

**PAST  
MASTERS**

**253**

**Beatrice Grimshaw  
Bertram Atkey  
Robert W. Chambers  
Magaret Cox Taylor  
Rafael Sabatini  
Sydney Horler  
Peter Cheyney  
Booth Tarkington  
Edward Dyson**

**and more**

# Past Masters 253

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

15 March 2026

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# 1: St. George and the Dragon

*Katharine Tynan*

Katharine Tynan Hinkson, 1859-1931

*Queenslander* 31 Jan 1925

GUY VEREKER did not half like the milieu in which he found himself. He was no puritan, but the manners of the ladies at the Palais de Danse did not altogether content him. He had been four years in the East, where a man would have gone miles to see a white lady and sit at a civilised dinner table. Women, white women, were to him something sacred and precious; and here were white women dancing with an abandon not much less complete than he had seen at Port Said.

Vallancy had prevailed upon him to go. Vallancy was an irresponsible youngster who took his gaieties where he found them. He had been an immense favourite with the ladies of mixed blood in the various stations where they had been together. A good boy, Vallancy, and quite loyal to the people who gave him an exaggerated hospitality. Vallancy would take no harm. There he was dancing like a teetotum with a fat Frenchwoman, who nevertheless, danced exquisitely. Vallancy would go on till daylight.

Guy Vereker disregarded the many glances of invitation sent his way. He was disgruntled, half-vexed with his own fastidiousness. Why could he not enjoy himself like the others ?

He moved towards the door which led into the garden which made the fortune of this special Palais de Danse among many others. *Le Jardin des Lilac*—it was the name the Palais advertised itself by. It was a big garden for Paris. The lilacs were in bloom. The scent came in by the open door and shook him with some memory of England and home, to which he was going, by slow stages. Why should he hurry? His old home was empty— his mother dead, Nessie, his only sister married. His little girl had not been able to wait for him over the daily torture of these four years of War.

The fresh smell of the lilac ; and a frightened bird twittered. He moved nearer the door. The dancing floor was horrible, with all those languishing women, and odd-looking young men. Dash Vallancy! Why had he allowed the youngster to persuade him?

He looked for Vallancy's sleek dark head insular among the long-haired students, his smooth pink cheeks, but while his eye moved over the dancing figures, it was suddenly arrested. He frowned. Almost he made a step forward, but restrained himself. Good Heavens, what was that child doing in that *galere*? He did not call it by so polite a name.

His eye had fallen on a young girl, of such a pale fairness as to be very conspicuous among the swarthy women. She looked no more than seventeen,

and in all that heat and glare she was chill and pure as a snowdrop in the Spring. Her hair was the palest gold, like the hair of a young child. Her profile turned towards him was soft and pure. She was dressed in palest green, with the smallest decolletage, her round arms veiled by what he had heard Nessie call "angel sleeves," of the floating green gauze. On the pale hair was a little green wreath.

If a young angel had suddenly dropped into the Palais de Danse it could not have been stranger.

The girl was dancing with a young man who wore his hair *en brosse*— a variant from the long hair of some of the others. The frenzy of the dance was upon him, Guy Vereker had seen that curious frenzy before— in the East. A good many of those who were dancing seemed to be under its influence.

Surely, the girl was looking alarmed. As she was borne along in the arms of her whirling partner, held in a clasp that made Guy Vereker oddly enraged, she spent appealing glances from side to side. No one noticed. She had a swooning look— quite different from the languor of the other dancing ladies. Her small ungloved hands seemed as though they strove to push off the man who held her so fast.

Right into the dance, stepped Guy Vereker. He had some difficulty in arresting the progress of the dancing man. At last he succeeded.

"Pardon, M'sieur!" he said, in his best French. It went against the grain to be civil to the brute, but he did not want a scene. "Pardon M'sieu! M'sieu has not observed that the lady he dances with is ill."

The Frenchman, who had been frowning prodigiously, released the girl. She tottered. Guy Vereker put out an arm and supported her.

"Pardon, M'sieu," he said, "the young lady is my countrywoman. I may perhaps be permitted to take her to her chaperon. M'sieu must not have his dance interrupted."

The Frenchman looked at him, the frenzy of the dancing dervish in his eye.

"I would suggest the garden," he said, bowing. "The Meess have not responded to the dance. Yonder is her chaperon. She has the spirit of the dance."

Guy had put down the pale girl on a seat in a little recess. He glanced in the direction the Frenchman indicated. The dance was just ending. The chaperon was coming towards them, the long "fish-tail" train of her black and gold dress held over her arm. Vereker had noticed her— a pale woman with a long nose, narrow eyes, a tight red mouth, and a curious sinuous grace. An ugly woman, with a beautiful figure. Vereker's feeling for her had been one of repulsion. She, the chaperon of that pale child!

She came towards them with a sidling gait, her eyes narrowed, her head thrust forward as she observed Vereker standing with the Frenchman. Her red

mouth curled in a smile. She was looking at Vereker. He drew himself up stiffly. He had an amazed, horrified sense that she might be fascinating, even to him. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" He did not say it, but he felt as though he said it.

"Why, what is the matter?" she asked.

The Frenchman explained volubly. The Meess had had a sudden faintness, This Monsieur had very kindly taken charge. If Madame would honour him by dancing with him.

"Gustave is dancing mad," she said to Vereker, with her queer smile. "It will be very kind if you will take Miss Wyndham into the garden for a little air. They overheat these places abominably!"

She laughed, her hand already on the Frenchman's shoulder. "Buck up, Hilary!" she said to the pale girl. "This gentleman will take care of you. I can't really take you home, you know, the night is too young."

She was already dancing as she concluded, with a look at Vereker. The dance swept her away. Suddenly the atmosphere was poisonous to Vereker. It was no wonder that child felt faint.

"Come out of this, " he said, almost imperiously. "You will faint if you stay here. There is a garden and lilacs in bloom— you can smell them."

She stood up languidly and went with him. He felt that she was trembling. He wanted to steady her with his arm, but he could not do it in the sight of these people. His heart was full of a queer pity and rage over the girl— that she should be in such a place— with such a chaperon. Why, the woman frightened him, though he had seen her type before. She was Lilith, she was the Snake, the Temptress.

They were over the threshold, and in the garden. He had been afraid of the garden. He need not have been afraid. The habitues of the Palais de Danse come to dance, not to promenade the garden, and there was a fresh west wind, it was that which had blown the scent of the lilac into the stifling room. They had the garden to themselves. It was a night full of scents for a bird twittered now and again. But it was too fresh for the dancers. A couple who had followed them out had gone back again, the woman crying out, "*Mon Dieu, qu'il fait froid!*"

There was a young moon above the trees of the garden. He put her sitting down on a seat under a lilac-bush while he fetched her a glass of water. He had taken the two ends of the floating green scarf she was wearing and fastened it about her throat. He did not sit down beside her. He stood watching her bent head, as though he would stand between her and any one that came.

How the brazen music affronted the quiet night! There were stars overhead with the moon as though it was country and not Paris.

"I feel better now," she said looking up at him. "You are very kind."

"I want you to think of me as a countryman who wants to help you," he said, keeping his voice very steady. "Believe me, you can trust me— as though I were your brother. Tell me what brings you to a place like this— in charge of that— lady? It is not a fit place for you."

Suddenly like a frightened child she broke down in tears. She covered her face with her hands.

"I am so frightened," she sobbed. "I want to get back, but I have no money. She, Mrs. Leigh, she only laughed at me. She says I am a little fool not to enjoy myself. I have not dared to tell Papa. He sent me with Mrs. Leigh. She is the daughter of our Lady of the Manor, but she is so unlike her. She has quarrelled with her husband, and she thinks of noth-ing but pleasure. Papa would be so vexed. Mrs. Leigh can be so nice, and Papa thinks so much of her. He would think me so ungrateful. "

He listened to the simple explanation. Somehow he understood more than was told. He could see some simple old man, a village doctor perhaps, a parson, dazzled by this wicked woman with her strange power of fascination. He did not doubt that Mrs. Leigh was a wicked woman. Something came into his mind. Leigh! Leigh! there was an association with a brown head, just slightly streaked with grey, down on a table, a man's folded arms; a sharp sudden sob. It was something he had turned away from, half-grieved and half-shocked. Poor Humphrey Leigh; Was it possible that the woman was Humphrey Leigh's wife?

"Mrs. Leigh, " he repeated, "Humphrey Leigh."

"Yes; you know him?" the girl looked up at him with wet eyes.

"Yes, I know him," he said grimly. He was hearing Humphrey Leigh's voice saying brokenly:

"My God, why wasn't I knocked out instead of some happier man?"

Well, she had strangled poor Leigh in her coils. It had been a piteous, a shocking thing to hear him confess that he still loved her.

"Tell me what has been happening," he said; and, sitting down beside her he drew one of her hands into his, and held it fast. He was very quiet as he listened to her making no sign of the horror and indignation he felt. Apparently her terrified reluctance had whetted some cruelty in the woman's nature, stirring it to.....

"She will take me to these places," whispered the girl, still trembling and sobbing. "She says I am a fool— that it is only seeing life. I am so afraid of the men— and the women, who laugh. To-night, she sent me along with the man you saw me dancing with in a fiacre. She followed with another man."

As though she defined the rage in him, she added:

"There was nothing. He knew I was frightened and seemed sorry. Perhaps I should not have been frightened. To-night when the dance is over we go to supper with the Baron— you saw the man she was dancing with?"

Yes, he had seen the man she was dancing with.

"Listen," he said, "Will you trust me absolutely? Will you do as I suggest?"

"I was going to ask you to take me home," she said simply, "but see I have no money at all. Oh, I trust you, I trust you entirely. You are not like these men. If you would take my ticket for me, and put me in the train, Papa will be so grateful. He doesn't know, he is always with his books."

A clock began to strike, somewhere. She clung to his arm counting the strokes. It was eleven o'clock.

"They will dance till twelve," she said. "Soon they will come looking for me. How am I to escape? In these clothes I dare not return to the flat."

He had a thought that if he chose to join Mrs. Leigh's party for reasons of his own, he would be warmly welcomed. But he could not pretend. He could not have the child exposed for one minute longer than was possible to the influences of Mrs. Leigh's friends.

"Can you fetch your cloak?" he said, "I am going to take you to my sister, who happens, most luckily, to be in Paris. Her husband is at the Embassy."

"Oh," said the girl, in bewildering gratitude. "You are going to save me! I know now why I felt when I saw your face that God had not forgotten me."

Her trust was terrible, still it was sweet. Suppose he had not been a decent person? What a child.

Lady Trevor seemed hardly surprised when her brother arrived at her apartment at 11.30 at night with a stray young woman whom he had picked up at the Palais de Danse. Guy was such a quixotic creature. But when she heard the tale, after Hilary Wyndham had been put to bed, she was very grave about it. Mrs. Leigh's reputation had reached her ears. She did not minimise the danger to an innocent child like Hilary Wyndham, the daughter of a scholarly recluse whom Nessie had met once and pronounced an old Babe in the Wood.

"I shall have to travel back to England myself with her," she said with a resigned shrug of her shoulders. "Of course it matters less as Hugh is so taken up with his conference. The poor wives! I shall have to explain to Hilary's Papa why my brother ran away with his daughter to opened his dear innocent eyes to that Delilah's thoroughly bad character. My dear Guy must simply disappear out of it."

Guy did, but not for very long. As he explained afterwards he simply could not trust Hilary to the protection of her simple-minded Papa, with a possible Mrs. Leigh hanging somewhere in the background. So the simplest way to look after Hilary, who seemed to have taken a terror of the world, was to make her his own.

Coming back after a long honeymoon, when Hilary had forgotten her terrors, they came face to face with Mrs. Leigh in the *entresol* of the Opera at Paris. He

was aware of the lady's presence before he saw her, from the sudden violent clutch of his wife's hand on his arm.

Mrs. Leigh stopped.

"That was very unceremonious, your departure," she said to Hilary. "But of course it was justified by what followed. You left Gustave inconsolable."

They passed her by without a word.

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## 2: Roughing it With Reggie

*Sydney Horler*

1888-1954

*Pearson's Magazine*, Oct 1918

*Horler's first magazine story*

HAVE you noticed how deucedly complex Life has become ? I know it sounds frightfully like Aldous Huxley, but it's a fact. That's why I'm mentioning it.

There's poor old Reggie— Reggie Tibbs.

He's all right now, and looks like settling down into a comfortable middle-age, with a large family and a safe job as vicar's warden, but he was up to his neck in trouble at one time. Reggie and I went to school together. He says he will always regard me as his best friend. That's enough— I've finished. But there's no getting away from it that he messed things horribly.

Reggie is in Steel. Has been in Steel ever since he went into the City, and will probably be buried in a steel coffin. That's the kind of chap he is. Cuts out everything else; thinks it's all bosh. Red-faced, beefy sort. Going to run to fat before long— you know the type. Doesn't talk much— all about Steel when he does.

When I heard that Reggie— sounds ridiculous a man like that being called Reginald; his name should have been Milner, or something rugged like Horatio— was engaged, I began to have qualms. Chap like that's got to marry right, or it's going to be rough on the woman. I found out it was rough on poor old Reggie!

I missed Reggie for a month after his bereaved friends read all about the sad ceremony in the *Morning Post*; thought that the supply of Steel had given out— extraordinary business! Then I was having a bit of food in Simpson's one day when he came in. My first impression was that he wanted some of those jolly little liver pills— cunning little blighters— wanted pocketfuls of them!

"Cheeri-o!" I said. "We must have a drink on this; in fact, we must have several drinks! Where have you been hiding ?"

The poor old chap didn't seem a bit wholesome to me when he sat down— had that unpleasant cold-cod look about the eyes.

"Get it off your chest, old top!" I cried. "Trust your Uncle Clarence!"

"You're a decent fellow, Clarrie," he replied in a far-away voice. "But I'm only a bit tired. Oh, by the way, you must run in to dinner one night and meet the wife." Then he pitched into his mutton.

Now that set me thinking. When a chap's only been married a month, you naturally expect him to be full of his subject— *My Wife in Seven Large Volumes* kind of thing. Reggie never had been one of the talking sort, but this was being scant— scant; that's the word.

"Where are you livin'?" I asked, a bit coldly, for I felt that he wasn't playing the game, somehow. He pushed his plate away as though all the savour had gone, and groaned.

"Rhodenia Park," he replied, hanging his head.

"Rhodenia Park!" I said. "What is it?"

"It's a garden colony," replied Reggie, still using that far-off voice as though he were a ventriloquist. "Melis— I mean Millicent— likes it; all her interests are centred there."

I felt myself going faint; if I hadn't had the presence of mind to pour out another glass of Burgundy and nip it down quick, I believe I should have gone off.

"How do I get there— taxi, train, tube, bus, or by boat from Glasgow?" I managed to stammer.

He pushed a large map of the suburbs into my hand and rushed away.

BY JOVE! It was absolutely ghastly, the whole business. It was not until I got there that I realized what the poor old chap was suffering. Rhodenia Park was not so much a suburb as a home for those poor souls who had gone off the rails through eating a straight diet of raw beans. There was a sort of cerebral combustion about that place that quite put the wind up me; a week in that show and I should have been going about in shorts and a guitar singing sonnets to Bernard Shaw.

We were mooning round old Reggie's shack, which looked to me as though the chap who had built it meant it first of all to be a church, but had finished it off as a circus, when I heard Reggie's breath coming quick.

"My wife," he says— and leaves me to it.

I stared— I don't mind telling you I did. Reggie being in Steel, I should have thought he would have picked up something solid. Not a bit of it. She was one of the drooping, willowy kind. Not that she wouldn't have looked well if she had only taken care of herself. But she was wearing a potato-sack sort of greeny thing over her shoulders, and an intense expression as though her food wasn't doing her any good.

"Awfully glad to meet you, Mrs. Tibbs," I said as pleasantly as I could. I was going to do the right thing by Reggie as long as I had strength and retained my faculties.

"Reginald is a scoffer, and not of the Elect!" she comes back to me, rolling her eyes, as though she had indigestion and didn't think it polite to mention it before a strange man. "But you— you look as though, for all your foppish vanities, you had a soul!"

Never a civil word— just that High Priestess stuff, and nothing to sweeten it. And I her husband's best friend! If old Reggie hadn't come up then I don't know

what I should have done, for a lot of sallow men with long hair, and even more sallow women with short hair, started coming towards us.

Directly she caught sight of them, Mrs. Tibbs (I didn't like to think of her as Reggie's wife) clapped her hands, and cried: "Oh, Let Us Be Glad!"

"O Sister, We Will Be Glad!" shouts back the woosy crowd— honestly. She, whom Reggie had sworn to cherish all the days of his life, put herself at the head, and the procession, which would have made Old Man Barnum reach for his cheque-book, started towards the Tibbs' home.

Arm-in-arm, and resting on each other for mutual support, Reggie and I brought up the rear. I like to think I'm a feeling sort of chap, and I wasn't going to ask a lot of fool questions. But there was something I had to know.

"What's going to happen?" I whispered. I had to know what I was in for with all those rotters about.

"Milli— I mean Melisande— is giving a dinner to-night, and afterwards there'll be a Communion of Souls."

That was the time when I started to feel my hair pushing my hat over my eyes. A chap in Steel talking about Communion of Souls...

"Don't leave me, old man!" he said, and there was absolutely a throb in the poor old chap's voice.

"Leave it to me, boy! But what does it all mean?"

This is how I figured it out after he had finished: Old Reggie had been bitten in the neck by one of those wild-bird women who are always talking about Culture and all that sort of bally rot. She must have had it pretty badly, from what I gathered, for although her real name was Millicent, she insisted on being called Melisande. That will show you how awful the whole thing was— woosy, absolutely woosy! And instead of settling down in Clarges Street or somewhere near things, she had insisted upon bringing him to this colony of the Completely Half-Baked. You can see for yourselves, now, how ghastly the whole thing was— especially for a chap in Steel.

Some of you know me— you know how particular Jenkins is the way I turn out. Well, can you figure me sitting down Turk-fashion, eating my food from my lap like any wretched heathen? And no napkin! I tell you, I shudder now when I think of it. Reggie and I were the only sane persons there; all the rest were wearing sandals and bare legs. And the stuff was all half cooked and wretchedly messy. Nothing civilized— beans and tomatoes, and all that ghastly stuff. If there had been a table, I'd have pitched my little lot underneath; but we were all squatting on the floor. Milli— I mean Melisande— had given the order: "Our souls are free; so shall our bodies be!"

That dinner lasted the best part of a year, and all the time the bean-eaters were looking at Reggie and I as though we were beastly savages who ate with

our fingers. I tell you, the first chance I had I slipped away for a Scotch, and it saved my life.

Poor old Reggie didn't have anything to say. He knew I was an understanding sort of chap. Just looked into my eyes. You wouldn't have thought it of a fellow who was as much in Steel as he was. Just shows you how broken up he was. At last his mouth opened.

"It's wearing me down," he said; and then, as though afraid to say too much, he went on: "But we'd better be getting back. Melis— I mean Millicent— is giving a Circle Reading, and someone— Oswald FitzHugh, I think— has promised to propound his theory of Entrammelled Expansion, or the Higher Cult of Expressive Gladness!"

I was forced to have another Scotch after that. When I heard Reggie— Reggie Tibbs— talking stuff like that, I went all limp.

When we got back to the chapel, which they called the dining-room, we found them lying about just like the pictures of those old Roman johnnies. Only one of them had a chair, and this was on a kind of platform. Melis— I mean Millicent— sat in this, looking as though she had a gumboil. She glowered at us when we came in, and the rest of the woosers followed her example. I felt as though I were being tried for bigamy. As for poor old Reggie, he seemed to rattle.

"As you have not yet received Gladness into your souls," howled the woman who had brought the blight into my poor friend's life, "come into the Inner Circle. Perhaps the Light will come to you and rout out the Dark Places!"

What with the excitement, sympathy for poor old Reggie, and the Scotch, I wasn't so steady as I might have been. Something was in the way as I barged forward with good old Reggie in support, and I kicked it away. It proved to be a bean-eater's bare shin, and if he had any Gladness in his soul, it didn't sound much like it.

The blighter glared at me, and muttered something in his dirty bit of a beard. I wanted him to say something I could hear— for it turned out to be the wooser I was sitting next at that horrible dinner. If I'd had those Scotches before, I'd have choked him with his own beans.

The President's Opening Address from the Chair was awful tosh. It nearly made me risk all and rush out for another lifesaver, and I could hear old Reggie making noises like stifled birds. According to Melis— I mean Millicent— she and the other poor twisted freaks had resolved that the outside world was far too crude for them to have anything to do with. So they lived together, away from the rough influences of Bayswater, West Hampstead and Maida Vale, each helping the other on the Raw Bean Route, and each giving off rays of Hope and Comradeship. At least, that was what Melisande said.

They lived on Proteids— and Gladness— the most miserable set of blighters I ever set eyes on! Nothing surprised me after that— not even when the wooser whose shin I had kicked proved to be the notable Oswald FitzHugh, who was to read a paralysing paper on— what was it? Oh, "Untrammelled Expansion, or the Higher Cult of Expressive Gladness".

Oswald was no beauty; let me put that on record at once. He may have been Glad, but he wasn't *spirituel*. The sight of his feet inside his sandals made me revolt against Life as I found it. His was one of those large, pallid faces, fringed with a sickly beard. He looked something like the moon in the middle of a heat-wave. If a cheese is aesthetic, then so was Oswald. But not otherwise. He had some trouble in getting on his feet, but it seemed worth it, for the woosers gave little panting sounds of delight when he clutched his forehead and commenced to let out the hot air. And directly Oswald got into full song, I knew that he was getting at me; he was trying to make me the goat.

"Be Glad!" he cried, glaring in my direction. "O my brother, be Glad! Cast away the Sin that is in you, holding you back from the Inner Circle of True Soul-Gladness, and Live the New Life! Begin to-night! I can see that you are a frequenter of Taverns and the Low Places; throw aside the bonds that hold you in Thralldom, that arrest your progress towards Gladness! Come, and I will lead you; I will sate your soul in Gladness; it will shine from your Eyes; it will Show in your Face. O Sinner, who by Fate has strayed into the Magic Inner Circle, Save Yourself— and be Glad!"

And it seemed that Oswald wasn't the only one who wanted me to be Glad. The woosers all swayed towards me in a tempest of pleading.

"Yes! Yes!" they cried, and started sighing in tremendous gusts. I looked at Reggie; but Reggie wasn't worth looking at just then. I felt myself shipping away. If anyone had told me I was mad, I shouldn't have dared to contradict. Something started buzzing in my head.

This got worse when Oswald, the Lad Who Was Glad, started his streaky tenor solo again— leering at me as though he knew what a beastly ass I was feeling.

"Oh, come!" he bleated. "Surrender yourself to me! Show me you have received Gladness."

That buzzing noise up in my dome stopped just then— something snapped. I felt myself mad; madder even than Oswald!

With a spring, I jumped up.

"I am Glad!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

"He is Glad!" cried the woosers in chorus, and all tried to get on their feet at once.

It was some riot! Once they were on their sandals, they started a catch-as-catch-can contest among themselves by way of celebrating the new convert.

One of the females made for Oswald. But Oswald was my meat, and I headed her off. Gladness with me was going to take a peculiar form, and Oswald was essential to the plot. He didn't like the look of me; I could see that. But I was determined to show him how Glad I was; *glad of the chance to hand him a few where they would do him most good!* I was going to pound the Glad Lad, and the woosers would think that it was simply Joy breaking out in me. What Oswald thought didn't matter.

"Brother," I cried, giving him a punch in the chest that made him upset a couple of bean-eaters, "I am Glad to come to you! I never knew what Gladness meant before to-night!" (This with a teasing left that sank into his fat face as though into dough!) "Be Glad with me, brother!" (*Plop!*) "Let Gladness shine from your eyes" — (*biff!*) — "and show in your face!" (*Smack-k!*) The last was a daisy of a right hook which landed clean on the point. Oswald slumbered.

The subsequent proceedings broke up in disorder.

FOR A WEEK I drank nothing but black coffee, and wore a wet towel continuously. Reggie said that I had ruined his life. After doing what I had done, most men would have left it at that. But I had sworn to help him out of the mess — and I was going to do it, even if it meant adopting a wet towel permanently. Then — at 1.15 in the morning — the IDEA came.

FROM THE MOMENT that Reggie — upon my soul, I didn't think he had it in him — advanced up-stage and cried in a high, commanding voice:

"My brothers and sisters, I have brought with me to-night a Super-soul who commands your deepest — Madame Olga Petrolovitch, the world-renowned president of the Sublime Sons of Secret Sadness!" — the excitement was *intense*.

Reggie's introduction knocked 'em flat. They craned their necks until they looked like storks as I, in my character of the Russian prophetess, strode through the crowd, followed closely by Reggie, and mounted the small platform.

Melisande was there — just about to make a speech too, it seemed — but neither Reggie nor I as much as looked at her. It was hard on Reggie, but he was playing for big stakes. "If it had not been for the earnest pleading of my latest disciple" — here I caught hold of Reggie's arm — "I would not have made this journey to-night!" I cried. "All London is waiting to hear my voice — and why should I waste my precious time on a handful of stunted minds who perhaps are too foolish even to understand my words? "But my disciple pleaded" — another arm-squeeze — "and I have come."

A voice — shrill and laden with passion — came from my right.

"Why have you come — why, why, why?"

It was Melisande — a Melisande who looked at that moment almost a real woman. The plot was developing on favourable lines.

"Woman," I replied, "you ask me why I have come. You have only to look into the anguished features of my disciple to know why I have come! I have come to save others— as I have saved him— from the ravages of your baneful influence! Don't speak!" I commanded, as I saw her lips quivering. "I, who come from the Youngest Yogi, He Who gained Knowledge through Sleeping Every Third Night in the Watercress Beds and Eating Filtered Coke, will not be interrupted! Had not my disciple wandered by chance into my Salon and heard the Light as It was Revealed to me, his mind would have given way beneath the Strain imposed upon his intellect by your spurious teachings! Silence!"

I thundered again, as her lips trembled once more. I had got into my stride by this time, and was running well.

"Gladness!—it is a false doctrine! It poisons the mind! It unbalances the brain! It is the last relic of Heathenism! I tell you all, if you want to delve into the innermost secrets of Cosmic Psychology you must be— Secretly Sad!"

There was a sensation in court. There came from the assembled multitude a low, murmurous sound that told me I had them safe until the end of the session.

As for Melisande, they turned doubting glances on her! A fierce hand clawed my sables (by Clarkson). I shook it off. She and I who were wrestling for the soul of Reggie Tibbs faced each other, glaring! Melisande was no longer Melisande— she was Millicent.

"You are a wicked woman!" she cried. "This man is no disciple of yours— I won't allow him to be your disciple! He is my husband, and I won't have him going to your Salon!" I smiled—the wicked smile of the William Le Queux adventuress. Then I looked at Reggie, and he drew me to him.

"What do we care for earthly ties?" I said scornfully. "We, the true followers of the Youngest Yogi, scorn man-made laws— we are of the Spirit!"

"Reginald—Reginald!" screamed the poor mutt— no longer Melisande; no longer Millicent, but plain Mrs. Tibbs. "Why has this creature bewitched you? Tell me!"

Reggie didn't tell her. He put up a hand protestingly as she made a rush for him.

"Back, woman!" I said sternly. "Touch not a Son of Secret Sadness, one upon whom the Youngest Yogi has Laid Hands! My disciple will tell you how hopeless is your desire!"

This was where Reggie had some good lines. And he was splendid— simply splendid!

"I have forsaken the Old Ways!" he said sardonically. "I cleave unto the New. Olga, my Spiritual Bride, will guide my footsteps should they err!" (It had taken a deuce of a lot of coaching to make him word-perfect, but he got it off fine!)

Mrs. Tibbs shivered until the potato-sack arrangement she was wearing in the character of Melisande threatened to slip from its moorings. Then she raised her arms on high.

"Are you mad, Reginald Tibbs?' she shrilled. "Do you realize that I am your lawful wedded wife ?"

"I realize nothing but that I am no longer Wantonly Glad, but Secretly Sad!" replied the priceless old thing, who was patting my face so hard that the grease-paint was coming off. "If you desire to forsake the Old Ways I will be a brother to you, O my sister— but I can be nothing more!"

