ex-pantaloon very ruefully replaced the five-pound note in his pocket. Joe drained the glass of stout he had been drinking, and shook his friend by the hand.

"I'm off now," he said. "Not going to let the grass grow under my feet, father. I'm going to earn that thousand pounds if I can."

He waved his old friend good-bye at the door, and then made his way across Covent Garden in the direction of the Tube station near St. Martin's: lane. Mr. Ernest Stanton lived at Hampstead, and Joe had proposed to travel by the tube to that destination; but on the very threshold of the station he paused. The fare would cost threepence.

"Whatever beans there are, Mary's going to have," he said. "I'll walk it."

He buttoned up his coat and struck out vigorously northwards. It was already afternoon, and the late November light had failed and a thick London mist had crept up when he at last reached the house in which Mr. Ernest Stanton lived— an old-fashioned, red-brick place, shut off from the road by iron railings and a screen of bushes and trees.

Joe felt his way up the gravel drive and rang the electric bell. It was some moments before the door was opened, and then it was only swung back on the chain.

A hard-faced, elderly female peered out at him through the gap.

"Who are you and what do you want?" she exclaimed.

"I want to see Mr. Ernest Stanton— about the London and Suburban Bank, you know."

"If you're one of those newspaper men you may just as well go away. He won't see you: He's talked enough to the newspapers."

Joe was somewhat taken aback. He had anticipated, in his simplicity, no difficulty in seeing the late Secretary of the bank. But he wouldn't see the newspaper man, Joe argued, he certainly wouldn't see a private person— for in Joe's profession one always saw newspaper men as often as possible, and as he had no experience of life outside his profession, it never occurred to him that anybody could have too much press publicity. Suddenly; he had an inspiration.

"Tell him I'm Detective Brown, of Scotland Yard," he said, gruffly, as he thrust his hands, in a business-like manner, into the side pockets of his coat, as if to suggest that he kept hidden there all kinds of police weapons which he was prepared to use if refused an entry.

"Oh," said the woman. "That's different, of course. If you'll wait one moment, I'll tell him."

After the lapse of about a minute she returned; removed the chain from the door, and admitted him into a large hall.

"Step this way, sir," she said, and opening a door, ushered him into a warm, comfortably furnished room. A tall young man with, glasses and a fair moustache rose, with an air of being quite at his ease, from the comfortable chair by the side of a brightly burning fire.

"Detective Brown," he said. "You wish to speak to me?"

"I do," said Joe, grimly.

Mr. Stanton seemed somewhat taken aback by his tone. He edged a little away from him, nervously adjusting his *pince nez*.

"If I can be of any service in the way of helping the cause of justice, I am entirely at your service, of course," he stammered.

"You can," said Joe, laconically, wondering inwardly how he was to break to this man the fact that he had come into his house under false pretences.

"Won't you sit down, officer?" Mr. Stanton exclaimed, after a pause.

Joe started at being addressed in this way, but quickly recovered himself.

"I ought to tell you," he said, "that I'm not an officer. I sprang that on the lady who opened the door because she didn't seem inclined to let me in. You'll know my name when I tell it you."

Joe assumed, in his innocence, that a man like himself, who had invested two thousand pounds in the London and Suburban Bank, must be familiar to every official of the company. He had often pictured the directors sitting down at a board meeting .discussing how they should employ to the best purpose the money of Mr. J. Miller.

"You know where I come from right enough," he said. "There is no need for me to tell you that. Perhaps you can guess what brings me here."

Mr. Stanton, somewhat to his surprise, looked at him closely for a few moments, and then softly crossing the floor, quickly opened the door, satisfied himself that nobody was listening outside, and then closed it again.

"That was a precaution," he said. "I've been respecting his messenger all day," he went on, in a whisper. "I was getting scared. I don't mind telling you that when you sent in your name as Detective Brown from Scotland Yard it made me feel a bit queer."

Joe did not understand a word of what he was saying. Why was he so mysterious, he wondered.

"I'm sorry I gave you a turn," he said. "Now we know one another we can talk, this little matter over. Now, about Mr. Montague Ferrers—"

Mr. Stanton raised his hand, warningly. "Hush, my dear sir; not so loud. We don't know who may be listening. You saw nobody as you came up the drive?"

"There's a fog outside, and it's as dark as pitch," Joe retorted, sinking his voice.

"We can't be too careful. I've kept them all at bay here for the last fortnight— I've followed Mr. Ferrers's instructions and talked freely and openly to the press— but I don't mind telling you that I was getting a little scared. That's why I sent him that letter last night, asking him to send a messenger to tell me exactly the position."

Upon Joe's dazed brain it suddenly dawned that he had tumbled head foremost into the very, heart of the conspiracy. As his old friend, the ex-pantaloone, would have said, he had put his foot on the first clue. Somehow or other, this young man who had posed before the public as the only honest employe in the service of the London and Suburban Bank, who had told the public with such apparent candour all that he knew about the movements and doings of the gang of swindlers who had formed the board on the company, was a party to the trick by which Montague Ferrers and his companions had got away with all the money in the bank.

"The position is all right," he answered, bringing to bear upon his voice and manner all the dramatic experience he possessed, that he might appear unconcerned and have time to think.

"You mean—" questioned Mr. Stanton.

"I mean what I say," Joe replied desperately, feeling about for some means of keeping himself afloat on the surface of this mysterious conversation. "The position's all right."

He had a sudden inspiration.

"He told me to tell you that," he added. "Yes; he said I was to tell you that specially. 'The position's all right— mind you let Mr. Stanton know that.' "

He winked— that particular wink which he had used for years when indicating to the pantaloon that there was a baby to be stolen from a perambulator, or a string of sausages that could easily be lifted from a butcher's-shop. Mr. Stanton seemed to be relieved.

"And he's still there?" he enquired.

"Oh, yes; he's still there— or, at least, he was when I left him," Joe replied.

"And is it fixed for tonight?"

"Yes, tonight." Joe felt himself wondering furiously what was fixed for tonight. The next question puzzled him.

"And what time does the boat sail? It is the *Orinoco*, isn't it?"

"It is," said Joe, stolidly. "She leaves, the dock at one in the morning. I was to tell you that—one in the morning."

"And what time am I to be on board?"

"Not until the last moment," said Joe, stoutly.

Mr. Stanton glanced around the room. "I shan't be sorry to leave here. This last fortnight's been as much as I could bear. I shall like to be at sea and I shall like better still when we set foot in South America. They'll manage to get the stuff all right on board, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; trust Mr. Ferrers for that," said Joe, with another wink.

Mr. Stanton gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you for bringing me the news. It's funny I didn't recognise you when you first came in— but a beard makes all the difference to a man. To-night, when we're safely out in the Channel we'll split a bottle to celebrate the occasion; eh, Mr. Manning?"

"Rather!" said Joe, desperately absorbing the fact that he was Mr. Manning. Mr. Stanton took out a cigarette case and handed it "to Joe.

"Have a smoke to help you on the way back," he said.

Joe took one. He never, as a rule, smoked cigarettes, but the lighting of it gave him time to think. He had plumbed part of the mystery at any rate. Mr. Ferrers and his confederate were apparently hiding, and they were proposing to leave London that night by a ship called the *Orinoco* for South America with the money they had stolen. So far as it went this was an amazing discovery, but the only drawback was that Joe was no nearer finding out where Mr. Montague Ferrers was, and unless he learnt that he could not earn the thousand pounds reward.

He could not ask Mr. Stanton the address, for it was assumed that he knew it, seeing that he was supposed just to have left Mr. Ferrers. A way out of the difficulty occurred to him, however.

"I shan't be able to see Mr. Ferrers until we meet on board," he said. "You were Do let him know it everything was all light. If you'll just write him a line I'll send it express from the post office so that he will be sure to get it."

To his intense satisfaction, Mr. Stanton sat down, wrote a hurried line, put it in an envelope, and addressed it. Joe, glancing over his -shoulder, read with tremulous excitement the words, "J. Smith, 40 Love lane, St. George's in-the-East."

iii

IT WAS NOT UNTIL he found himself outside the house that Joe allowed his face to relax, and then he grinned as widely as if he had been in a harlequinade.

"After this, Sherlock Holmes will have to take a back seat to the old-established favourite," he muttered to himself.

The fog had thickened, and it was only with difficulty that he groped his way down the drive. He had only just reached the pavement when somebody collided with him violently and the letter he held dropped or was snatched— he could not say which— from his hand.

"Bless my buttons!" he exclaimed, making a grab for the envelope where it was dimly visible upon the gravel. But the stranger with whom he had collided so mysteriously was before him. "I'm so extremely .sorry," he said. "Please allow me."

The light of an electric torch flashed out momentarily. It came to a focus upon the letter, which lay with the address upper-most, and lingered there for a fraction of a second. Joe, recovering from his astonishment, snatched it up quickly.

"Perhaps you'd like to read what's inside as well?" he said, indignantly.

He could dimly discern through the fog a long hatchet face, an aquiline nose that turned up with an expected aggressiveness at the tip, and a pair of keen, blue eyes. Somehow that face alarmed him.

"Don't you come pushing into me any more," he said.

The man was profuse in his apologies. But without waiting to listen to them Joe made his way to the pavement and began to walk as quickly as the fog permitted him down the hill from Hampstead. He had not gone far, however, before he heard footsteps following him— soft, stealthy footsteps. He took cover under the over-hanging leafless branches of a tree. The stranger presently appeared.

"Here we are again," said Joe. "What are you following me for?"

"You haven't bought the pavement, have you?" the man enquired.

Joe had no answer ready to this pointed question, and so, without wasting words, he hurried on again. To test whether the man really was following him he took several turns down side streets and then waited. On each occasion the stranger with the hatchet face came upon him.

"So that's your game, is it?" Joe exclaimed to himself. "Now I know I'll give you a run for your money."

He zig-zagged off again on a purposely devious course. Presently he found himself by the side of a high wall, behind which stretched the branches of a tree. He could hear the stranger close upon his heels.

"Now then," said Joe to himself. With an alacrity which was the result of years of practice in the circus and on the stage he was on the top of the wall, and was hanging like a monkey from a branch some 30 ft. above the pavement. He saw the stranger come by and pause. He saw the light of his electric torch wander inquisitively up and down the wall and across the road. Then, apparently realizing that he had lost the man he had been following, the stranger broke into a run and disappeared.

Joe came down from his branch, stepped on to the top of the wall, and jumped with the lightness of a cat on to the pavement. He was chuckling with satisfaction.

"Whoever he was, I've shaken him off," he said. "And now for Mr. Montague Ferrers, and then home and Mary."

He groped his way back through the side street down which he had wandered, and reaching the main road, at last found a cabstand.

"I want a taxi," he said, putting his head into the shelter, where the drivers were collected warming themselves and smoking their pipes.

"Right you are, governor," said one of the men, rising. "Where do you want to go?"

"Love Lane, St. George's-in-the-East," Joe answered. The man looked at him in astonishment, and then, turning round to his companions, laughed.

"Wonder what's on in Love lane," he said. "Why, you're the second gentleman that's been here in the last two minutes asking to be driven to Love-Lane. It's becoming a regular Piccadilly Circus."

"A tall, hatchet-faced man, with eyes like a rat, in a bowler hat!" gasped Joe.

"That's the very picture of him, gov'nor!" the driver replied.

"Well, you take me as quick as you can there," he said, "and I'll give you an extra five bob." Under this spur he found himself within the next few seconds being driven almost recklessly down the hill.

He sat forward, his hands on his knees, staring out of the window, consumed with anxiety. Supposing that man with the hatchet face was a -detective sent to watch the house of the late Secretary of the London and Suburban Bank, and

supposing he was to get to Love Lane first and arrest Mr. Montague Ferrers— Joe's dream of a thousand pounds would be a dream and nothing more. He had a vision of Mary in the little home he loved, penniless and reduced to wanting even the necessaries of life.

The cab seemed so slow— it seemed such a long time before they could reach St. George's-in-the-East. And the prize might be snatched from him just as he was about to grasp it. They had reached the city at last, and as they were driving through one of the streets the chauffeur turned round and tapped at the glass, and putting his mouth to the speaking tube, bawled out a message.

"Bill's just ahead, guv'nor, with the other gentleman that s going to Love lane."

"I'll give you a sovereign if you beat him," he said. "Push her along, and there's a whole quid for you if you get there first." In ordinary circumstances this golden bait might have been successful; but the circumstances were not ordinary. The fog was very thick in the city, and under the new lighting regulations it was very difficult to see. At several places they were held up by the police, and twice the other cab, when it had been overhauled, managed to slip on ahead, The race ended almost in a dead heat outside a dirty broken-down looking public house, from the inside of which came a babel of drunken voices. Joe swung himself out on to the pavement before his cab had stopped, just as the man with the hatchet face also alighted.

"Here's a sovereign," Joe said, realizing that there was no time to waste in getting change. "You wait for me here, will you? Maybe I shall want you. If I come back again in half an hour with somebody else don't wait for any instructions; or if I give you any, don't take any notice of them, but drive straight to the nearest police station. You savvy?"

"Right, guv'nor!" retorted the driver, "I'll stand by till you come back."

While he had been whispering these instructions the man with the hatchet face had also been giving orders to the driver of the other vehicle. Joe doubled round his own cab, and, creeping up, saw the man hesitate for a moment, and then take a turning, to the left.

Glancing up at the -corner house, Joe saw fixed on the wall a sign bearing the .name of "Love Lane." The detective, if he was a detective, was already some few yards ahead of him. In another moment he would have reached No. 14.

Joe, with the thought of that £1,000, and of the dreadful fate that was overhanging Mary, felt that it. was now or never. He had been unable to decide upon any definite course of action; all he knew was that by hook or crook he must stop this man from reaching No. 14, and arresting Montague Ferrers before he got there.

Love lane at its brightest and best was a dark, evil-smelling, slum street. Now, in the fog, with its few lamps shaded and turned low, it was almost impossible to see. Nobody was about— the public house at the corner had absorbed every living person who had a desire to wander from his or her own dwelling place.

Joe's quick eyes noticed a dark passage which led out of Love lane on the right. The man with the hatchet face had just reached this opening when Joe suddenly caught him up. The old clown was desperate. All his life he had been a law-abiding citizen. On the stage he might have committed innumerable assaults upon policemen and babies, but in private life he had been a model citizen. Now, however, he realized that Mary's whole future depended upon prompt, and, if necessary, violent action.

"It's got to be done, Mary," he said to himself, invoking the name of his wife as if to help him in what he intended doing. In a rush he had caught the man's arm, turned him round and pushing him forward before he could utter a word, ran him a good 50 yards down the dark alley.

At the end of that distance the man seemed to recover himself. He turned swiftly, wrested himself free from Joe's grasp, and faced him.

"So it's you is it, my man?" he said. "We'll soon settle you."

He made a professional grab at Joe's coat, fastening upon the lapels in such a way that any ordinary person would have been powerless. But Joe was not an ordinary person. He had not been a clown for 30 years without knowing the tricks of his trade.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, and as he uttered the word his coat, in some mysterious way, came off his back and was left in the hands of the stranger. Joe's next move was a violent onslaught. He ran at the man with his head down, and butting him in the stomach, sent him sprawling to the ground. He saw him drag something from his pocket and try to put it to his lips.

Joe grabbed for it, and was just in time to drag a police whistle from his grasp. Something clinked on the cobbles of the road. It was a pair of handcuffs that had fallen from the man's pocket.

Joe picked them up, and after a short struggle, securely fastened them on the man's wrist. "Now, you come along with me," he said.

The man was almost bursting with rage.

"I'm a police officer!" he exclaimed, "and you will have to answer for this assault."

"I don't think!" replied Joe, cheerfully. "I know a crook when I see one."

"If you put your hand in my pocket you can see my warrant card," the man went on, in a tone of furious exasperation.

"Yes, I expect so. I'm not going to waste any time on bogus pieces of paper."

"What's your game?" said the now maddened detective.

"You know very well what my game is!" Joe retorted, with a grin. "I'm out to arrest you and your gang, and I'm going to put you safely out of the way until I get your fellow-conspirators of the London and Suburban Bank!"

The detective began talking wildly and incoherently. Joe cut him short.

"Stop your jaw-wagging," he said, "and come along with me."

Taking him by the scruff of his neck, he ran him down the alley. At the end he came out upon an old, disused wharf, upon which stood a half-dismantled shed. Beyond he could faintly see the river.

"Here's the very place for you, my lad," he said, pushing his captive into the shed and making him sit down on the floor. "Sou don't happen to have a belt about you. do you?"

As the man proffered no explanation on this point, Joe felt under his waistcoat and unclasped the regulation belt that Joe wore. With this he bound his legs together securely above the knee.

"You'll do," he said, standing up and surveying his prize.

"Keep cool, and don't make too much noise. We shall soon have cooked your goose for you." He turned back on the threshold, his tender conscience pricking him. "You're quite comfortable?"

The man's only answer was an oath, which hardened Joe's soft heart.

"All right, if you're going to 'talk like that," he said, offendedly. "I won't worry with you." He turned away and ran quickly back up the alley, stirred to speed by the bloodcurdling cries for help that came from the shed behind him.

Reaching Love lane, he began carefully to examine the numbers. It was no easy task, for most of the numbers had been obliterated, but at last, by the aid of a match, he was able to make out the figures 14.

The house was like all the other houses in the lane— a broken-down brick edifice that seemed only to be standing by sheer good luck. The door stood open, and beyond was a dark, evil-smelling passage.

Before entering this Joe looked up at the windows. The only light in the place came from a window on the first floor— a faint light that percolated through a closely drawn curtain. Treading softly Joe crept down the passage, and, fumbling about for the stairs, at last grasped a very rickety banister. Guiding himself by this, he walked upstairs and found himself on a narrow landing. From a door on the left a little light was filtering. He could hear voices—the subdued, muffled voices of men.

Taking a long breath and muttering to himself the name of his wife to give him courage, he tapped softly at the door. Instantly the light was put out and the voices ceased. He repeated the tap, but only dead silence replied to his summons.

He tried the handle of the door. It was locked. Joe was in a quandary. It seemed to him that after all the prize was going to slip from his grasp. If he burst

the door and rushed into the room he would be no nearer the end he had in view. The man on the other side would be too many for him, and he would be unable to get Montague Ferrers away safely. Bending down he put his lips to the keyhole.

"Ernest Stanton," he whispered. "An important message from Ernest Stanton."

He heard something move in the room, and low voices whispering together. Presently a man's voice replied to him.

"Who is it" it asked.

"A friend who brings a letter from Ernest Stanton."

There was more whispering, and then the door was cautiously opened.

"Come in," said the voice in the darkness beyond. Joe advanced into the room. Immediately the door was closed and locked behind him, and a pair of hands grasped each of his arms. He stood quite still.

"Strike a light, Montague," whispered one of the men who were holding him. There was the scraping of a match, and then a little circle of yellow light lit up the room. The furniture consisted simply of a table and three chairs and three mattresses stretched upon the floor. On the table were some glasses and a bottle of whisky and a candle.

The man who held the match was Montague Ferrers— the promoter and organizer of the London and Suburban fraud.

Joe blinked at the light as Ferrers, with a shaking hand, lit the candle. "Now, my man," said Ferrers, turning to him with a scowl, "who are you and what do you want with us?"

"My name doesn't matter," replied Joe, smiling. "No name no telling. I've come straight from Mr. Stanton. I'm a friend of his, and he entrusted me with a letter for you. If you'll put your hand in my pocket, Mr. Ferrers, you'll find it there."

Montague Ferrers started as the name was uttered, and then, with a face alive with suspicion, plunged his hands into Joe's pockets, and produced the letter Stanton had written.

"To-night, as arranged— yes," he read, and then looked blankly at Joe. "What's be mean by that?" he said.

"Couldn't say," answered Joe, "unless he wants you to go on board the *Orinoco*. He seemed to be in a fair way with nerves. He said to me again and again that you must clear off by tomorrow morning."

Montague Ferrers stared at him steadily. "How do we know who you are, my man?" he said. "How do we know that this isn't all a plant?"

It was a question for which Joe had prepared himself.

"Well, you can easily settle that," he said. "Just to show you I'm a friend, I'll tell you what I've done for you to-night. When I came along here there was a

detective making his way to this house. I grabbed him, ran him down that alley to the river, put his own bracelets on him, and he's lying there at this moment in a shed on the wharf, if you want to make sure that I'm a friend, not having seen me before— and you're right to be on the safe side— one of you go down and have a squint at him."

The three men stared at one another.

Joe's statement, uttered with a good-natured grin, had taken them aback.

"If that's the case, this man is what he says he is," one of them exclaimed. "Somebody had better go down and see."

They debated for some moments who should go, and at last they decided to toss for it. Chance devolved the duty upon Montague Ferrers. "Keep this man safe till I come back," he said.

"Oh, I shall be all right!" retorted Joe. "I'm with you all through. Don't you worry about me, Mr. Ferrers."

In spite of this assurance Joe noticed that the men kept a tight hold of him during the other's absence.

When Montague Ferrers returned -breathless five minutes later, his saturnine face was distorted with laughter. "Yes, it's all right, boys— you can let him go. He's got Thompson, of Scotland Yard, trussed up like a parcel there right enough."

iv

HIS ARMS at last released Joe sank down into a chair, and began to answer the string of questions that were put to him.

"All I can tell you," he said, "is that Mr. Stanton wants you to clear off tonight— with the stuff. He'll meet you on board. He told me you were not to go all in a bunch— one was to go one way— one another, and he instructed me to make special arrangements to Mr. Ferrers. Up at the end of the lane, by the pub, there, I've got a taxi waiting. That's for Mr. Ferrers."

He began to elaborate these instructions, wondering at himself. "And Mr. Stanton was particular to say that you weren't to know one another when you got on board. You're to be strangers— see? But you've got to get on board tonight. That detective will be found sooner or later, and then it'll rail be

It only needed him to remind them of this to hasten their arrangements. Joe saw one man put on his coat and hat and pick up a Gladstone bag that appeared unusually heavy. With this in his hand he crept softly from the house. Five minutes was allowed to elapse, and then the second man followed suit, carrying another bag.

Mr. Ferrers and Joe were at last left alone.

"Well, shall we be getting along, Mr. Ferrers?" Joe said at last, breaking in upon the strained silence.

Montague Ferrers looked, at his watch, and then pouring himself out a stiff glass of whisky, swallowed it neat.

"I don't mind if I do," said Joe, reaching for the bottle, and following his example with a more moderate dose.

The spirit did him good. He suddenly remembered that with a view of saving as much money as possible for Mary, he had not spent a penny on food all that day, and this abstinence had begun to tell upon him. The small drop of whisky, however, helped to revive his flagging energies.

"Well, shall we get a move on, Mr. Ferrers?" he said, rising.

He noticed that Montague Ferrers was staring round the room, an angry scowl upon his brow. "Confound it!" he exclaimed. "One of those men has taken my bag and left me only the handbag."

Joe understood instantly the meaning of his annoyance. One of the conspirators had for precaution's sake taken away the bulk of the money that had been stolen, leaving Montague Ferrers with the small amount that the handbag was capable of containing.

"Never mind," he said, soothingly. "You'll find your bag when you get on board. The great thing to do is to get on board. We oughtn't to waste any more time."

Montague Ferrers struggled into a thick fur coat, turning up the high collar so that it almost completely hid the lower part of his face, and then, with a slouch hat pulled well over his eyes, picked up the bag.

"Come along," he said. "You go first and I'll put out the light."

Joe passed out on to the landing and groped his way downstairs. He paused for a moment in the passage until he was joined by Montague Ferrers. Then together they passed down Love lane to the dingy public house at the corner. The taxi was waiting there, and at the sight of Joe the driver at once set the engine in motion.

"Tell him the address," Joe whispered to Ferrers.

Montague Ferrers, with a cautious glance over his shoulder, spoke in a low voice to the driver.

"The *Orinoco*, West London Docks," he said.

"Right, you are, guv'nor," replied the driver, jumping into his seat. Ferrers and Joe took their places in the cab; slowly they turned and moved down the street, away past the Tower to Mark Lane. Suddenly Ferrers leant forward.

"Where's he taking us to?" he exclaimed.

"He's got to go round by the city," Joe replied, quickly. "All the other roads are closed: They're expecting a Zeppelin raid tonight and they're stopping the traffic down to the docks— except this way."

It was a lame explanation, but it seemed to satisfy Mr. Ferrers for the moment. He lay back in the cab fingering his moustache, clearly nervous and ill at ease.

The cab sped on.

"It's a deuce of a long way round!" Montague Ferrers exclaimed.

"We shall be there in ten minutes," Joe replied, reassuringly. "Keep cool, Mr. Ferrers. Once aboard the lugger and the money's yours. "

As he spoke the cab stopped. Glancing out of the window Joe saw a flight of steps leading up to a brick porch over which was a shaded lamp on which was written "Police Station."

"What's he stopping here for?" Montague Ferrers gasped.

"Something gone wrong with the engine, I expect," Joe replied. He leant forward so as to hide the view of the police station from his companion.

But he was not quick enough. Montague Ferrers had also leant forward—had also seen the flight of steps and the red-brick porch and the lamp above it bearing that ominous sign.

With a cry he sprang to his feet.

"Curse you!" he cried, and made a grab for the door by his side. He had half-turned the handle when Joe fell upon him.

With an acrobatic trick, with which years of clowning had made him familiar, he dug his head into the small of Mr. Ferrers's back and lifted him bodily off his feet.

The driver had sprung from his seat and opened the door. Joe backed out skilfully on to the pavement, carrying the struggling figure of Montague Ferrers upon his back. Then, turning round, he ran with an ease and agility that had earned him many a round of applause in the circus straight up the steps. The glass doors at the top were closed. Using Montague Ferrers as a battering ram, he pushed them open, staggered into the station beyond, looked round for a moment, saw the inspector's office, and door of which was open, and rushed straight on.

"Here we are, inspector," he said, as he appeared in the presence of that astonished official. Saying this, he deposited his burden with a bump on the floor, and stood over him, his hands on his hips, smiling.

"What the—!" exclaimed the inspector, as two or three policemen, amazed at the scene, rushed in to defend their superior officer.

"That's Montague Ferrers, who's wanted for the London and Suburban Bank fraud," said Joe, looking round with a grin of innocent delight. "I got him alone, and so if you happen to have that £1,000 handy, inspector, I should be much obliged if you'd just push it over the counter."

"Montague Ferrers!" exclaimed the inspector. He stared incredulously for a moment at the limp figure that had now struggled into a sitting posture on the floor. Then a look of grim satisfaction came into his eyes.

"It is Montague Ferrers all right," he said: "but how the dickens did you bring him here?"

"Never mind that," said Joe. "I want to finger that £1,000."

It was some time before the inspector could satisfy Joe that the reward was not payable, in commercial language on the immediate receipt of the goods, and it was only when Montague Ferrers had been removed to the cells that the clown, somewhat disappointed, was induced to relate his story.

"If you send some men down to the Orinoco you will collar the rest of them," he said. "They're got the stuff with them in the bags they're carrying. And you'll also find my friend, Mr. Ernest Stanton, there, who's as big a rogue as any of them."

Half an hour later Joe, the story of his adventures told, his evidence written down, and his name and address taken, left the station. He was just going to step into the cab when with an exclamation he turned and ran back.

"Forgotten something, inspector," he said. "There's a man that tried to play hanky-panky with me, and to obstruct me in my duty. He said he was a detective— but, of course, he wasn't. I put a pair of handcuffs on him that he had in his pocket, and you'll find him in the hut on the wharf near Love lane. I shouldn't keep him there any longer than is necessary, for it mayn't be very comfortable."