With a wild, despairing cry, Mrs. Tibbs opined that she wanted the full restitution of her conjugal rights. I pinched Reggie's arms, and he remembered his last lines.

"O my teacher, take me from the demoralizing influences of this house!" he said.

I led him away. While I fumbled in my underskirts for my cigarette-case I allowed Reggie one Scotch.

"Now double back, old son!" I said. "The taxi is waiting, and you ought to find things pretty soft."

They live near me now. She is filling the empty places in Reggie's stomach instead of the empty places in his soul. But she doesn't like me; she must have wormed the truth out of old Reggie. And it was I who turned her into a decent woman!

That's why I say Life is so deucedly complex.

### 3: Samoan Bogies

*Florence Blair, (as by "A Victorian girl")*

1860-1937

*Argus, Melbourne, 13 Aug 1892*

THE ONLY SOUND that breaks the stillness is the splash of the oars and the low roar of the surf on the reef. The tide is coming in rapidly, so the little fishing canoes, whose lights an hour ago twinkled all over the dark bosom of the harbour are safely tucked upon short, the light extinguished and the fishers gone home. It is three hours since we left Vaitele, and we are making little headway because of the strong tide. The rowers seem quite tired out, poor fellows. It is nearly an hour since they sang their last song, and when a Samoan ceases singing he pulls very languidly.

"How far from Apia are we now, Laulii?" someone asks at last.

"Not far," is the reply; "we will be there in half an hour. Are you getting weary of the journey?"

"Oh, no!" is the answer, "who could be? It is so glorious. Listen to the music the breeze is making amongst those palms."

We are very near the shore now, so near that we catch a glimpse of a family gathered at evening prayer through the raised blinds of a house built close to the water's edge.

We are returning from a four days' sojourn at some pretty villages far down the island. One was perched on the summit of a high cliff, another nestling on the shores of a quiet little bay, and the other completely hidden by orange trees and flowering reeds along the banks of a noisy, bustling little river. Laulii, our pretty little Samoan friend and guide, is sitting steering in the stern. She has been very quiet for the last half hour or so, and as the boat grates slightly against a prong of coral she starts and shudders.

We look at her surprised. "How foolish I am," she says, apologetically, "but it is here, just here, that the serpent sinks the canoes. I was thinking of it when the boat bumped, and it frightened me."

"What serpent, Laullii?" we ask; "do tell us about it."

Laulii points to a little dark bay, and tells us that under the water there close to the shore, the Samoans believe that a huge serpent sleeps. If the canoes go in too close this monster, part fish and part beast, is disturbed, and enraged it throws its body across the boat and sinks it. The Samoans all swim like fish, but the serpent has the power of thickening and poisoning the water, so that when the body sinks in it, it never rises again.

"Of course I don't believe in it," says Laulii boldly (now that the dark little bay is some distance behind us), "but it is one of our ghost stories."

Then we ask Laulii to tell us some other of her weird stories. She becomes very serious, and says, "These I will tell you are true— we all believe them— you must not laugh at them."

This we promise at once, and Laulii goes on: "We will soon be round the point of Matautu, and then you will see the ghost light off Mulinuu; it is only seen when the tide is full as it is now. You must have seen it many times. It looks like the light of a fishing boat, only it is larger and blue. When all the boats are on shore, and the harbour is dark as it is now, the light springs up, just at the edge of the reef, and burns bright and clear till the dawn comes.

"Years ago, when it was first seen, the Samoans were very frightened; they called it the devil's light, and begged the missionaries to drive it away. The missionaries said it was phosphorus or something like that, and that it would soon go away. But it will never go away, never, never; it will burn there always when the tide is full, to remind the Samoans how cruel they were once, long ago. My grandfather used to tell me that once a canoe full of people from one of the other islands, who had been driven out of their home by some enemy, came to Samoa and wished to make their home here. But the Samoans forbade them to land, threatened to kill them if they did, and sent them off. It was night, and the tide was very strong. They could not row, they were so worn and tired. When they reached Mulinuu their canoe sank, and they were all drowned. The light sprang up over the place, and it has been there ever since. Look, you can see it now."

We are slowly rounding the point at Matautu, and Mulinuu is in sight. Sure enough, there is the light burning clearly and steadily off the point. It looks like some solitary fishing-boat; it is the only light in the harbour, the men-o'-war having cleared out to sea a day or two ago on account of March, 1889, having been brought rather vividly to mind by a "strong blow" or slight hurricane, which sprang up suddenly.

"Some people say that they have seen ghosts there," goes on Laulii, pointing to the grim looking skeleton of the German man-of-war, the *Adler*, lying on the edge of the reef. "I have not seen them myself, but I have heard the story."

This is certainly not hard to believe, for the feeblest imagination could conjure up ghosts of drowned sailors haunting that dreary wreck-strewn beach. In high noon, when the sun turns the water into a sea of gold, and the harbour is alive with tiny craft, the sight of the ribs and spars of great ships which are scattered about saddens and disturbs one. But at night, when the wind is stirring the palm trees on shore into all sorts of weird whisperings, and the harbour is dark— as it is now— the scene is ghostly in the extreme. In spite of ourselves we feel creepy, and sit close together, our voices sinking to whispers.

Every part of Apia Harbour is full of tragic recollections. Just beyond us is the spot where the *Vandalia* disappeared in the great hurricane in 1889. One

moment the watchers on the bench saw the ship flung high on the crest of a great breaker, and the next moment she was tossed under the shelf-like edge of the reef, leaving not so much as a spur to mark the spot.

Then Laulii tells us a romantic story of a deserted maiden, who drowned herself not far from Apia, her ghost, holding a flaming torch, rises from the water at mid-night, and peers into the faces of passers-by, trying to discover her faithless lover. This youth, evidently, has been wise enough to keep away from the part of the beach the ghost walks, for it is over fifty years, we are told, since the tragedy occurred, and the ghostly maiden is still on the look-out.

All these uncanny tales have really made us quite nervous, and we are delighted when the boat is pushed alongside the tiny wharf, and we clamber up the shaky steps, and hear Jack's cheerful voice telling us he has been expecting us for hours.

Laulii, who has been our guide on the occasion, is, you must know, a great personage in her way. Her father was a chief at the village of Laulii, after which she was called. When little more than a child she married an American, who took her to America and had her educated. She is very pretty and fascinating, and, wonderful to relate, her American training has not spoilt her in the least, for she is as simple, frank and generous as any Samoan in the island. She has the distinction of being the first Samoan to write a book in English, and a very charming book it is too, written in her own graceful, simple English, full of poetic feeling and warm patriotism. Even Jack, who really seems to feel slighted if we are out of his sight for an hour, said when we told him we were going to dispense with his valuable company and conversation for a time and go on a *malaga* with Laulii,

"Oh, that is all right. Laulii is my relash (relation). She cleverest woman in Samoa. Samoan woman, I mean," he added gallantly.

Laulii lives in a Garden of Eden sort of place some miles from Apia, on the road to Vailima, R L Stevenson's place. The Vaisigago, a glorious river, runs through the gardens. Part of the land is laid out in approved civilised fashion, but the rest is planted by the hand of nature, and is just a jungle of palms, orange trees, mangoes, and gorgeous coleus. Built in the civilised part of the ground is a European house, so elegant and complete in detail that it includes a piano, a sewing machine, and "pigs in clover." Laulii is immensely proud of this home of hers. She and her hand-maidens clean and tidy it with scrupulous care every morning, and then scuttle off to a dear old native house close to the river in the jungle at the back, and remain there for the rest of the day. She tells now with much laughter how terrified she was of the first white man she saw when she was a tiny child. He was a missionary, and was strolling along with a huge white umbrella spread (an article she had, of course, never seen before). With a scream she rushed into a bank of high reeds, and remained there trembling and

crying for hours, till her mother found her nearly dead with fright. The white man is held up as the bogy to Samoan children just as the "black" man is to white children, and Laulii tells how, when she was disobedient to her parents, her mother used to say, "The white man will come all take you, "and this threat always frightened her into good behaviour.

In spite of her nine years in America, she seems very much at home down at her own village, telling her numerous nephews and nieces of the peculiar ways of the populace and the wonderful things she saw when she went away in the "big canoe."

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## 4: House Enchanted

*Beatrice Grimshaw*

1870-1953

*Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 26 Nov 1939

IT MIGHT have been the cry of a bat or one of the things, like flying moles, that faintly peep and squeak, filtering among the stars.

It came from the house of Corbal, one of three white men who lived up the Karari, longest and least known of Papuan rivers. He had travelled there years ago, prospecting for gold had found none, but had stayed on, snared by the lure of wild places. Joe Sandeman, Assistant Resident Magistrate, was the second white man. I, Arthur Dane, patrol officer, was the third.

Sandeman was having a whisky on my verandah. The native boy who had just brought the whisky in all but dropped the bottle when he heard the peeps and squeaks in Corbal's house, a little way down the road.

"Spilit!" he cried, and fled to the kitchen.

I said: "They think those noises are the talk of the departed souls. They think that Corbal can call them into his house. Quaint, isn't it?"

Sandeman took a drink and set down his glass determinedly.

"The less you worry about those things or about Corbal," he said, "the better. Some people have strong heads, and some haven't."

He thought I was too much inclined to go off the deep end in the mysteries and mazes of native custom.

"Of course I know it's ventriloquism," I said.

IT WAS a queer night; black as a black snake's back; mosquitoes raging outside; crocodiles, down in the river, bellowing like the ghosts of dead and drowned bullocks. Papua was showing her ugly side.

Sandeman lit his pipe; his hard face showed red in the glare of the match. I wondered if I should ever be as good an officer, ever as worthy to belong to the famous Service. He might be hard, but he was efficient; if fever, or native spears, or river rapids didn't get him first, he was sure to rise.

He said quite suddenly, dropping the previous subject:

"This is no place for a girl, but—"

"What!" I cried. "What girl? Whose?"

"Mine," said the A.R.M., taking a long suck at his pipe. "Coming here to marry me, next boat. I've no leave due this good while; so she said to me— bless her—" He drew at the pipe again; didn't tell me what she had said.

"When's the boat?" I asked, a bit excitedly.

Sandeman answered, "You ought to know that. Bad thing to let go your dates. That's the beginning."

He didn't enlarge on what I he meant, but went on: "Due in 10 days. Three days up the river, with the parson. You and Corbal as witnesses."

"Congratulations. I hope you'll be happy."

"Isabel," he said, with a note in his voice that was new to me— musical almost, one might have called it, if anyone but rough-and-tough Sandeman had been in question— "Isabel would make anyone happy. And," he added after a second, as if he had been thinking the matter over, "she's going to be happy herself. I'll see to that."

You can't order a girl to be happy, I thought. Maybe I was jealous. It seemed to me that beautiful girls like Isabel (I was sure she was beautiful) ought not to be given to moon-faced, almost middle-aged A.R.M.'s.

I said something like that to Corbal, when he Joined me later in the evening. I always: told everything I thought to Corbal: he was a deep well of a man, who never tattled, and you could say anything to him. I even asked him what he was doing with bats inside his house, and he answered, "Can't keep them out," and that seemed sensible enough at the time. Afterwards, though, I thought it did not fit; bats never came into my house, or if they did; did not stay.

Corbal evidently knew about the marriage. He did not say much; he sat listening to me and looking at nothing. An odd figure he was, all legs and arms, lean and fleshless.

"Where's Sandeman how?" he asked.

"He had to go down to the village. He thinks the natives are starting some trouble with the new house they built the other day."

"The Nobo House?"

"The new house," I said. "I don't know what the trouble is, but he says he wants things all cleaned up proper before she comes. It'll be wonderful to have a girl here. We miss a good many things, don't we?"

Corbal said musingly, "That's right I haven't seen a girl for two years and she's pretty-very pretty."

"Why, do you know her?"

"No... But I know that she has fair hair. And blue eyes. And a skin as white as a frangipani flower.."

"How did you hear?" I stated doubtfully. He laughed. I knew Sandeman hadn't told him; the A-B.M. hardly spoke to him if he could help it.

"Just guessing," I thought.

THIRTEEN DAYS LATER the bridal procession came up from the bank of the river— a missionary, a launch engineer, Sandeman, and his girl, slowly walking through the blinding heat of noon. Corbal and I were watching. I gaped and exclaimed, in astonishment, when the face beneath the bride's big hat became visible. Blue eyes, fair hair, skin white and warm as the flowers of the frangipani

under sou'-east season suns; a lovely face, just as the heathen savages, who hadn't seen it, had told each other— and Corbal— that it would be.

We hurried up to the Residency as soon as they had passed. Down in the Village the natives were drumming ceaselessly; their half-wild dogs, disturbed, had begun to wail— a nasty sound— made your flesh creep. Isabel, the bride, stood up in the midst of it all and was married to Sandeman. You could see with every glance she gave, and hear with every word she spoke, that she loved him. I thought, there's no accounting for women.

I do not know what. Corbal thought; he looked at her all the time, but his eyes were blank. When the ceremony was over we signed the station register as witnesses. The engineer and I, I mean. For some reason or other, Sandeman did not ask Corbal to sign.

There was a kind of breakfast afterwards, and the parson' and the engineer went back to the launch.—Corbal and I, after a couple of drinks, were getting up to go, when a native sergeant came in, saluted, and spoke rapidly in native to Sandeman.

I DIDN'T understand what he said, but Corbal evidently did, for I saw him grin in an ugly way, and then put on a face as smooth as butter. Sandeman turned to the bride, his hand on her shoulder.

"I'll have to leave you for half an hour," he said. "No more—" and he whispered something we didn't try to hear. He turned to me.

"This chap says-they're starting the ceremonies for the making of a Nobo House— queer, after I burned the one they were building. I've got to go down and stop it."

"What's a Nobo House, sweet?" Isabel asked. She was pouting a little and no wonder.

"Sorcery and stuff," he told her, "but there's mischief in it, and it can't be allowed. I'm not going to have our honeymoon spoiled by murders."

Murder is a word that has lost its ugly thrill for us who live out-back; it hadn't done so for Isabel, however. She grew a nine pale, Sandeman kissed her and hurried away.

I heard the thud of bare feet marching as the native constables came up from-the barracks and passed by.

"We'll keep you company," I told her. "Nothing to worry about. He'll be back in no time. Come out on the verandah."

She came, a slender thing like a bush lily; her hair was curled and shining, and the scent of some delicate flower clung about her. The sight of her light dress, her satin shoes, beside our khaki clothing and nailed boots, made me feel, of a sudden, in love with white women the world over, and very especially in love with this one; but that wasn't going to do me any good.

I looked at Corbal, to see how he was taking it. His eyes were fixed on the back of her neck; he looked to me like one of those tall, thin herons one sees standing in the river lagoons, waiting for prey.

Sandeman seemed to be having a bit of trouble away below; the natives were running about like ants. They were coming into the village from some place above; they were all dressed up in those ghastly masks they wear for magical ceremonies, and I rather thought they had something dead with them; a dog or a pig; sacrifice .probably. Before we built our station there and brought order it would have been a man. I couldn't see any new house being built, and I was aware that Sandeman had burned the one they were at a few days before.

I wondered where the Nobo House, whatever it might be, was situated. And I wondered whether my superior wasn't beginning to need me down there. I said so to Corbal.

"You're right," he answered, seeming to wake up. "I reckon he will. Better go. I'll look after this little lady."

Isabel hardly heard him; she was intently watching the figures below.

"Do you think he's safe?" she asked , me.

"Of course," I answered her encouragingly, "but I'll go all the same."

I have very keen hearing; as I left, I heard Corbal say to Isabel, "Come to my house; you can see. more from it," and I rather wondered, because he was not in the habit of asking anyone in there.

She answered, "Thanks so much, but my husband told me not to go into any house without him."

"He meant native houses," Corbal explained.

"Thanks, I'd rather stay," she said politely, but determinedly.

There I left them. Corbal said something else; I did not catch it; I was out in the furious sun by that time, .hurrying to the village down the track that was all wet and green, and smelled of perfumed gums and pigs and mud.

SANDEMAN was slanging the natives about something, and slanging his police, too; they seemed upset and unwilling to interfere. He saw me coming and turned on me; asked me what the hell I was doing there?

"I didn't send for you," he said. "Get back, immediately!"

"What's it about?" I asked, turning away.

"But he only said, "Did I tell you to get back or did I not?"

I went.

Reaching the top of the hill again, I went to the Residency by the back, which was the shortest way. There was no one inside; no one on the verandah; no one on the track below. I did not like it. I went to the turn of the road and stood there, wondering what to do. The sound of the village drums had ceased, but it seemed to me as if I could still hear them inside my head— those sinister drums

of the Islands, that roar like fighting bulls, that whisper softly, telling ugly secrets, that beat through the black warm nights like the throb of your own pulses... In my head or out of it, they were going on. And it seemed to me now, that this faint ghostly drumming came from somewhere near; I thought, from Corbal's house.

I took a step round the turn of the track, and saw the bride. She was alone, walking slowly, in her wedding dress, with her white shoes treading the red mud of the tracks, towards the house of Corbal. No one else was visible, anywhere.

I want to make it clear that there was no sort of hypnotism in the matter, no holding up of shiny objects, or making passes, or giving spoken orders. Nobody was constraining her. But all the same, she was doing just what she had said she would not do; she was going into another house.

SOMETHING told me— something that crept like cold water down my back, and made me lick dry lips with a stiffened tongue— that she was going without her will. If she went into that house, I thought, she would get a nasty fright. It was full of ugly things; stuffed heads, daggers, of human bone, dried babies' hands; all the outfit of a New Guinea sorcerer, which Corbal had so painstakingly gathered. Why was she going? I didn't— quite— understand.

But when I had followed the impulse of the moment, to rim forward -call her name, and begin, to lead her by her strangely cold, strangely irresponsive hand, back towards the Residency— I saw Corbal's face. He had been hiding inside the doorway, watching her come slowly towards his house. And the look that he turned on her and on me was the look of a devil. In the next moment I saw him, standing in the doorway, his face as cool and inexpressive as usual.

Isabel didn't speak until we got in, and then she said she thought she had a headache; and would lie down. I did not care to ask any questions, but I thought she hardly knew where she was, or what had happened.

I stayed about the house until I saw Sandeman coming back, saw Isabel run to meet him, and caught one glimpse, as I turned away, of their embrace. Then I went back to my own house. But I could not rest there. It grew dark; I found my way to Corbal's, after the moon rose; somehow, the place attracted me, and I thought I would talk with him.

THERE was a new piece of native stuff set over Corbal's doorway; very good, as were all his curios. It was one of those huge carved wooden birds with wings out-spread, that can be found still in the remoter reaches; of New Guinea rivers, and it is mixed up, invariably, with all sorts of murder and madness. It's supposed to represent the man-of-war-bird, which lives by rapine; snatching its prey alive from the very throat of a previous captor.

I called Corbal's name, but there was no answer; no sound but the papery rustling of the sago thatch, and, away in the valley, the faint, unceasing murmur of the river.

I went back home again and sat for a long while with my head in my hands. In that moment I realised what we pay, all our lives through, for our cherished romance of the wild, we of the famous Service. I should be older than Sandeman before I could afford to bring a bride to this back end of the world— even if I were willing to do so. I was young now, and the wine of youth ran hot in my veins.. But I sat here alone, while over at the Residency, as I watched, the lights were suddenly, softly put out.

For the next few days no one saw much of the bride. When she and Sandeman took up the ordinary life of the station again. It became clear that he was almost morbidly jealous of her. So much so that when he found himself obliged to go out on a two days' visit to a neighboring village he thought of taking Isabel with him. She was willing, delighted even. But when he hesitated, telling her that it was strictly forbidden to take wives on any patrol, short or long, and that he'd probably get into trouble over it, she agreed.

"I shall be all right," she told him cheerfully. "We mustn't spoil your chances of promotion."

Sandeman seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then he looked at me, and said, "Dane will see after you." He gave me an order then: "You'll rig your mosquito net on my veranda, " and sleep there for these next two nights." And, glancing round to see whether Isabel heard him— "Keep your eye on my wife when she leaves the house."

In another minute he was gone.

THE MOON was strong on the verandah of the Residency that night. They say that moonlight drives you mad, if you sleep with it shining on your face. I did not sleep at all, but it shone on me most of the night, and I found myself, in the morning, strained and nervous. I went about my work as usual; there was plenty to do, in the absence of Sandeman.

Towards" evening I grew so heavy with sleep that I could hardly stand; and having seen that Isabel was safe inside the house, sewing away at some of her wedding fineries, I went off to my own shack, intending to take half an hour's rest.

I woke suddenly, as if I had been stabbed. The moon was pouring through the window. Everything was quiet. My watch wasn't going; I did not know the time, but I knew that it was late. I remember saying, as I tugged on my boots, "Good God!"

I ran to the Residency; went through the rooms. Empty.

I hurried to Corbal's house. It was dark, and the door was shut. I listened. No sound within. I called out, and struck the door. Nobody answered. Doors in the wilderness are frail. I kicked that one in and entered.

The light from outside fell through in a torrent of silver. It struck the figure of Isabel, standing, nightdress-clad, in the middle of the floor. Her eyes were open, black with horror, fixed on Corbal, who, like a spider, creeping on a fly, was slowly; advancing..

IT WAS in that tense moment that I remembered— as one sees, suddenly, a whole landscape, hidden before, revealed by one lightning flash— what a Nobo House really was. The sorcerers of the forest had; it was said, the evil art of so enchanting a house that the intended victim was drawn towards it, and obliged to enter whether he would or not. They raised the spirits of the dead to do this, it was said; and carried out other strange and horrible practices.

Corbal, the white man who had sunk to native sorceries, had seized the opportunity given by Sandeman's suppression of the Nobo House to the village, and commandeered the services of his evil friends to work the charm upon his own house.

It would have made a scene for a; play— the three of us standing there,; I with one arm stretched out between Isabel and Corbal; the girl suddenly waking up to the knowledge of where she was, and opening her lips in a scream that I instantly checked, with one hand clapped across her mouth— and Corbal, starting back, as he heard what I had heard— the sound of nailed boots, tramping along the .track below. Sandeman. was coming back, a night too soon.

In. that moment I was seized by the greatest temptation of my life. I knew what Sandeman was; a good man, but jealous and violent when roused. If he found Isabel there, nothing would persuade him— short of the explanation only I could give— that she had not deceived him in the grossest manner. He might kill Corbal; he would certainly cast her off. And I? There'd be divorce court business. There'd be waiting. There'd be a long hill to climb. But at the end of it the white-and-gold girl might be mine.

I STILL believe it might all have come about Just that way. But I shall never know. For what I did was the thing to which mere instinct forced me.

I waited until Sandeman's footstep's had passed the house; then I seized Isabel by the hand, and led her, none hindering me, down the steps and swiftly by the back way home. She was shaken, frightened, bewildered, almost crying. I led her on; I was above myself, amazed to wild unrealities.

We came to the back of the house just as Sandeman, treading carefully, for fear of awakening Isabel, came to by the front. I left her entering her room. She had not said a word; she was shivering as if the night were cold, though I, beside

her, was a-steam with heat. Papaws outside the door, tall trees covered with dangling flowers', smelled heavily; the scent came up as I went to meet Sandeman. I couldn't for a long time after bear the scent of them. " I stopped him as he was taking off his cartridge belt; he had already unwound his puttees, but his boots were on.

I said, "You have to know," and told him everything. In the light of the hanging kerbs, one lamp I saw him turn first red, and then fish-belly white.

He buckled on the belt again; it had his .44 Colt in the holster. He didn't say a word; just went out, strode purposefully into Corbal's house, and after him. ' I he'd thought he would kill Corbal, and in the frame of mind that held me that night it would have seemed no more than justice. I still think he would have done It had he entered the house a few minutes earlier. But I had not reckoned with the Government officer in Sandeman; that side of his character had had time to awake, and to take command. He stood in the middle of the floor, in the pouring moonlight, keeping his distance from, Corbal, who stayed all crouched together in the dusk at the other side of the room. He asked him: "Anything to say?"

Corbal was silent. Sandeman said then: "You know too much. Do you also know—" he used a native word I did not understand.

Corbal said, "Yes." His face was like the face of a skull, looking out of a grave.

"Then you know what to do," Sandeman told him. He turned, we walked out of the house.

My cook boy was asleep when I got home. I roused him.

"Do you know the meaning of this word?" I asked and repeated it. Sleepily he said, "Man he lie down, go finish," and himself lay down again.

I understood. Like other residents of the Land of Mystery, I had heard of the power possessed by many, but not all, natives of letting go their hold on life, when life pressed too hard, or slipping away, as a boat slips its painter, and going out like the boat, silently, into unknown seas. No white man— I thought— had ever learned the secret. None till then.

Sandeman sent for me at dawn next day.

"You can go and arrange for the burying." he said. He did not say funeral. He knew, as I did, that no prayers would be said above the grave.

## 5: Her Last Curious Case

*Dy Edwardson*

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

*Punch* (Melbourne) 26 June 1913

ARTHUR HENRY WARD was an interesting object to the ladies at Scobie's Mountain Retreat. He was young; sufficiently young, at any rate, to be considered romantic in his ailments. At fifty-five one's sicknesses are not invested with sentimental significance by the other sex, but at thirty-five it is different. Arthur Henry was tall, too, and rather good looking. To be young, tall, good-looking and becomingly pale is to be invested with romance wherever two or more women are met and assembled.

There were many women at Scobie's Mountain Retreat, most of them convalescents, lying about becomingly in charming tea-gowns, and looking as romantic as nature and circumstances would permit.

Arthur Henry Wood was a convalescent. Scobie's Mountain Retreat was a well-known resort for convalescents. Its air was peculiarly salubrious; its cooking exquisitely delicate; its mineral waters (springs on the premises) most invigorating. For terms, see advertisements....

Arthur's had been a case of nerves. There had come a time when the stress of toil, in conjunction with somewhat "hard" living, had induced frequent visits from a little blue devil. Mr. Ward's familiar spirit was a very peculiar kind of devil, blue all over with a skin like a scraped pig, and similar hoofs. Out of his head grew one long ivory horn, and he had white porcelain eyes, which he would take out and juggle when bored with the monotony of sitting in the big black chair in Ward's bedroom.

Arthur knew his little blue and white porcine Mephistopheles to be an illusion; but he was none the less real on that account. In fact, to Arthur he was the most real and significant thing in existence. The devil would come after Arthur had gone to bed, and seat himself in the big, black chair, and twiddle his pettitoes, and gaze blandly at Arthur out of his china-white eyes. He must have brought the black chair with him. It had black plumes at the back of it, and there was no such article in the room ordinarily. After sitting so for a couple of hours the blue imp would take his porcelain eyes out and juggle with them. His juggling was most marvellous. It kept Arthur Ward awake all night.

Of course, this had to have an end, either in the lunatic asylum or in a long vacation. Arthur explained things to the head of the firm of Muntchin, Muntchin and Low, wholesale jewellers, and then retired to Scobie's Mountain Retreat. To Arthur's great disgust the blue and white devil found him out, and appeared on the first night, as usual, and brought his black chair with its hearse plumes, and juggled his china-white eyes till four in the morning.

But after Miss Eva Neil arrived the blue devil began to sicken. Miss Neil arrived on the third day. That very night Arthur noticed that the blue of his devil had become much paler. Three nights later he was only a vapoury object, the colour and substance of cigarette smoke, and he no longer juggled his eyes— he was too weak. Then Miss Eva Neil spoke to Arthur, and that night the devil went out altogether. He trailed away like the last whiff of a blown candle. It was a remarkable proof of the efficacy of Scobie's mountain air.

What Miss Neil said was: "You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Why, certainly," answered Arthur from his couch under the window. Nothing would delight him more than to forgive her anything— everything.

"The fact is," said Miss Neil, "I noticed you were reading *The Infinite Capacity*. I have finished my book, and have nothing to read. If—"

"Delighted!" responded Arthur. He was on his feet with promptitude; he departed with alacrity; he returned with all speed— and *The Infinite Capacity*.

"So good of you," said Miss Neil. "But one would be bored to death in this place without a good book."

"Yes; it is rather a dull hole. Salubrious, but stale."

"I have tried the ladies. They will talk of nothing but their complaints, and I came here to forget complaints— my own and others."

"I, too."

"Are you forgetting?"