Having given these particulars in more detail Joe once more made his way to the cab. All thought of economy had vanished from his mind. He wanted to see Mary at once— to hold her in his arms and kiss her, and feel that even if half his money had gone, there was still some to go along with. He gave the address to the driver.

"Push her along, my son," he said. "There is the most beautiful woman in England waiting to see me, and I'm in a hurry."

As the cab sped towards the little suburb in which he lived he rubbed his hands together with delight. It had been a splendid day. It was true he had lost half his money, but still he might have lost it all. Sherlock Holmes, he told himself, wasn't in it with him. And best of all there would be no need to worry Mary. She should never know what had happened.

He would look round and find something to do, if it was only a super's job, that brought, in a couple of guineas a week. She shouldn't want. That ghastly prospect in which he had figured her as pale and thin and hungry, driven to wandering the streets with him, or taking shelter in a workhouse, was gone for good and all.

As he moved restlessly about in the cab, hugging himself, his foot struck something on the floor. He lit a match, and, bending down, examined it. It was the bag Montague Ferrers had been carrying. With a thrill of excitement Joe picked it up and put it on Iris knees. It was locked, but one good tug broke the fastening. He struck another match and looked inside.

There was gold there— gold and notes. Feverishly he began to count the sovereigns. There were close on a hundred and fifty. And -then he turned his attention to the notes. There were packets of them, carefully docketed—new £5 notes. that had never been through anybody's hands, and bundles of £1 notes. He added up the figures on the packets and found that they amounted in all to £850.

"Golly!" exclaimed Joe. "Why, that exactly fills up the blank— the whole of my £2,000."

He put his head out of the window.

"Can't you go a bit quicker, driver?" he shouted.

The longest journey comes to an end, and a few minutes later Joe, panting with excitement, was out on the pavement in front of his little home. "There's another sovereign for you, driver. You've brought me luck. Good night, and thank you very much."

He ran up the steps and was in such a desperate hurry that it was quite 30 seconds before he could fix his latchkey into the lock. But at last he was inside the familiar passage, and as his eyes looked round him a great gust of thankfulness stirred in his heart, bringing the tears to his eyes.

It was his home still. It wouldn't be sold up. He wouldn't have to go and beg his bread in the streets.

But where was Mary? Something was rubbing against his legs. Looking down he saw that it was Tiny. There seemed to be an odd expression in the dog's eyes...

She grabbed the cloth of his trousers in her teeth and backed down the passage as if she would hasten his footsteps in-that direction.

"Good old girl," he said, "what's the matter? Want a sausage?"

There was a light in the sitting room and the door was open. He looked in Mary was there, sitting at the table, leaning forward, her face buried in her arms. From her regular breathing he realized that she was asleep.

"Dear little girl," he muttered, tenderly. "She has been sitting up for me all this time— bless her sweet heart!"

He put the bag softly down on the floor, and tip-toeing up .to her, put his arms about her.

"Mary, my dear," he whispered. She started with a cry, and looked up at him. He saw that her face was very pale, and that her eyes were red.

"Mary!" he exclaimed. "Mary!" and touched her cheek tenderly with his hand. Her cheeks were wet. She had been crying.

He held her head against his chest, stroking her hair, speaking to her incoherently in an agony of distress. It was the first time he had ever seen Mary cry since that day when he had met her, a lonely, penniless orphan in the park, and in the gentle tenderness of his heart had taken her back to his lodgings.

"Oh, Mary, my dear— what is the matter? What is the matter?"

She struggled from his arms, her lips quivering.

"Oh, Joe, I couldn't keep it up any longer," she cried.

"Keep up what?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"This pretending, Joe. I've known all about it for the last fortnight."

"What have you known?" he stammered, quite at a loss to understand her meaning.

"That the London and Suburban Bank had gone smash, and that all your money had gone with it. I read it in the papers, Joe— but I was stupid, and didn't want you to be worried and unhappy before it was necessary."

"Didn't want me to be worried and unhappy?" he repeated, dully.

"But this morning, when you got that letter, I knew you had heard. I saw the letter after you had gone. Joe— you left it in your pocket when you changed your clothes. I knew you went out to pawn the clock— and, oh, my poor, poor old Joe!" She buried her face on his shoulder and gave way to a renewed outburst of weeping.

It was some moments before Joe recovered from his amazement. He had imagined all the time that it had been he who was keeping worries and troubles from his wife— and she had known all about it for the past fortnight, and had gone on her round of duties with a smiling face so that he wouldn't be worried and unhappy! And all his little subterfuges about the clock and the bank and his important engagement down town— she had seen through them all!

He was aghast at her cleverness. What a wonderful woman she was! He looked round the room, glanced up at his own picture, and shook his head at it as if he were saying that he recognised what a very inferior creature he was to the sweet woman he held in his arms. And then he grinned.

"Mary," he said, "I've got a surprise for you. You've got to dry those eyes of yours, and not to be unhappy on my account any longer." He couldn't keep his secret any longer.

"Mary, my dear, it's all right. I've got one of my thousands in the bag with me, and the other thousand will be paid me for having placed Montague Ferrers under arrest. The little home is all right, dear, and you're all right and Tilly's all right and I'm all right— and everything's simply scrumptious."

And then, seated in his favourite chair, holding her on his lap, he told her the whole story.

HE TOLD the story a second time three nights afterwards, when the thousand pounds reward had been paid and the occasion was being celebrated. At his little sitting-room table there sat two other persons beside himself— Mary and the old pantaloon. The old pantaloon was grinning from ear to ear as he listened to the amazing narrative.

"What did I say to you, standing on the pavement outside Bow Street Police Station? Get a clue, Joey, get a clue."

"You did that, father," Joe replied, and then looked across at his wife.

"Just look up at the ceiling a moment, father. I feel I really I must."

Saying this, he jumped from his seat and ran round to his wife and kissed her pretty lips with such determination that the old pantaloon grinned more than ever.

"You make me wish I was a married man," he said, and then added, philosophically, "but I don't suppose there's another one like Mary in the world."

"There isn't, father," said the clown, emphatically, and kissed his wife again.

---

## 17: The Pool of the Black One

**Robert E. Howard**

1906-1936

*Weird Tales*, Oct 1933

*Say hello to Conan the Barbarian, immortalised on film by a young Arnold Schwarzenegger*

*Into the west, unknown of man,  
Ships have sailed since the world began.  
Read, if you dare, what Skelos wrote,  
With dead hands fumbling his silken coat;  
And follow the ships through the wind-blown wrack—  
Follow the ships that come not back.*

SANCHA, ONCE OF KORDAVA, yawned daintily, stretched her supple limbs luxuriously, and composed herself more comfortably on the ermine-fringed silk spread on the carack's poop-deck. That the crew watched her with burning interest from waist and forecandle she was lazily aware, just as she was also aware that her short silk kirtle veiled little of her voluptuous contours from their eager eyes. Wherefore she smiled insolently and prepared to snatch a few more winks before the sun, which was just thrusting his golden disk above the ocean, should dazzle her eyes.

But at that instant a sound reached her ears unlike the creaking of timbers, thrum of cordage and lap of waves. She sat up, her gaze fixed on the rail, over which, to her amazement, a dripping figure clambered. Her dark eyes opened wide, her red lips parted in an O of surprise. The intruder was a stranger to her. Water ran in rivulets from his great shoulders and down his heavy arms. His single garment— a pair of bright crimson silk breeks— was soaking wet, as was his broad gold-buckled girdle and the sheathed sword it supported. As he stood at the rail, the rising sun etched him like a great bronze statue. He ran his fingers through his streaming black mane, and his blue eyes lit as they rested on the girl.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Whence did you come?"

He made a gesture toward the sea that took in a whole quarter of the compass, while his eyes did not leave her supple figure.

"Are you a merman, that you rise up out of the sea?" she asked, confused by the candor of his gaze, though she was accustomed to admiration.

Before he could reply, a quick step sounded on the boards, and the master of the carack was glaring at the stranger, fingers twitching at sword-hilt.

"Who the devil are you, sirrah?" this one demanded in no friendly tone.

"I am Conan," the other answered imperturbably. Sancha pricked up her ears anew; she had never heard Zingaran spoken with such an accent as the stranger spoke it.

"And how did you get aboard my ship?" The voice grated with suspicion.

"I swam."

"Swam!" exclaimed the master angrily. "Dog, would you jest with me? We are far beyond sight of land. Whence do you come?"

Conan pointed with a muscular brown arm toward the east, banded in dazzling gold by the lifting sun.

"I came from the Islands."

"Oh!" The other regarded him with increased interest. Black brows drew down over scowling eyes, and the thin lip lifted unpleasantly.

"So you are one of those dogs of the Barachans."

A faint smile touched Conan's lips.

"And do you know who I am?" his questioner demanded.

"This ship is the *Wastrel*; so you must be Zaporavo."

"Aye!" It touched the captain's grim vanity that the man should know him. He was a tall man, tall as Conan, though of leaner build. Framed in his steel morion his face was dark, saturnine and hawk-like, wherefore men called him the Hawk. His armor and garments were rich and ornate, after the fashion of a Zingaran grandee. His hand was never far from his sword-hilt.

There was little favor in the gaze he bent on Conan. Little love was lost between the Zingaran renegades and the outlaws who infested the Baracha Islands off the southern coast of Zingara. These men were mostly sailors from Argos, with a sprinkling of other nationalities. They raided the shipping, and harried the Zingaran coast towns, just as the Zingaran buccaneers did, but these dignified their profession by calling themselves Freebooters, while they dubbed the Barachans pirates. They were neither the first nor the last to gild the name of thief.

Some of these thoughts passed through Zaporavo's mind as he toyed with his sword-hilt and scowled at his uninvited guest. Conan gave no hint of what his own thoughts might be. He stood with folded arms as placidly as if upon his own deck; his lips smiled and his eyes were untroubled.

"What are you doing here?" the Freebooter demanded abruptly.

"I found it necessary to leave the rendezvous at Tortage before moonrise last night," answered Conan. "I departed in a leaky boat, and rowed and bailed all night. Just at dawn I saw your topsails, and left the miserable tub to sink, while I made better speed in the water."

"There are sharks in these waters," growled Zaporavo, and was vaguely irritated by the answering shrug of the mighty shoulders. A glance toward the waist showed a screen of eager faces staring upward. A word would send them

leaping up on the poop in a storm of swords that would overwhelm even such a fighting-man as the stranger looked to be.

"Why should I burden myself with every nameless vagabond the sea casts up?" snarled Zaporavo, his look and manner more insulting than his words.

"A ship can always use another good sailor," answered the other without resentment. Zaporavo scowled, knowing the truth of that assertion. He hesitated, and doing so, lost his ship, his command, his girl, and his life. But of course he could not see into the future, and to him Conan was only another wastrel, cast up, as he put it, by the sea. He did not like the man; yet the fellow had given him no provocation. His manner was not insolent, though rather more confident than Zaporavo liked to see.

"You'll work for your keep," snarled the Hawk. "Get off the poop. And remember, the only law here is my will."

THE SMILE seemed to broaden on Conan's thin lips. Without hesitation but without haste he turned and descended into the waist. He did not look again at Sancha, who, during the brief conversation, had watched eagerly, all eyes and ears.

As he came into the waist the crew thronged about him— Zingarans, all of them, half naked, their gaudy silk garments splashed with tar, jewels glinting in ear-rings and dagger-hilts. They were eager for the time-honored sport of baiting the stranger. Here he would be tested, and his future status in the crew decided. Up on the poop Zaporavo had apparently already forgotten the stranger's existence, but Sancha watched, tense with interest. She had become familiar with such scenes, and knew the baiting would be brutal and probably bloody.

But her familiarity with such matters was scanty compared to that of Conan. He smiled faintly as he came into the waist and saw the menacing figures pressing truculently about him. He paused and eyed the ring inscrutably, his composure unshaken. There was a certain code about these things. If he had attacked the captain, the whole crew would have been at his throat, but they would give him a fair chance against the one selected to push the brawl.

The man chosen for this duty thrust himself forward— a wiry brute, with a crimson sash knotted about his head like a turban. His lean chin jutted out, his scarred face was evil beyond belief. Every glance, each swaggering movement was an affront. His way of beginning the baiting was as primitive, raw and crude as himself.

"Baracha, eh?" he sneered. "That's where they raise dogs for men. We of the Fellowship spit on 'em— like this!"

He spat in Conan's face and snatched at his own sword.

The Barachan's movement was too quick for the eye to follow. His sledge-like fist crunched with a terrible impact against his tormenter's jaw, and the Zingaran catapulted through the air and fell in a crumpled heap by the rail.

Conan turned toward the others. But for a slumbering glitter in his eyes, his bearing was unchanged. But the baiting was over as suddenly as it had begun. The seamen lifted their companion; his broken jaw hung slack, his head lolled unnaturally.

"By Mitra, his neck's broken!" swore a black-bearded sea-rogue.

"You Freebooters are a weak-boned race," laughed the pirate. "On the Barachas we take no account of such taps as that. Will you play at sword-strokes, now, any of you? No? Then all's well, and we're friends, eh?"

There were plenty of tongues to assure him that he spoke truth. Brawny arms swung the dead man over the rail, and a dozen fins cut the water as he sank. Conan laughed and spread his mighty arms as a great cat might stretch itself, and his gaze sought the deck above. Sancha leaned over the rail, red lips parted, dark eyes aglow with interest. The sun behind her outlined her lithe figure through the light kirtle which its glow made transparent. Then across her fell Zaporavo's scowling shadow and a heavy hand fell possessively on her slim shoulder. There were menace and meaning in the glare he bent on the man in the waist; Conan grinned back, as if at a jest none knew but himself.

Zaporavo made the mistake so many autocrats make; alone in somber grandeur on the poop, he under-estimated the man below him. He had his opportunity to kill Conan, and he let it pass, engrossed in his own gloomy ruminations. He did not find it easy to think any of the dogs beneath his feet constituted a menace to him. He had stood in the high places so long, and had ground so many foes underfoot, that he unconsciously assumed himself to be above the machinations of inferior rivals.

Conan, indeed, gave him no provocation. He mixed with the crew, lived and made merry as they did. He proved himself a skilled sailor, and by far the strongest man any of them had seen. He did the work of three men, and was always first to spring to any heavy or dangerous task. His mates began to rely upon him. He did not quarrel with them, and they were careful not to quarrel with him. He gambled with them, putting up his girdle and sheath for a stake, won their money and weapons, and gave them back with a laugh. The crew instinctively looked toward him as the leader of the forecastle. He vouchsafed no information as to what had caused him to flee the Barachas, but the knowledge that he was capable of a deed bloody enough to have exiled him from that wild band increased the respect felt toward him by the fierce Freebooters. Toward Zaporavo and the mates he was imperturbably courteous, never insolent or servile.

The dullest was struck by the contrast between the harsh, taciturn, gloomy commander, and the pirate whose laugh was gusty and ready, who roared ribald songs in a dozen languages, guzzled ale like a toper, and— apparently— had no thought for the morrow.

HAD ZAPORAVO known he was being compared, even though unconsciously, with a man before the mast, he would have been speechless with amazed anger. But he was engrossed with his broodings, which had become blacker and grimmer as the years crawled by, and with his vague grandiose dreams; and with the girl whose possession was a bitter pleasure, just as all his pleasures were.

And she looked more and more at the black-maned giant who towered among his mates at work or play. He never spoke to her, but there was no mistaking the candor of his gaze. She did not mistake it, and she wondered if she dared the perilous game of leading him on.

No great length of time lay between her and the palaces of Kordava, but it was as if a world of change separated her from the life she had lived before Zaporavo tore her screaming from the flaming caravel his wolves had plundered. She, who had been the spoiled and petted daughter of the Duke of Kordava, learned what it was to be a buccaneer's plaything; and because she was supple enough to bend without breaking, she lived where other women had died, and because she was young and vibrant with life, she came to find pleasure in the existence.

The life was uncertain, dream-like, with sharp contrasts of battle, pillage, murder, and flight. Zaporavo's red visions made it even more uncertain than that of the average freebooter. No one knew what he planned next. Now they had left all charted coasts behind and were plunging further and further into that unknown billowy waste ordinarily shunned by seafarers, and into which, since the beginnings of Time, ships had ventured, only to vanish from the sight of man for ever. All known lands lay behind them, and day upon day the blue surging immensity lay empty to their sight. Here there was no loot— no towns to sack nor ships to burn. The men murmured, though they did not let their murmurings reach the ears of their implacable master, who tramped the poop day and night in gloomy majesty, or pored over ancient charts and time-yellowed maps, reading in tomes that were crumbling masses of worm-eaten parchment. At times he talked to Sancha, wildly it seemed to her, of lost continents, and fabulous isles dreaming unguessed amidst the blue foam of nameless gulfs, where horned dragons guarded treasures gathered by pre-human kings, long, long ago.

Sancha listened, uncomprehending, hugging her slim knees, her thoughts constantly roving away from the words of her grim companion back to a clean-limbed bronze giant whose laughter was gusty and elemental as the sea-wind.

So, after many weary weeks, they raised land to westward, and at dawn dropped anchor in a shallow bay, and saw a beach which was like a white band bordering an expanse of gentle grassy slopes, masked by green trees. The wind brought scents of fresh vegetation and spices, and Sancha clapped her hands with glee at the prospect of adventuring ashore. But her eagerness turned to sulkiness when Zaporavo ordered her to remain aboard until he sent for her. He never gave any explanation for his commands; so she never knew his reason, unless it was the lurking devil in him that frequently made him hurt her without cause.

So she lounged sulkily on the poop and watched the men row ashore through the calm water that sparkled like liquid jade in the morning sunlight. She saw them bunch together on the sands, suspicious, weapons ready, while several scattered out through the trees that fringed the beach. Among these, she noted, was Conan. There was no mistaking that tall brown figure with its springy step. Men said he was no civilized man at all, but a Cimmerian, one of those barbaric tribesmen who dwelt in the gray hills of the far North, and whose raids struck terror in their southron neighbors. At least, she knew that there was something about him, some super-vitality or barbarism that set him apart from his wild mates.

Voices echoed along the shore, as the silence reassured the buccaneers. The clusters broke up, as men scattered along the beach in search of fruit. She saw them climbing and plucking among the trees, and her pretty mouth watered. She stamped a little foot and swore with a proficiency acquired by association with her blasphemous companions.

The men on shore had indeed found fruit, and were gorging on it, finding one unknown golden-skinned variety especially luscious. But Zaporavo did not seek or eat fruit. His scouts having found nothing indicating men or beasts in the neighborhood, he stood staring inland, at the long reaches of grassy slopes melting into one another. Then, with a brief word, he shifted his sword-belt and strode in under the trees. His mate expostulated with him against going alone, and was rewarded by a savage blow in the mouth. Zaporavo had his reasons for wishing to go alone. He desired to learn if this island were indeed that mentioned in the mysterious *Book of Skelos*, whereon, nameless sages aver, strange monsters guard crypts filled with hieroglyph-carven gold. Nor, for murky reasons of his own, did he wish to share his knowledge, if it were true, with any one, much less his own crew.

Sancha, watching eagerly from the poop, saw him vanish into the leafy fastness. Presently she saw Conan, the Barachan, turn, glance briefly at the men

scattered up and down the beach; then the pirate went quickly in the direction taken by Zaporavo, and likewise vanished among the trees.

Sancha's curiosity was piqued. She waited for them to reappear, but they did not. The seamen still moved aimlessly up and down the beach, and some had wandered inland. Many had lain down in the shade to sleep. Time passed, and she fidgeted about restlessly. The sun began to beat down hotly, in spite of the canopy above the poop-deck. Here it was warm, silent, draggingly monotonous; a few yards away across a band of blue shallow water, the cool shady mystery of tree-fringed beach and woodland-dotted meadow beckoned her. Moreover, the mystery concerning Zaporavo and Conan tempted her.

She well knew the penalty for disobeying her merciless master, and she sat for some time, squirming with indecision. At last she decided that it was worth even one of Zaporavo's whippings to play truant, and with no more ado she kicked off her soft leather sandals, slipped out of her kirtle and stood up on the deck naked as Eve. Clambering over the rail and down the chains, she slid into the water and swam ashore. She stood on the beach a few moments, squirming as the sands tickled her small toes, while she looked for the crew. She saw only a few, at some distance up or down the beach. Many were fast asleep under the trees, bits of golden fruit still clutched in their fingers. She wondered why they should sleep so soundly, so early in the day.

NONE HAILED HER as she crossed the white girdle of sand and entered the shade of the woodland. The trees, she found, grew in irregular clusters, and between these groves stretched rolling expanses of meadow-like slopes. As she progressed inland, in the direction taken by Zaporavo, she was entranced by the green vistas that unfolded gently before her, soft slope beyond slope, carpeted with green sward and dotted with groves. Between the slopes lay gentle declivities, likewise swarded. The scenery seemed to melt into itself, or each scene into the other; the view was singular, at once broad and restricted. Over all a dreamy silence lay like an enchantment.

Then she came suddenly onto the level summit of a slope, circled with tall trees, and the dreamily faery-like sensation vanished abruptly at the sight of what lay on the reddened and trampled grass. Sancha involuntarily cried out and recoiled, then stole forward, wide-eyed, trembling in every limb.

It was Zaporavo who lay there on the sward, staring sightlessly upward, a gaping wound in his breast. His sword lay near his nerveless hand. The Hawk had made his last swoop.

It is not to be said that Sancha gazed on the corpse of her lord without emotion. She had no cause to love him, yet she felt at least the sensation any girl might feel when looking on the body of the man who was first to possess her. She did not weep or feel any need of weeping, but she was seized by a

strong trembling, her blood seemed to congeal briefly, and she resisted a wave of hysteria.

She looked about her for the man she expected to see. Nothing met her eyes but the ring of tall, thickly-leaved forest giants, and the blue slopes beyond them. Had the Freebooter's slayer dragged himself away, mortally wounded? No bloody tracks led away from the body.

Puzzled, she swept the surrounding trees, stiffening as she caught a rustle in the emerald leaves that seemed not to be of the wind. She went toward the trees, staring into the leafy depths.

"Conan?" Her call was inquiring; her voice sounded strange and small in the vastness of silence that had grown suddenly tense.

Her knees began to tremble as a nameless panic swept over her.

"Conan!" she cried desperately. "It is I— Sancha! Where are you? Please, Conan—" Her voice faltered away. Unbelieving horror dilated her brown eyes.

Her red lips parted to an inarticulate scream. Paralysis gripped her limbs; where she had such desperate need of swift flight, she could not move. She could only shriek wordlessly.

## ii

WHEN CONAN SAW Zaporavo stalk alone into the woodland, he felt that the chance he had watched for had come. He had eaten no fruit, nor joined in the horse-play of his mates; all his faculties were occupied with watching the buccaneer chief. Accustomed to Zaporavo's moods, his men were not particularly surprized that their captain should choose to explore an unknown and probably hostile isle alone. They turned to their own amusement, and did not notice Conan when he glided like a stalking panther after the chieftain.

Conan did not underrate his dominance of the crew. But he had not gained the right, through battle and foray, to challenge the captain to a duel to the death. In these empty seas there had been no opportunity for him to prove himself according to Freebooter law. The crew would stand solidly against him if he attacked the chieftain openly. But he knew that if he killed Zaporavo without their knowledge, the leaderless crew would not be likely to be swayed by loyalty to a dead man. In such wolf-packs only the living counted.

So he followed Zaporavo with sword in hand and eagerness in his heart, until he came out onto a level summit, circled with tall trees, between whose trunks he saw the green vistas of the slopes melting into the blue distance. In the midst of the glade Zaporavo, sensing pursuit, turned, hand on hilt.

The buccaneer swore.

"Dog, why do you follow me?"

"Are you mad, to ask?" laughed Conan, coming swiftly toward his erstwhile chief. His lips smiled, and in his blue eyes danced a wild gleam.

Zaporavo ripped out his sword with a black curse, and steel clashed against steel as the Barachan came in recklessly and wide open, his blade singing a wheel of blue flame about his head.

Zaporavo was the veteran of a thousand fights by sea and by land. There was no man in the world more deeply and thoroughly versed than he in the lore of swordcraft. But he had never been pitted against a blade wielded by thews bred in the wild lands beyond the borders of civilization. Against his fighting-craft was matched blinding speed and strength impossible to a civilized man. Conan's manner of fighting was unorthodox, but instinctive and natural as that of a timber wolf. The intricacies of the sword were as useless against his primitive fury as a human boxer's skill against the onslaughts of a panther.

Fighting as he had never fought before, straining every last ounce of effort to parry the blade that flickered like lightning about his head, Zaporavo in desperation caught a full stroke near his hilt, and felt his whole arm go numb beneath the terrific impact. That stroke was instantly followed by a thrust with such terrible drive behind it that the sharp point ripped through chain-mail and ribs like paper, to transfix the heart beneath. Zaporavo's lips writhed in brief agony, but, grim to the last, he made no sound. He was dead before his body relaxed on the trampled grass, where blood drops glittered like spilt rubies in the sun.

Conan shook the red drops from his sword, grinned with unaffected pleasure, stretched like a huge cat— and abruptly stiffened, the expression of satisfaction on his face being replaced by a stare of bewilderment. He stood like a statue, his sword trailing in his hand.

As he lifted his eyes from his vanquished foe, they had absently rested on the surrounding trees, and the vistas beyond. And he had seen a fantastic thing— a thing incredible and inexplicable. Over the soft rounded green shoulder of a distant slope had loped a tall black naked figure, bearing on its shoulder an equally naked white form. The apparition vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, leaving the watcher gasping in surprize.

The pirate stared about him, glanced uncertainly back the way he had come, and swore. He was nonplussed— a bit upset, if the term might be applied to one of such steely nerves as his. In the midst of realistic, if exotic surroundings, a vagrant image of fantasy and nightmare had been introduced. Conan doubted neither his eyesight nor his sanity. He had seen something alien and uncanny, he knew; the mere fact of a black figure racing across the landscape carrying a white captive was bizarre enough, but this black figure had been unnaturally tall.

Shaking his head doubtfully, Conan started off in the direction in which he had seen the thing. He did not argue the wisdom of his move; with his curiosity so piqued, he had no choice but to follow its promptings.

Slope after slope he traversed, each with its even sward and clustered groves. The general trend was always upward, though he ascended and descended the gentle inclines with monotonous regularity. The array of rounded shoulders and shallow declivities was bewildering and apparently endless. But at last he advanced up what he believed was the highest summit on the island, and halted at the sight of green shining walls and towers, which, until he had reached the spot on which he then stood, had merged so perfectly with the green landscape as to be invisible, even to his keen sight.

He hesitated, fingered his sword, then went forward, bitten by the worm of curiosity. He saw no one as he approached a tall archway in the curving wall. There was no door. Peering warily through, he saw what seemed to be a broad open court, grass-carpeted, surrounded by a circular wall of the green semi-translucent substance. Various arches opened from it. Advancing on the balls of his bare feet, sword ready, he chose one of these arches at random, and passed into another similar court. Over an inner wall he saw the pinnacles of strangely shaped tower-like structures. One of these towers was built in, or projected into the court in which he found himself, and a broad stair led up to it, along the side of the wall. Up this he went, wondering if it were all real, or if he were not in the midst of a black lotus dream.

At the head of the stair he found himself on a walled ledge, or balcony, he was not sure which. He could now make out more details of the towers, but they were meaningless to him. He realized uneasily that no ordinary human beings could have built them. There was symmetry about their architecture, and system, but it was a mad symmetry, a system alien to human sanity. As for the plan of the whole town, castle, or whatever it was intended for, he could see just enough to get the impression of a great number of courts, mostly circular, each surrounded by its own wall, and connected with the others by open arches, and all, apparently, grouped about the cluster of fantastic towers in the center.