"Splendidly. And you?"

"I have forgotten that I ever had any old thing the matter with me. Let me lend you my book. *Regina*, it is called, by Sudermann. It is fine."

"Yes," said Arthur. "I have read it. Look here, since the ice is broken, don't let us read. Let us talk and walk."

"Perhaps it would be better for us."

"I am sure it would. Do you know what I have been thinking, lying here these two days?"

"I didn't think you were thinking at all. You seemed to be industriously reading."

"Seemed to be— Really, I was watching you most of the time, and thinking how utterly stupid it was that two people, obviously well suited to interest each other, should be wasting their time over printed words, stories of things, when they might be living the stories for themselves."

"What sort of stories, for instance?"

"Heaven knows. Here we are at work on the introductory passages, however. Let the plot work itself out."

She laughed with great good nature. "I hope it will not be tragedy," she said.

"I hope it will not be comedy," he answered.

"It might be both."

"Let the fates decide. Shall we go for a walk?"

"Very well. My doctor sent me here for the rest cure. He enjoined persistent lassitude, but surely a walk through the long orchard will not kill me?"

"No, no, our story is not going to terminate fatally. But you look strong."

"Yes. That, I understand, is the serious nature of my malady," she laughed.

"But you do not look strong. You are grey, and thin, and nervy."

He nodded. "Yes. But it's going. With attractive company I shall soon be all right. But no more about symptoms. We must play in the sunshine. The play's the thing."

They walked out into the big orchard; they strolled in the sun, and lounged in the shade, and returned hungry and invigorated. No wonder Arthur's devil looked pale and distressed that evening.

On the following night Arthur Henry Ward thought more of Miss Eva Neil than of his familiar spirit. He saw her sitting under the big apple tree, whose boughs let the sunlight through to sprinkle her beautiful auburn hair with powdered gold, and the blue devil whimpered at this neglect.

Eva was a woman of twenty-six, a little over middle height; a tailors-made type, clean cut from her low brow and short, straight nose to her neat, high instep. There was a direct, business-like air about her; but her smile was soft, and womanly. The brown eyes were full of kindness.

It was on the third afternoon. It was under the big apple tree in the orchard. She was sitting on a rug; he lay at full length beside her. The hand, on which she leaned, was almost touching his cheek. He turned suddenly, and kissed the pink knuckles. He clung to her wrist, and kissed the dear hand a dozen times. She had not stirred.

She looked down upon him. There was a harder look in the brown eyes than he had ever seen there.

"I love you," he said. "It's no use vacillating and pretending. I adore you. I have to wait for a few weeks to pass in order that we may be said to have had the conventional courtship; but I can't. I love you now as well as I could in ten years." He raised himself, and moved nearer to her. "What do you say?" he asked eagerly.

She was avoiding his eyes. He tried to turn her face to him, then took her in his arms, and kissed— eyes, lips, cheeks, hair, neck— kissed wherever there was a touch of her.

"I love you! I love you!" he whispered.

She pushed him away. Her face was flushed, but her eyes were cool.

"Well?" she said. "Do you love me? Can you care for me?"

"And if I do?"

"Will you be my wife?"

"This 'is rather' serious, isn't it? You know nothing of me."

"Very well, I take you on trust. Without asking one question, without expecting one word of who, or what, or whence, I'll take you, and thank God for his goodness."

"I may not be so trusting."

"Of course, you don't know me either. I am Arthur Henry Ward. You did not know me either. I am a clerk with Mutchin, Mutchin and Low, wholesale jewellers, city. I get £5 a week, and have expectations and no encumbrances, neither fathers, no mothers, sisters nor brothers, and what uncles and aunts I have are too far removed to be any inconvenience. And, dearest, dearest, I love you!"

"Five pounds a week?" she said, and smiled. "Five pounds and expectations." He looked a little anxious now. "You think me poor?"

"Well, not exactly impoverished. With £5 a week one need not want for bread and butter and ready-made dresses, dirt cheap at 25/ a little late in the season."

He was sorely abashed.

"I never thought of the money side," he said, and his hand fell from her neck. "It seemed to me that I was fairly well fixed, that I could keep a wife very decently on my screw. Denton, at our place, who only gets £3/15/. seems to get along very well, and he has a wife and kiddy."

"Very likely. I have known it done. But then Mrs. Denton must be simple and domesticated— a good housewife. I am not simple. I am not domesticated. I couldn't housekeep for the life of me."

"And you— you don't care for me?"

"That's quite another matter. I do care for you. I suppose I love you."

"You love me! You love me!" He caught her in his arms again. His embrace was not that of an invalid. He held her close and tight.

"If you love me it will be all right. I'll work. I'll get on."

She allowed him to kiss her. She even kissed him. He played with her beautiful hair; he wooed her with a kind of eloquence that she found very sweet.

That night Arthur's blue devil passed. He laughed after it. It was gone for ever. Never again would his life be tortured with such visitors. He would live cleanly. Everything Eva would not approve of must be cut out— cards, horses, wine, women and song all might go to the devil. He had her.

But the question of ways and means was a barrier between them. When he talked of marriage she said: "You mustn't be absurd. I couldn't think of marrying a man with your income. It is utterly impossible."

"Will you wait?"

"What is there to wait for? At the best in a few years you might have three hundred, or three hundred and fifty a year. That would never do. I am rather

fond of the good things of life. I should be miserable without many indulgences that are rather expensive."

"You will make no sacrifice for love, then?"

"Yes. I would make some sacrifice, but not this much."

"You don't love me."

"That is a boy's talk. You are no longer a boy. I am a woman. Let us be practical."

"Then we are to part?"

"Have you no other source of income apart from the shop?"

"None whatever."

"No means? No savings?"

"Nothing."

She would not say no, she would not say yes, and the money question was discussed again and again. She always came to the point of some possible money-making scheme apart from his earnings as a clerk. She grew inquisitive. She plied him with questions. It seemed to him at length that she doubted his word.

"Do you imagine I am keeping something from you?" he asked. "Do you think that if I possessed means of any kind I should hide the fact from you, knowing that I can only win you with money?" He spoke bitterly.

"I cannot marry a poor man."

"Poor! I do not call myself a poor man—"

"Comparatively poor. If you cannot do something I am afraid it would be better if we had never met. If you had seven thousand pounds— five."

"Absurd ! I haven't fifty pounds to my name."

"Then I cannot see what is to be done."

On the following afternoon Arthur had been riding. He returned earlier than he had anticipated. He walked across the velvet lawn to the open window of his room, and looked in. E.va was there. She was very busy. Quietly and systematically, she was searching the place. She looked through the drawers of the small dressing-table; she searched his trunk and portmanteau. Evidently she had already subjected other articles of furniture to a rigid, examination. When she had finished she went to the door, listened for a moment, then, softly opened the door, and disappeared.

What did it mean? Arthur puzzled over the matter for the rest of the day. He could not bring himself to question her. Evidently her suspicion that he possessed property still lingered, and she had hoped to satisfy herself by the discovery of some evidence.

He tried to speak to her of the matter in his mind, but failed. She had fallen far in his estimation. He was cold towards her— full of suspicions. She found him alone in the orchard next morning. She carried an opened telegram in her hand.

"Will you read this?" she said.

He took the message from her fingers, and read:—

*"Wylie arrested. Confesses all. Your man right out of it. Return."*

Arthur looked at her inquiringly, "What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that my work here is done. It means that you had no hand in the big robbery from Muntchin and Muntchin's last June."

"My God! I? Of course I hadn't. Did the firm suspect me?"

"No, but the police did. I was sent here to watch you. My name is not Eva Neil, but Alice Barnes. I am a sort of female detective. I often assist the police in cases of this kind."

"This accounts for the search in my room, then?"

"Yes."

"And for your apparent interest in me."

"Yes."

"For your concern about my means."

"Yes. I thought to trap you into confessing you had money. The proceeds of the robbery."

"Rather a bit of bad luck for you you did not discover me to be rich!" He spoke sneeringly.

"I am grateful to heaven with all my heart and soul to find you a poor man."

"Do you mean that? Do you, mean it? I still love you. I shall always love you. Oh! my darling, have I a chance now?"

"I think, dear, I'm an excellent housekeeper, and we could get along splendidly on £5 a week."

And they have done.

## 6: Somebody Waiting

*Louis Arthur Cunningham*

1900-1954

*Australian Women's Weekly*, 16 March 1935

THE HUGE GATES of Kingsdale Prison clanged shut on Eddie Marlow. The sound was a glad echo of their dismal closing three years ago, on that autumn day when Edward Marlow became Convict 8347 and changed a life of quiet luxury for the grim and awful routine of the Big House. Three years of it. The world, even a few yards outside the grey walls, seemed a vast place. A wonderful place. A new land. To be able to walk as far as he wanted, to be able to rise when he felt like it, rest when he wanted to, eat the kind of food he liked. Why, it would take him a year, he thought, to get used to it.

Three long years in which the world, his friends, everyone had forgotten him. He walked out into the wide roadway and swung past the prison. Free. A suit of clothes; a few shillings in his pocket. But free— that was the thing. What if the world had forgotten him? What did anything matter in the face of this sensation that made him want to leap and run and stretch out his arms and know, with a joyous lifting of the heart, that those outstretched hands would touch neither stone nor steel.

Across the road from the prison a blue roadster was parked. The kind of car he used to own. The kind of car his friends drove. Going back to that world again— the world of motors and yachts and parties; of good clothes, good food, good companions. He stared at the car, at the blonde girl sitting behind the wheel. He stared harder, his eyes widened; then he shut them. It couldn't be. They— they'd all forgotten him. No one had come. No one had written. He was dreaming. He opened his eyes. She was looking at him. She waved a white-gloved hand.

He stumbled across the road. Lord, he couldn't even walk right. She was out of the car now. Tall, slender, blue-eyed, exquisite. How beautiful she was. His eyes, starved for the sight of such as she, swept her wistfully, hungrily. Life, the world, freedom— freedom to look on beauty, on women like this— to touch her hand.

"Jill!" he said huskily. "Jill! You —you remembered. God, how glad I am that you, at least, did!"

He took her hand in both of his.

His eyes looked funny. It was a lonely road. There was a long black sedan parked further down. He lifted her hand to his cheek, to his lips. He rubbed his cheek against it.

"Three years," he muttered. "Three years, Jill, since I touched a woman's hand, since I was near a woman, since I felt the wonder and beauty of a woman.

And here it is you waiting for me. The one I've thought of and dreamed about and cursed myself for losing. I— I can't believe. Jill!"

He stared into the blue eyes. They were misty. The little mouth trembled. She lifted a handkerchief to her eyes. But she continued to look at him.

"I— I'm glad to see you, Eddie. I'm glad you're free. Come and sit in the car with me. You look so pale and tired, yet you're the same."

Jill Moore slid in under the wheel. Eddie got in beside her.

"I'm taking the train from the station down there," he said, with a slight, determined smile. "It will be along in five minutes."

"What are you going to do? Where are you going?"

Her shoulder touched his. He thought, laying his hand on hers: "I could shut my eyes and sit like this for ever. It's worth waiting three years for. It's worth being in prison to feel a sensation like this. She's so warm and soft and— and the perfume." He touched her hair.

"Going to do?" He looked up at her. "I'm going to work. I'm going to make good. I got off on the wrong foot, you know. You can't beat the races. I slipped badly. But I know how to go ahead now."

"You have something in view then, Eddie?"

"Listen, Jill darling, I had two things in view. One is a job, an honest-to-God job with hard work and good pay and a chance to clean up in a few years. The other—" He broke off, and looked over his shoulder. "See that big car down there? Well, that's the other thing I had in view. Big money but crooked. I met a fellow in the prison. He liked me. He fixed it for me to get in with these pals of his. I'd be cleaning up a fortune in a few months."

"But, Eddie, you wouldn't! After being in there—" She looked at him, frightened.

HE laughed harshly. It made her shiver.

"Oh, I don't know. You come out of there. You don't feel like starting at the bottom and working like a slave. You learn things. Dutch Conroy told me about this racket. It looked good— and I was going with those chaps in that car— until I saw you."

Jill's full red lip was caught between tiny teeth. He felt her hand clutch his. She turned her face away.

"Until I saw you and then everything seemed different. The sun seemed to burst out from behind the clouds where it's been hiding for three years. I looked at you and I knew in an instant what I was going to do. I'm going down there and get the train. I'm going to the city and see Grosset, he was a friend of my dad's. He offered me this engineering work in Yucatan, I'm going to Yucatan. I'll be there three years more. But I'll love it. I'm going to put body and soul into it and I'm going to make a success of it. That is what seeing you here did to me, Jill.

That's what your faith, your friendship, did to me. Probably if I'd gone with Dutch Conroy's pals, I'd have landed back in the Big House. But never again. Life is too sweet now. I'm going away. I'll be thinking of you and when I come back, if— if you—"

"I'll be around. Eddie," she said softly "You write to me. I'm living at Millerton, ten miles from here. You write to me. And when you come back I— well, maybe I'll be waiting."

He laid his head on her shoulder. Far down the track, a train whistled. He kissed her cheek.

"I'll take that path through the field, Jill. It will save time. Good-bye, Jill."

"Good-bye, Eddie." She gave him her lips.

Then he was out of the car and sprinting across the fields down to the little Kingsdale Station. He waved to her. A white kerchief fluttered in answer. The long train pulled in, stopped a moment. She saw him swing aboard. Each waved again, then the train vanished around a bend.

She sat down behind the wheel.

She smiled in the mirror; she saw that her eyes were red, her hair disarranged. She got her compact from her bag and deftly powdered her nose and touched up her lips. In the mirror she saw a man coming up behind her. He was lugging a large tin. He was hot and dusty. He put down the tin behind the car and mopped his brow.

"Here I am," he said. He removed the cap from the gas tank and poured the two gallons in. Then he came around and got in beside Jill.

"Hell of a place to run out of gas, wasn't it?"

"Yes." She was looking down at her hands. He looked down, too.

"Why, where is your ring?" he asked.

He was plump, rather bald. His name was Hilton Benn. He made automobiles, owned a factory that made them.

"I took it off," said Jill. She took the ring from her pocket and gave it to him. "I told you I might change my mind some day, any day. Well, I have; I don't love you. I thought for a while, I could. But now I know—"

"Well, I'll be—!" He stared at her stupidly. "I run out of gas in front of the Big House, I go back to get some, and when I get it, when I come back, you tell me our engagement is all off. Why? Just because I ran out of gas?"

Jill smiled queerly. "Just because you ran out of gas."

## 7: He Didn't Believe in Fairies

*William Almon Wolff*

1885-1933

*Blue Book* Oct 1917

THE time was late April, and the place was a country road in the wooded hills that rise from the banks of the Hudson opposite West Point. More specifically, the time was afternoon, and the shadows were lengthening. Bill Tempest was walking with Barbara Morgan, and he was, pardonably enough, paying more attention to her than to their surroundings. Yet there were sights spread out before his eyes that were not unworthy of their notice.

The road was soft beneath their feet, yet firm; motors did not care to climb so high. Not yet were all the trees in leaf, but everywhere a faint green overlay branch and twig, and here and there a dogwood blazed in all the riotous beauty of its blossoms. Through the wet loam ferns were springing up, and sometimes early flowers were nodding. The song of birds was in the air; squirrels chattered at them from the trees and ran in front of them unafraid.

They walked along slowly, talking. The girl was taken up with the sheer beauty of the spring, as it was all about them; her eyes were never still. They lighted up at this and that; she caught her breath, from time to time, in little gasps of pure delight. And sometimes she would stop and leave the road, bending to pluck a violet, perhaps, or some other flower, to add to the little bunch that she carried.

Bill would stop to wait for her, when she did that, and to smile, tolerantly. It was as if he approved, largely, a mood he could not altogether share. One must have been insensate, indeed, not to approve of Barbara that day. She wore no hat; the sun picked out ruddy tints in her hair, lighted it up, burnished it. A tall girl, she was full of a lithe grace. Her movements were all in flowing lines; there was something oddly pagan about her, flinging herself down recklessly to lean over a bank and reach a blossom far below. She was like a flower herself then, and as she rose and held her booty out for him to see, standing flushed, her hair blowing a little in the wind, her white skirt wrapped about her, the pale green of her sweater blending with the other green of tree and bush.

THEY walked along and came to a turn in the road— rounded it and stopped to stand and stare at a tiny waterfall where a stream came tumbling down the rocky hillside, flinging white spray across the road, catching the sun, so that there was an iridescent sheen in air and water.

"Oh!" said Barbara, and she looked spellbound upon the tumbling water.

And: "Gee!" said he. "We never came this way before, did we?"

She cried out at that, and there was a sort of mocking triumph in her laugh.

"You!" she said. "Even you, Bill! Even practical, utilitarian you! Isn't it the loveliest spot you ever saw?"

"Oh— I suppose so— yes," he said. "But— I wasn't just thinking about that, Babs. It's the power-site. You could light a house— you could get power for everything from that fall."

For just a moment she seemed to wilt. And then she laughed at him, bravely.

"Oh— Bill!" she said reproachfully. "But I might have known! Bill, has everything got to be useful before it means anything to you? Doesn't— doesn't just beauty— appeal to you at all?"

"Why— I— yes, I guess so," he said dubiously. And his face, his square, determined face, that had grown sober at the change in her, was lighted up by a smile, boyish, engaging. "You, now— why, you're not so awfully useful, Babs. And, well— you— I— I'm awfully strong for you."

"You're rather a dear, sometimes, Bill," she said inconsequently. "'But— oh, you never did believe in fairies! Poor Bill! Come on— I'll race you to that dogwood!"

She was off, a flying flash of green and white; and he, grinning, bewildered and yet somehow happy, lumbered after her. At the dogwood she was waiting for him, more flushed than ever, more elusive too..... And they went on sedately, with little to say to one another, until suddenly, with one of those swift, lithe movements of hers, Barbara turned aside, stooped and held out, smiling, a shoe a horse had cast in the road.

"Look!" she said. "This is a lucky day, Bill! See how worn it is— how smooth and bright!"

He frowned faintly as he considered her trophy.

"Luck!" he said. "I— do you take stock in luck, Barbara? I never did."

"Oh!" she said, and for a moment was speechless. "How— how can you, Bill? How can you be so —so— material? Here— and now."

He looked contrite— but unconvinced.

And the hard lines about his mouth stood out, somehow; the squareness of his jaw seemed to be underlined. She sighed.

"You— you make me think of a place I went to once, where they took care of children," she said. "They were so proud of it. They showed me how clean it was, and how careful they were about germs, and everything, and they explained about the scientific way they fed the children and gave them just as many calories and proteins and starches and things as they ought to have. And then— they punished a little girl because she'd put a ribbon in her hair, and they disapproved of me most awfully because I didn't like it, and when I wanted to send out for ice-cream— why, Bill, you'd have thought I was trying to poison those kids!"

"Well—" he began obstinately, and then he stopped, because after all he was not stupid. And he sighed too, and he wondered how it was and why it was that he and Barbara, who had been so close to one another so short a time before, had drifted so far apart. But it seemed to him that there was nothing for him to do, and they walked on and so came to her home, in the dusk, with all the things that he had meant to say to Barbara unsaid.

HE was disappointed, and he was angry at himself and, a little, at Barbara. He had had such hopes when he had come up for the week-end. He had been so resolute, so determined. He had so carefully rehearsed the questions he meant to put to Barbara; he had laid his plans with such guile. Not that he had been sure of her! He hadn't been, for a minute. He was humble enough, and conscious enough of his audacity in wanting her, to have pleased any stickler for Victorian romance. And yet he did feel that he was entitled to his day in court; that it was his right to plead his case and get his answer. And somehow that right had been denied. This was Sunday; he had had her alone for the last time, he knew, before his going, on a late train. And he wasn't going to see her again for weeks— weeks in which anything might happen.

Bill was pretty dull and stupid at tea. Mrs. Morgan, a smile in her eyes, tried to cheer him up, and failed. Helen Cameron teased him, and he didn't even know she was doing it— though Barbara did, and scowled, to the confusion of young Westcott, who was paying her a hopeless sort of court. He was glad when Mr. Morgan waylaid him, later, for a talk about business conditions; he was on his own ground there. He really was interested in the things he and Morgan had to talk about; for though Morgan was a financial giant, their orbits did touch. And he was immeasurably gratified by Morgan's manner— encouraged to ask a question.

"If you're going away, sir," he said, "I suppose it means that the new port terminal scheme is off?"

"Draw your own conclusions," said Morgan. "The new port would save a day on the transatlantic voyage— but you can figure costs as well as I can."

"They've kept me awake nights for a year," said Bill.

But even though the talk came to nothing, it kept him going until it was time to dress for dinner— kept him, too, from thinking about his wrongs.

He brooded rather sullenly, though, while he dressed. In the confusion of his thoughts he put a sock on wrong side out— or in; which should one say? And he swore whole-heartedly as he ripped it off and repaired the blunder:

"Horseshoes!" he said to himself. "I suppose Barbara'd say I ought to leave it as it was! Bad luck to change a thing you've put on wrong side to! All right!"

He was honestly at sea about Barbara and himself. Here it was, as nearly as he could come at it: He was a business man; being young, he had to be a hard,

driving worker, practical, an opportunist, within limits. And Barbara didn't like it because he saw a power-site where she saw a waterfall that should be painted, because he thought of waste and a careless driver at the sight of a cast shoe when she saw a gracious omen of good luck. It seemed to him that she was unfair, and a good deal less than kind. But immediately, of course, he repented, and hurried with his tie, because she might have dressed quickly, and if he were down a minute or two early, he might have: a minute with her in the great hall, where logs would be burning on the hearth to banish the faint chill of the spring night.

He got his minute— but much good it did him! She had her horseshoe, and she made him nail it up for her, and he did the task ungraciously, and she felt his disapproval and gathered herself, somehow, to defend herself against it.

"Poor Bill!" she said. "You miss so much— so many little thrills. Oh, I know it's silly to be superstitious. And I don't suppose I am, really. But Bill, so many, many things I love are silly— little foolish things that just make life more gay and easier, somehow. Superstitions, fancies— they— I think they help to keep life young, somehow!"

"I wish I could understand, Babs," he said, rather wretchedly, so that she was sorry for him.

"Oh, you will!" she said. And then her eyes seemed to search him, and her voice was so low that he could scarcely hear. "Only— I hope it won't be when it's too late."

"Babs—" he said, taking a step toward her. But someone came down the stairs, and his minute was over.

HE went back to the city and his work that night. And the next day, he knew, she would be off, with her father and mother, on the yachting trip that would keep her out of touch with him for weeks. It was a young man extremely sorry for himself, almost amusing in his patent bewilderment, who sat gloomily in the smoker all the way down the river.

When it came to Barbara, Bill showed up pretty badly. He blundered ; he made ludicrous mistakes; he was inept, awkward, given to choosing the wrong moment. In his business he was amazingly different. Business was for him the great game— the game that Kim played and that all men play in whom the creative spark has leaped to life. Here Barbara— and others— had misjudged him grotesquely. They saw him absorbed in routine, in dull, drab things, and never saw that for him these things were not drab, that they were veiled for his eyes with all the colors of romance.

It had always been so with him. In college he had failed to emerge from the ruck of his class until luck had thrust him into the management of some enterprise always theretofore conducted at a loss. That had been the beginning.

He had gone on from triumph to triumph. He had set the musical clubs upon their financial feet; he had reorganized a dying college paper, and filled its treasury. So it had gone.

And Bill's success after he had taken his degree had been meteoric. He was vice-president, now, of the Standard Construction Company; for three months he had been its sole head, in the enforced absence of Newberry, the president, who had worked himself to the verge of collapse and was likely to be gone for three months more, chafing under his doctor's orders. It was only a question of time, could be only that, before Bill should fill Newberry's place permanently. And he was just thirtytwo, with all the world before him. Only, of course, he did not think about it in just that way.

BILL was restless in the morning; he sharply resented the irritability that gripped him during a conference with three of his directors, men who on principle distrusted him because of his youth. For a long hour they nagged him; again and again he explained, from one new point of view after another, the imperative need of the expansion upon which he had resolved. They challenged him querulously, pointed out what seemed to them the dangerous increase of overhead expense, objected to expansion at a moment when all industry was crying out retrenchment, suggested waiting. He closed his teeth on that, stood up and faced them, grim, resolute.

"Wait!" he said. "That's the one thing we can't do! We've got to decide, and decide now. If this chance goes, it goes for good. And now— I'm sorry, but I have some pretty important work that must be done. If you have any more questions—"

They had. They hemmed and hawed; in the end he could get nothing more definite from them than a promise to lay the matter, without prejudice, before the entire board. He went out to lunch in a futile rage that was almost childish. The fact was that he was feeling the strain Newberry's absence had involved; three months before, he would have been able to laugh at the solemn caution of his directors— men who, lacking exact knowledge, followed their instinct to distrust the man who had it and was impatient because they lacked it. He vaguely felt that he had not been tactful, that Newberry would have brought them around easily, and that he ought to have been able to do it, too.

But after lunch, on his way back to the office, he obeyed an impulse and telephoned that he would not return at all. He went instead to the yacht-club, in the southernmost wilds of Brooklyn, where he kept his motor-boat, and took her out on the Bay. All afternoon he waited, being tossed about, drifting with the tide, under the Staten Island shore, to pick out the *Vishnu*.

He smiled at the sheer futility, the gorgeous pointlessness, of what he was doing. It suddenly struck him that this was just the sort of thing Barbara would

like, just the sort of thing she would never believe he would do. She had forbidden him to see her off; she hated leave-takings. And so he didn't want her to see him, and yet he wished, illogically, that he could draw her eyes when the *Vishnu* came, and make her wave to him, at least.

But when she came, and he caught just a glimpse of Barbara leaning over the taffrail, looking back at the receding towers of the city, he made no effort to be seen. He only looked, and wondered what she was thinking of, and whom.

He was tired enough to feel better, relaxed, perhaps, when he went ashore. And when he got home, the first thing his eyes fell upon was a package, addressed to him in Barbara's hand. He rather caught his breath when he saw that; for a minute he just held it, weighing it, staring at it. She had never sent him anything before. And then he tore off the paper wrapping and disclosed a book— a book old and weatherbeaten, a sort of relic, it seemed to him, His curiosity grew as he opened it. And then he smiled. The book was an old one that dealt with pirates and their ways— with the romance of the brave days when buccaneers had sailed the Spanish Main. And on the flyleaf Barbara had written a few words:

*Read it for my sake. And— read it between the lines!*

There was no mirth in his smile. Indeed, in a moment, for a moment, he frowned. Barbara and her eternal playing upon romance! But after all, it was the thought that had brought the book that counted; it was that that softened his mood, gave him, probably, a better night's sleep than he should have had with the knowledge that the *Vishnu* was steaming steadily southward, reeling off her twelve knots every hour, to plague him.

It was the next morning that the curious sequence of events that was to sweep him on to the incredible and impossible climax began.

HE was shaving when he turned, suddenly, at some noise, and swept his shaving mirror to the floor, where it was shattered: Perhaps, if he hadn't been thinking so constantly of Barbara, the first thought that flashed into his mind would not have been one about the superstition of the seven years of bad luck that follow a broken mirror. But it was. He laughed it down, denied to himself that he had harbored it. But that, as Dr. Freud could have told him, was not the way to get rid of a disturbing idea!

He thought again of the broken mirror later, when he walked rather defiantly under a ladder that leaned against a wall. He had a way of doing that, anyhow; he scoffed just as loudly at practical men who talked about the possibility of becoming the target for a pot of paint as he did at those who, like Barbara, frankly avoided the shadows of ladders just because of superstition.

But this time he paid up! Some one— thinking, probably, that no one would walk under the ladder— had left a coil of rope on the sidewalks. Bill tripped upon it and went down sprawling. He rose, brushed himself off, was conscious of a pain in his knee, and more than conscious of the great triangular rip that had ruined his trousers. Fuming, he went home, bathed his cut knee and changed his clothes. He was half an hour late at the office; the delay, coming on top of his wanton truancy the previous afternoon, had piled his desk sky high with urgent matter requiring his instant and undivided attention.