TURNING IN the other direction from these towers, he got a fearful shock, and crouched down suddenly behind the parapet of the balcony, glaring amazedly.

The balcony or ledge was higher than the opposite wall, and he was looking over that wall into another swarded court. The inner curve of the further wall of that court differed from the others he had seen, in that, instead of being smooth, it seemed to be banded with long lines or ledges, crowded with small objects the nature of which he could not determine.

However, he gave little heed to the wall at the time. His attention was centered on the band of beings that squatted about a dark green pool in the midst of the court. These creatures were black and naked, made like men, but the least of them, standing upright, would have towered head and shoulders above the tall pirate. They were rangy rather than massive, but were finely formed, with no suggestion of deformity or abnormality, save as their great height was abnormal. But even at that distance Conan sensed the basic diabolism of their features.

In their midst, cringing and naked, stood a youth that Conan recognized as the youngest sailor aboard the *Wastrel*. He, then, had been the captive the pirate had seen borne across the grass-covered slope. Conan had heard no sound of fighting— saw no blood-stains or wounds on the sleek ebon limbs of the giants. Evidently the lad had wandered inland away from his companions and been snatched up by a black man lurking in ambush. Conan mentally termed the creatures black men, for lack of a better term; instinctively he knew these tall ebony beings were not men, as he understood the term.

No sound came to him. The blacks nodded and gestured to one another, but they did not seem to speak— vocally, at least. One, squatting on his haunches before the cringing boy, held a pipe-like thing in his hand. This he set to his lips, and apparently blew, though Conan heard no sound. But the Zingaran youth heard or felt, and cringed. He quivered and writhed as if in agony; a regularity became evident in the twitching of his limbs, which quickly became rhythmic. The twitching became a violent jerking, the jerking regular movements. The youth began to dance, as cobras dance by compulsion to the tune of the faquir's fife. There was naught of zest or joyful abandon in that dance. There was, indeed, abandon that was awful to see, but it was not joyful. It was as if the mute tune of the pipes grasped the boy's inmost soul with salacious fingers and with brutal torture wrung from it every involuntary expression of secret passion. It was a convulsion of obscenity, a spasm of lasciviousness— an exudation of secret hungers framed by compulsion: desire without pleasure, pain mated awfully to lust. It was like watching a soul stripped naked, and all its dark and unmentionable secrets laid bare.

Conan glared, frozen with repulsion and shaken with nausea. Himself as cleanly elemental as a timber wolf, he was yet not ignorant of the perverse secrets of rotting civilizations. He had roamed the cities of Zamora, and known the women of Shadizar the Wicked. But he sensed here a cosmic vileness transcending mere human degeneracy— a perverse branch on the tree of Life, developed along lines outside human comprehension. It was not at the agonized contortions and posturing of the wretched boy that he was shocked, but at the cosmic obscenity of these beings which could drag to light the abysmal secrets that sleep in the unfathomed darkness of the human soul, and find pleasure in

the brazen flaunting of such things as should not be hinted at, even in restless nightmares.

Suddenly the black torturer laid down the pipes and rose, towering over the writhing white figure. Brutally grasping the boy by neck and haunch, the giant up-ended him and thrust him head-first into the green pool. Conan saw the white glimmer of his naked body amid the green water, as the black giant held his captive deep under the surface. Then there was a restless movement among the other blacks, and Conan ducked quickly below the balcony wall, not daring to raise his head lest he be seen.

AFTER A WHILE his curiosity got the better of him, and he cautiously peered out again. The blacks were filing out of an archway into another court. One of them was just placing something on a ledge of the further wall, and Conan saw it was the one who had tortured the boy. He was taller than the others, and wore a jeweled head-band. Of the Zingaran boy there was no trace. The giant followed his fellows, and presently Conan saw them emerge from the archway by which he had gained access to that castle of horror, and file away across the green slopes, in the direction from which he had come. They bore no arms, yet he felt that they planned further aggression against the Freebooters.

But before he went to warn the unsuspecting buccaneers, he wished to investigate the fate of the boy. No sound disturbed the quiet. The pirate believed that the towers and courts were deserted save for himself.

He went swiftly down the stair, crossed the court and passed through an arch into the court the blacks had just quitted. Now he saw the nature of the striated wall. It was banded by narrow ledges, apparently cut out of the solid stone, and ranged along these ledges or shelves were thousands of tiny figures, mostly grayish in color. These figures, not much longer than a man's hand, represented men, and so cleverly were they made that Conan recognized various racial characteristics in the different idols, features typical of Zingarans, Argoseans, Ophireans, and Kushite corsairs. These last were black in color, just as their models were black in reality. Conan was aware of a vague uneasiness as he stared at the dumb sightless figures. There was a mimicry of reality about them that was somehow disturbing. He felt of them gingerly and could not decide of what material they were made. It felt like petrified bone; but he could not imagine petrified substance being found in the locality in such abundance as to be used so lavishly.

He noticed that the images representing types with which he was familiar were all on the higher ledges. The lower ledges were occupied by figures the features of which were strange to him. They either embodied merely the artists' imagination, or typified racial types long vanished and forgotten.

Shaking his head impatiently, Conan turned toward the pool. The circular court offered no place of concealment; as the body of the boy was nowhere in sight, it must be lying at the bottom of the pool.

Approaching the placid green disk, he stared into the glimmering surface. It was like looking through a thick green glass, unclouded, yet strangely illusory. Of no great dimensions, the pool was round as a well, bordered by a rim of green jade. Looking down he could see the rounded bottom— how far below the surface he could not decide. But the pool seemed incredibly deep— he was aware of a dizziness as he looked down, much as if he were looking into an abyss. He was puzzled by his ability to see the bottom; but it lay beneath his gaze, impossibly remote, illusive, shadowy, yet visible. At times he thought a faint luminosity was apparent deep in the jade-colored depth, but he could not be sure. Yet he was sure that the pool was empty except for the shimmering water.

Then where in the name of Crom was the boy whom he had seen brutally drowned in that pool? Rising, Conan fingered his sword, and gazed around the court again. His gaze focussed on a spot on one of the higher ledges. There he had seen the tall black place something— cold sweat broke suddenly out on Conan's brown hide.

Hesitantly, yet as if drawn by a magnet, the pirate approached the shimmering wall. Dazed by a suspicion too monstrous to voice, he glared up at the last figure on that ledge. A horrible familiarity made itself evident. Stony, immobile, dwarfish, yet unmistakable, the features of the Zingaran boy stared unseeingly at him. Conan recoiled, shaken to his soul's foundations. His sword trailed in his paralyzed hand as he glared, open-mouthed, stunned by the realization which was too abysmal and awful for the mind to grasp.

Yet the fact was indisputable; the secret of the dwarfish images was revealed, though behind that secret lay the darker and more cryptic secret of their being.

iii

HOW LONG Conan stood drowned in dizzy cogitation, he never knew. A voice shook him out of his gaze, a feminine voice that shrieked more and more loudly, as if the owner of the voice were being borne nearer. Conan recognized that voice, and his paralysis vanished instantly.

A quick bound carried him high up on the narrow ledges, where he clung, kicking aside the clustering images to obtain room for his feet. Another spring and a scramble, and he was clinging to the rim of the wall, glaring over it. It was an outer wall; he was looking into the green meadow that surrounded the castle.

Across the grassy level a giant black was striding, carrying a squirming captive under one arm as a man might carry a rebellious child. It was Sancha, her black hair falling in disheveled rippling waves, her olive skin contrasting abruptly with the glossy ebony of her captor. He gave no heed to her wriggles and cries as he made for the outer archway.

As he vanished within, Conan sprang recklessly down the wall and glided into the arch that opened into the further court. Crouching there, he saw the giant enter the court of the pool, carrying his writhing captive. Now he was able to make out the creature's details.

The superb symmetry of body and limbs was more impressive at close range. Under the ebon skin long, rounded muscles rippled, and Conan did not doubt that the monster could rend an ordinary man limb from limb. The nails of the fingers provided further weapons, for they were grown like the talons of a wild beast. The face was a carven ebony mask. The eyes were tawny, a vibrant gold that glowed and glittered. But the face was inhuman; each line, each feature was stamped with evil— evil transcending the mere evil of humanity. The thing was not a human— it could not be; it was a growth of Life from the pits of blasphemous creation— a perversion of evolutionary development.

The giant cast Sancha down on the sward, where she grovelled, crying with pain and terror. He cast a glance about as if uncertain, and his tawny eyes narrowed as they rested on the images overturned and knocked from the wall. Then he stooped, grasped his captive by her neck and crotch, and strode purposefully toward the green pool. And Conan glided from his archway, and raced like a wind of death across the sward.

The giant wheeled, and his eyes flared as he saw the bronzed avenger rushing toward him. In the instant of surprize his cruel grip relaxed and Sancha wriggled from his hands and fell to the grass. The taloned hands spread and clutched, but Conan ducked beneath their swoop and drove his sword through the giant's groin. The black went down like a felled tree, gushing blood, and the next instant Conan was seized in a frantic grasp as Sancha sprang up and threw her arms around him in a frenzy of terror and hysterical relief.

He cursed as he disengaged himself, but his foe was already dead; the tawny eyes were glazed, the long ebony limbs had ceased to twitch.

"Oh, Conan," Sancha was sobbing, clinging tenaciously to him, "what will become of us? What are these monsters? Oh, surely this is hell and that was the devil—"

"Then hell needs a new devil," the Barachan grinned fiercely. "But how did he get hold of you? Have they taken the ship?"

"I don't know." She tried to wipe away her tears, fumbled for her skirt, and then remembered that she wore none. "I came ashore. I saw you follow Zaporavo, and I followed you both. I found Zaporavo— was— was it you who—"

"Who else?" he grunted. "What then?"

"I saw a movement in the trees," she shuddered. "I thought it was you. I called— then I saw that— that black *thing* squatting like an ape among the branches, leering down at me. It was like a nightmare; I couldn't run. All I could do was squeal. Then it dropped from the tree and seized me— oh, oh, oh!" She hid her face in her hands, and was shaken anew at the memory of the horror.

"Well, we've got to get out of here," he growled, catching her wrist. "Come on; we've got to get to the crew—"

"Most of them were asleep on the beach as I entered the woods," she said.

"Asleep?" he exclaimed profanely. "What in the seven devils of hell's fire and damnation—"

"Listen!" She froze, a white quivering image of fright.

"I heard it!" he snapped. "A moaning cry! Wait!"

He bounded up the ledges again, and glaring over the wall, swore with a concentrated fury that made even Sancha gasp. The black men were returning, but they came not alone or empty-handed. Each bore a limp human form; some bore two. Their captives were the Freebooters; they hung slackly in their captor's arms, and but for an occasional vague movement or twitching, Conan would have believed them dead. They had been disarmed but not stripped; one of the blacks bore their sheathed swords, a great armload of bristling steel. From time to time one of the seamen voiced a vague cry, like a drunkard calling out in sottish sleep.

Like a trapped wolf Conan glared about him. Three arches led out of the court of the pool. Through the eastern arch the blacks had left the court, and through it they would presumably return. He had entered by the southern arch. In the western arch he had hidden, and had not had time to notice what lay beyond it. Regardless of his ignorance of the plan of the castle, he was forced to make his decision promptly.

Springing down the wall, he replaced the images with frantic haste, dragged the corpse of his victim to the pool and cast it in. It sank instantly, and as he looked, he distinctly saw an appalling contraction— a shrinking, a hardening. He hastily turned away, shuddering. Then he seized his companion's arm and led her hastily toward the southern archway, while she begged to be told what was happening.

"They've bagged the crew," he answered hastily. "I haven't any plan, but we'll hide somewhere and watch. If they don't look in the pool, they may not suspect our presence."

"But they'll see the blood on the grass!"

"Maybe they'll think one of their own devils spilled it," he answered.

"Anyway, we'll have to take the chance."

They were in the court from which he had watched the torture of the boy, and he led her hastily up the stair that mounted the southern wall, and forced her into a crouching position behind the balustrade of the balcony; it was poor concealment, but the best they could do.

SCARCELY had they settled themselves, when the blacks filed into the court. There was a resounding clash at the foot of the stairs, and Conan stiffened, grasping his sword. But the blacks passed through an archway on the southwestern side, and they heard a series of thuds and groans. The giants were casting their victims down on the sward. An hysterical giggle rose to Sancha's lips, and Conan quickly clapped his hand over her mouth, stifling the sound before it could betray them.

After awhile they heard the padding of many feet on the sward below, and then silence reigned. Conan peered over the wall. The court was empty. The blacks were once more gathered about the pool in the adjoining court, squatting on their haunches. They seemed to pay no heed to the great smears of blood on the sward and the jade rim of the pool. Evidently blood stains were nothing unusual. Nor were they looking into the pool. They were engrossed in some inexplicable conclave of their own; the tall black was playing again on his golden pipes, and his companions listened like ebony statues.

Taking Sancha's hand, Conan glided down the stair, stooping so that his head would not be visible above the wall. The cringing girl followed perforce, staring fearfully at the arch that let into the court of the pool, but through which, at that angle, neither the pool nor its grim throng was visible. At the foot of the stair lay the swords of the Zingarans. The clash they had heard had been the casting down of the captured weapons.

Conan drew Sancha toward the southwestern arch, and they silently crossed the sward and entered the court beyond. There the Freebooters lay in careless heaps, mustaches bristling, ear-rings glinting. Here and there one stirred or groaned restlessly. Conan bent down to them, and Sancha knelt beside him, leaning forward with her hands on her thighs.

"What is that sweet cloying smell?" she asked nervously. "It's on all their breaths."

"It's that damned fruit they were eating," he answered softly. "I remember the smell of it. It must have been like the black lotus, that makes men sleep. By Crom, they are beginning to awake— but they're unarmed, and I have an idea that those black devils won't wait long before they begin their magic on them. What chance will the lads have, unarmed and stupid with slumber?"

He brooded for an instant, scowling with the intentness of his thoughts; then he seized Sancha's olive shoulder in a grip that made her wince.

"Listen! I'll draw those black swine into another part of the castle and keep them busy for awhile. Meanwhile you shake these fools awake, and bring their swords to them— it's a fighting chance. Can you do it?"

"I— I— don't know!" she stammered, shaking with terror, and hardly knowing what she was saying.

With a curse Conan caught her thick tresses near her head and shook her until the walls danced to her dizzy sight.

"You *must* do it!" he hissed. "It's our only chance!"

"I'll do my best!" she gasped, and with a grunt of commendation and an encouraging slap on the back that nearly knocked her down, he glided away.

A few moments later he was crouching at the arch that opened into the court of the pool, glaring upon his enemies. They still sat about the pool, but were beginning to show evidences of an evil impatience. From the court where lay the rousing buccaneers he heard their groans growing louder, beginning to be mingled with incoherent curses. He tensed his muscles and sank into a pantherish crouch, breathing easily between his teeth.

The jeweled giant rose, taking his pipes from his lips— and at that instant Conan was among the startled blacks with a tigerish bound. And as a tiger leaps and strikes among his prey, Conan leaped and struck: thrice his blade flickered before any could lift a hand in defense; then he bounded from among them and raced across the sward. Behind him sprawled three black figures, their skulls split.

But though the unexpected fury of his surprize had caught the giants off guard, the survivors recovered quickly enough. They were at his heels as he ran through the western arch, their long legs sweeping them over the ground at headlong speed. However, he felt confident of his ability to outfoot them at will; but that was not his purpose. He intended leading them on a long chase, in order to give Sancha time to rouse and arm the Zingarans.

And as he raced into the court beyond the western arch, he swore. This court differed from the others he had seen. Instead of round, it was octagonal, and the arch by which he had entered was the only entrance or exit.

Wheeling, he saw that the entire band had followed him in; a group clustered in the arch, and the rest spread out in a wide line as they approached. He faced them, backing slowly toward the northern wall. The line bent into a semicircle, spreading out to hem him in. He continued to move backward, but more and more slowly, noting the spaces widening between the pursuers. They feared lest he should try to dart around a horn of the crescent, and lengthened their line to prevent it.

He watched with the calm alertness of a wolf, and when he struck it was with the devastating suddenness of a thunderbolt— full at the center of the crescent. The giant who barred his way went down cloven to the middle of the

breast-bone, and the pirate was outside their closing ring before the blacks to right and left could come to their stricken comrade's aid. The group at the gate prepared to receive his onslaught, but Conan did not charge them. He had turned and was watching his hunters without apparent emotion, and certainly without fear.

This time they did not spread out in a thin line. They had learned that it was fatal to divide their forces against such an incarnation of clawing, rending fury. They bunched up in a compact mass, and advanced on him without undue haste, maintaining their formation.

CONAN KNEW that if he fell foul of that mass of taloned muscle and bone, there could be but one culmination. Once let them drag him down among them where they could reach him with their talons and use their greater body-weight to advantage, even his primitive ferocity would not prevail. He glanced around the wall and saw a ledge-like projection above a corner on the western side. What it was he did not know, but it would serve his purpose. He began backing toward that corner, and the giants advanced more rapidly. They evidently thought that they were herding him into the corner themselves, and Conan found time to reflect that they probably looked on him as a member of a lower order, mentally inferior to themselves. So much the better. Nothing is more disastrous than underrating one's antagonist.

Now he was only a few yards from the wall, and the blacks were closing in rapidly, evidently thinking to pin him in the corner before he realized his situation. The group at the gate had deserted their post and were hastening to join their fellows. The giants half crouched, eyes blazing like golden hell-fire, teeth glistening whitely, taloned hands lifted as if to fend off attack. They expected an abrupt and violent move on the part of their prey, but when it came, it took them by surprise.

Conan lifted his sword, took a step toward them, then wheeled and raced to the wall. With a fleeting coil and release of steel muscles, he shot high in the air, and his straining arm hooked its fingers over the projection. Instantly there was a rending crash and the jutting ledge gave way, precipitating the pirate back into the court.

He hit on his back, which for all its springy sinews would have broken but for the cushioning of the sword, and rebounding like a great cat, he faced his foes. The dancing recklessness was gone from his eyes. They blazed like blue bale-fire; his mane bristled, his thin lips snarled. In an instant the affair had changed from a daring game to a battle of life and death, and Conan's savage nature responded with all the fury of the wild.

The blacks, halted an instant by the swiftness of the episode, now made to sweep on him and drag him down. But in that instant a shout broke the stillness.

Wheeling, the giants saw a disreputable throng crowding the arch. The buccaneers weaved drunkenly, they swore incoherently; they were addled and bewildered, but they grasped their swords and advanced with a ferocity not dimmed in the slightest by the fact that they did not understand what it was all about.

As the blacks glared in amazement, Conan yelled stridently and struck them like a razor-edged thunderbolt. They fell like ripe grain beneath his blade, and the Zingarans, shouting with muddled fury, ran groggily across the court and fell on their gigantic foes with bloodthirsty zeal. They were still dazed; emerging hazily from drugged slumber, they had felt Sancha frantically shaking them and shoving swords into their fists, and had vaguely heard her urging them to some sort of action. They had not understood all she said, but the sight of strangers, and blood streaming, was enough for them.

In an instant the court was turned into a battle-ground which soon resembled a slaughter-house. The Zingarans weaved and rocked on their feet, but they wielded their swords with power and effect, swearing prodigiously, and quite oblivious to all wounds except those instantly fatal. They far outnumbered the blacks, but these proved themselves no mean antagonists. Towering above their assailants, the giants wrought havoc with talons and teeth, tearing out men's throats, and dealing blows with clenched fists that crushed in skulls. Mixed and mingled in that *mêlée*, the buccaneers could not use their superior agility to the best advantage, and many were too stupid from their drugged sleep to avoid blows aimed at them. They fought with a blind wild-beast ferocity, too intent on dealing death to evade it. The sound of the hacking swords was like that of butchers' cleavers, and the shrieks, yells and curses were appalling.

Sancha, shrinking in the archway, was stunned by the noise and fury; she got a dazed impression of a whirling chaos in which steel flashed and hacked, arms tossed, snarling faces appeared and vanished, and straining bodies collided, rebounded, locked and mingled in a devil's dance of madness.

Details stood out briefly, like black etchings on a background of blood. She saw a Zingaran sailor, blinded by a great flap of scalp torn loose and hanging over his eyes, brace his straddling legs and drive his sword to the hilt in a black belly. She distinctly heard the buccaneer grunt as he struck, and saw the victim's tawny eyes roll up in sudden agony; blood and entrails gushed out over the driven blade. The dying black caught the blade with his naked hands, and the sailor tugged blindly and stupidly; then a black arm hooked about the Zingaran's head, a black knee was planted with cruel force in the middle of his back. His head was jerked back at a terrible angle, and something cracked above the noise of the fray, like the breaking of a thick branch. The conqueror dashed his victim's body to the earth— and as he did, something like a beam of blue light flashed

across his shoulders from behind, from right to left. He staggered, his head toppled forward on his breast, and thence, hideously, to the earth.

SANCHA TURNED SICK. She gagged and wished to vomit. She made abortive efforts to turn and flee from the spectacle, but her legs would not work. Nor could she close her eyes. In fact, she opened them wider. Revolted, repelled, nauseated, yet she felt the awful fascination she had always experienced at sight of blood. Yet this battle transcended anything she had ever seen fought out between human beings in port raids or sea battles. Then she saw Conan.

Separated from his mates by the whole mass of the enemy, Conan had been enveloped in a black wave of arms and bodies, and dragged down. Then they would quickly have stamped the life out of him, but he had pulled down one of them with him, and the black's body protected that of the pirate beneath him. They kicked and tore at the Barachan and dragged at their writhing comrade, but Conan's teeth were set desperately in his throat, and the pirate clung tenaciously to his dying shield.

An onslaught of Zingarans caused a slackening of the press, and Conan threw aside the corpse and rose, blood-smeared and terrible. The giants towered above him like great black shadows, clutching, buffeting the air with terrible blows. But he was as hard to hit or grapple as a blood-mad panther, and at every turn or flash of his blade, blood jetted. He had already taken punishment enough to kill three ordinary men, but his bull-like vitality was undiminished.

His war-cry rose above the medley of the carnage, and the bewildered but furious Zingarans took fresh heart and redoubled their strokes, until the rending of flesh and the crunching of bone beneath the swords almost drowned the howls of pain and wrath.

The blacks wavered, and broke for the gate, and Sancha squealed at their coming and scurried out of the way. They jammed in the narrow archway, and the Zingarans stabbed and hacked at their straining backs with strident yelps of glee. The gate was a shambles before the survivors broke through and scattered, each for himself.

The battle became a chase. Across grassy courts, up shimmering stairs, over the slanting roofs of fantastic towers, even along the broad coping of the walls, the giants fled, dripping blood at each step, harried by their merciless pursuers as by wolves. Cornered, some of them turned at bay and men died. But the ultimate result was always the same— a mangled black body twitching on the sward, or hurled writhing and twisting from parapet or tower roof.

Sancha had taken refuge in the court of the pool, where she crouched, shaking with terror. Outside rose a fierce yelling, feet pounded the sward, and through the arch burst a black red-stained figure. It was the giant who wore the gemmed head-band. A squat pursuer was close behind, and the black turned, at

the very brink of the pool. In his extremity he had picked up a sword dropped by a dying sailor, and as the Zingaran rushed recklessly at him, he struck with the unfamiliar weapon. The buccaneer dropped with his skull crushed, but so awkwardly the blow was dealt, the blade shivered in the giant's hand.

He hurled the hilt at the figures which thronged the arch, and bounded toward the pool, his face a convulsed mask of hate. Conan burst through the men at the gate, and his feet spurned the sward in his headlong charge.

But the giant threw his great arms wide and from his lips rang an inhuman cry—the only sound made by a black during the entire fight. It screamed to the sky its awful hate; it was like a voice howling from the pits. At the sound the Zingarans faltered and hesitated. But Conan did not pause. Silently and murderously he drove at the ebon figure poised on the brink of the pool.

But even as his dripping sword gleamed in the air, the black wheeled and bounded high. For a flash of an instant they saw him poised in midair above the pool; then with an earth-shaking roar, the green waters rose and rushed up to meet him, enveloping him in a green volcano.

CONAN checked his headlong rush just in time to keep from toppling into the pool, and he sprang back, thrusting his men behind him with mighty swings of his arms. The green pool was like a geyser now, the noise rising to deafening volume as the great column of water reared and reared, blossoming at the crest with a great crown of foam.

Conan was driving his men to the gate, herding them ahead of him, beating them with the flat of his sword; the roar of the water-spout seemed to have robbed them of their faculties. Seeing Sancha standing paralyzed, staring with wide-eyed terror at the seething pillar, he accosted her with a bellow that cut through the thunder of the water and made her jump out of her daze. She ran to him, arms outstretched, and he caught her up under one arm and raced out of the court.

In the court which opened on the outer world, the survivors had gathered, weary, tattered, wounded and blood-stained, and stood gaping dumbly at the great unstable pillar that towered momentarily nearer the blue vault of the sky. Its green trunk was laced with white; its foaming crown was thrice the circumference of its base. Momentarily it threatened to burst and fall in an engulfing torrent, yet it continued to jet skyward.

Conan's eyes swept the bloody, naked group, and he cursed to see only a score. In the stress of the moment he grasped a corsair by the neck and shook him so violently that blood from the man's wounds splattered all near them.

"Where are the rest?" he bellowed in his victim's ear.

"That's all!" the other yelled back, above the roar of the geyser. "The others were all killed by those black—"

"Well, get out of here!" roared Conan, giving him a thrust that sent him staggering headlong toward the outer archway. "That fountain is going to burst in a moment—"

"We'll all be drowned!" squawked a Freebooter, limping toward the arch.

"Drowned, hell!" yelled Conan. "We'll be turned to pieces of petrified bone! Get out, blast you!"

He ran to the outer archway, one eye on the green roaring tower that loomed so awfully above him, the other on stragglers. Dazed with blood-lust, fighting, and the thunderous noise, some of the Zingarans moved like men in a trance. Conan hurried them up; his method was simple. He grasped loiterers by the scruff of the neck, impelled them violently through the gate, added impetus with a lusty kick in the rear, spicing his urgings for haste with pungent comments on the victim's ancestry. Sancha showed an inclination to remain with him, but he jerked away her twining arms, blaspheming luridly, and accelerated her movements with a tremendous slap on the posterior that sent her scurrying across the plateau.

Conan did not leave the gate until he was sure all his men who yet lived were out of the castle and started across the level meadow. Then he glanced again at the roaring pillar looming against the sky, dwarfing the towers, and he too fled that castle of nameless horrors.

The Zingarans had already crossed the rim of the plateau and were fleeing down the slopes. Sancha waited for him at the crest of the first slope beyond the rim, and there he paused for an instant to look back at the castle. It was as if a gigantic green-stemmed and white-blossomed flower swayed above the towers, the roar filled the sky. Then the jade-green and snowy pillar broke with a noise like the rending of the skies, and walls and towers were blotted out in a thunderous torrent.

Conan caught the girl's hand, and fled. Slope after slope rose and fell before them, and behind sounded the rushing of a river. A glance over his straining shoulder showed a broad green ribbon rising and falling as it swept over the slopes. The torrent had not spread out and dissipated; like a giant serpent it flowed over the depressions and the rounded crests. It held a consistent course— *it was following them*.

The realization roused Conan to a greater pitch of endurance. Sancha stumbled and went to her knees with a moaning cry of despair and exhaustion. Catching her up, Conan tossed her over his giant shoulder and ran on. His breast heaved, his knees trembled; his breath tore in great gasps through his teeth. He reeled in his gait. Ahead of him he saw the sailors toiling, spurred on by the terror that gripped him.