All morning, as he tried to work, one thing after another went wrong. As he struck a match, its head flew off into a tray of letters ready for his signature and set them afire; before he could abolish the blaze, half of them were ruined and must be typed again. A file containing papers it was essential for him to have was missing— only misplaced, of course, but that contributed to his nervousness. From the West came the report of a flood that had wrought untellable mischief on a big job already far behind its schedule; he saw profits wiped out at a single blow there. And there were other things— a querulous letter from Newberry, complaining of the impossibility of keeping track of what was going on from his, Bill's, reports. He grimly tossed that letter over to his secretary.

"Save that, Miss Sherman," he said. "I'm trying to obey the doctor— as you know! And I get that for thanks!"

Miss Sherman smiled tolerantly, without letting him see her do it. She could have told Barbara many things about the essential boyishness of a great business executive as he appears in certain moments... She knew extremely well the sulky drooping of the corners of his mouth. And she wished that Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Dorgan and Mr. Hammarskold, the three directors who had made such unqualified nuisances of themselves the day before, would stop telephoning to Bill at frequent intervals— because he wasn't smiling, half wearily, half tolerantly, this morning as he got rid of them and hung up the receiver, and she knew that for a bad sign. She was afraid of what might happen when the board met that afternoon.

STILL, even Miss Sherman, concerned though she was, never anticipated what really did happen. It was a highly confidential meeting, so that she did not attend it. She knew that it wasn't going smoothly; once or twice, when she passed the board-room, she heard angry voices coming through the door, And then, just before five o'clock, when she was in Bill's room sorting out some papers, its door was flung open and she saw Bill, his back turned, gesticulating angrily.

"No— you can't come in!" he said. "There's nothing to talk over! I've said my piece. And I want to be let alone now! I've work to do."

He slammed the door, but not before she caught a glimpse of Armstrong, one fat protest, beyond it. Bill turned and came toward her and his desk, two spots of color high on his cheek-bones, his eyes blazing. When he saw her, he calmed down a little and grinned in the friendliest way. But he grew sober at once.

"Well— I've done it now, Miss Sherman!" he said. "I've resigned."

"I was afraid you were having a trying time," she said diplomatically.

"You don't get me," he said. "I've honest to goodness resigned! It isn't one of those bluff resignations that the chief's always pulling off. I— well, I guess I saw red, in there, after they'd been ragging me awhile."

"But— I don't see— how can you resign?" she asked, really concerned, all at once.

"I don't know," he said. "I just did! It's the lowest down trick I ever played, and the biggest break I ever made, too, I guess— because, after all, the tail can't wag the dog! This dog may be annoyed about losing its tail for a while, but it will keep right on doing business at the old stand. But a tail without a dog isn't much use— and that's me!"

She heard it all, in incoherent, jerky sentences.

"I can't crawl now— or I wont!" he said finally. "I'm right enough, you know— but after all, I ought to have remembered that it's up to them about spending the money. I delivered an ultimatum. If I back down now, they'll never have any use for me— and if they back down, they'll never have any use for themselves. Oh, it's a pretty mess!"

There wasn't much for her to say, of course. She made tentative suggestions— reconsideration, thinking it over, wouldn't he, and the others too, feel differently in the morning? He shook his head.

"You didn't hear me," he said. "Oh, I'm not trying to defend myself, Miss Sherman! I put myself in the wrong, absolutely, I'd like to apologize— but it wouldn't do."

"I don't know what's the matter with me!" he broke out. "I've been getting snappier every day for the last two weeks; and to-day I haven't been fit to live with. And now I forget about the chief and cut up like this— just because I happen to know I'm in the right."

He knew he couldn't make the way he felt about that sound convincing, but he knew, too, absolutely, that here was a case in which, even if two wrongs wouldn't make a right, a wrong and a right would be even worse.

"Here's what I'll do, Miss Sherman," he said. "It's a low-down trick again, but I don't see anything else for it. I'll disappear for a week— longer, maybe. I need a rest, anyhow— ought to go to Bloomingdale, probably, if you come down to it! And there's just a chance that they may come around, if I'm not here to make

three or four more sorts of an idiot of myself talking to them. Preston will have to run things— with your help. I'm sorry for you, but—"

She nodded.

"It'll be all right," she said. "It probably is the best thing for you to do, too. Can you leave me an address?"

"I'll try to, before I go," he said. "And anyhow, I'll keep in touch with you. Something for me to sign?"

He dropped into his chair and the routine of the job. Use and habit kept him going. But he loathed himself as he sat there working. To act like that! To let a lot of directors goad him into putting himself in the wrong when all he had needed to do was to wait behind the impregnable defense of his conviction that he was right! But:

"Oh, well— I don't give a hang, anyhow!" he said as he went out.

BILL might have done anything in his present mood; but what he did do was to go to his rooms and hunt up the book Barbara had sent him, just because it was so eloquent of her, somehow.

He found himself interested in the book for its own sake, before long. It was oddly worded ; there was something quaint about the old phrases, something intriguing about the matter-of-fact way in which it dealt with battle and murder and sudden death, with violence and rapine. Before he knew what he was doing he had let the book carry him along. And then suddenly he came to a check. He turned a page, and what he read didn't connect with what had been on the previous page. He thought a leaf was missing— and then he saw that two pages had stuck together. A moment's scrutiny showed him, too, that it was not by accident, but by design, that they were so attached. He was piqued; his curiosity was aroused.

Yet he was half angry with himself as he steamed the pages to separate them; he laughed incredulously when between them, after he had carefully pried them apart, he found, securely hidden, a loose sheet of old, yellowed paper— older even than the book, he thought.

But what a piece of paper! All creased and stained it was, and curling at the edges. It laid a sort of spell upon him, and he laughed nervously as he saw that lines were drawn upon it, and that there was writing.

There was a map, rudely, roughly, drawn in faded ink. Such ink, it seemed to be, as children are allowed to play with sometimes, much diluted. It showed a cove; a sandy beach was marked, and ground rising up gradually to a ridge where stood a group of trees. From one of them an arrow pointed. There were marks of latitude and longitude. There was a date— a date incredible, absurd, a date in the eighteenth century. Bill laughed again at that. But still he read the queer, sprawling words that had been written carefully below the map:

*From ye arrow walk a hundred paces along the line of ye shadow that is cast at noon precisely by ye tree ye arrow marks. The treasure-chest lies there.*

Bill stared at the words. They were oddly formed; some of the letters were archaic. "Ye arrow," it was, not "the." The oddest feeling seemed to steal over Bill, take hold of him. He wanted to laugh. And yet somehow he couldn't. He jotted down, absently, the position that was given for the cove, and he rose, to go to his mantel and find and fill a pipe. Somewhere about the room were a lot of charts, Government charts, that he used for motor-boat trips. But of course he wasn't going to look up the spot that was marked on that map. And then he found himself bending low, reaching into the drawer under his bookcase, bringing out the proper chart, taking it back to the light, poising his pencil over the exact spot where met the lines of latitude and longitude that were named on the old map.

He roused himself before the lead could mark the chart. He sprang up, shaking his head angrily. What a fool he was! This was some hoax, of course. Was he a romantic idiot, to let it fool him even for a moment? He remembered what Barbara had said— something about believing in fairies! Well— a man would have to believe in fairies before he could take a thing like this seriously! He folded the map and put it away. He wouldn't throw it out, though that had been his first instinct; he'd save it, to show to Barbara when she came home. After all, she was concerned with it, in a way. And it was the sort of thing that might amuse her.

THE little devils of ill luck that had been dogging Bill were active that night. He had to dine alone, and he didn't want to be alone. And he found it utterly impossible to buy, at any price, tickets for the only play in town he cared to see that night. It was a new musical comedy, and its opening night. His wanderings in search of seats brought him face to face with Armstrong, the director he hated most violently; they had more words, and Armstrong, his face purple, really settled matters.

"You can't bluff us!" he stormed. "We were going to refuse to accept your resignation. Now I shall insist on its immediate acceptance."

Bill was a good deal depressed. He couldn't understand himself. It seemed to him that he had been swept abruptly from all the moorings of his life. All his rules, all the principles that had guided him, had brought him to this— mess! He thought of Barbara, of course. And he wandered about gloomily. Some special providence must have protected him from taxicabs and other menaces.

He didn't want to go home, but he had nowhere else to go. So he wandered rather aimlessly; at Twenty-third Street some bookshops, where he sometimes picked up a bargain, attracted him.

But in the shop into which he turned, the first display that struck his eyes was one of picaresque books. There was an extraordinary collection— *Gil Blas* and all the rest. He picked up a history, thumbed its pages, was caught by a phrase, sat down to finish a page— and was lost. An hour later, shamefaced, he slunk out of the shop and homeward, carrying half a dozen books that the bookseller had recommended.

AND at three o'clock next morning Bill was applying himself, soberly and in good earnest, to an analysis of the evidence for and against the belief that certain buccaneers had buried part of their booty hereabout— along the coast of Long Island, of New Jersey, of Maine, up the Hudson, even. And he had his map out and was comparing it curiously with figures given in some of his books, and staring at it with scowling, troubled eyes.

"Oh, rot!" he said to himself. "But—"

After all, here he was! All his life, since it had counted for anything, he had been sober, materialistic, industrious, practical, And what had it all come to? A smash that any fool would have had sense enough to avert! He had laughed at superstitions, bogies, signs of ill luck. He had broken a mirror— and what, in heaven's name, had gone right for him since that moment?

"I'll do it!" he vowed. "I'll dig out for that cove! I'll follow the shadow of that tree for a hundred paces at high noon, and then I'll dig! I need some exercise, anyhow!"

But, be it understood, he didn't believe in fairies, or, to avoid symbolism, in the good faith of the map. He had to go away somewhere. He didn't know where the *Vishnu* had gone; Barbara had refused to tell him. So his only logical destination, for the trip he had to take, wasn't available. None of the usual resorts one goes to in the spring appealed to him. And so—

He borrowed a cruiser— his own boat was too small and uncomfortable for the trip. But he had no trouble in getting a boat that was just what he wanted. He laid in provisions and shovels and tobacco and books, and took a tent along, in case he wanted to camp on shore. And then he set out for— "Somewhere on the Atlantic coast." There are reasons for vagueness as to his actual destination.

He couldn't keep his promise to keep in touch with Miss Sherman, but he decided that that was just as well. If the directors backed down, it wouldn't hurt them to worry for a few days; if they didn't, his absence wouldn't matter anyhow. All things being considered, he was reasonably care-free and happy as he steered his boat through the heavy traffic of the East River and toward the freer waters of the Sound. (So much of a hint as to his direction it is safe to give. But the censor deletes his running-time to that cove.)

HE picked up the ridge, with its sentinel trees, early in a morning made to order for such a quest as his. And it seemed to him that the spot, too, was made to order. His skepticism had a shock as he made out the two small jutting headlands that sheltered the cove; he hadn't really expected to find any such spot as had been marked on the map. Yet there it was before him, exactly as it had been on the map. There were the trees; the sight of them shook him most of all, somehow. They ought not to have survived; he would have been content had he found their rotted stumps.

He looked about him. It seemed to him that he ought to know this spot, and yet he didn't. The sun was hot already; the day was going to be warm; there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. And for witnesses of his digging there would be gulls; there wasn't a human habitation, or a sign that there had ever been one, anywhere about. The isolation, the solitude of that sandy waste, with the dunes rising endlessly, and just the one solid ridge that was his particular concern, were queerly impressive. So much he had to admit— a pirate, seeking a safe hiding-place, could hardly have chosen better!

He made his landing— an easy matter, on the sloping beach. He took his tent ashore and pitched it, and amused himself by gathering wood and making a fire. There was any amount of driftwood for his purpose, and it pleased him to cook his breakfast over a real fire instead of by the alcoholflame that he used on the boat. It wasn't so bad— all of it. It was a change, and a welcome one, from the city and the driven life he had been living for months. He could relax and let himself go utterly, and he did. After his breakfast he stretched out on the sand and let the sun beat down upon him while he smoked.

He made sure of noon— chronometer was confirmed by an observation in good sea-fashion. And on the instant he walked along the shadow of the tree until he came to the spot where he was to dig. He stared curiously down at the sand— he had left the ridge and come to sand again. It looked as if it had never been disturbed. But that meant nothing. Sand blows; men might have been digging here within the week, and he would never know.

So he set to work digging. He went at his task slowly, steadily. It would be long, he was sure; a heavy chest would sink; moreover much sand might have been deposited since it had been buried.

"As if I expected to find anything!" he said aloud in a tone of infinite contempt. "I'm doing this for exercise— instead of golf or tennis."

Straight down he dug, for half an hour; then he rested. And so it went, while the sun slipped down in the west and the gulls circled about above him, screaming. Straight down he dug, until he was sure he had dug too deep— then extended the circle of his digging, lest he might have missed that clash of shovel against wood or iron that, somehow, despite his skepticism, he had from the first moment been listening for. And still, when it was quite dark, and the flames

of the fire that he had from time to time stopped to replenish were casting weird shadows across the sand, he had found nothing.

He stopped at last and straightened up, the sweat pouring down into his eyes, every muscle sore and aching from his unwonted labor. He had to climb out of the great pit he had dug, over the ramparts of wet sand that he had thrown up; in the bottom of his pit there was a pool of water in which he had been standing while he dug. His hands were blistered; he was dripping wet from head to foot.

Slowly, wearily, he went down to his fire and his tent. He stripped off his reeking clothes and, with a bucket, bathed. Shivering, then, he dressed and crouched over the fire to get warm. The reaction was not long delayed; a delicious sense of well-being stole over him. And tired as he was, his hunger asserted itself too, and he had to fry bacon and potatoes, and make coffee, of which he drank cup after cup. Not until he had finished, and was smoking his pipe, would he admit to himself that his disappointment had fairly sickened him. He knew, then, that he had expected to find something— not a treasure-chest perhaps, but something. And he was as disappointed as a boy could have been.

He might have lain awake had he not been so utterly tired. But as it was, he built up his fire and turned in and slept like a log.

HE awoke to a startled realization that he was lying on the ground with a rubber sheet beneath him, with canvas walls instead of those of his own room about him. And then his lip curled as he remembered. Even before he cooked his breakfast he went and looked down into his pit. It was deep enough— he had been foolish enough. He would dig no more, as he had for the last hour the night before, with the thought that the next shovelful of sand might reveal the quarry. He turned away bitterly and went back to his fire, hating himself. He thought of Barbara. If she knew, she would laugh, probably. Well— a man ought to stick to his own game! He would, hereafter. He began to think of ways of retrieving his glorious blundering at the office.

After breakfast he climbed the ridge again and did what he had not taken the pains to do the day before— surveyed the ground all around from that vantage-point. And suddenly something startled him and brought his eyes close together in a puzzled frown.

He could see a row of stakes, stretching west, as far as, farther, indeed, than his eyes could follow. They bent, those stakes, as they neared him, and swung around the northern headland of the two that sheltered his cove. He stared at them— then whistled and went back very thoughtfully to his boat. He carried a map with him when he walked along the beach and passed beyond the headland. And then he saw that another and a larger cove stretched beyond—

the shore, indeed, of what was almost a natural harbor. A glance showed him that there was shallow water outside— but showed him something else too, and set him to studying his map. And on shore here, there were more stakes, in oddly symmetrical arrangement. They puzzled him, but they set his eyes to blazing too.

THOSE stakes didn't puzzle him for long. They could have just one meaning. He had never known, definitely, the location of that new port of which he had tried to talk to Morgan. But he had known that it must be somewhere near here. And now his map made it all clear. The tunnels under New York— the great bridge at Hell Gate— all fitted in. Here could be such a modern harbor as would eliminate lighterage, transshipment. To the clear day's saving of the ocean trip would be added half a day, at least, by reason of direct railroad handling.

And he could see that the very reasons that would have made his own directors scoff at such a time for such a project would compel the decision of a man like Morgan, a man with real vision. The war? It had come down to a matter of ocean-transport. Save a day's time for a hundred ships, and you add just so many ships to your total! He grinned at his own wisdom. And then he spun around, and stared out to sea, startled by a sudden sound.

What he had heard had been the running-out of the anchor chains of the *Vishnu*. There she was— the yacht he had last seen as she carried Barbara to the West Indies, as he had supposed. For a moment he couldn't believe his eyes. And then, somehow, everything ran together. Richard Morgan— those stakes he had seen! And he knew, be it remembered, where he was. In his mind's eye there was a map of the whole Atlantic coast, with certain lines of railroad spreading over it, coming to a point.... He grinned, and then he frowned. He raced back to his tent.

When the *Vishnu*'s launch scraped along the beach, he was waiting to greet those who landed: Morgan, Stephen Trask, another malefactor of great wealth, with Morgan intimately associated in many great affairs, and Cobden, of the Thirtieth National Bank. And of course Barbara— a Barbara who caught her breath at the sight of him, and then smiled, radiant, incredibly transformed— a Barbara who blushed and laughed and tried to hide her eyes from him all in the same moment.

The sight of Barbara gave him his first clue. His jaw fell. He stood and stared at her, incredulous, angry, bewildered, hurt somehow. The book she had sent him was in his hand; he saw how she was looking at it, and how she was all afire with excitement and delight— a delight mocking, mischievous and yet tempered with a tenderness that her eyes had never held for him before.

MORGAN was upon him before he could speak. It takes so much longer to describe some things than it takes for them to happen! "What's the meaning of this?" he asked savagely. "What are you doing here, Tempest?"

"Taking observations," said Bill genially. He flashed one steely look at Barbara, and she turned away at that and stood apart for a time, with eloquent shoulders that moved strangely. "Taking observations," Bill repeated. Barbara would have to wait; he would get around to her later. Just at present he meant to spoil the Egyptians. "I'm surprised at you, Mr. Morgan— the way you took advantage of my confidence in you! I took you at your word when you said the transatlantic terminal plans were going over a year. And now I find this— and you and Mr. Trask and Mr. Cobden pussy-footing around here!"

"Spy!" said Cobden furiously.

"Please!" said Bill. "Be nice! Let's keep this discussion on a high plane!"

"Huh!" said Trask. He grinned faintly. "Well— you seem to have us, young man! What are the terms of surrender?"

"To you— they're easy," said Bill. "I get nothing. And I'm not greedy for my company, even. You needn't give us the contracts for all your construction. We don't want the dredging, for example, How about this? You're to take me into your confidence as to your plans, so that we can make preparations and begin assembling our material before the news of this job leaks out and disorganizes prices. Then, instead of a flat bid, we'll do our share at cost plus fifteen per cent. Say yes to that, and you needn't worry about any premature publicity."

Morgan and Trask exchanged glances. Cobden scowled.

"Talk it over," Bill suggested. "There's no hurry." He turned to Barbara. "Would you like a little walk? I've something I'd like to show you."

HE went with him without a word. He took her arm to guide her. And they walked in silence until they came to the great hole he had dug in the sand. "I suppose it was a pretty good joke," he said dourly. "You're entitled to the satisfaction of seeing how successfully you hoaxed me."

"Oh!" she said. For a moment she seemed to be speechless. "Oh, Bill! Is that all you've seen?"

"It's a good deal, I should say," he said thoughtfully. "I— well, there were various things. It was clever of you to hide the map the way you did! I never thought about you— that you had done it— until I saw you coming ashore! Romance—"

"Romance!" She snatched the word from him. "Bill, can't you see? Oh, I wanted you to come! I wanted to know that you could do a mad, wild, boyish thing— that you could believe in fairies, just for once! And— and— you followed the rainbow, and you found the crock of gold at its end, didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Babs!" he said, his voice uncertain. "You— why— Babs—you worked it all out! You meant me to find out what they were doing!"

"Of course I did!" she cried. "I wanted you to have your reward if you would only play my game, Bill! I knew— oh, you see, I knew so well that I could trust you— that you'd do nothing mean."

It was a little time before he could find words again. Meanwhile, somehow, she was in his arms, and everything had come right— just how, he didn't know. Nor did he care. He was supremely content.

"And now, of course," he said scornfully, "I can make them eat crow! They'll have to admit my plans for expansion were right. Oh, you've given me all the cards to play, my dear!"

"There's just one thing," he said a little later. "Any time things look bad for me, after this, I'm going after the nearest mirror with an ax! I'll pick up pins and stick them in something above my head! I'll knock wood when I boast! And I'll play every other superstition you hold to— except the one about mirrors!"

She laughed at him mockingly until he stopped her in the way that had so newly become possible. And then they got up and went back, rather gravely, hand in hand, to find Mr. Morgan and explain a lot of things to him.

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## 8: The Extra Man and the Milk-fed Lion

**Charles E. Van Loan**

1876-1919

*Buck Parvin and the Movies, 1919*

*In 1915 the author, humorist and sports writer, began a series of entertaining tales in the Saturday Evening Post featuring Buck Parvin, an "extra" in the silent movies, which were posthumously collected as "Buck Parvin and the Movies" (1919)*

WHEN Tommy Dennis began to love the beautiful and talented Myrtle Manners he was an Arab trader squatting in the shade of a date-palm, and she was a Christian maiden— a captive in the harem of Sheik Abdallah, the Scourge of the Sahara.

When first he saw her face at the barred window, lovely in spite of the fear and grief it depicted, Tommy was conscious of a sudden delightful shock that fluttered to the tips of his fingers and toes; and when she stretched out her arms and wept, every sob went straight to Tommy's susceptible heart.

He held his breath as he watched her make a perilous descent from the roof of the harem by means of a rope ladder furnished by a faithless slave, the same who later paid for his treachery to his cruel master, the sheik, by being hurled from that very roof upon the spears of the tribe.

Tommy Dennis was among those present when the beautiful stranger fled from the sheik's oasis on Sharkey, the trained camel; and he murmured a brief but fervent prayer that the ungainly brute might not stumble. After a fashion of his own the Scourge of the Sahara offered up the same supplication— but it was Sharkey's lame foreleg he was thinking of, and not the neck of the Christian maiden. Camels are expensive beasts, requiring time and patience in training; and Abdallah, besides being a sheik and a scourge, was also heavy actor and producing director for the Titan Company and, as such, responsible for its animal stuff.

Later, as a wild Bedouin, armed with a bell-muzzled weapon and mounted upon a milk-white steed that manifested true Arabic love for its master by biting him severely upon the knee-cap. Tommy scoured the plain in pursuit of the lumbering Sharkey, again securing fleeting glimpses of the lovely stranger as she clung desperately to the camel's saddle. Sharkey's footwork was very erratic, consisting of two speeds forward, one sidewise and an abrupt reverse.

After several spirited sprints over dunes and across dry river bottoms, all of which Sharkey managed to win by a neck under shrill protest, the Bedouins, led by Sheik Abdallah, engaged in mortal combat with French troops— and Tommy Dennis was shot dead at the first fire. He did not mind this at all, being used to it; but he was very much annoyed at his Arab steed for kicking him as he fell.

Neither were his feelings soothed to any great extent by alighting heavily upon the belled muzzle of his ancient weapon.

Tommy was resurrected in a short blue jacket, which puckered abominably under the arms, and motheaten red trousers several sizes too small for him— a private in the corporal's guard and an eyewitness to the affecting reunion of the lovers inside the French lines, the sandy river bottom doing duty as the Desert of Sahara.

He saw the beautiful Christian maiden fall fainting from Sharkey's back into the arms of her sweetheart, a tall, handsome fellow in the uniform of a captain of the Foreign Legion— he who had just slain the wicked Abdallah in a thrilling encounter with cavalry sabers, it being well known that a sheik never fights with anything else if he can help it.

Tommy was not pleased with the ardent manner in which the gallant officer clasped the limp and yielding form to his bosom and pressed the parted lips with a neatly waxed mustache and imperial. The late Abdallah was not pleased either, judging by his comment. "That was rotten!" he shouted. "No good at all! Myrtle, you forgot to register a recognition before you pulled the fall. Jack, you cloaked the best part of the action with your shoulder when you ran in. Do it again, and try to get some real feeling into it— if you know how."

"Oooo-issch!" sneezed the long-suffering Sharkey, nipping the director upon the arm.

"Ouch!" yelled Mr. Abdallah, whose other name was Jimmy Montague. "Get that fool brute back where he belongs! Now then, all set, Myrtle? Take up a few feet of waste on that film.... Ready— action— go!... What's the matter with that infernal camel! Come on with him!... Look down at Jack, Myrtle!... Now fall!... Oh, hold her close to you, man! That's something like it!... Well, it went better that time, but it's still rotten in spots. Throw out your arms when you fall, Myrtle. Don't flop down like a sack of meal. And sprinkle some water here— Sharkey kicks up an awful dust when he stops quick."

Seven times the beautiful maiden fell into the arms of her beloved before the Scourge of the Sahara announced himself as satisfied, and Sharkey was led away, bubbling and gurgling with rage and indignation. Seven times Tommy Dennis stood stiffly in the corporal's guard, blushing behind his makeup, trembling in every fiber of his being.

This was the lady of his dreams; he had found her at last. What difference did it make to Tommy's fluttering heart that she was the Queen of the Movies, at a salary of one hundred dollars a week, and he but a despised extra man at three dollars a day? Cupid, careless little rascal with his bow and arrow, might take the blame for that. Tommy had found her— that was the main thing— and having found her he was forced to endure seeing her kissed back to consciousness by a supercilious person who wore a handkerchief in his cuff and

addressed all extra men as "Here, you!" Tommy had not liked the handsome leading man any too well to begin with. He loathed him now.

It was a slight source of comfort to note the businesslike way in which the young woman freed herself from Jack La Rue's embraces the instant the camera man's hand ceased to move. Tommy also observed that at the finish of the scene she walked away toward the temporary dressing tent, without so much as a word or a glance behind her.

"I'll bet she doesn't like him!" thought Tommy, with a swift fluttering sensation under the blue coat. Then later: "I don't see how any nice girl could!"

Tommy Dennis was twenty— he stood six feet in his stockings; his nose was straight; his eyes were clear; and, better than all else, his heart was clean. He knew as soon as he saw Myrtle Manners at the barred window of Abdallah's harem that he had never really loved before. He realized that his high-school affairs, which had seemed so serious at the time, were but the silly flirtations of childhood; and the brief but burning passion for the lunch-counter waitress was a youthful indiscretion. By the same process of reasoning he was not more than seven minutes in convincing himself that he would never love again.

When one is twenty it is easy to believe that true love is the only real thing in the world, and fame and fortune but the tinsel stage settings for the One Big Scene, in which the right man plays opposite the right woman forever, and there are no makeovers, no cut-ins and no fogged films.

He wondered as he discarded the dusty uniform of the Legion and washed the paint from his face whether she had noticed him at all. He decided that it was within the range of possibility. He recalled that she was standing behind the camera when the Bedouins swept yelling upon the French outpost. She must have seen the rider who plunged from his saddle at the first volley; and on the whole he was rather glad that his horse had kicked him. It was the sort of thing to draw the spectator's attention. He ceased to regret the bruise on his hip where he had fallen upon his gun. She might have seen that he was painfully hurt as he limped away— might even have been sorry for him. A bruised hip was a small price to pay for a pitying glance from those soft brown eyes. He pictured her as asking questions about him and receiving truthful replies:

"Who is that good-looking young man over there— the one who made such a daring fall?"

"That is Tom Dennis, quite an unusual sort of an extra man. He is a fearless chap; never stops at anything when it comes to making a good picture. He's going to be a great stunt actor some day— that boy."

Tommy was recalled from a dream of imaginary conversation by some of the genuine article close at hand. Buck Parvin was speaking. Buck was a moving-picture cowpuncher, acting during every waking moment. His street costume consisted of a widebrimmed hat of gray felt, a blue flannel shirt, a red bandanna

for a cravat, a leather vest thickly studded with shining disks of brass, lavender trousers tucked into highheeled boots; and on special occasions he wore angora chaps and enormous spurs, which tinkled musically as he walked. His hatband was made of rattlesnake skin, and distributed about his person he wore several pounds of Indian beadwork and Mexican silver jewelry. Buck Parvin was one character actor who never left his makeup in the dressing room at the end of the day's work, having, as he said, but three complete changes of wardrobe—put on, take off and go without.

"Well, kid," said Buck, "what do you think of the new leading lady? Quite a doll, ain't she? Pretty soft for that big stiff. La Rue! I'd like to have his job for about a week. I bet ole Jimmy Montague wouldn't have to bawl me out for not huggin' her hard enough. I'd play that scene for nothing. Yes, sir! Myrtle is certainly some dolly!"

"Aw, put the diffuser on that kind of talk!" growled Tommy. "You've got an awful nerve calling her by her first name."

"Oho!" chuckled Buck. "You kind of like her your own self, don't you, kid? I reckon you'll be round here to-morrow acting all over the place. Maybe they'll have a makeover on some of them chases and you'll get a chance to pull another phony fall. Take it from me, Tommy, throw away that slide-trombone of a gun next time, unless you want to bust yourself plumb in two. And lemme tell you something else: whenever you're on the ground, with horses coming behind you, lay still! They'll all jump over you. You began to crawl and ole Pieface just missed you by an inch."

"Darn it!" said Tommy. "I wasn't crawling; I had to get off that gun."

"Now if you want to catch the lady's eye," said Buck mischievously, "do a real fall! I got mine— right in the eye of the camera too. I thumbed ole Pieface in the neck and he went straight up like he was goin' over backward; an' I slid off him as easy as rolling out of bed. Not a bruise on me. And, believe me, the lady seen me do it; she was lookin' right at me!"

"You make me tired!" said Tommy, grinning in spite of himself. "I fell like a man that was shot."

"You limped like it too," said Buck with a chuckle. "We both of us might have broke our necks and it wouldn't have made any difference. You and me ain't got a Chinaman's chance for a pleasant look from her! They won't be no extry men in Myrtle's picture a-tall. None whatever! If she's going to fall for anybody round here it'll be La Rue."

"I don't believe it," said Tommy stubbornly. "Why, she hardly speaks to him."

"Listen at our banty rooster crow!" mocked Buck. "Tommy, you're a lovely little feller, and I like you; but there's a whole lot you don't know about women. Yes, when it comes to females I should say you was consid'able ignorant. Let your Uncle Buck steer you. He's a pretty wise Injun on this skirt thing."

"Huh!" snorted Tommy. "What do you know about women?"

"Everything," said Buck calmly. "Everything what is. I ought to. Women have throwed me higher in the air than you've ever been away from home. Tommy. Yes, sir; they cert'n'y had their fun with ole Buck— but he got a line on 'em, you bet! Take it from me, it's the dough that counts with the dolls— the dinero; the iron men; the large, smilin' yaller boys. We ain't got no bankroll, Tommy, and we're safe. The camera ain't focused on us at all— see? We're way over yonder on the other side of the hill, plumb out of the picture. As soon as this jane finds out that La Rue drags down one-fifty a week, she's goin' to go ropin' for him."

"Pshaw!" said Tommy. "The trouble with you, Buck, is that you haven't met the right kind of women."

"I ain't, hey?" demanded Parvin, as he fastened his bandanna with the huge silver ring set with turquoise matrices. "Oh, no; I suppose not. There's the women what likes you and there's the women what don't; and they're the only kinds what is. Take it from me, I've met a many of both varieties— an' they was all out for the dough."

ii

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT is a beautiful theory; but in every-day life there is such a thing as taking a long critical second look. Tommy took several, and each time he saw Myrtle Manners in a new part he discovered added charms. An extra man may look at a moving-picture queen if he has the luck to be selected by the director for a day's work.

Each morning Tommy reported faithfully at the Titan headquarters, and when Jimmy Montague crooked his forefinger and said, "I want you, kid!" that day was ringed on Tommy's calendar with a circle of gold. When the director shook his head and said, "Nothing doing!" Tommy slouched away, with his lower lip drooping and his hands crammed deep in his pockets, a picture of blighted hope.

As the Cattle Queen, in sombrero and short riding skirt, Miss Manners captivated Tommy by her dash and daring in the saddle, and even Buck Parvin admitted that she "sat up in the middle of a hawss" like a cattle queen born. As the brave but heartbroken hospital nurse in the Civil War picture, All for Dixie, she plumbed unsuspected depths of sentiment; but when she played the deserted wife and mother in The Cashier's Disgrace, and wept over the borrowed baby, she touched Tommy in his tenderest spot. He was all hers from that moment.

Then came the wonderful day when she spoke to him. The performers had gone out "on a location" to the outskirts of the city and had been delayed

beyond the noon hour. Tommy volunteered to find the nearest restaurant and bring back food.

"Two ham sandwiches and a pint of milk, please," was what she said to him; but Tommy walked in a daze for the rest of the day.

He read a dozen meanings into that innocent remark and was pleased with every one of them.

An actor employed by the Titan Company and working under Director Jimmy Montague had no sinecure. Montague had a reputation as a producer of sensational film dramas. He spent his nights in thinking up new and thrilling stunts for his actors to perform, and in devising scenarios to fit the stunts.

Jimmy's people never knew, when they reported for work on a new picture, whether they would be required to leap off a cliff into forty feet of water, go up in a balloon or track a real lion to the camera's eye. Montague's leading man had to box like a Corbett, wrestle like a Muldoon, ride like a Cody, swim like a fish, climb crags like a goat, dress like a Brummel, make love like a Sothern, and face wild animals like a— Colonel.

Jimmy's specialty was animal stuff. After his tremendous success with *The King of Beasts*— a three-reel production that appeared in nearly every country under the sun and yielded a dollar harvest which remains a record to this day— the Titan owners saw a great light and began to invest in wild animals.

They had objected when Jimmy insisted on buying a mangy, toothless lion for use in a single production; the poor old brute turned out to be the most profitable investment the company had ever made, paying some eight thousand per cent. With one lion as a nucleus the Titan people rapidly acquired quite a respectable menagerie, and Jimmy Montague's animal stuff became known from St. Petersburg to Tasmania.

There was Selim, the elephant— a star in *The Rajah's Revenge* and *The Heart of Hindustan*. Selim was a Hamburg-trained pachyderm, with a fair working knowledge of the German language and a painstaking attention to detail that made him a remarkable moving-picture actor. No desert scene was complete without the camels— Sharkey, Old Blue, Betsy and Mame— unwilling but efficient performers. The lions— King, Duke, Bertha and Babe— had thrilled audiences all over the world; and the monkeys, wolves, snakes, coyotes, elk, deer, hyenas, and the nearsighted comedy tapir, also contributed their bit to the entertainment of the masses.

Every time Sam Packard, the purchasing agent, had a chance to buy a wild animal he snapped it up and looked confidently to Jimmy Montague to invent a scenario to fit the creature.

One morning Montague received a telegram from the head of the firm in New York.

"Jungle stuff worked to death," it read. "Get new scenario quick. Use all animals."

"There's gratitude for you," growled Jimmy as he tossed the telegram to Jack La Rue, who happened to be present. "How the deuce can I ring in lions and elephants and camels without a jungle scenario?"

"Blest if I know!" said La Rue, lighting a cigarette. "You never see 'em anywhere else except in a circus, and— "

"Bully boy!" shouted Montague. "Great suggestion, Jack!"

"What suggestion?" demanded the amazed leading man.

"Why, the circus!" said Jimmy. "It's never been done. We'll make a circus picture and it'll be a knockout!"

"You're a wizard, Jimmy!" said La Rue. "Give you a toothpick to start with and you'll have a lumberyard in ten minutes. How do you do it?"

Jimmy Montague pressed three buttons. The stenographer was first to appear.

"Send a telegram to the house in New York and ask 'em if they've got any stock films of circus parades. Get that off quick! That parade stuff will do fine for cut-ins," said Montague.

Ben Leslie, the property man, and Joe Bates, in charge of the wardrobe department, entered together.

"Joe," said the director, "Jack here wants some silk fleshings— full tights; white or pink will do. Manners ought to be a bareback rider, I suppose— no; hold on. Maybe we can't get anybody to double for her in a real riding act. I've got it! Why not make her a lion tamer? The very thing! Joe, get Manners a Spanish outfit and a lion-tamer's whip. I'll need some ringmaster's boots. That's all I can think of now; but it's enough to get busy on. I'll give you a list later."

"Goin' to do a circus picture?" asked Ben Leslie. Ben was a lean, saturnine individual, as remarkable a personage in his way as any member of the company. Had he been ordered to produce the Kohinoor immediately he would have nodded twice, shifted his fine-cut from one cheek to the other and gone out without a word. And he would have brought back the Kohinoor— or the next best thing. Nothing surprised him; nothing daunted him.

"Yes," said Jimmy Montague, "we're going to do a circus picture. Get busy on it, quick! Ward Brothers' Circus is wintering down at Santa Monica. You can borrow a lot of junk from them. You know Billy Ward, don't you?"

"Sure!" said Ben. "Worked for him once."

"Gee-whiz!" said Montague. "Is there anybody in the world you haven't worked for— once?"

"Reckon not," said Ben, and departed.

"This will be some scenario!" remarked Jimmy to his leading man.

In his brilliant mind the toothpick was already expanding into a telegraph pole; the lumberyard would come later.

"Yes, but I don't get you," said La Rue. "What am I supposed to be in this picture? An acrobat!"

"Bareback rider," said Jimmy succinctly. "In love with the lion tamer. So am I. I'm the ringmaster. We can work up a lot of jealousy stuff. I crab your act. Hit your horse with the whip when you go to do a jump-up. You fake a fall— all that 'Cur-rse you, Jack Dalton!' business. I ain't got it straightened out, yet, of course; but for the blowoff Myrtle's lion-taming stunt goes wrong, I get cold feet, and you tear in and save the lady. Ain't that great?"

"Me?" said La Rue, laying one hand upon his breast. "Me— save the lady? Me— in the cage with a lion? Not on your life! Suppose something goes wrong and he takes a wallop at me?"

"Forget it!" said the director. "We'll use old Duke for the cage scenes. You know what a gentle animal he is! Brought up on a bottle, Kelly tells me."

"So was I," said La Rue; "but I'll eat meat now. That milkfed business doesn't signify anything, Jimmy."

"Oh, rats!" said Montague. "Duke's got the disposition of a great big dog."

"No, he ain't," said the leading man earnestly. "He's got the disposition of a great big cat— and the claws and the teeth, and all the rest of it. Because he hasn't killed anybody yet is no sign that he won't before he's through. Nix on this tame-lion stuff— they're all wild, I tell you! And Manners wouldn't want to work with a lion either."

"She's done animal pictures before," said Jimmy. "That girl ain't afraid of anything."

La Rue passed over the slur.

"There's such a thing as being too brave for your own good," he insisted. "I'm as game as anybody, Jimmy, but it wouldn't get me anything to be clawed up by a milkfed lion. If Duke doesn't look right to me you'll have to double me in that cage scene. I won't work. I'm an actor, not an animal trainer."

"Oh, well," said Montague, "If it comes right down to cases we can let that Dennis kid double you and pull off the rescue; but there ain't any need of it. I've been in the cage with Duke a dozen times myself. He wouldn't harm a fly. You ought to know that I never ask you to take chances. I never got you hurt yet, did I?"

"Oh, no; not at all," said La Rue with sarcasm. "I suppose I wasn't hurt that time when I got pounded on the rocks by the surf up on the Malibu coast. There wasn't a spot on me as big as your hand that wasn't cut or bruised; but of course that didn't hurt! I just thought it did— that's all."

"The trouble with you, Jack," said Montague, "is too darned much temperament. Beat it out of here! I'm going to rib up this scenario."

"You remember, now," warned La Rue. "If Duke doesn't look right to me— nothing doing! You'll have to double me in that scene."

"Get out of here!" said Montague.

Left alone with his toothpick he drew a sheet of paper to him and scrawled upon it.

"The Jaws of Death," said he with a grin. "I guess that's a perfectly miserable title!"

iii

AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK Jimmy Montague pushed his chair back from his desk and gazed upon a masterpiece completed.

"If that ain't dopping out canned drama while you wait I don't know what is," he remarked with a satisfied sigh. "If the two big stunts in the lion's cage stand up all right I've got another grand picture for the poor old boss. If they fizzle— good night! We'll try fifty-one and fifty-three first. If Duke won't work with a woman I can turn the lion-taming stunt into something else and still have a circus picture."

One very fine thing about the moving-picture business is that no shred of an idea is ever wasted. Scenarios and action plots are subject to change at an instant's notice. A camera-caught accident often forms the basis of a new film drama. Jimmy Montague had once written a scenario round a leading man's broken leg. The picture of the fall from the roof was too good to waste.

The Jaws of Death, as articulated on paper by J. Montague, called for two reels of film, seventeen separate backgrounds or locations— as they are always called when the photographs must be made outside of the studio— and fifty-five scenes. The two big stunts in the lion's cage were numbered fifty-one and fifty-three— almost the closing scenes of the picture. These would be photographed first for economic reasons.

In Jimmy Montague's early days with the Titan Company, when the moving-picture business was in its swaddling clothes and all the men connected with the infant enterprise were learning something daily from the best and the bitterest teacher in the world, Jimmy worked forty men and women for two weeks, consumed miles of film leading up to his one big stunt scene; and he found when he got to it that it was a physical impossibility. The Titan people paid the bills, but the telegrams from New York were hot enough to melt the glass insulators in their flight. Jimmy managed to hold his job, but it was a close call; and after that he decided to make sure of his stunts first. If they succeeded, well and good. If they failed, the loss in time, money and raw film was trifling; and the scenario was deftly twisted about to meet the limitations of man or beast.

This time the limitations were those of Duke, the performing lion; and the circus drama as originally planned would stand or fall upon that brute's behavior. Scenes fifty-one and fifty-three, marked simply Interior Cage, were the crucial ones; so Jimmy set about his newest sensational production tail-first as it were.

In the darkened theater devoted to the Movie Muse the pictures flit upon the screen, incident fitting smoothly into incident to tell a connected story; but in the making a photo-play is the wildest crazy-quilt imaginable— a headless, tailless, cubist affair without form or coherence.

Scenes are photographed with an eye to back-ground or location and no regard for sequence. The complete plan exists only in the magnificent mind of the producing director. Picking up the plot of a moving picture by following the actors at their work would be as easy a task as unraveling Monte Cristo by reading chapters at random. This is one reason why seasoned moving-picture actors seldom ask questions. The director tells them what to do and they do it. Thus Myrtle Manners did not ask questions when she was given a Spanish costume, though she wondered what she was to do with the short rawhide whip.

Jack La Rue did not need to ask questions. He scowled as he inserted his manly form into pink silk fleshings. Jack did not like animals of any sort, and animals did not like him.

Tommy Dennis, picked out of the squad of extra men at the usual morning inspection, asked but one question as he tugged at another suit of pink silk fleshings.

"Say, Buck," said he, "is— is Miss Manners in this picture?"

"I dunno," said Buck, gloomily surveying a clown costume. "All they told me was that I got to ride that ornery trick mule. Jimmy Montague is fixin' to get my head kicked off, I reckon. Look at the clothes they wished on me! What are you made up for, Tommy? The flyin' trapeze or just a parachute jump? Where do these fool pants hook on to the shirt!"

Tommy Dennis, however, had lapsed into dreamy silence. Miss Manners, he reflected, had never seen him in tights. He looked down at his symmetrical limbs with a grave air of satisfaction. A costume of this sort— silk— ought to make a difference.

Charlie Jennings, a retired stock actor of long experience and no small skill with grease paints, entered the extra men's dressing room, carrying a makeup box and a black, curly wig.

"You're elected to be made handsome, Tommy," said he. "Montague says for me to make you up to double La Rue."

To double the leading man! Tommy's heart skipped a beat and then hurried wildly as if to catch up.

"S-a-a-y!" exclaimed Buck, suddenly jealous. "What's coming off here? If this is goin' to be ridin' stunts, why can't I double it? Tommy can have the mule. I can pull stuff on a hawss that La Rue— the big dub!— never knowed was in the book! I'm going to make a holler about this! I'm a rider; I ain't no rough-and-tumble comedian. There's favoritism in this joint!"

"Oh, I guess you don't want this job so bad as you think you do," said Jennings as he darkened Tommy \*s eyebrows. "I've got an idea you'd pass it up if they offered it to you."

"What's the stunt?" asked Tommy, trying his best to appear blase and unconcerned.

"Lion stuff!" said the old actor. "Hold that eye still! How do you expect I'm going to make you up if you wiggle all over the place?"

"Lions!" ejaculated Buck. "Excuse me a minute till I put my cue back in the rack. Tommy, you win a job and welcome. I'll take a chance with the mule. Ole Buck here is awful careless, but he ain't mislaid no lions lately. Huh-uh!"

"Are you afraid of lions, kid?" asked Jennings. "Would you go in the cage with Duke?"

"Which one is Duke?" asked Tommy.

"The big one. Think you'd be afraid!"

"Did La Rue pass it up!" Tommy had no intention of committing himself until he knew more of the details.

"Well," said Jennings with tact, "I don't know as Jack's really leary; I heard him tellin' Miss Manners just now that she might be a lion tamer, but he thanked God he was an actor."

"Is that little gal goin' into a lion's cage!" demanded Buck incredulously.

"Sure!" said Jennings. "She's game as they make 'em."

"I never was much afraid of lions," said Tommy. "Even when I was just a little shaver I used to look 'em right between the eyes and make 'em turn away."

"Ho!" sniffed Buck. "But you was outside the cage when you done that hypnotic stuff. It makes a heap of difference to a lion whether you're outside lookin' in or inside with him tryin' to get out. Don't overlook that, son!"

"Well, you needn't worry about Duke," said Jennings. "He's kind and gentle, and works fine in a picture. I wouldn't be afraid to lead him right down the middle of the street by his whiskers."

Buck cackled derisively.

"My! My! That actor man sure don't need no press agent!" he said. "Tommy, you know me! I'm your friend. I like you; but you don't resemble no Daniel-in-the-den to me, and don't you let nobody kid you into pullin' no lion's whiskers. It ain't bein' done this season at all. You could put a million dollars in a cage with a lion— an ole, sickly lion— a lion that had run round nights and dissipated, and never took no kind of care of himself, and wasn't enjoyin' good health— you

could stack that dough right up to the roof, and do you think I 'd go in there after it? Not in four thousand years! No, sir! A lion has got something on you any time he starts— an' he don't say nothin' to you before he starts neither. Just b-zing!— and first thing you know you ain't got no face left. I claim I'm gamer 'n any man ought to be and have good sense. I've had the cold chills sometimes thinkin' about the darn fool chances I've took; but little ole Buck Parvin in a cage with a lion? Huh-uh! My folks raised me to know better!"

"What are you trying to do— scare somebody?" snapped Jennings. "Don't pay any attention to him, kid. This is a tame lion."

"Tame— hell!" snorted Buck. "They ain't no tame lions!"

iv

DUKE WOKE UP when Tim Kelly and the crew of the animal farm began to trundle his cage toward the canvas studio. He blinked lazily, shook a fly off his nose, yawned twice, and prepared to take a languid interest in his surroundings. It was as if he said:

"Well, boys, what new foolishness is this?"

Nothing that men might do could surprise Duke very much. Beginning life under the canvas of a circus tent, he had seen human beings since the day his eyes opened. Even before he saw them he had smelled them. He had studied them covertly for years, without arriving at a definite conclusion regarding them; there was about him something of the impartial air of one who suspends judgment until all of the evidence has been presented. He looked upon the entire human race with a mixture of grave dignity, quiet patience and noble condescension.

Certainly these two-legged animals were queer creatures— the moving-picture ones queerest of all— but they were good to him; and Duke recognized a certain obligation on his part. He did not know why they wished him to do foolish and undignified things, but it was plain to him that these things pleased his friend Tim Kelly, the boss animal man; so whenever he was called upon, Duke stalked gravely through his part like the obliging old gentleman he was.

Duke liked the animal farm. He liked the long, lazy California days. There were no jolting street parades; no stuffy circus tent with its endless stream of gaping faces; no irritating rattle and thunder of night freights. If Duke had planned a Heaven for tired old lions it would have been like the animal farm, with its kindly attendants, large, comfortable cages, good food and long stretches of drowsy inactivity.

He had but one disquieting memory left him from his circus days— the memory of a swarthy man who made him leap through a fiery hoop, stand on

his hind legs, and roll over. Before every performance the swarthy man came into the cage and beat Duke unmercifully with a rawhide whip.

This memory returned vividly whenever Duke saw a whip in a trainer's hand. At such times he would sit up and strike at the rawhide, growling ferociously and showing his teeth, as he had always done when the swarthy man whipped him. He continued to do this long after he learned that, though Tim Kelly might sometimes show him a whip, he never struck him with it.

"Poor old felly!" Tim would say in his soft, crooning voice. "'Tis not me ye're scoldin' at, darlin'; it's the whip. Ye've been abused, Juke— bad luck to the brute that done it to ye!"

Then Tim would toss the whip out of the cage and rub the short hair on Duke's nose; and Duke would stretch himself luxuriously, making gentle dabs at Tim with his great cushioned paws by way of explaining to him that habit bound lions too, and that his growl did not really mean anything of a personal nature. Upon this habit Jimmy Montague had built his scenario. If Duke would growl at a whip in the hands of a woman the picture was as good as made.

Once in the studio Duke looked about him with a patronizing stare, sniffed once or twice, and then, dropping his nose between his paws, composed himself for a nap. He had been fed heavily early in the day and he was very sleepy.

"Ah!" said Jimmy Montague, very elegant in a ring-master's shining tile, cutaway coat, white moleskin breeches, and top boots. "That's my notion of the ideal moving-picture actor! He rolls in, on time to the dot; rubbers round once to see that everything is all right, and then goes to sleep till he's wanted. He never forgets his makeup and doesn't try to do any of the director's thinking for him."

Jimmy crossed toward La Rue, who was sitting on a bench, Ms pink-silk legs crossed and the eternal cigarette between his lips.

"You see how quiet he is," urged Montague. "He's as easy to get along with as a Newfoundland puppy."

La Rue scowled and shook his head.

"The only lion I'll ever go in the cage with will be a dead one," said he. "He's asleep now, Jimmy; but I've seen these tame wild animals wake up at the wrong time— and so have you."

Miss Manners, more beautiful than ever in the Spanish costume, a single yellow rose in her dark hair, looked at Duke anxiously. Tommy Dennis, modestly smothering his silken grandeur in a shabby raincoat, took up a protecting position beside her. After a time he dared to speak, feeling that his elevation to the part of understudy to the leading man permitted him a certain amount of latitude.

"Aw, he's all right!" said Tommy, nodding toward the sleeping beast. "He never hurt anybody in his life. Miss Manners. He's what they call a milkfed lion."

The girl indulged him with a smile.

"He looks peaceful enough now," said she. "I'm always a little nervous with animals, though. Are you?"

"I never have been yet," said Tommy, skirting the thin edge between truth and fiction.

"Did you ever work with this lion before?"

"Not with this one," said Tommy, allowing the lady to draw her own conclusions from the slight shading of the adjective.

"You're doubling La Rue, aren't you?" asked the girl, glancing at the wig. "You don't look much like him."

"I thank you," said Tommy, and they laughed together. Immediately he felt a subtle bond of sympathy between them and risked a bold stroke. "You don't care very much for him yourself, do you?" asked Tommy, marveling at his own audacity.

"I'm not answering questions this morning," smiled Miss Manners.

"You don't have to," said Tommy bluntly. "I know!"

"Indeed?" The slow, rising inflection warned Tommy that it was time to change the subject.

"Say, what about this stunt we're going to do?" he asked. "All they told me was that it was lion stuff."

He said it with the airy nonchalance of one to whom lions were nothing—the merest trifle— an every-day affair.

"I don't know what the action is myself yet," said the girl. "You're not in the first scene, I believe; but in the next one you're to carry me out of the cage."

"Great!" ejaculated Tommy, who at that moment would not have exchanged places with any living man, lion or no lion. "That ought to make a swell picture!"

"Yes," said Miss Manners; "but don't you forget that it's my face that you want to keep toward the camera. I don't want anybody to think that I had to be doubled in this scene!"

"Leave it to me!" said Tommy. "I don't care whether they see me or not, so long as I can help you make a good picture of it. And let me tell you something: When you go in there, look at that lion right between the eyes! Whatever you do, don't turn your head away for a second! Just keep your nerve with you; and remember that a lion can't do a thing so long as you look him square in the eye."

"I've heard that before," said the girl.

"Sure you have, and it's true! I've pulled that eye stuff on lions and things ever since I was a kid, and it 's worked every time."

WHILE TOMMY was gilding the dull edges of fact with the glittering alloy of fancy Jimmy Montague had not been idle. His first task was to superintend the placing of the cage— a long, narrow receptacle, constructed with an eye to the focal limitations of a camera lens. The inclosure was swung about so that the narrow front end of the cage, in which was the door, rested opposite the steep tier of bleacher seats upon which the audience was already seated.

A single bar at the back end of the cage was then removed to permit the entrance of the camera. The lines of focus sweeping fanwise from the lens embraced the entire width of the receptacle at the front end, with the door as the exact center of the stage, and broadened out to embrace the audience as a background. Between the bleacher seats and the cage was an open space in which a certain portion of the action must transpire.

The completed picture, when flashed upon the screen, would present to the beholder an unobstructed foreground of the interior of the cage, beyond which the actors appeared against a solid wall of faces, the latter conveying the impression of a crowded circus tent.

"Now then!" said Jimmy Montague briskly, "all you people who are not in this first scene get back over the lines and keep still! Dennis, that means you. Beat it!"

"Remember about keeping your eye on him!" whispered Tommy as he faded away, and the girl nodded.

Tommy took up a position in the far corner of the studio, where for the first time he became conscious of the shabby raincoat. He removed it, deeply regretting that he had not done so sooner.

Into the space between the cage and the bleachers Montague summoned Miss Manners, La Rue and Tim Kelly, conversing with them in low, earnest tones. Tommy could not hear what the director was saying and, to tell the truth, he was not interested in the action of scene fifty-one. He was already playing the hero in scene fifty-three, inventing a dozen methods of rescuing the beautiful lion tamer at risk of life and limb. He wondered if Jimmy Montague would order him to kiss her, and the one drop of bitterness in his cup was the thought that La Rue would probably do that.

"Now here's the action of the first scene," Jimmy was saying. "Myrtle, you're to go into the cage. This old lion is whip-shy. Pull the rawhide on him and he'll begin to act. He'll sit up on his haunches and growl, and make passes with his paws; but he's only bluffing."

" 'Tis what he always does when ye show him the whip," said Tim. "An' it ain't meanness wid him, miss— it's fear! He's been abused in his time an' he can't forget it. He'll git up on his hunkers an' show his teeth an' make an awful powwow; but, bless ye, he don 't mean anything by it. So long as he can see the whip he'll keep on actin'— remember that."

"Good!" said Montague. "Now, Myrtle, as soon as the lion begins to work you register fear. Keep the whip in your hand where he can see it, and back away from him toward the side. Put one arm over your face— like this. Better crouch down against the bars and stay there till the end of the scene. The camera is cutting in the whole front end of the cage, so you won't have to worry about getting out of focus. Jack, when she kneels down by the bars you come forward to the door of the cage and establish yourself. Then register great fear that the lion's turned bad. I want you to get that right square into the camera's eye. That's all; we cut there with an announcement: Dolores Loses Her Nerve— Love to the Rescue."

"Is that the end of the scene?" asked Miss Manners.

"Yes. Then you stand by, and Kelly will make the lion lay down and play dead— and the double will carry you out. Afterward I can make a closeup of La Rue grabbing a pistol out of my pocket, shooting through the bars and running. That'll come after the announcement— to establish that the lion was shot by La Rue. That's all, I guess— except that we won't rehearse this because the lion won't work more than once a day. We'll just go ahead and make the picture."

"You're sure about this lion, are you?" asked Miss Manners.

"Absolutely! Tim and the other animal man will be right outside the door and they could get you out in a flash. Oh, by the way, Tim, it would be a pretty good touch if you and George got a couple of those iron prods you had for the leopard and held 'em up as if you expected to use 'em. We want to make Duke look as ferocious as possible."

Tim Kelly grinned.

"Ye're slandherin' the poor old dog," said he; "but it'll look grand in a picture!"

Montague next turned his attention to the camera man. A producing director is responsible for everything, from the newest extra man to the high-salaried and capable expert who handles the camera.

"Oh, Charlie!"

"Yep!" answered Dupree, the little photographer.

"Got your focus nice and clear, so there won't be any fuzzy backgrounds in this? Camera all threaded up! And be sure you've got a full box there, because I'm going to make these two scenes together, all in one piece."

"Right-oh!" answered Dupree.