The ocean burst suddenly on his view, and in his swimming gaze floated the *Wastrel*, unharmed. Men tumbled into the boats helter-skelter. Sancha fell into

the bottom and lay there in a crumpled heap. Conan, though the blood thundered in his ears and the world swam red to his gaze, took an oar with the panting sailors.

WITH HEARTS ready to burst from exhaustion, they pulled for the ship. The green river burst through the fringe of trees. Those trees fell as if their stems had been cut away, and as they sank into the jade-colored flood, they vanished. The tide flowed out over the beach, lapped at the ocean, and the waves turned a deeper, more sinister green.

Unreasoning, instinctive fear held the buccaneers, making them urge their agonized bodies and reeling brains to greater effort; what they feared they knew not, but they did know that in that abominable smooth green ribbon was a menace to body and to soul. Conan knew, and as he saw the broad line slip into the waves and stream through the water toward them without altering its shape or course, he called up his last ounce of reserve strength so fiercely that the oar snapped in his hands.

But their prows bumped against the timbers of the *Wastrel*, and the sailors staggered up the chains, leaving the boats to drift as they would. Sancha went up on Conan's broad shoulder, hanging limp as a corpse, to be dumped unceremoniously on to the deck as the Barachan took the wheel, gasping orders to his skeleton of a crew. Throughout the affair, he had taken the lead without question, and they had instinctively followed him. They reeled about like drunken men, fumbling mechanically at ropes and braces. The anchor chain, unshackled, splashed into the water, the sails unfurled and bellied in a rising wind. The *Wastrel* quivered and shook herself, and swung majestically seaward. Conan glared shoreward; like a tongue of emerald flame, a ribbon licked out on the water futilely, an oar's length from the *Wastrel's* keel. It advanced no further. From that end of the tongue, his gaze followed an unbroken stream of lambent green across the white beach, and over the slopes, until it faded in the blue distance.

The Barachan, regaining his wind, grinned at the panting crew. Sancha was standing near him, hysterical tears coursing down her cheeks. Conan's breeks hung in blood-stained tatters; his girdle and sheath were gone, his sword, driven upright into the deck beside him, was notched and crusted with red. Blood thickly clotted his black mane, and one ear had been half torn from his head. His arms, legs, breast and shoulders were bitten and clawed as if by panthers. But he grinned as he braced his powerful legs, and swung on the wheel in sheer exuberance of muscular might.

"What now?" faltered the girl.

"The plunder of the seas!" he laughed. "A paltry crew, and that chewed and clawed to pieces, but they can work the ship, and crews can always be found. Come here, girl, and give me a kiss."

"A kiss?" she cried hysterically. "You think of kisses at a time like this?"

His laughter boomed above the snap and thunder of the sails, as he caught her up off her feet in the crook of one mighty arm, and smacked her red lips with resounding relish.

"I think of Life!" he roared. "The dead are dead, and what has passed is done! I have a ship and a fighting crew and a girl with lips like wine, and that's all I ever asked. Lick your wounds, bullies, and break out a cask of ale. You're going to work ship as she never was worked before. Dance and sing while you buckle to it, damn you! To the devil with empty seas! We're bound for waters where the seaports are fat, and the merchant ships are crammed with plunder!"

---

## 18: The Death Hound

*Dion Fortune*

Violet M. Firth, 1890-1946

*The Royal Magazine*, Oct 1922

Collected in: *The Secrets of Dr Taverner*, 1926

"WELL?" said my patient when I had finished stethoscoping him, "have I got to go softly all the days of my life?"

"Your heart is not all it might be," I replied, "but with care it ought to last as long as you want it. You must avoid all undue exertion, however."

The man made a curious grimace. "Supposing exertion seeks me out?" he asked.

"You must so regulate your life as to reduce the possibility to a minimum."

Taverner's voice came from the other side of the room. "If you have finished with his body, Rhodes, I will make a start on his mind."

"I have a notion," said our patient, "that the two are rather intimately connected. You say I must keep my body quiet,"— he looked at me— "but what am I to do if my mind deliberately gives it shocks?" and he turned to my colleague.

"That is where I come in," said Taverner. "My friend has told you what to do; now I will show you how to do it. Come and tell me your symptoms."

"Delusions," said the stranger as he buttoned his shirt. "A black dog of ferocious aspect who pops out of dark corners and chivvies me, or tries to. I haven't done him the honour to run away from him yet; I daren't, my heart's too dicky, but one of these days I am afraid I may, and then I shall probably drop dead."

Taverner raised his eyes to me in a silent question. I nodded; it was quite a likely thing to happen if the man ran far or fast.

"What sort of a beast is your dog?" enquired my colleague.

"No particular breed at all. Just plain dog, with four legs and a tail, about the size of a mastiff, but not of the mastiff build."

"How does he make his appearance?"

"Difficult to say; he does not seem to follow any fixed rule, but usually after dusk. If I am out after sundown, I may look over my shoulder and see him padding along behind me, or if I am sitting in my room between daylight fading and lamp lighting, I may see him crouching behind the furniture watching his opportunity."

"His opportunity for what?"

"To spring at my throat."

"Why does he not take you unawares?"

"This is what I cannot make out. He seems to miss so many chances, for he always waits to attack until I am aware of his presence."

"What does he do then?"

"As soon as I turn and face him, he begins to close in on me! If I am out walking, he quickens his pace so as to overtake me, and if I am indoors he sets to work to stalk me round the furniture. I tell you, he may only be a product of my imagination, but he is an uncanny sight to watch."

The speaker paused and wiped away the sweat that had gathered on his forehead during this recital.

Such a haunting is not a pleasant form of obsession for any man to be afflicted with, but for one with a heart like our patient's it was peculiarly dangerous.

"What defence do you offer to this creature?" asked Taverner.

"I keep on saying to it 'You're not real, you know, you are only a beastly nightmare, and I'm not going to let myself be taken in by you.' "

"As good a defence as any," said Taverner. "But I notice you talk to it as if it were real."

"By Jove, so I do!" said our visitor thoughtfully; "that is something new. I never used to do that. I took it for granted that the beast wasn't real, was only a phantom of my own brain, but recently a doubt has begun to creep in. Supposing the thing is real after all? Supposing it really has power to attack me? I have an underlying suspicion that my hound may not be altogether harmless after all."

"He will certainly be exceedingly dangerous to you if you lose your nerve and run away from him. So long as you keep your head, I do not think he will do you any harm."

"Precisely. But there is a point beyond which one may not keep one's head. Supposing, night after night, just as you were going off to sleep, you wake up knowing the creature is in the room, you see his snout coming round the corner of the curtain, and you pull yourself together and get rid of him and settle down again. Then just as you are getting drowsy, you take a last look round to make sure that all is safe, and you see something dark moving between you and the dying glow of the fire. You daren't go to sleep, and you can't keep awake. You may know perfectly well that it is all imagination, but that sort of thing wears you down if it is kept up night after night."

"You get it regularly every night?"

"Pretty nearly. Its habits are not absolutely regular, however, except that, now you come to mention it, it always gives me Friday night off; if it weren't for that, I should have gone under long ago. When Friday comes I say to it: 'Now, you brute, this is your beastly Sabbath,' and go to bed at eight and sleep the clock round."

"If you care to come down to my nursing home at Hindhead, we can probably keep the creature out of your room and ensure you a decent night's sleep," said Taverner. "But what we really want to know is—," he paused almost imperceptibly, "why your imagination should haunt you with dogs, and not, shall we say, with scarlet snakes in the time-honoured fashion."

"I wish it would," said our patient. "If it was snakes I could 'put more water with it' and drown them, but this slinking black beast—" He shrugged his shoulders and followed the butler out of the room.

"Well, Rhodes, what do you make of it?" asked my colleague after the door closed.

"On the face of it," I said, "it looks like an ordinary example of delusions, but I have seen enough of your queer cases not to limit myself to the internal mechanism of the mind alone. Do you consider it possible that we have another case of thought transference?"

"You are coming along," said Taverner, nodding his head at me approvingly. "When you first enjoined me, you would unhesitatingly have recommended bromide for all the ills the mind is heir to; now you recognize that there are more things in heaven and earth than were taught you in the medical schools.

"So you think we have a case of thought transference? I am inclined to think so too. When a patient tells you his delusions, he stands up for them, and often explains to you that they are psychic phenomena, but when a patient recounts psychic phenomena, he generally apologizes for them, and explains that they are delusions. But why doesn't the creature attack and be done with it, and why does it take its regular half-holiday as if it were under the Shop Hours Act?"

He suddenly slapped his hand down on the desk.

"Friday is the day the Black Lodges meet. We must be on their trail again; they will get to know me before we have finished. Someone who got his occult training in a Black Lodge is responsible for that ghost hound. The reason that Martin gets to sleep in peace on Friday night is that his would-be murderer sits in Lodge that evening and cannot attend to his private affairs."

"His would-be-murderer?" I questioned.

"Precisely. Anyone who sends a haunting like that to a man with a heart like Martin's knows that it means his death sooner or later. Supposing Martin got into a panic and took to his heels when he found the dog behind him in a lonely place?"

"He might last for half-a-mile," I said, "but I doubt if he would get any further."

"This is a clear case of mental assassination. Someone who is a trained occultist has created a thought-form of a black hound, and he is sufficiently in touch with Martin to be able to convey it to his mind by means of thought

transference, and Martin sees, or thinks he sees, the image that the other man is visualizing.

"The actual thought-form itself is harmless except for the fear it inspires, but should Martin lose his head and resort to vigorous physical means of defence, the effort would precipitate a heart attack, and he would drop dead without the slightest evidence to show who caused his death. One of these days we will raid those Black Lodges, Rhodes; they know too much. Ring up Martin at the Hotel Cecil and tell him we will drive him back with us tonight."

"How do you propose to handle the case?" I asked.

"The house is covered by a psychic bell jar, so the thing cannot get at him while he is under its protection. We will then find out who is the sender, and see if we can deal with him and stop it once and for all. It is no good disintegrating the creature, its master would only manufacture another; it is the man behind the dog that we must get at.

"We shall have to be careful, however, not to let Martin think we suspect he is in any danger, or he will lose his one defence against the creature, a belief in its unreality. That adds to our difficulties, because we daren't question him much, less we rouse his suspicions. We shall have to get at the facts of the case obliquely."

On the drive down to Hindhead, Taverner did a thing I had never heard him do before, talk to a patient about his occult theories. Sometimes, at the conclusion of a case, he would explain the laws underlying the phenomena in order to rid the unknown of its terrors and enable his patient to cope with them, but at the outset, never.

I listened in astonishment, and then I saw what Taverner was fishing for. He wanted to find out whether Martin had any knowledge of occultism himself, and used his own interest to waken the other's— if he had one.

My colleague's diplomacy bore instant fruit. Martin was also interested in these subjects, though his actual knowledge was nil— even I could see that.

"I wish you and Mortimer could meet," he said. "He is an awfully interesting chap. We used to sit up half the night talking of these things at one time."

"I should be delighted to meet your friend," said Taverner. "Do you think he could be persuaded to run down one Sunday and see us? I am always on the lookout for anyone I can learn something from."

"I— I am afraid I could not get hold of him now," said our companion, and lapsed into a preoccupied silence from which all Taverner's conversational efforts failed to rouse him. We had evidently struck some painful subject, and I saw my colleague make a mental note of the fact.

As soon as we got in, Taverner went straight to his study, opened the safe, and took out a card index file.

"Maffeo, Montague, Mortimer," he muttered, as he turned the cards over. "Anthony William Mortimer. Initiated into the Order of the Cowled Brethren, October, 1912; took office as Armed Guard, May, 1915. Arrested on suspicion of espionage, March, 1916. Prosecuted for exerting undue influence in the making of his mother's will. (Everybody seems to go for him, and no one seems to be able to catch him.) Became Grand Master of the Lodge of Set the Destroyer. Knocks, two, three, two, password, 'Jackal.'

"So much for Mr. Mortimer. A good man to steer clear of, I should imagine. Now I wonder what Martin has done to upset him."

As we dared not question Martin, we observed him, and I very soon noticed that he watched the incoming posts with the greatest anxiety. He was always hanging about the hail when they arrived, and seized his scanty mail with eagerness, only to lapse immediately into despondency. Whatever letter it was that he was looking for never came. He did not express any surprise at this, however, and I concluded that he was rather hoping against hope than expecting something that might happen.

Then one day he could stand it no longer, and as for the twentieth time I unlocked the mailbag and informed him that there was nothing for him, he blurted out: "Do you believe that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder,' Dr. Rhodes?"

"It depends on the nature," I said. "But I have usually observed if you have fallen out with someone, you are more ready to overlook his shortcomings when you have been away from him for a time."

"But if you are fond of someone?" he continued, half-anxiously, half-shamefacedly.

"It is my belief that love cools if it is not fed," I said. "The human mind has great powers of adaptation, and one gets used, sooner or later, to being without one's nearest and dearest."

"I think so, too," said Martin, and I saw him go off to seek consolation from his pipe in a lonely corner.

"So there is a woman in the case," said Taverner when I reported the incident. "I should rather like to have a look at her. I think I shall set up as a rival to Mortimer; if he sends black thought forms, let me see what I can do with a white one."

I guessed that Taverner meant to make use of the method of silent suggestion, of which he was a past-master.

Apparently Taverner's magic was not long in working, for a couple of days later I handed Martin a letter which caused his face to light up with pleasure, and sent him off to his room to read it in private. Half an hour later he came to me in the office and said:

"Dr. Rhodes, would it be convenient if I had a couple of guests to lunch tomorrow?"

I assured him that this would be the case, and noted the change wrought in his appearance by the arrival of the long wished-for letter. He would have faced a pack of black dogs at that moment.

Next day I caught sight of Martin showing two ladies round the grounds, and when they came into the dining-room he introduced them as Mrs. and Miss Hallam. There seemed to be something wrong with the girl, I thought; she was so curiously distraught and absent-minded. Martin, however, was in the seventh heaven; the man's transparent pleasure was almost amusing to witness. I was watching the little comedy with a covert smile, when suddenly it changed to tragedy.