Montague turned to the bleachers:

"You extra people, sit still and don't act! And I'll fine anybody a day's pay that makes a noise. I want absolute quiet in this scene— remember!"

The director then became the heavy actor, twitched at the collar of his coat, straightened his tie and moved into position.

"All right, Tim! Wake up the star!"

TOMMY DENNIS watched the animal man as he rattled the bars of the cage. Duke raised his head inquiringly.

"Up! Git up, Juke!" commanded Kelly, and the big beast heaved himself erect with a sigh. He fixed his sleepy yellow eyes upon Tim's face with an expression of patient resignation plainer than words.

"I haven't the slightest idea what this is all about, *said the yellow eyes, "but I am in the hands of my friends. Let's get it over with as soon as possible."*

"Gee! He's a whopper when he stands up!" thought Tommy Dennis.

"Get him a little farther back from the door, Tim," whispered Montague. "That's better.... Hold up the iron prods, boys!... Now, then, Myrtle! Ready— action— go!"

Duke had often heard the three words that move the movie world. In his mind they were associated with unusual happenings and sudden developments. He pricked up his ears, for in the dead silence he could hear the ticking purr of the film as it sped past the lens into the takeup box; and turning slightly he caught the glint of the camera's eye at the far end of the cage.

Miss Manners stepped bravely forward, Tim Kelly threw open the door and Duke became aware that he had a visitor. Beyond a slight lifting of his head, Duke remained motionless, regarding this charming stranger with polite and respectful interest. To tell the truth, Duke was rather partial to women. He remembered that in his circus days they had never prodded him with canes or umbrellas, and he placed that to their credit. Over in his corner Tommy Dennis drew a deep breath. It was a milkfed lion, after all!

"The whip! Show him the whip!"

Obedient to the whisper, Miss Manners drew the rawhide from a fold of her skirt and shook it under Duke's nose. Instantly the big brute rose upon his haunches, snarling and striking with his paws and filling the place with his angry protest.

"Ar-r-r-ugh! R-r-r-ugh!" scolded Duke, thinking of the swarthy man with the bad eye.

"Ye're doin' fine, Juke! Bully f'r you!" whispered Tim. "He's only bluffin', miss."

Tommy Dennis took a step forward, his knuckles whitening through the tan as his fingers closed convulsively.

"Don't lose your nerve!" he breathed. "Look him right in the eye!"

Even as the words were on his lips the transformation came. The girl wavered; the whip lowered uncertainly, and she turned slowly from the lion to the camera. Tommy read terror in the staring eyes— in the blind groping of the

free hand— in the whole cringing attitude. He sensed panic in the sudden shifting of Montague and La Rue.

"She's afraid!" he groaned. "Why don't they do something?"

There was worse to come. Miss Manners crept toward the side of the cage, where she knelt cowering against the bars. Duke ceased to growl, but he could still see the whip; and, like the dependable actor he was, he continued to register emotion. He squatted on the floor to await developments, and his tail whisked in swift, nervous circles.

"Swell!" whispered Jimmy Montague. "That crouch makes him look as if he was going to do a jump. Establish yourself, Jack!"

Then it happened.

Charlie Dupree, counting his film foot by foot and congratulating himself upon an artistic success, caught a glimpse of a thunderbolt in pink-silk fleshings that shot into the picture from the void beyond the focal lines. Before Dupree could cry a warning, Jack La Rue, establishing himself at the cage door, was hurled violently to the ground, and high over the wild howls and imprecations of director and camera man rose a clarion call:

"It's all right! I'm coming!"

Being an animal man by instinct and training, Tim Kelly was geared up to meet emergencies rather more than halfway. As La Rue was doubled up by his double, Tim launched himself at Tommy's legs; but silk is slippery stuff, and not for nothing had Tommy been the star halfback of a football team. The flying tackle crumpled in a limp heap; Tommy snatched the iron bar from the petrified George, and the next instant he was inside the cage, brandishing the weapon.

Old Duke, still crouching, looked up just in time to receive a terrific blow full upon the tip of his sensitive nose.

"You would, would you!" howled Tommy.

The king of beasts covered his afflicted head with his paws, tucked his tail between his legs and humped his back to the storm. His piteous clamor took on a shrill note of hysteria.

"Run, Miss Manners! I've got him going!"

The command fell on deaf ears. Myrtle had given one terrified glance over her shoulder and fainted, thereby blocking entrance to the cage for several seconds.

To the everlasting credit of Charlie Dupree let it be recorded here that his good right hand did not miss a single revolution of the crank.

"Hey! Keep him in the corner!" yelled Dupree. "Swing round more! You'll cloak the action!"

Tommy Dennis was beyond orders, however, and Duke was past remaining in any corner. There was only one idea left in the lion's battered head, and that was to tear down the bars and escape from this maniac who pursued him so

relentlessly and hit him so hard. The cage rocked to Duke's frantic assaults, and at each thump of the iron bar his agonized cries grew louder. His wildly roving eye fell upon the gap that had been made to admit the end of the camera— and Duke leaped for it, plunging his nose into the aperture below the ticking black box. Charlie Dupree grew suddenly pale, but his right hand did not falter.

"Back!" he roared. "You're out of the picture! Back!"

Then Tommy Dennis, reeling and dizzy, exhausted by violent exercise and excess of emotion, added a finishing touch to a remarkable performance. He aimed his valedictory at the top of Duke's head, between the ears, putting into the blow the last remaining ounce of his strength. The heavy bar descended squarely upon the top of the camera, smashing the delicate mechanism into a thousand pieces; and Charlie Dupree, festooned with ruined film but faithful to the last, continued to turn the piece of crank that remained in his hand.

The next thing Tommy knew the iron bar was whisked from his grasp and he was plucked backward, going down underneath an avalanche of striking, swearing humanity. Five strong men sat upon various portions of his person, and the one astride his shoulders seized him by the ears and banged his head upon the floor of the cage. This was Director J. Montague. Duke was whimpering in the far corner, his head in Tim Kelly's lap; and the animal man was weeping and cursing by turns.

"Kill him f'r me!" he raved. "The murdherin' scut has fair slaughtered the best actor we got!"

TOMMY DENNIS was sullenly collecting his few personal effects when Buck Parvin burst into the dressing-room, out of breath and panting.

"What's this I hear? What's this! Tommy, they tell me you saved the lady, all right; but you saved her so strong that the whole gang had to tear into the cage to save the lion! What kind of a guy are you anyway? Just my fool luck to be down at the hawss corrals and miss a show like that! Did they can you for it?"

Tommy nodded. Then, after a silence:

"What do they say about it?"

"Well," said Buck judiciously, "different people says different things. Now there's Tim Kelly. I seen him before I come away from the farm. Tim says Duke won't never get his tail out from between his legs if he lives to be older 'n Methuselah, an' that, as a movin'-picture lion, he's through— loss o' confidence, and all that stuff. I don't know 'bout the confidence part of it; but, from what I seen, Duke sure is shy a lot of scalp, an' he's got a couple of front teeth that might's well be on a watch-charm as where they are."

"Darn it!" said Tommy. "I think they might have told me what the action was going to be!"

"Ye-ep, they might, at that," said Buck; "but how could they figure you was goin' to go for that lion the way you did? Then there's Dupree, the photographer guy. I seen him cryin' over what's left of his tick-tick. He says he could forgive you for doublin' La Rue at the wrong time, and he ain't got no kick on what you done to the lion; but when you caved in that box it looks like you lost a wellwisher. He 'lows as how he hadn't missed a move you made an' was gettin' a wonderful picture of you a-fannin' that ole snoozer on the bean, when— blooie! And there he was, kneedeep in busted glass and loose film. You'd better try not to meet that guy when you go out— he's hostile! Then there's Montague. Jimmy says you made a bum of the grandest scenario he ever wrote."

"Did anybody else say anything?"

"Well, yes," said Buck. "Myrtle— she was kind of mentionin' you in spots— a little."

"What did she say?"

"I heard her tellin' La Rue that you'd spoiled the best piece of actin' she'd ever done, an' then beat up the lion so horrible they couldn't never get no makeover on it. What made her sorest was that you'd been ribbin' her up to keep her nerve an' then you went an' lost yours!"

"Me?" demanded Tommy. "Lost my nerve— after what I did to that lion!"

"That's what the lady said," remarked Buck, rolling a brown-paper cigarette. "The way she figures it out, you got scared and went kind of daffy!"

There was a silence of two full minutes while Tommy crammed his belongings into his suitcase.

"That does settle it!" he said bitterly. "And I thought I was risking my life— for that!"

Buck Parvin peered at the boy through the smoke as it rose from his nostrils. When he spoke there was something almost like sympathetic understanding in his tone.

"Son," he said, "Uncle Buck— he knows how you feel. He tried to do a lady a favor once by beatin' up her husband when he had a beatin' coming. Spanish lady she was— down in the Pecos country. Ever seen that scar across my ribs?... That's the thanks I got!... Women an' lions— lions an' women— look out for 'em, Tommy! Both of 'em scratch!"

## 9: Betty's Bracelet

**William Crawford Honeyman**

(as by 'James M'Govan')

1845–1919

Collected in: *The Edinburgh Detective*,  
Old Cap Collier's Library, Oct 1883

IN GOING THROUGH one of the fashionable crescents at the West End very early one morning, the night policeman noticed a single window on the second flat of one of the big houses wide open. All the other windows were closed and shuttered as usual, but this one had the sash raised high, and the blind idly flapping outside. It was just dawn on a mild summer morning, and the man, though he had passed the house more than once during the night, had not noticed the open window in the darkness.

Now in the brightening dawn he stood staring at it, uncertain what to think or how to act. There was a railed area flat below the window, but it was possible to place a long ladder on the copingstone inside those railings and against the wall of the house and thus reach the window.

After considering the case, the man rang the bell violently till he succeeded in rousing the servants. There were three in all, and they ran down half dressed, thinking that the house was on fire, and scolded the policemen roundly for disturbing them about such a trifling matter as an open window. Trifling matter?

When the rooms were examined, it was found that plate, jewelry, and soft goods had been removed to the value of £200. The thieves had gone about their task with the utmost coolness and precision, which implied either extraordinary experience or a thorough knowledge of the premises and the habits of the inmates.

Only the first and second flats had been entered— the bedrooms above and the servants' attics being avoided— but these had been ransacked with business-like skill. It is not common in cases of this kind for housebreakers to burthen themselves with soft goods, but here was an exception. They had taken tablecloths, curtains, linen, clothing, and even boots. The bundles of these alone must have been of no small size and weight, yet the only visible entrance and exit of the thieves had been that raised window-sash on the second flat.

That was the point which puzzled me. It was quite unlike the style of experienced housebreakers such as they appeared to be. It implied the risk of bringing a heavy and cumbrous ladder through the streets at night, the risk of leaving that ladder against the wall while they were within, the bringing out of that window and down the ladder of their big bundles, and the conveying away of the whole in the short interval of the night policeman's absence. I could conceive such a performance possible had there been a gang of four or five at

work, but the laziness and recklessness of the tribe were all against such a course. Then, supposing that they had found it necessary to enter by the window, there was no reason why they should not have left by the main door. It was secured by two bolts and two locks, the keys of which hung on a nail close by, quite within their reach. And when they had accomplished all so noiselessly, why should they not have closed the window after them, so as to delay the alarm as long as possible? It appeared as if they were anxious to proclaim aloud— "We came in by the window, and we left by the window— behold the proof!" The hint was too transparent, but what was it intended to cover?

A knowledge of the premises could only have been got in one way, and I began to question and examine the three servants. I made no progress in that way. They appeared all innocent enough, and had no followers of dubious character. The only thing I remember noticing was that one of them— the housemaid, a smart-looking girl named Betty Baxter— spoke with a Glasgow accent. To Edinburgh ears that accent has a thievish or 'keelie-like" sound, and I firmly believe I questioned that girl more closely than the others merely on that account.

She had been only about six weeks in the place, but came well recommended, having certificates of character from no end of former mistresses. She had been the last to be roused by the furious ringing of the policeman, and the loudest in scolding him. She was a smart girl, Betty— just a little too smart, I thought. Her answers appeared too ready, and she was never taken aback by a question, however suspicious.

"If it were necessary," I remember thinking, "that girl could lie through a brick wall;" but that fact did not necessarily connect her with the robbery.

From the servants actually on the premises I went back to those who had left at the preceding term, and thought I had got a clue. One of them had been put away on suspicion of pilfering from her mistress and from the other servants, and I spent a deal of time ferreting after her, trying to discover her whereabouts and the characters she was now consorting with.

I had an idea that if I found her and her associates I should not be far from the house-breakers: but all my work only proved that the girl had first gone home to her mother's house, and then, after spending a week or two in a strange town hunting for a situation, had gone off as a free emigrant to Queensland. Clearly, then, if she had given the information upon which the thieves acted, she was now far beyond our reach. At that stage a curious accident led to a discovery, for which we got a great deal of undeserved praise. A publican's wife had run away with a bottler in her husband's employ, and taken with her a number of articles of jewelry and clothing, to say nothing of money belonging to her husband. It was supposed that the runaways had made for Glasgow, with the intention of getting across to Ireland, and before copies of

their likenesses could be sent thither the Belfast steamer was boarded by the police, armed with the proper warrant.

The runaways were not found, for at that moment they were sailing out of the Mersey for America; but in turning over the boxes and luggage of the passengers, there were found a green painted box and crate, or basket, which had no name upon them, and which no one claimed.

This luggage was hauled out from the rest, and the passengers were all mustered and called upon to claim it, but in vain. Accordingly the box and crate were removed on shore, and opened in hope of discovering the publican's treasures, then gliding safely out into the Channel. The result was the discovery of nearly every article which had been taken from that house with the raised sash. The crate contained the soft goods, and the green box the plate and other articles of greater value.

Immediately on the discovery being made a telegram was sent to Belfast to have the steamer searched for suspicious characters upon its arrival, but this resulted in no capture. If the owner had really been on board he probably had left whenever the box and crate were taken possession of by the police under the impression that it was these the men had been after. A spirited paragraph appeared in all the newspapers next day describing the "clever recovery of stolen property," and praising us to the skies for our acuteness and skill. Of course we laughed as heartily in our sleeve at the press's praise as we had often done at its censure.

The impression left on the minds of the men on board the steamer was that the box and hamper had been brought on board by a small, thin-legged fellow with close cropped hair, and their description of the man led to nothing at this time, though it was to prove useful after.

The most valuable part of the plunder was recovered, and the public were satisfied that we had done our duty, and so the matter rested.

A month or two later there came a report of a somewhat similar robbery at a comfortable country house about two miles from the city. As in the first case, the place had been securely fastened at windows and doors on the first fiat, but a window on the second was found open, this time with a ladder brought from an adjoining garden leaning against the wall close by. With the first news of the robbery I went out to the place. It was a good old house, occupied by a wealthy widow, whose fine plate and curiosities had suffered woefully by the invasion.

A noisy brute of a watch-dog kept me from the door till a servant, attracted by the barking, ran out to rebuke him. When the dog had been kicked into his kennel by this girl, she turned to me to receive my message, when, to my unbounded surprise, I recognized my former smart acquaintance with the Glasgow accent, Betty Baxter.

"What! You are here, too?" I unguardedly exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, sir," she answered, with the greatest readiness, and not in the least abashed. "Isn't it strange that this place should be entered by robbers, too? I left the other place in fear that they would come back— and that, you know, would have frightened the life out of me; but there seems to be thieves in the country as well as the town."

"So it seems," I dryly returned, "and they have the same style of working as the town ones. Perhaps they're related to each other."

She did not blush nor show the least confusion, though it was clear to me that a girl with such a quick eye as she was blessed with could not but see my meaning. I went over the house with her and her mistress, and accompanied by another servant girl—a quiet-looking lass of eighteen or so, named Maggie Black— and found that very much the same system of robbery had been practiced as at Betty's first place.

The window appeared to have been the only means of ingress and egress, the front door and lower windows being left untouched in bolt, lock or bar. During the examination I was thinking not so much of Betty as of the watchdog, which had howled and barked and created such an uproar upon my arrival.

How had the invisible thieves placed a ladder against the wall close to that brute's kennel without rousing him, when my footfall made him nearly strangle himself in the desire to gobble me up? I was not wishing the beast dead, but rather that his long red tongue could for a minute or two be endowed with the gift of speech.

The stately old lady who had been robbed was in a state of great excitement, and had no sooner shown me over the place than she conducted me to the parlor, and, closing the door after sending down the servants, desired me to give an opinion on the robbery. I evaded the question, and talked of other matters for a few minutes, and then suddenly and noiselessly rose, crossed the room, and threw open the door.

I was just in time as I looked out into the lobby to catch a glimpse of a servant's cap and dress disappearing swiftly below.

"What is the matter?" demanded the widow, anxiously.

"Nothing— only I fancied I heard some one breathing outside the room door," I quietly returned. I said nothing of Betty Baxter, though I felt morally certain that the smart cap and spotless print dress which had just vanished belonged to her, and her alone. She feared me then? She, too, had been anxious to hear my decision? It might be mere feminine curiosity, but I was inclined to think otherwise. I left the house and returned to town to report, but I took care to leave orders that either of the servant girls attempting to leave the house should be detained or handed over to the county police.

I did not give Betty credit for half the ingenuity she possessed. Besides, if she had only known it, she had little to fear from me even supposing she had 'put

up" the robbery for some gang. How could I possibly connect her with them? Luckily for justice all the points in their favor do not occur to the guilty; and where their position is already impregnable they hastily try to make it more strong, and so bring down the whole about their ears. Betty's wits had not been idle during the two days which elapsed. She and the other servant, who was quiet and religiously inclined, had never agreed well since she came, and I was no sooner out of the house than Betty sought her mistress, and threw out several mysterious hints to the effect that the robbers might be found a great deal nearer home than Mr. M'Govan expected. Being called upon to explain her meaning, Betty, upon extracting a solemn promise of secrecy, imparted to her mistress the information that Maggie Black always kept the door of her room—a little corner of an attic, lighted by a trap-window in the slates, about a foot and a half square—locked. At the same time she stated that she had missed several articles of her own which no one but Maggie could have taken. Betty slept in a closet off the kitchen, and declared that she had always kept her trunk unlocked. She could not tell how many things she had lost, but would look through her trunk as soon as she could find time, and report. Next day Betty had her story ready, which was to the effect that she missed a number of articles of wearing apparel and also several trinkets, among which was a silver bracelet, which she had got as a present from a sweetheart. Mrs. Newton, her mistress, at once suggested that she should call in Maggie Black, charge her with the theft, and challenge her, unlock the door of her room, and show its contents; but to this Betty replied that these things were best done before witnesses, and suggested that "Mr. M'Govan, the able detective, who had so much skill and experience in such matters," should be sent for, so as to appear to be accidentally present when the charge was made.

Accordingly Mrs. Newton sent me a note requesting my presence, though that was really not called for, as I was on my way to the house when the note was delivered. The truth is, I had been as busy as Betty, and had unmistakable evidence that the night before a little fellow with thin legs and close-cropped hair had been seen coming from the direction of Mrs. Newton's house. The fellow had been stopped by the county constable, and had asserted that he was a slater, on tramp, and had not stopped near Mrs. Newton's house, a statement which was found to be false when the man was out of reach, for he had not only been seen near the house, but in company with a female wearing a light-colored print dress like that of a domestic servant.

Betty was the first to greet me on my arrival, and she at once became confidential.

"We think," she said, alluding to herself and her mistress, "that Maggie Black knows something of the robbery or those who did it, for we've missed ever so

many things, and Mrs. Newton is to demand that she opens her door and shows what's in her box."

"You don't mean me to believe that she has the stolen things in her room?" I said, in no pleasant tone.

"Maybe not, but she has some of my things, for nobody else could have took them," said Betty, determinedly, "and Maggie has owre mony queer characters coming about her."

"And you haven't, of course?"

"No, there's not a lad near here worth looking at," she answered, with a toss of the head, but all the while she was watching me cunningly out of the corners of her quick eyes, and I was saying to myself: "My lassie, the man who catches you napping may call himself clever."

Of course I never calculated upon the minx cutting her own throat, if I may so speak. Her cunning, as I shall now try to show, was of the kind which overleaps itself, and falls on the other side.

After I had been shown into the presence of Mrs Newton, the other girl, Maggie Black, was summoned to the room. She appeared a good deal agitated, but her excitement increased painfully when I read over the list supplied by Betty of the things she had missed, and asked Maggie if she had any particular reason for keeping her door always locked.

"Betty told me to keep it locked," she indignantly replied.

Betty raised her hands and eyes in apparent horror at the statement.

"You are quite sure that you have kept it locked, constantly, so that no one but yourself could enter the room?" I continued, suspecting a plot.

"Oh, yes, quite sure, and there's nothing in it I'm afraid to show," Maggie promptly returned. "Come and see for yourselves."

Nothing could have been more frank than the offer, and we followed her to her little attic, which she unlocked and entered. The place could hardly hold us, and I noticed that the window of obscured plate glass on the slates was opened on the hinge— that is, pushed upwards— to air the little closet. A few dresses hung behind the door. There was nothing else in the room but the bed and Maggie's trunk. I glanced round, and then nodded to her to unlock the trunk.

She took everything out, article by article, accounting for all till she was near the bottom, when she lifted up a parcel in glazed wrapping paper, and stared at it in dismay.

"I dinna ken what this is," she slowly observed. "I dinna mind o' seeing it before."

I glanced at Betty. Her eyes were gleaming, and there was a ring of pallor round her mouth, the only indication of the intense excitement within. Maggie opened the parcel with a shaking hand, stared at the contents, and then burst into tears.

"I never saw them afore! They've been put in by somebody!" she wailed, with the most piteous exclamations of grief.

Betty pressed forward and leant over as I took up the things.

"That's my silver bracelet," she vengefully snapped out; "and that's my lace collar, and my gloves, and my neck-tie, and my pink ribbon, and my cap," and so she went on enumerating the articles till the parcel was exhausted.

There was another small parcel wrapped in a bit of newspaper lying in the box, and which also Maggie declared she had never seen before; and on opening that I found within one dozen of the finest cambric handkerchiefs and half a dozen pairs of kid gloves of a peculiar Paris make. The whole were highly scented, and in sniffing at them I noticed a monogram worked with pink silk at the corner of the handkerchiefs.

Betty disclaimed all ownership of these articles, and I examined the monogram and made it out to be " M.Y.W." I had been on the hunt for articles so marked not long before, and a flash of memory recalled the circumstances. The plunder recovered on the Belfast steamer had been so marked, and among the articles of that robbery detailed as not recovered were a dozen cambric handkerchiefs and a half-dozen pairs of kid gloves of a particular size and style, received by one of the ladies as a birthday present.

I looked straight into Betty's eyes as I read out the monogram, and her look of innocent wonder was a study.

"What was the monogram used by your last mistress, Betty?" I quietly asked.

"I don't remember, sir," was her guileless reply. "What! is it possible that she has been concerned in that robbery, too?"

I looked at Betty steadily, but made no reply. Had the case been a little less serious I believe I should have laughed outright, for I was thinking not of Betty and her ingeniously trailed "red herring" so much as of my uncle's monkey and, that the reader may follow the drift of my thoughts, I shall here record Jacko's exploit. The monkey was very fond of sugar, but disliked the strapping which he always got for stealing that luxury. One Sunday, when my uncle had gone to church, Jacko found the cupboard unlocked. The cupboard served as a pantry, and held milk, bread, etc., as well as the sugar bowl.

Jacko entered the press and emptied the sugar bowl at his leisure. Then, to take the guilt from his own shoulders, Jacko got hold of the cat and shut it into the cupboard. He had seen the cat strapped for stealing, but his intellect did not grasp the fact that cats do not steal and eat sugar. When my uncle returned Jacko was seated on the hob at the fireplace, looking hard up the chimney, the picture of innocence.

The press door was opened, the cat ran out, and then the sugar was missed. Jacko was watching the whole of the proceedings with one corner of one eye. The other was solemnly fixed on the sky, up through the chimney. The milk was

untouched— the cat having only been on the floor of the cupboard but all the sugar had vanished.

"Jacko!" thundered my uncle, taking down the strap.

Jacko started violently nearly as high as himself, but caved in at once, and darted for his usual place of refuge under the bed, whence he was dragged to receive a double punishment for his ingenious crime.

I looked at Betty and thought of the monkey, for, like Jacko, she had proved too much. In her anxiety to fix guilt on Maggie Black, she had forgotten that Maggie had not been in the place last robbed, while Betty had. These thoughts had scarcely crossed my mind when another discovery nearly electrified me, for by it I imagined I had got another clue such as Betty had never dreamed of giving.

The silver bracelet taken out of the parcel in Maggie's trunk yet lay in my hand. I chanced to turn it over absently and noticed a word scratched inside. I looked closer and made out the word to be "Tim." And as I did so, there flashed upon me the words "Slater Tim!" and my wonder now is that I did not shout them out.

Slater Tim was a little slim, Glasgow fellow, who had been a slater, and got injured in some way, and drifted into a lazier life. I knew that at that moment Tim was in Edinburgh, at a place where I could find him without trouble. The report of the county constable that he had seen a fellow calling himself a slater seemed to fit in so nicely that I could not refrain from saying to Betty as carelessly and innocently as possible—

"What's that written on the inside of your bracelet?"

"Only the name of the sweetheart I got it from," she readily answered. "I can swear to it by that."

"Yes, but what is the word?" I persisted.

"T-i-m— Tim," said Betty, kindly mincing it for my weak intellect.

"What is he, at all?" I carelessly continued, examining the bracelet closely, lest the cunning girl should read anything in my eyes.

Stupid, suicidal Betty!

"A slater!" she proudly returned.

"Imphum. Is it long since you saw him?"

"Oh, yes, a long time," she hastily returned.

The tone— for I did not look up— told me that she was getting wary, and had rejected truthfulness for lying.

"I saw him leave you last night at the foot of the walk," cried Maggie promptly and decisively. "I believe you sent me for the milk half an hour too soon just to have him up at the house while I was away."

"Very likely," was my thought as Betty broke into a storm of denials, "and a nimble rascal like him could easily go along the roof and get in at this window, and insert the things in that trunk in spite of locks," but I kept the idea to myself.

"Would you know him again if you saw him?" I quietly asked of the weeping girl.

"Ay wad I, for I've seen him three times," she readily returned, and then my mind was made up.

I told Betty to get on her things, and also reluctantly decided that I must take poor Maggie with me too, though I so far honored her as to send her for one of the county constables before taking them both away. Betty was silent and defiant in her demeanor, and as bold as brass; Maggie appeared overpowered with grief and shame. I took them in to Edinburgh, and they were locked up. Then I went and took Slater Tim out of his bed, so far gone with drink that he did not know but he was being led out by some boon companion to have a jolly spree, and became quite outrageous when at the Central Office no one ran to execute his order for two gills of brandy.

With Tim I got some trifling articles stolen from Mrs. Newton, but the most valuable and dearly cherished had gone into the melting pot. There was no difficulty in establishing the innocence of poor Maggie Black, and as little in roving Betty's guilt. It turned out that she had originally been led off her feet by the insignificant-looking rascal whom she was serving. Tim was identified by Maggie, and also by the men on board the Belfast steamer, and the whole case was so clear that he and his assistant got five years apiece.

Tim was not strong, and the prison life proved too much for him. He died when he had served only the half of his term. Betty professed great grief and contrition for her past faults after learning of Jim's death. It is possible that her contrition was genuine, and that her penitence and prayers were sincere. I can offer no opinion on the point, but when she was set at liberty, she managed to get some ladies interested in her, and after a little got into a capital place as house-maid— in which work, I am led to understand, she showed real smartness and ability. I should not trouble to record all this but for a curious incident which brought her once more under my notice.

Betty had a terrible tongue, and said some hard things about a fellow-servant, which stuck deep into the woman's mind, and rankled there. Shortly after the woman complained of having missed a number of articles, including a sovereign marked in a peculiar manner, and insisted on Betty's box being turned out and searched. Betty resisted, and a warrant was got. The articles were duly found in Betty's trunk; but Betty, with an energy which never saw equalled, reared herself before her accuser, and solemnly swore the most awful oath that she was innocent. Her assertion, and even the oath, went for nothing. Betty had to tramp. The other conviction was brought up against her, and this time her

sentence was seven years. She screamed out her protestations of innocence at the very bar; she held on to the rail with giant strength, and refused to allow them to remove her; called on her Maker to smite her dead before every one's eyes if she was not proclaiming the truth; and finally was forced out in strong convulsions. In prison she would not work, and could scarcely be forced to eat. She became emaciated, sullen, and depressed. Finally she was ordered into hospital as a confirmed invalid, and died there, solemnly protesting to the last that she was innocent of the crime which had sent her there. I believe she spoke the truth.