As the girl stripped her gloves off she revealed a ring upon the third finger of her left hand. It was undoubtedly an engagement ring. I raised my eyes to Martin's face, and saw that his were fixed upon it. In the space of a few seconds the man crumpled; the happy little luncheon party was over. He strove to play his part as host, but the effort was pitiful to watch, and I was thankful when the close of the meal permitted me to withdraw.

I was not allowed to escape however. Taverner caught my arm as I was leaving the room and drew me out on the terrace.

"Come along," he said. "I want to make friends with the Hallam family; they may be able to throw some light on our problem."

We found that Martin had paired off with the mother, so we had no difficulty in strolling round the garden with the girl between us. She seemed to welcome the arrangement, and we had not been together many minutes before the reason was made evident.

"Dr. Taverner," she said, "may I talk to you about myself?"

"I shall be delighted, Miss Hallam," he replied. "What is it you want to ask me about?"

"I am so very puzzled about something. Is it possible to be in love with a person you don't like?"

"Quite possible," said Taverner, "but not likely to be very satisfactory,"

"I am engaged to a man," she said, sliding her engagement ring on and off her finger, "whom I am madly, desperately in love with when he is not there, and as soon as he is present I feel a sense of horror and repulsion for him. When I am away, I long to be with him, and when I am with him, I feel as if everything were wrong and horrible. I cannot make myself clear, but do you grasp what I mean?"

"How did you come to get engaged to him?" asked Taverner.

"In the ordinary way. I have known him nearly as long as I have Billy," indicating Martin, who was just ahead of us, walking with the mother.

"No undue influence was used?" said Taverner.

"No, I don't think so. He just asked me to marry him, and I said I would."

"How long before that had you known that you would accept him if he proposed to you?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought of it; in fact the engagement was as much a surprise to me as to everyone else. I had never thought of him in that way till about three weeks ago, and then I suddenly realized that he was the man I wanted to marry. It was a sudden impulse, but so strong and clear that I knew it was the thing for me to do."

"And you do not regret it?"

"I did not until today, but as I was sitting in the dining room I suddenly felt how thankful I should be if I had not got to go back to Tony."

Taverner looked at me. "The psychic isolation of this house has its uses," he said. Then he turned to the girl again. "You don't suppose that it was Mr. Mortimer's forceful personality that influenced your decision?"

I was secretly amused at Taverner's shot in the dark, and the way the girl walked blissfully into his trap.

"Oh, no," she said, "I often get those impulses; it was on just such a one that I came down here."

"Then," said Taverner, "it may well be on just such another that you got engaged to Mortimer, so I may as well tell you that it was I who was responsible for that impulse."

The girl stared at him in amazement.

"As soon as I knew of your existence I wanted to see you. There is a soul over there that is in my care at present, and I think you play a part in his welfare."

"I know I do," said the girl, gazing at the broad shoulders of the unconscious Martin with so much wistfulness and yearning that she clearly betrayed where her real feelings lay.

"Some people send telegrams when they wish to communicate, but I don't; I send thoughts, because I am certain they will be obeyed. A person may disregard a telegram, but he will act on a thought, because he believes it to be his own; though, of course, it is necessary that he should not suspect he is receiving suggestion, or he would probably turn round and do the exact opposite."

Miss Hallam stared at him in astonishment. "Is such a thing possible?" she exclaimed. "I can hardly believe it."

"You see that vase of scarlet geraniums to the left of the path? I will make your mother turn aside and pick one. Now watch."

We both gazed at the unconscious woman as Taverner concentrated his attention upon her, and sure enough, as they drew abreast of the vase, she turned aside and picked a scarlet blossom.

"What are you doing to our geraniums?" Taverner called to her.

"I am so sorry," she called back, "I am afraid I yielded to a sudden impulse."

"All thoughts are not generated within the mind that thinks them," said Taverner. "We are constantly giving each other unconscious suggestions, and influencing minds without knowing it, and if a man who understands the power of thought deliberately trains his mind in its use, there are few things he cannot do."

We had regained the terrace in the course of our walk, and Taverner took his farewell and retired to the office. I followed him, and found him with the safe open and his card index upon the table.

"Well, Rhodes, what do you make of it all?" he greeted me.

"Martin and Mortimer after the same girl," said I. "And Mortimer uses for his private ends the same methods you use on your patients."

"Precisely," said Taverner. "An excellent object lesson in the ways of black and white occultism. We both study the human mind— we both study the hidden forces of nature; I use my knowledge for healing and Mortimer uses his for destruction."

"Taverner," I said, facing him, "what is to prevent you also from using your great knowledge for personal ends?"

"Several things, my friend," he replied. "In the first place, those who are taught as I am taught are (though I say it who shouldn't) picked men, carefully tested. Secondly, I am a member of an organization which would assuredly exact retribution for the abuse of its training; and, thirdly, knowing what I do, I dare not abuse the powers that have been entrusted to me. There is no such thing as a straight line in the universe; everything works in curves; therefore it is only a matter of time before that which you send out from your mind returns to it. Sooner or later Martin's dog will come home to its master."

Martin was absent from the evening meal, and Taverner immediately enquired his whereabouts.

"He walked over with his friends to the crossroads to put them on the bus for Hazlemere," someone volunteered, and Taverner, who did not seem too well satisfied looked at his watch.

"It will be light for a couple of hours yet," he said. "If he is not in by dusk, Rhodes, let me know."

It was a grey evening, threatening storm, and darkness set in early. Soon after eight I sought Taverner in his study and said: "Martin isn't in yet, doctor."

"Then we had better go and look for him," said my colleague.

We went out by the window to avoid observation on the part of our other patients, and, making our way through the shrubberies, were soon out upon the moor.

"I wish we knew which way he would come," said Taverner. "There is a profusion of paths to choose from. We had better get on to high ground and watch for him with the field-glasses."

We made our way to a bluff topped with wind-torn Scotch firs, and Taverner swept the heather paths with his binoculars. A mile away he picked out a figure moving in our direction, but it was too far off for identification.

"Probably Martin," said my companion, "but we can't be sure yet. We had better stop up here and await events; if we drop down into the hollow we shall lose sight of him. You take the glasses; your eyes are better than mine. How infernally early it is getting dark tonight. We ought to have had another half-hour of daylight."

A cold wind had sprung up, making us shiver in our thin clothes, for we were both in evening dress and hatless. Heavy grey clouds were banking up in the west, and the trees moaned uneasily. The man out on the moor was moving at a good pace, looking neither to right nor left. Except for his solitary figure the great grey waste was empty.

All of a sudden the swinging stride was interrupted; he looked over his shoulder, paused, and then quickened his pace. Then he looked over his shoulder again and broke into a half trot. After a few yards of this he dropped to a walk again, and held steadily on his way, refusing to turn his head.

I handed the glasses to Taverner.

"It's Martin right enough," he said; "and he has seen the dog."

We could make out now the path he was following, and, descending from the hill, set out at a rapid pace to meet him. We had gone about a quarter of a mile when a sound arose in the darkness ahead of us; the piercing, inarticulate shriek of a creature being hunted to death.

Taverner let out such a halloo as I did not think human lungs were capable of. We tore along the path to the crest of a rise, and as we raced down the opposite slope, we made out a figure struggling across the heather. Our white shirt fronts showed up plainly in the gathering dusk, and he headed towards us. It was Martin running for his life from the death hound.

I rapidly outdistanced Taverner, and caught the hunted man in my arms as we literally cannoned into each other in the narrow path. I could feel the played-out heart knocking like a badly-running engine against his side. I laid him flat on the ground, and Taverner coming up with his pocket medicine case, we did what we could.

We were only just in time. A few more yards and the man would have dropped. As I straightened my back and looked round into the darkness, I

thanked God that I had not that horrible power of vision which would have enabled me to see what it was that had slunk off over the heather at our approach. That something went I had no doubt, for half a dozen sheep, grazing a few hundred yards away, scattered to give it passage.

We got Martin back to the house and sat up with him. It was touch-and-go with that ill-used heart, and we had to drug the racked nerves into oblivion.

Shortly after midnight Taverner went to the window and looked out.

"Come here, Rhodes," he said. "Do you see anything?"

I declared that I did not.

"It would be a very good thing for you if you did," declared Taverner. "You are much too fond of treating the thought-forms that a sick mind breeds as if, because they have no objective existence, they were innocuous. Now come along and see things from the viewpoint of the patient."

He commenced to beat a tattoo upon my forehead, using a peculiar syncopated rhythm. In a few moments I became conscious of a feeling as if a suppressed sneeze were working its way from my nose up into my skull. Then I noticed a faint luminosity appear in the darkness without, and I saw that a greyish-white film extended outside the window. Beyond that I saw the Death Hound!

A shadowy form gathered itself out of the darkness, took a run towards the window, and leapt up, only to drive its head against the grey film and fall back. Again it gathered itself together, and again it leapt, only to fall back baffled. A soundless baying seemed to come from the open jaws, and in the eyes gleamed a light that was not of this world. It was not the green luminosity of an animal, but a purplish grey reflected from some cold planet beyond the range of our senses.

"That is what Martin sees nightly," said Taverner, "only in his case the thing is actually in the room. Shall I open a way through the psychic bell jar it is hitting its nose against, and let it in?"

I shook my head and turned away from that nightmare vision. Taverner passed his hand rapidly across my forehead with a peculiar snatching movement.

"You are spared a good deal," he said, "but never forget that the delusions of a lunatic are just as real to him as that hound was to you."

We were working in the office next afternoon when I was summoned to interview a lady who was waiting in the hall. It was Miss Hallam, and I wondered what had brought her back so quickly.

"The butler tells me that Mr. Martin is ill and I cannot see him, but I wonder if Dr. Taverner could spare me a few minutes?"

I took her into the office, where my colleague expressed no surprise at her appearance.

"So you have sent back the ring?" he observed.

"Yes," she said. "How do you know? What magic are you working this time?"

"No magic, my dear Miss Hallam, only common sense. Something has frightened you. People are not often frightened to any great extent in ordinary civilized society, so I conclude that something extraordinary must have happened. I know you to be connected with a dangerous man, so I look in his direction. What are you likely to have done that could have roused his enmity? You have just been down here, away from his influence, and in the company of the man you used to care for; possibly you have undergone a revulsion of feeling. I want to find out, so I express my guess as a statement; you, thinking I know everything, make no attempt at denial, and therefore furnish me with the information I want."

"But, Dr. Taverner," said the bewildered girl, "why do you trouble to do all this when I would have answered your question if you had asked me?"

"Because I want you to see for yourself the way in which it is possible to handle an unsuspecting person," said he. "Now tell me what brought you here."

"When I got back last night, I knew I could not marry Tony Mortimer," she said, "and in the morning I wrote to him and told him so. He came straight round to the house and asked to see me. I refused, for I knew that if I saw him I should be right back in his power again. He then sent up a message to say that he would not leave until he had spoken to me, and I got in a panic. I was afraid he would force his way upstairs, so I slipped out of the back door and took the train down here, for somehow I felt that you understood what was being done to me, and would be able to help. Of course, I know that he cannot put a pistol to my head and force me to marry him, but he has so much influence over me that I am afraid he may make me do it in spite of myself."

"I think," said Taverner, "that we shall have to deal drastically with Master Anthony Mortimer."

Taverner took her upstairs, and allowed her and Martin to look at each other for exactly one minute without speaking, and then handed her over to the care of the matron.

Towards the end of dinner that evening I was told that a gentleman desired to see the secretary, and went out to the hall to discover who our visitor might be. A tall, dark man with very peculiar eyes greeted me.

"I have called for Miss Hallam," he said.

"Miss Hallam?" I repeated as if mystified.

"Why, yes," he said, somewhat taken aback. "Isn't she here?"

"I will enquire of the matron," I answered.

I slipped back into the dining-room, and whispered to Taverner, "Mortimer is here."

He raised his eyebrows. "I will see him in the office," he said.

Thither we repaired, but before admitting our visitor, Taverner arranged the reading lamp on his desk in such a way that his own features were in deep shadow and practically invisible.

Then Mortimer was shown in. He assumed an authoritative manner. "I have come on behalf of her mother to fetch Miss Hallam home," said he. "I should be glad if you would inform her I am here."

"Miss Hallam will not be returning tonight, and has wired her mother to that effect."

"I did not ask you what Miss Hallam's plans were; I asked you to let her know I was here and wished to see her. I presume you are not going to offer any objection?"

"But I am," said Taverner. "I object strongly."

"Has Miss Hallam refused to see me?"

"I have not inquired."

"Then by what right do you take up this outrageous position?"

"By this right," said Taverner, and made a peculiar sign with his left hand. On the forefinger was a ring of most unusual workmanship that I had never seen before.

Mortimer jumped as if Taverner had put a pistol to his head; he leant across the desk and tried to distinguish the shadowed features, then his gaze fell upon the ring.

"The Senior of Seven," he gasped, and dropped back a pace. Then he turned and slunk towards the door, flinging over his shoulder such a glance of hate and fear as I had never seen before. I swear he bared his teeth and snarled.

"Brother Mortimer," said Taverner, "the dog returns to its kennel tonight."

"Let us go to one of the upstairs windows and see that he really takes himself off," went on Taverner.

From our vantage point we could see our late visitor making his way along the sandy road that led to Thursley. To my surprise, however, instead of keeping straight on, he turned and looked back.

"Is he going to return?" I said in surprise.

"I don't think so," said Taverner. "Now watch; something is going to happen."

Again Mortimer stopped and looked around, as if in surprise. Then he began to fight. Whatever it was that attacked him evidently leapt up, for he beat it away from his chest; then it circled round him, for he turned slowly so as to face it. Yard by yard he worked his way down the road, and was swallowed up in the gathering dusk.

"The hound is following its master home," said Taverner.

We heard next morning that the body of a strange man had been found near Bramshott. It was thought he had died of heart failure, for there were no marks of violence on his body.

"Six miles!" said Taverner. "He ran well!"

**End**