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## 10: Hercules in Hell

**Bertram Atkey**

1880-1952

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IF ONE IS TO JUDGE by the writings about Hercules one can hardly fail to arrive at the conclusion that this popular hero was a young man of practically no character and of pronouncedly dissipated habits. It is the intention of the present writer to prove that these historians were in error.

The Atkeys are descended in a more or less direct line from the great Greek hero, and thanks to a recent discovery, Bertram of the clan is able to throw a good deal of new light upon the life and labors of Hercules.

Some years ago Bertram's great-aunt, when making her will, remarked with a tolerant smile: "It is quite useless to leave poor Bertram any money, as he is a literary person— the only one, thank goodness, in the family— and I understand that literary people have no idea of the value of money. But he must not be forgotten. Let me see; he is fond of reading, is he not? Very well, then. Let him be put down in my will for that great chest full of old volumes, in the attic."

For some time the chest of ancient, moldy, moth-eaten books reposed unopened in the writer's chambers, and it was only when, entirely running out of coal one bitter winter's evening (says Mr. Atkey), he opened the chest in search of a little fuel, that he discovered among the volumes a very old book, written in ancient Greek, which a moment's study showed him was nothing more nor less than a close account of the famous labors of Hercules, and which must have been written either by Hercules himself or some close relative.

Spellbound, Bertram flashed through the faded parchment pages. And in the transcription from them which follows, he is able to straighten out the whole affair:

There was nothing much the matter with Herc. He was, of course, a little thoughtless and rather apt to leap before he looked; he was inclined to be extravagant; he was susceptible to feminine charm; and it is not to be denied that he was a little quick-tempered. But these are faults which are characteristic of youth of all nations and all ages. On the other hand Herc was bold and high-spirited; he was an out-and-out sportsman; he was no slacker; he kept himself fit; and he was generous to a fault. So let us not fall into the mistake of judging him by what Homer says about him. Herc was a regular fellow. Homer was a— well, a poet.

The facts in the case of Hercules are as follows: His godfather, a very influential party named Zeus, apparently being under some obligation, of which no record is left, to the father of His Majesty, King Eurystheus of Mycene,

entered into a contract that the boy Hercules when he grew up should enter Eurystheus' service for a period of twelve years.

There appears to have been no legal reason why, when he grew up, the lad should have troubled himself about the matter. But Herc was straight. He went of his own free will to King Eurystheus and placed himself at the King's disposal. Hardly the act of a crook, that! He became the best of friends with Eurystheus, and the following stories give a fairly exact account of the various little services which Hercules rendered the King. In conclusion of this note, the present writer would say that if there is one statement in these stories which is not true, let Homer disprove it. But he won't! And why? Because he can't!

—*Bertram Atkey*

IT WAS EARLY SUMMER in Greece when young Hercules, in accordance with his godfather's command, presented himself before the Oracle Madame Pythia and thrust a palm the size of a soup-plate before her. After a brief survey of the big, badly calloused member, she pronounced:

"What do I see in this hand? I see a busy future and a deplorable past. The owner of this hand is a violent man when roused, He is fond of the ladies. He should beware of a dark lady whose name begins with a D. He will go upon a journey very shortly. I see in this hand a signal from the Fates— an order— that the owner hereof must journey to the home of Eurystheus, King of Mycene, and offer his services to that gentleman in accordance with a contract made years ago when the owner of this hand was a child. That contract was to the effect that for a space of twelve years Alcmene's son should work for King Eurystheus. The contract is binding and completely in order."

She dropped the great hand and glided away into the temple.

SOME days after his consultation with the oracle, Hercules arrived at Tiryns, and engaging a chariot, drove out to call upon King Eurystheus, who was staying at his country-place some miles outside the town.

Arrived at the palace, Hercules tossed the charioteer a coin, and telling him he need not wait, was about to enter the house when he was called back by the charioteer, who with an expression of extraordinary bitterness on his face was staring at the coin which lay in his open palm and muttering to himself.

"Here, what d'you think this is?" he said insolently as Hercules returned.

"Your fare, laddie— what do you think it is? A medal?" replied Hercules, good-humoredly.

"It ain't right— it ain't enough," insisted the charioteer. "Lumme, what's it coming to?" he continued sourly. "Toffs come here and expect you to give 'em free rides into the country—"

Hercules hitched his club into a more convenient position.

"That's your legal fare— and a trifle over," he said, quietly. "So take it and,"— his unfortunate temper suddenly flared up— "and shut your unshaven jaw! You've got vine leaves in your hair!"

The charioteer flushed darkly. He did not appear to be very good-tempered himself, and undoubtedly he had, as Hercules suggested, been gazing upon the wine when it was red.

"Who? Me? Me got the vine leaves in my— hic— hair? You'll have to prove that! I don't let no bilker tick me off— not if he's the size of a house!" He began to get off, but Hercules' patience was already exhausted. He swung in a curious underhand shot with his club at the chariot. There did not appear to be much force in the quick, easy-actioned stroke, but it was beautifully timed; it wrecked that chariot as few chariots have been wrecked before or since.

The dour charioteer, suddenly sobered, gasped, gazed at Hercules a moment, and then turning abruptly, tore away down the drive after his horse, which had promptly bolted.

Hercules stared after them for a moment, and then with a smile bade a gaping chamberlain announce him.

KING EURYSTHEUS was in his library alone— when at his country-place the King lived the life of a simple country gentleman— and received him with complete cordiality.

"Well, my boy, so you have come to carry out that little arrangement made by Zeus so long ago?" he said. He was a mild, rather subdued-looking individual.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," he said, cordially. "I must say that this is a very pleasant surprise— very pleasant indeed. It isn't every young fellow who would cheerfully come along to give twelve years' labor to another man in this way, and I appreciate it. It's honest— and honesty is getting rarer in Greece every day. But mind you, Hercules, it's no more than I expected of you. I've heard a good deal about you, one way and another, and I must say that I expected you. I'm sorry the Queen isn't at home— she has been looking forward to meeting you; but there will be plenty of opportunities of making her acquaintance later on."

He paused a moment, raking absently at his beard.

Presently, with a rather nervous laugh, he spoke again.

"Now, I don't want you to think that I'm rushing you away to your work in a hurry," he said, "but the fact is you've come at a very opportune moment, and there happens to be a very great favor which you can do me almost at once. It is the Queen's birthday next month, and she's set her heart upon a new set of skins. There seems to be a craze this year for lion-skin, and of course the wife, being the Queen, wants a set of the very best. In fact— between ourselves—

she's simply crazy on getting the skin of that lion down in the Nemean valley. You've heard of it, I dare say?"

HERCULES signified that he had.

"Well, foolishly enough, I've promised her that she should have it— you know how it is: they wheedle these promises out of you before you know where you are. I sent a party of hunters after this lion last month, but they didn't do any good. Got devoured, most of 'em, in fact. And it's put me in rather an awkward position. If you could do the business for me you would be doing me a very great service and you would start right with her. As you're going to be more or less living with us for the next twelve years it would be the tactful thing to do, too. Mind you, Hercules my boy, I haven't got a word to say against her. She's been a good wife to me— one of the best; but— er— well, you see how it is. Tact, my boy— tact— a little tact goes a very long way. To go and kill this lion and bring her back the skin would be a very tactful start."

He looked anxiously at Hercules, who smiled.

"Oh, if that's all," he said buoyantly, "don't worry."

Eurystheus' face brightened up, then clouded over.

"It's not an easy matter, I tell you frankly. This lion is not merely a man-eater— it is said to be about the biggest brute ever known, and as intelligent as a human being. Don't underrate the beast. Are you pretty skillful with your weapons?"

"Oh, not too bad," said Hercules modestly. "I've done a bit of wrestling with Autolycus— he held the heavyweight championship of Parnassus for ten years, and taught me quite a decent bit. I learned my archery from Eurytus, and my heavy-armor fighting from Castor. But my club work I taught myself. You can't beat a good club for infighting. Don't worry about me."

Eurystheus nodded.

"Well, my boy, you know best. But be careful. And that settles that. Will you have anything?"

Hercules rose.

"No, thanks. I think I'll get that skin as soon as possible, if you don't mind. I'm rather keen on starting well with Her Majesty," he explained. Nodding approval, Eurystheus rose also.

"Very well, my boy." He shook hands. "Have you everything you want— money?"

"Yes, thanks— quite all right," replied Hercules gayly. "Expect me back before long— with the skin, what? Good-by."

TWO mornings later Hercules might have been seen standing by a cave at the entrance to the Nemean valley, engaged, not in searching for the lion, but in exchanging badinage with an attractive peasant maid.

"Yes, my child," he was saying, as he passed an amorous arm round her lissome form, "yes, my child, I purpose camping in or about this valley until I run across this lion everybody seems to be talking about, what? And naturally I shall want some one to bring me milk and eggs from the nearest farm— which appears to be your papa's farm, little one. Why shouldn't it be you, child?" He patted her pretty cheek. "Do you like me, little one?" he inquired.

"Very much," she said, softly.

"And I like you," said Hercules. "What is your name, my little pigeon?"

"Those that like me call me Dodo!" she whispered shyly.

"That," said Hercules firmly, "is my favorite name. Well, Dodo, darling, I—"

He broke off abruptly as a noise resembling distant thunder rumbled somewhere far up the valley.

Dodo started.

"The lion!" she said. "I want to go home, please," she added, sensibly.

Hercules looked at her reproachfully.

"Oh, I say, Dodo, don't say that, what?" he exclaimed. "Surely you aren't afraid of a mere moth-eaten lion when you have your Hercules here to take care of you!"

But apparently Dodo was. She slipped out of the lion-hunter's grasp with a deftness which to a less unsuspecting man might have hinted at a certain amount of practice.

"I've stayed too long already," she said. "Mother will be wondering. When are you going to begin hunting the lion?"

"Oh, after lunch, perhaps. Any time," he said carelessly. "The first thing I must do is to find a decent cave to sleep in, what? Sort of headquarters. Do you know of a good cave anywhere about here, Dodo?"

Dodo appeared to reflect.

"Yes," she said at last, "the very place. It's a lovely cave—we used to have picnics in it before the lion came. It is about a mile up the valley just past a clump of cypress trees on the right. It is rather dark right at the back, but it has a sandy floor and it's awfully comfortable."

"The very place," said Hercules. "Will you bring the eggs and milk there, dear little Dodo, or are you afraid of the lion?"

She glanced at him under her long lashes.

"I will bring them in the moonlight," she said. "The lion never hunts in the moonlight. Will that do?"

"Will it do?" echoed Hercules. "I should think it will do, darling. It's most frightfully sporting of you, Dodo. And you really-truly will come at moonlight for a little chat with your Herky-boy?"

"Yes," said Dodo, and blowing him a kiss, tripped away.

HE watched her until she turned a rocky corner. Then, with a sigh, he shouldered his kit-bag, picked up his club and headed up the Nemean valley.

"What a positive little peach!" he said to himself as he went. "The sweetest little thing that ever happened! And her darling little name is Dodo! Dodo! And how fresh and pretty and healthy! How different from our set. What a jaded lot they seem beside Dodo. And how ingenuous and innocent!"

Thus communing with himself, he proceeded at a leisurely pace up the valley.

He would perhaps have somewhat modified his opinion of Dodo's ingenuous and innocent nature had he been able to see her then. No sooner had she turned the rocky corner which hid her from Hercules' sight than she came face to face with another individual— a tall young man, tastefully arrayed in a leopard-skin and a bangle. He was not by any means the physical equal of Hercules, being at least twenty-five per cent smaller, but he was not at all unhandsome (for those days) though he had a rather shifty eye, and a hardish jaw.

He took Dodo in his arms and kissed her.

"Well, kiddy, and what did the great stiff have to say for himself?" he asked, jerking his thumb up the valley.

"He's going to hunt the lion for the sake of its skin," said Dodo. "He's going to camp in the valley till he kills it!"

The gentleman in the leopard-skin frowned.

"Oh, is he? Did you explain to him that I'm out to get that lion alive, that I've come here specially from Rome, and have been here for the last month, kid?" he inquired.

"Yes, Max, dear!" said Dodo, using an affectionate diminutive of Maximus, which was the name of the young Roman who was her lover.

"What did he say, honey?"

"He was rather gentlemanly about it," said the little traitress, "but very firm. He said he was 'awf'ly sorry and all that,' but he'd practically promised the skin of the lion to a lady, and that, being a Greek gentleman, he simply had to keep his word. He said— don't be angry, Max, darling— he said he couldn't possibly allow any dago circus-proprietor to have his lion. It wasn't his way, he said. And he looked fearfully determined when he said it!"

Max ground his teeth.

"Dago circus-proprietor, eh, kid? He called me that, did he— me, the biggest wild-beast importer in Rome! The hulking Greek gink! They look down on Rome, these guys over here do. I know it— but Rome's a growing little burg, believe me, kiddo, and it won't be long before we get these measly Greeks guessing! Dago circus-proprietor, hey? I'll tell you what it is, hon, that great muscle-bound Olympian gorilla is scheduled for some rough work if he don't beat it out of this locality."

Dodo nestled close to the exasperated importer of wild animals, and soothingly patted his cheek.

"I don't think I should worry, Max darling," she said. "I think perhaps I have been able to help you. Of course I'm only a weak girl, I know, but every little helps."

"Why, kid, what have you done?" demanded Max, holding her at arm's length, staring hard at her.

"Well, he asked me if I knew of a good cave to take up his quarters in," she said softly.

"Yes, hon— go on!"

"And I told him of a beauty— one about a mile up the valley just past three cypress trees on the right. And he's going there!"

A look of admiration dawned slowly on the face of the hard-looking Max.

"Why, Dodo— that cave is the favorite den of the Nemean lion!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Max," said Dodo meekly.

"Gee!" shouted Max, and pulling her to him, embraced her with extreme liberality. "Why— why, the great gink will walk bing into the lion's jaws!"

"Yes, Max!"

"Oh, you Dodo! You little genius!"

He kissed her enthusiastically.

"Why, within the next hour he'll be eaten! We'll give him time, and then we'll quietly scout up the valley and see what's happened," proposed Max. Dodo agreed.

MEANTIME, Hercules, heavily laden with his weapons, his kit-bag, his cooking utensils and luggage generally, was innocently approaching the cave, his mind so occupied with the delightful Dodo that he had temporarily clean forgotten the lion. He went dreamily on, dragging his club at the trail, until he saw the cypress trees and just beyond them the dark mouth of a large cave.

"Ah, that's the place that dear little thing meant," he murmured. "Good! Not at all a bad little cave, either."

He turned toward it, and humming a snatch of the latest song, entered. A few feet inside it curved rather abruptly to the left, and Hercules walking round

the turn nearly fell over a sleeping lion which, in the subdued light, seemed as big as a rhinoceros.

"Great Zeus!" he gasped, and as the big beast scrambled violently to its feet, with a horrible and blood-curdling snarl, Hercules dropped his luggage and shot out of the cave with a rapidity that was remarkable in one so big and burly. But the Nemean lion was what Max would probably have described as "no slouch." The big brute was not more than a few yards behind Hercules as he tore frantically toward the nearest tree, and brave man though Hercules undeniably was, the growls of the man-eater made his blood run so cold that he would not have perspired had he run ten miles at the same pace.

He was not afraid of the lion. He feared the big beast no more than a fly, for he was one of those men who have not an atom of fear in his body. In fact, he did not know what fear was. He would have faced half a dozen such lions, any day— provided he was ready.

The reason he was going to climb a tree was not because he was afraid of a Nemean lion or any other kind of a lion, but because he wished to find a place where he could think out a plan of action without being disturbed. He would have turned on the brute like a flash, as he explained later on to Eurystheus, but he— well, he wasn't ready.

He reached the tree first, with perhaps four yards to spare, and he went up it like a squirrel. The claws of the lion tore a shower of chips from the bark about an inch below his foot as he jerked it up into safety.

He worked his way out upon a bough, and sitting comfortably in a fork, surveyed the raging man-eater below with complete coolness.

"Well, old top," he said cheerfully, "you made a close finish of that little sprint, what?"

"Oo-wough!" went the lion, leaping for him, but springing at least six feet short.

"Oh, don't get stuffy about it," said Hercules. "You've had your chance— thanks to that little dev— that little vixen Dodo, and you've missed it. It's my turn next, old son."

For some minutes the two stared at each other; and then the lion, apparently realizing that it was wasting its time, strode away, growling sulkily. It did not return to the cave, but passed it and turned into a little ravine which opened into the valley some ten yards past the cave.

Hercules watched the beast go and then devoted a few minutes to reflection.

"Now, let me see— if I were a lion with a reputation for great intelligence, what should I do? That's the way to work these things out. Well, it's easy. I should hide round the corner of that ravine until my dinner climbed down. And that's what the brute is doing, if I am any judge. I'll take a bit of a rest, I think."

And having come to this wise conclusion, he settled back to doze.

IT was beautifully warm and sunny in the valley, and save for the lazy chirping of birds, it was drowsily quiet. A rabbit of youthful and inexperienced appearance presently issued forth from its hole and played about a little. Presently it hopped into the ravine. It did not return.

Hercules smiled slightly and shouted. But the rabbit did not come racing back to its hole. Evidently something had detained it.

Hercules nodded and settled back again.

Presently a stray tortoise-shell cat came strolling up the valley, apparently looking for either a rabbit or a good place in which to bask in the sun. This creature also turned into the ravine, Hercules watching it alertly.

He saw an extraordinary thing occur.

The cat reached the corner of the rock round which the rabbit had wandered, and then suddenly went straight up into the air, with a frantic yell of surprise. It landed again a good ten feet farther back from the ravine, and then only for an infinitesimal fraction of a second. It went bounding away down the valley as though pursued by a pack of starving wolves.

Hercules smiled again. He had seen the vicious sweep of a great hooked paw as it flashed like lightning over the spot the cat had just left when she first went up.

"What a brainy old beast it is!" he mused,

Then, chancing to look down the valley, he saw approaching slowly and cautiously two figures— one of them Dodo!

He started a little, frowning. This complicated things.

"I can't allow that pretty little thing to walk into danger like this," he said to himself. "True, she allowed me to— but after all women nowadays have to fight with what weapons they can get. We're not really civilized yet. Later on, in the twentieth century or thereabouts, it will be different, no doubt. Women won't send men to the dogs— or lions— in those days. I must warn her and her friend in the leopard-skin."

He stood up and measured the distance from the tree to the cave in which his weapons lay.

"Might just do it," he said. "But it will be a close thing. I don't care about it. I may, in fact, get a fairly thorough mauling. But there's nothing else to do! If I shout to warn them it will probably bring the beast out, and he'd catch them before they'd gone a hundred yards!"

He took off his wallet. It was a big wallet, as wallets go, being about the size of a satchel, and judging the distance carefully, threw it about forty yards up the ravine. He heard it fall with a soft thud.

"If the brute goes to investigate that it's odds on me!" he muttered, waited ten seconds, then dropped to the ground and raced for the cave.

He heard a grunting "Whoof-whoof!" from the ravine as he went, and out of the tail of his eye had a glimpse of huge, dun-colored body all eyes and mane and teeth charging out of the ravine. But he won. He had just time to snatch up his club and dart back into the open, when the Nemean lion, the terror of the district, was on him.

Bout this time Hercules was ready. He met the man-eater with a full, butt-ended shot that connected with its frontispiece like a sledge-hammer on an anvil. It made the club, tough hickory wood though it was, groan. But it made the lion groan louder.

"Come on, then, you Nemean burlesque!" shouted Hercules. "You a man-eater! How's that?" He slid in a lateral clip to the animal's ear with the knotty side of the club, which rolled it over like a rabbit.

But it was full of fight and as strong as an elephant. It came on for Hercules' throat like a wildcat. Hercules dodged neatly and steered one to its slats as it swung past, a blow that made it boom like adrum. Hercules began to shout his war-cry— a habit of his when excited.

"I learned my wrestling from Autolycus, heavy champion of Parnassus!" He deflected another charge by the maddened lion with a sparkling whang to the jaw.

"And Eurytus taught me my archery!" Here the crispest of sideswings closed one of the man-eater's eyes.

"What I know about armor fighting I picked up from Castor—"

Here he missed a vicious drive and lost a good two pounds of flesh from his thigh to a steel-hooked claw as he whirled clear of the charge.

"But my club-work is my own idea— ah!" he roared, furious with pain, and deposited a pile-driver on the lion's intellect-plate which made the very ground shake and must have jarred the beast clear back to the tassel on its tail.

The animal went down as though struck by lightning, but it was up again before Hercules could repeat the frontal slam.... Some hundred yards away Max and Dodo stared in fascinated wonder.

The lion doubled itself up and leaped again. But it was tiring slightly, and Hercules, seeing his chance, stepped in with his left foot and handed out a dazzling shot which would have sent a lighter lion clean to the mat.

"Club-work!" roared Hercules. "Some club-work, too! What?"

Wearily the man-eater rose again, and again precipitated itself at its enemy. But its chance— if indeed it had ever had one— was gone. For Hercules was roused.

With a yell he dropped the club, and ignoring the claws, met the lion as it came. He grabbed its right foreleg, and twisting sharply so that his right

shoulder came well under the man-eater's right chest, lurched forward with all his weight and strength. Even Max, telling some friends about it later on, one morning in Rome, said that, although he, personally, disliked Hercules immensely, he could honestly say that he had never seen a better flying mare executed by any wrestler before or since.

For thirty-three clear yards the Nemean lion traveled through the air like a projectile, and even then was only stopped by a large granite boulder, weighing some fifty tons, which obstructed its flight. The big beast arrived with such a fearful impact that it split the boulder, practically wrecking it, and as Hercules afterward discovered, breaking its own neck in six places and in six different positions.

IT was at this moment that Max threw off his fascination. He turned to Dodo and jerked a thumb over-shoulder at Hercules.

"Kid!" he said solemnly, "he wins it! I'm no coward— but what's the use, anyway? I'm not a bad little old workman on the wrestling mat myself, but gee, honey, that Greek guy's out of my class altogether. I own it— I admit it. Do you want your little Max to commit suicide, kid? No? Well, let's beat it while the going's good! It's up an alley for ours, eh, Dodo?"

Dodo agreed without hesitation— and so by the time Hercules had calmed down a little and approached the lion, the couple were well out of sight and still hurrying.

Hercules wasted no time. In spite of his, victory he had taken quite a dislike to the Nemean valley. He had been looking forward to a charming idyl interspersed with an occasional day's hunting. But Dodo's default had wrecked his dreams as completely as he had wrecked the lion's future.

So, having bound up his wounds, he proceeded promptly to skin the dead man-eater, roll up the great hide, and collecting the remainder of his gear, start for home.

He was in an excellent humor. True, he had one or two nasty wounds, but if ever a person was used to nasty wounds it was Hercules.

He called in at the farmhouse of Dodo's parents on the way back, but Dodo, they said, was out.

"Oh, well," said Hercules, shrugging his shoulders. "With the gentleman in the leopard-skin, I presume."

He drank a bowl of wine, and reshouldered his gear.

"You might tell Dodo I looked in to say good-by," he said to the farmer, "— to say good-by and to thank her for telling me of a good cave," he said sarcastically. "You might add that Hercules said that if she ever feels a longing for another picnic in that cave it will be quite all right. There's nothing left in the

Nemean valley more ferocious than a stray tortoise-shell cat— and I doubt if that's feeling very ferocious after this afternoon, what? Adieu!"

And so saying, he turned away, and headed steadily for home.

iii

IT was perhaps three weeks after Hercules had settled the affair of the Nemean lion and he was sitting one evening, after a busy day's hunting, enjoying a small tank of wine (as was the custom, in those days) with the King.

They were putting in the week-end at Eurystheus' country place near Tiryns— a retreat to which the King was ever ready to flee for a few days' rest from the social whirl of the town, and it is necessary to add, from the keen and lengthy criticisms of his wife and daughters, with whom, it may be said, Hercules had made but a very moderate hit. They considered Hercules "coarse"— for so, in comparison with the curled, perfumed and somewhat undersized exquisites of the court, he appeared to them.

But Hercules, who was no very pronounced admirer of Eurystheus' family, was bearing up under their coolness very well, and like His Majesty was glad to get away from the court whenever possible.

"They may say what they like, my boy," remarked Eurystheus, dipping his crystal pitcher into the wine tank, "but they will never convince me that this isn't the correct way to spend a week-end. What is there to do in town, after all? A banquet with a crowd of people you don't know and wouldn't like if you did know, and a lot of dancing or gambling after it. That's the Queen's idea of an evening. And what is there to do in the daytime? Nothing— absolutely nothing that one hasn't done a thousand times before. Laying foundation- stones, receiving ministers and things like that. Attending bazaars, eh? Absolutely treadmill work, Hercules. Hey, boy?"

Hercules nodded.

"You are right— as usual," he replied. "There never yet was a bazaar in Tiryns, or anywhere else, which was worth a run like we had today, what!" He too refilled his pitcher.

"Hounds went well," he continued. "Never known 'em go better. They're coming on— we're getting 'em together."

Eurystheus agreed.

"It was a rare good scent, my boy— but you're right for all that. They're a very even lot of hounds and as stanch as gladiators. I was afraid the fox was going to reach the rocks— another five hundred yards and we should have had to whip 'em off. It's a bit of bad country there. There's a kind of sharp-edged shale stuff very plentiful there, and it's lamed me many a good hound." He emptied his pitcher thoughtfully.

"I thought old Pegasus seemed to be going well with you today," he said. Hercules' eyes brightened.

"He was. That's a rare good horse, Eurystheus, an uncommon good horse. I used to think that he wasn't quite up to my weight, but he is. I don't mind owning that—"

But whatever Hercules was willing to own did not immediately appear, for at that moment a page entered with a pink envelope on a salver— an express letter.

"This has just arrived by special runner from Tiryns, Your Majesty," said the boy.

Eurystheus took it, eying it uneasily— the more so as he observed that it was addressed in the handwriting of the Queen's secretary.

"What's wrong now?" he mumbled, as he dismissed the page, and opening the envelope hastily, read the letter. Then he handed it over to Hercules.

"Damned nonsense!" muttered Eurystheus under his breath. 'What on earth does any sensible woman want with a crawling little insect of a pet dog? If it were a decent setter or retriever or a good little terrier, I could understand it— but these fancy, curly-haired freaks raise my very gorge! What do you think, Hercules?" He clapped his hands as he spoke, summoning the page.

"Send in the kennel-man, boy," he ordered.

Hercules looked up from the letter.

"I'm afraid Her Majesty is not going to be satisfied with an ordinary dog," he said. "It will have to be something rather special." He began to read aloud from the letter:

"The craze for pet dogs is extraordinary, and as a matter of policy I have ordered a dog-show to be held in a fortnight. I am determined that it shall be the best and biggest ever yet held in Greece, and I have decided to exhibit a dog myself. Kindly procure one for me. Please understand that this is an important matter, and that I am not to be fobbed off with a decrepit fox-hound, cast out of your pack— as your eldest daughter was, last year, when she was sanguine to ask you to give her a dog. Though you frequently appear to forget that you are the King of Mycene I will permit no one to forget that I am the Queen, and I insist upon a dog being procured which is not only worthy of exhibition by the Queen, but which, naturally, will sweep the board. I assume that you can spare a day to see to this matter!"

HERCULES finished, and for a moment the pair gazed at each other in silence. Then, automatically, they refilled their pitchers. Before they had time to discuss the somewhat acidulated request of the Queen the kennel-man entered—an ancient, weather-beaten person of remotely horsey appearance.

"Ah, Taxi, come hither," commanded the presence of his wife, was decidedly capable of keeping his end up with other men.

Taxi went thither, touching his forehead as he pulled up before the two.

"What have you got knocking about in the shape of a good dog, Taxi?" asked Eurystheus. "Not hounds, you understand— dogs!"

Taxi looked thoughtful.

"Well, Y'r Majesty, there's nothing much besides Y'r Majesty's setters, and spani'ls and retrievers," he said. "'There's a sheep-dog or two down at the farms, and mebbe a few tarriers— but nothing much good, Y'r Majesty." :

The King nodded, as though he had expected the answer.

"Well, they wont do," he said, half to Hercules, half to himself. 'Do you happen to know of a good dog for sale anywhere, Taxi? A well-bred one, you understand—a show dog, in fact."

Again the ancient reflected. Finally he shook his head.

"No, Y'r Majesty," he replied, "not at the minute, I don't. But I'll inquire round about."

"Do, Taxi, do," said Eurystheus kindly, and dismissed him.

As the old man left the apartment Hercules suddenly laughed.

"What's the joke?" asked Eurystheus.

"Why, I've just thought of a dog that would sweep the board at that dog-show," answered Hercules. "A better dog than any dog in Tiryns, or Greece, for that matter, or anywhere else."

Eurystheus brightened. "Oh, what dog is it? Is he for sale?" he inquired.

"Cerberus!" said Hercules, laughing rather excitedly as he refilled his pitcher. Eurystheus stared.

"Cerberus!" he gasped. He sat for a moment, taking in the idea. Then he said wistfully:

"Yes— Cerberus would sweep the board at any dog-show. But— who is going to get him for me?"

Hercules emptied his pitcher.

"I will," said he.

Eurystheus made a gesture of unbelief.

"You've had too much wine, my boy," he said. "I know you're a strong man— and we all know you've got pluck, but— well, talk sense, my boy, talk sense. You wouldn't have any more chance in Hades than a— snowball!"

Hercules rose. It was only when he stood up that one was able to get a fair idea of his immense size. He looked what he was— gigantic.

"By Zeus, Hercules, what a hefty great chap you are!" ejaculated the King. Hercules laughed.

"Look here, Eurystheus, if I get Cerberus for the Queen will you give me that grand old weight-carrier Pegasus? I've taken a fancy to the horse— I did the moment I saw him. He's too big for you, anyway."

Eurystheus stood up. "I will," he said eagerly. "Is it a bargain?"

Hercules silently extended his hand, and they sealed the compact.

But Eurystheus added a condition.

"Of course there's no necessity to— er— steal the dog, you know, if you can get him any other way. We don't want Pluto sending his folk up here after him again— as he would. We should have half Hades about our ears before long. Try to fix up an arrangement to borrow the dog until after the show. It would make it much easier for you— and the Queen won't want him long after the show. She never really cared for dogs— cats are more in her line," he added feelingly.

"When shall you start?"

Hercules pondered.

"Let's look— hounds meet at the cross-roads tomorrow, don't they? Yes. Well, I'll hunt tomorrow. After all, there's just a chance it may be the last time I shall ride to hounds this side of the Styx. I'll start on Monday."

"Good man!" said Eurystheus approvingly, and they refilled their pitchers to the brim. "Well— here's to fox-huntin'," said Hercules gayly.

"And dog-stealin'," added Eurystheus facetiously.

Then they went to bed.

iv

IT WAS just a week later when Hercules, who as usual had taken things comfortably, arrived in the neighborhood of Hades, the subterranean kingdom of Pluto. Although by no means so emphatically disconcerting a district as we of these days would expect to find, nevertheless it was a decidedly depressing locality and contained nothing whatever calculated to allure the wayfarer into lingering there.

The scenery for the greater part consisted of rocks— hard-looking, jagged, black rocks, very untidily distributed. Here and there pine trees stood about in a discouraged sort of way, and a clump or two of brilliantly hued toadstools endeavored, without much success, to lend a touch of color to the scene. The fauna of the place seemed to consist mainly of an occasional lizard of extremely impoverished appearance, a very shabby and depressed snake or so, and sitting upon a bough on one of the pine trees, a pair of bedraggled ravens of cynical and extraordinarily demoralized aspect. None of these took the least notice of Hercules as, perceiving a gigantic cavern-mouth in a huge wall of rock just before him, he halted and took a leisurely survey of his surroundings. He shrugged his mighty shoulders.

"Dull," he said. "Very dull, what?"

Then, without more ado, he hitched his club into a convenient position and passed through the gloomy portals of the cavern.

KEEPING, as was but natural, a sharp look-out, Hercules pushed along down the rather abrupt slope. The way twisted and turned quite a lot, and a number of side-roads seemed to branch off from the main road. There were no signposts, and Hercules stuck to the main road.

He had been walking for perhaps ten minutes when, turning a corner, he came abruptly upon a river,

"Ah, here we are," he said relievedly. "The Styx, what!"

Some forty yards to the left he saw a notice-board upon which was painted the following legend:

FERRY  
BOATS FOR HIRE  
Teas. Punts. Bait supplied.  
Geo. Charon, Prop.

In a ramshackle boat moored to the post of the notice-board sat an elderly, bearded person of remotely nautical appearance, fast asleep.

Hercules shook him, and he woke with astart. "Sorry, sir," he muttered. "Going over?"

"I am. You don't imagine I have come here merely to admire the scenery, do you?" said Hercules. "Put me across as quick as you can."

"Very good, sir," mumbled the old fellow. "Though you're the first gentleman I ever knew to be in such a hurry."

He rowed across in silence. The river was very calm and reasonably slow, and to Hercules it looked a likely trout-stream.

"Some pretty good trouting about here, what?" he said.

Charon nodded.

"There's plenty of fish— good fish, sir; but there's precious few anglers," he replied meaningly.

Hercules laughed.

"The people here evidently don't know when they're well off," he suggested.

"That," said Charon as he ran the boat alongside, "is what I'm always telling 'em."

Hercules got ashore, and leaving a coin and a pleasant word with the old ferry-man, headed down a long, rock-bordered chasm which evidently was intended to fulfill the functions of a carriage-drive. Presently the chasm widened

suddenly into an enormous basalt-walled square, at the far side of which rose the main front of a big, but very gloomily designed palace.

"Well, here we are," he said to himself, and began to cross the square. Evidently it was night time in Hades, for the square was entirely deserted. There was not even a policeman or sentry at the gates. For a moment the intrepid Hercules was astonished, but a moment's reflection brought home to him the fact that there was little need for any such guardians here. It was highly improbable that the boldest of burglars would ever venture to exercise his nocturnal art in this locality.

Besides— as a sudden growl from the big doorway which he was approaching reminded him— there was always that champion house-dog Cerberus to be considered.

Hercules stopped a few yards from the great main door and groping in the haversack he carried drew therefrom a large piece of that delicacy which never fails to appeal to a dog— cold boiled liver, slightly sprinkled with anise.

Then, with the liver in one hand and his club very much at the ready in the other, he mounted the steps.

He had not set foot on the topmost of the steps when, with a blood-curdling snarl, Cerberus bounded into view from out of a big stone kennel in the middle of the hall.

For a moment he and Hercules surveyed each other. Neither had ever before seen anything quite like the other, and consequently both were interested. Cerberus was, indeed, as unique a dog as Hercules had always been given to understand; he had three heads, one of which— the middle—was pure bulldog, massy, heavy-jawed and extraordinarily wrinkled. The left or near head was distinctly that of a well-bred old English bob-tailed sheep dog; and the head on the right was exactly that of a good foxhound. The body, too, was that of a very large foxhound, with plenty of good bone, and the tail was barbed.

All the heads were growling savagely— two at Hercules and the left at the fox-hound head. There seemed to be very little love lost between the two outside heads. Hercules noted this and consequently threw the piece of liver to the sheep-dog, which deftly caught it as it fell.

Instantly there was a dog-fight of a richness and variety which Hercules had never before dreamed was possible. He stared, lost in wonder and amazement. Almost before the sheep-dog head had seized the liver he was pinned by the ear by the bulldog. With a frantic yelp of rage the sheep-dog dropped the liver, which was promptly snatched up by the hound, with the result that he immediately found himself called upon to fight for his life against the joint heads of the sheep-dog and the bull. Grinning with fury, he turned upon his two companions and "mixed it" right royally with them until by accident the sheep-

dog gave the bull a nasty nip among his wrinkles, thus drawing the attentions of both bull and foxhound upon himself.

The clamor of them was deafening. It was superlatively civil war— precisely as Hercules had planned it. Cerberus had long ago ceased to notice Hercules— he was much too insistently engaged on his own affairs. And so, after watching the fight until he felt himself becoming dizzy, Hercules, perceiving that the position of each head rendered it impossible for one seriously to injure either of the others, turned away from the unique spectacle and crossed the great hall to a door in which was a pigeonhole labeled "Inquiries."

HE rapped peremptorily on the panel which closed the pigeonhole, and after a little delay it was slid back and a heavy-eyed porter with abundant whiskers looked out.

"What is it?" he asked sourly.

"An envoy from Eurystheus, King of Mycene, to Pluto, King of Hades!" replied Hercules sharply.

"Envoy! What's an envoy?" grumbled the man. "Envoys cut no ice here!"

"Naturally!" replied Hercules, with a chuckle. "Not bad that, what!"

He grew stern again, and laid the end of his club on the ledge under the porter's face.

"Perhaps that does," he rapped out.

Evidently it did, for the porter became a trifle more respectful.

"What's the good of coming to Hades at five o'clock in the morning?" he demanded. "The King isn't up— nor aint likely to be for another four hours."

Hercules pondered, and as he pondered it dawned on him that he was hungry.

"Very well, I'll wait. Just turn out a cook or a butler or something and give me some breakfast, will you? Unless," he added blandly, seeing that the man hesitated, "you particularly desire me to report adversely to the King upon the inhospitable character of my reception here!"

The porter suddenly was galvanized into activity.

"Pardon, my lord," he said. "I am but just awake from dead sleep. You are the first who has ever got past the dog—"

"That's all right, my man," replied Hercules. "The dog was too busy settling a little difference of opinion with himself and his friends to trouble about me."

The porter threw back the door.

"Enter, my lord," he said, and in accordance with what Hercules afterward learned was the custom, added sonorously:

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!"

Hercules stared at him.

"Not at all. Why should I? You appear to be a bit of a pessimist, what! Do hurry up that breakfast."

And so passed in.

v

WITHIN the next two hours Hercules had eaten an unexpectedly good breakfast, enjoyed a hot— very hot— bath, and had made himself much more solid with Cerberus by the simple process of taking each head a big bone.

Then he had returned to the apartment in which he had breakfasted and adjourned to a big couch in a corner to rest for an hour or two. For some moments he had pondered whether it would be worth his while to hunt up a rod from somewhere and have an hour with the trout in that likely-looking stream, the Styx, but finally he had decided against it.

He wrapped his big lion-skin well round him, turned the lamp low, and dropped off to sleep almost immediately.

It seemed to him that he had not been sleeping more than perhaps five minutes— though in reality it was well over an hour— when he was roused by the sound of whispering. He was wide awake in an instant— a very necessary habit to a man of his type in those days— and without moving, listened.

Evidently the whisperers were in the room, for he could hear every word distinctly. And it was equally evident that their business was secret, by reason of the fact that they did not turn up the light.

"We— the court— shall be ready within a week," whispered one of the newcomers— a woman. "There are only just the four to win over— and I can answer for three of them. How are you progressing with the people and the troops?"

"Fine, fine," came the whispered reply— a man this time. "The Trade Unions are practically solid for me— or at least they will be in a week's time, when my big remittances arrive. And the reports about the troops are most promising. The Hades Hussars are with us to a man. It is just a question of the Household troops— the Bodyguard. I understand that they've had no pay for weeks. Work on that, my dear. It should just do the business. We must have the Bodyguard with us before we can dream of a *coup d'état*! Never mind about the politicals now— though do what you can, of course. Concentrate on the officers and N.C.O.'s of the Household troops. Be secret, but be bold. You are not on such dangerous grounds as you think. All Hades is tired of Pluto— it is only a question of months before he's flung out even without us. With us it should be a matter of days only!"

"And the Queen is mine— you understand that clearly. I am to do as I like about Persephone."

"How you hate her!" whispered the man. "But yes— certainly, Mintha. You shall have absolute power to decide the fate of Persephone!"

"Good!" came the sibilant whisper of the woman. "That's all, I think?"

"For the present, yes. Good-by, Mintha, dear! You still love me?"

"Need you ask, Jake? Good-by! I must fly!"

THE conspirators rustled stealthily out of the room, and Hercules sat up.

"Tt seems to me that I have been over- hearing secrets, what!" he mused.

"Jake —whoever he may be—and Mintha are evidently engaged in what looks like being a successful little revolution in Hades."

He reflected.

"Mintha's fearfully bitter against Queen Persephone." He shook his head. "That wont do," he added. "It doesn't seem quite cricket to stand by and see her thrown into the clutches of that Mintha, who certainly sounded rather a terror, what! Of course it's no affair of mine if they're getting up a revolution in Hades, but— well, dash it all, a man has got to be on one side or the other, and I'm a royalist. Always have been, anyway, what! I must go into this at the first opportunity," he decided.

He had not long to wait, for at that moment a chamberlain came in announcing that Pluto had been informed of his visit, and, having now breakfasted, was ready to give him an audience.

"Thanks very much," said Hercules, rising and taking his club from the settee.

"You wont need that," said the courtier, with a slightly superior smile.

"Possibly not," replied Hercules blandly, "but I'll take it along. Always feel such an ass without it, what!"

"As you wish, of course," said the courtier. "This way."

HERCULES followed him through innumerable corridors to the great hall in which the king of Hades usually gave audience. Evidently Hercules' reputation had reached as far as Hades, for the crowd of courtiers and hangers-on of royalty generally, with which the hall was filled, very respectfully made way for him as he followed the chamberlain up to the throne upon which sat Pluto and Persephone, awaiting him. There were many whisperings.

"That's he, eh? .... Who? Yes, Hercules— the Terrible Greek. Enormous— gigantic! Notice the club... .. Oh, yes— killed Nemean lion— might have been a kitten. Remarkable person, very— fearless chap... Oh, quite— lives Mycene— great friend Eurystheus. Grand wrestler— rather! Challenge him best two falls out of three.... Graeco. ... You wrestle him? Don't be foolish.... Ha, ha, very probable! One does not think so.... Ssh! He's greeting Pluto— stout fellow,

what?" ran the confused comments as Hercules bowed before Pluto and the Queen.

He noted, as he did so, that Cerberus, newly groomed, was crouching at Pluto's feet.

"Welcome to Hades, Hercules," said Pluto— a tall, stout, bearded, rather untidy person, with a cold eye and an egg-stain on his beard. The Queen bowed with a slight smile.

"Thanks very much, Your Majesties," said Hercules easily.

"This is your first visit here?" continued the King, motioning to an attendant to place a seat for Hercules.

"Yes," said Hercules, sitting.

"And what do you think of Hades?" inquired the Queen, smiling. She was a somewhat passé, rather acidulated-looking lady, clearly verging on middle age.

"Well, Your Majesty, I have seen very little of it yet, but what I have seen I like. The Styx looks like an ideal trout-stream, and I should say it's a very fine hunting country once you get clear of the rocks," replied Hercules diplomatically. "Have you plenty of foxes?"

The court looked at each other with puzzled eyes.

"I'm afraid we don't understand much about hunting here," said Pluto.

Hercules looked astonished.

"Don't understand hunting!" he echoed. "Why, what do you do, sir?"

Pluto smiled frostily.

"Oh, we have our— er— diversions!" he said. "We are rarely dull here."

"That I can very easily believe," replied Hercules. "But I assure Your Majesties you ought to start a pack here— with yourself as M. F. H., I suggest, sir. Life without fox-hunting is like— er— well, thirst without drinks! Look here, sir," he went on enthusiastically, "I've no doubt King Eurystheus would be very glad to send you down a few couples of hounds to start, and I could make you up a fair pack by getting in more couples from friends of mine in different parts of the country!"

PLuto pondered. It was apparent that the suggestion that he should be M.F.H. ticked his vanity, though he hardly looked like a riding man.

"Thank you, Hercules," he said. "I will turn the matter over in my mind."

"Do, Your Majesty, do; you will never regret it! By the way, sir, you have a grand beginning of a pack at your feet— Cerberus. That off head of his is about the most perfect foxhound head I've ever seen. Grand dog, sir!"

"Yes," said Pluto. "We flatter our- selves that we know a good dog in Hades when we see one!"

"[z was really about Cerberus that King

Eurystheus commanded me to call upon you," said Hercules, seeing a favorable opening.

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see, Your Majesty, there is going to be held shortly at Tiryns the biggest and smartest dog-show ever known—" And Hercules rapidly explained matters. "And as it was essential that the Queen should exhibit something very special, something that would amaze society, the King bade me wait upon you in the hope that you would allow the Queen to enter Cerberus for exhibition," he concluded rather anxiously.

"I never lend my dog," said Pluto coldly. "I do not believe in making a fool of a dog. One master is enough for any dog. I wouldn't give that!"—he snapped his fingers—"for a dog that would follow anybody."

A murmur of approval ran round the court. The Queen nodded, and even Hercules felt that Pluto was right.

"Quite right, Your Majesty," he said. "Eurystheus would be the first to agree. But he thought that, the circumstances being exceptional—"

"Oh, but that's the Queen's own fault—" began Persephone. Pluto silenced her with a look.

"I don't see it," he said. "It isn't our dog-show. We don't have dog-shows here. Don't believe in em. I've got the best dog in Hades, and everybody knows it. What's the good of having dog-shows when things are like that? No," he continued, "I don't see it. I hope I know what is due from one king to another, but I think that to ask a man to lend his dog to another man's wife for exhibition at a dog-show is stretching things too far. I'm sorry, but I can't do it. No. I refuse. Certainly not. It's impossible, quite."

Persephone murmured something in the king's ear.

"Besides, it's illegal—even for me. I made the law myself. The fact is, there used to be too much lending out of things from Hades, and I had to put a stop to it.

Things never used to be returned. The law is that nothing shall go out of Hades without something of proportionate value coming in—unless, of course," he added sarcastically, "it is taken out by force."

Hercules suddenly remembered the whispers, Jake and Mintha, who had become rather a trump card now, he reflected, and he rose and came close to Pluto.

"Suppose I could tell Your Majesty of a plot against your life and throne—and name the chief conspirators!" he said softly. "Would you regard that as 'proportionate value' for the loan of Cerberus?"

Pluto smiled unpleasantly.

"If you refer to the conspiracy of Jake, the court bandmaster, and Mintha, the toe-dancer, to enlist the aid of the Trades Unions and the Household Cavalry in an effort to carry out a *coup d'état*," said he, "you are considerably

too late. The silly plot was discovered an hour ago, and the conspirators have been— er— attended to. We have a quick way with plotters in Hades!"

"In that case, then, I can only obtain the loan of Cerberus by force," said Hercules gently.

THERE was a roar of laughter. The idea of anyone being able to capture and subdue Cerberus seemed to strike the court as too humorous.

"Certainly," said Pluto, laughing immoderately. "If you can get him to come with you I will cheerfully allow you both to go without hindrance."

"You mean that, Your Majesty?" said Hercules.

"I do, indeed."

"Very good— and thanks very much."

Hercules stepped back and swung his club round to warn the court to keep a clear space. They watched in silence while he drew a long rope, thin but very strong, from his haversack. At one end of this he made a noose. The other end he threw over a hook in the ceiling, from which ordinarily hung a chandelier that, probably, had been removed for cleaning or repairing.

The courtiers looked on, giggling. Persephone was smiling her faded, rather contemptuous smile, and Pluto also was frankly scornful. Nevertheless he was the first to guess what Hercules' tactics were to be, for the latter turned to Cerberus, his club under his arm, a noose dangling from the other.

"Sss! At him, boy! Tear 'em!" hissed Pluto, and Cerberus leaped at Hercules like three raving tigers. But Hercules was ready. He stepped lightly aside as the great beast shot past, and plastered the bait against the face of the bob-tailed sheep-dog's head as he dodged.

Once more the heads clean forgot Hercules in their frantic lust for liver. Canine civil war again raged in Hades— but not for long. Moving with extraordinary quickness, Hercules wheeled, and dropping his noose over the fiercely wagging tail of the dog, swiftly drew it tight and rushed to the loosely hanging end of the rope, which he hauled in desperately, hand over hand.

Almost instantly the rope tightened. The noose slipped bit by bit, but was suddenly brought up by the big barb in Cerberus' tail.

And then Hercules hauled on the rope like lightning. Long before the heads of the great dog realized that something was seriously wrong its hind-quarters were raised off the ground. For a second its forefeet scabbled furiously upon the polished floor as it tried to get a grip, but it was too late. Hercules, excitedly bawling a chanty which he had evidently heard sailors singing when hauling up their sails, pulled on his rope as only Hercules could pull.

There could only be one end to it. In five seconds Cerberus was well off the ground, and suspended from the chandelier hook was swinging gently to and

fro, spinning as he swung, and yelling imprecations in three different dialects and keys— viz., hound, bulldog and bob-tail or barb-tail, as one chooses.

HASTILY fastening his end of the rope to the leg of a grand piano close by, Hercules took three muzzles from his haversack and, with the deftness of a man used to dogs, swiftly muzzled the outside heads first, and lastly the bulldog. Then he tied the forelegs, and next the hindlegs. Finally he turned to Pluto, with a slight bow.

"My game, I think, sir!" he said politely.

Mortified, disgusted, annoyed, discomfited, humiliated, and disconcerted though Pluto was, he was also a gentleman.

"Oh, quite! Congratulate you," he said, with not too palpable an effort. The Queen said nothing. She was too vexed to pretend to be anything but vexed. There was an ominous silence— and as he noted the silence an ominous shifting to a comfortable grip of Hercules' clubs. But Pluto was a king— though perhaps his kingdom was not much envied him— and knew how to behave. He rose, and in a voice trembling with rage, said:

"I must terminate the— er— audience now. There are important— ah— affairs of State. Treat the dog well—he is a good dog. And— er— consider all Hades at your disposal during your stay."

And without another word he and the Queen, followed by a goodly proportion of the courtiers, left the hall.

A LITTLE uncomfortable, Hercules was hesitating quite how to proceed, when an elderly old beau of very worldly appearance approached him, and whispered:

"Take the advice of an old habitué of Hades, Hercules, and get the beastly brute out of it as soon as possible. The King's bitterly angry about it."

Hercules smiled.

"Sound scheme, that," he said. "I will. You don't seem to care for Cerberus, sir," he added.

The old beau shuddered.

"I don't," he said. "The brute once bit me— with all three of his mouths!" And he hurried away.

Like most men who can be brave in cold blood, Hercules knew when a quick retreat was good strategy.

He lost no time.

Bluntly declining a cup of wine sent him with Queen Persephone's compliments (and which the delighted lackey took behind a curtain to drink himself— an unfortunate decision, for the wine contained enough aconite to poison a goat), he hoisted Cerberus on his shoulders and started....

It was five in the morning when he had reached Hades. By eleven he was on the right side of the Styx— extremely good work when one considers the weight of the dog. And it was not until he was a good twenty miles clear of the entrance of the carriage-drive that he began to drop into the steady, comfortable stride that within the course of the next few days would land him comfortably home— just in time, he estimated, for the week-end meet at the crossroads, to which, he knew, the gallant old weight-carrier, Pegasus, (now his own), was looking forward as keenly as he and Eurystheus.

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## 11: A Square Deal

*John Arthur Barry*

1851-1911

*Clarence and Richmond Examiner* (NSW) 3Aug 1901

'WELL, OF ALL THE CONFOUNDED CHEEK as I ever heard of, this takes the cake!' And the speaker, a tall, thin man of about sixty, with a brown, hard-looking, square-jawed face, surmounted by a great shock of grey hair, threw himself back in his chair, and stared sternly out of cold blue eyes at the young fellow, who, from the opposite side of the table in the cabin of the schooner *Casuarina*, then lying in Port Sirius, New South Wales, had calmly asked him for his daughter. 'Why,' he went on, presently recovering from his astonishment, 'you've clean forgot yourself, Bob Drake— or I s'pose,' he added with a sneer, 'I should say Cap'en Drake. Because years ago I took ye off the *Vernon* an' sent you to sea, an' made a man of you, and at long last put ye in charge o' this ship an' paid you like a dook, d'yer think that gives you a right to, as cool as a cucumber, come and ask me for my only daughter? For two pins I'd sack ye at once.' And Amos Priddy, retired master mariner, and owner of the topsail-schooner *Casuarina* and half a dozen smaller craft, stood up and laughed with a short derisive bark.

The other, a smart, handsome, young sailor, also rose, and, undeterred by his companion's passion, said quietly:— 'I don't deny, sir, that I've something to thank you for. But I think that fourteen years of faithful service isn't a bad set-off. I've saved a bit of money— not much, as you know— and got my master's ticket. We've loved each other— Mabel and me— since we were so high, and I don't quite see why we shouldn't set married without waiting any longer.'

At this matter-of-fact statement Priddy's rage overcame him, and he absolutely danced about the little apartment.

'Oh, you don't, don't you!' he raved. 'You don't see any difference between the daughter of a man with twenty thousand pound and a miserable scallywag of a State orphan, with no come from no go to, as thinks because he's made a couple o' vy'ges as skipper that he's admiral o' the fleet. Why, damn me,' he continued, 'you must be a cussed socialist or somethin' o' that kind! Pack your traps, you scoundrel, an' get ashore quick an' lively. I'll send another man aboard to take your place in the morning. An' by the Lord, if I catch you sneakin' round my house I'll shoot you like a dog!' And, so saying, the irate owner sprung up the companion and on to the little wharf, alongside which the *Casuarina* was lying, whilst Drake, who had expected nothing else, went on deck, and presently bent pennant D (which in sea-talk signifies 'No') on the signal halliards, kept it hoisted for a minute or two, and then hauled it down. His gaze was fixed on a small house among the fig trees on Peacock's Point, and he smiled as he saw a

blue handkerchief waved from one of its Windows, This is love-talk, and signified, in this instance, 'Well, it can't be helped. I'm ready when you are, dear,' The crisis just passed had long been foreseen by the lovers, and provided for.

Boy and man, young Drake had, as he told Amos, served faithfully, and his master had proved a hard and exacting one. The little chap, taken from the State training ship, had passed the first years of his servitude in grinding misery. Then, by sheer force of character, aided by intellectual capacity of no mean order, he had gradually forced himself into notice, and for some years had been Priddy's most trusted servant. Amos was a sweater of the first grade— 'a real hard case,' as even his few intimates called him— and Drake would have left his service long ago but for sunny-haired, blue-eyed Mabel, who, ever since as a small and tarry boy he was wont to be sent up to the house to chop wood and do 'chores' generally, had secretly played with him, and comforted him with stolen delicacies. Since then the girl had made several trips in her father's vessel, including one never-to-be-forgotten one on the *Casuarina*. But the old money-grubbing widower had been blind to the Cupid-play under his nose. Thus the scene just described had taken him utterly by surprise; and as he strode homewards up the steep road he was all on fire with anger and determination to give his daughter the 'rounds of the kitchen.'

The *Casuarina* on this especial trip was bound for Norfolk Island with a general cargo and one passenger— a passenger, on this occasion, as it happened, after Bob Drake's own heart, and, despite Amos' threats, midnight found the young man throwing Moreton Bay figs at his sweetheart's window. Experience had taught him that they were superior to gravel, making less noise.

'I'm locked in,' whispered Mabel, her face appearing dimly from among the passion vines that enshrouded the casement, a good 8 feet up.

'Jump!' commanded Bob, after a minute's thought.

First came a big bundle, which he caught. Then came Mabel herself, whom he also caught, but whose weight sent the pair of them to grass.

'He's been a good old dad to me,' panted the girl, as she hung back reluctantly.

'But a jolly bad boss to me,' replied Bob, grimly.

'And he beat me when he came home this afternoon,' said Mabel, coming forward again.

'That settles it,' said Bob, as taking her arm and bundle, he kissed her, and led her to where the Chinese cook held the dingy at the wharf, for the schooner had been hauled into the stream after dark.

No sooner had they stepped on deck than, without orders, the sails fell from the yards, and were as silently as might be sheeted home. The mooring rope was slipped from the buoy, and the *Casuarina* glided into the fairway like a

white phantom, whilst old Amos, under the influence of rage, a certain amount of remorse, and more rum toddy than usual, snored unconsciously.

The old man slept late, and, missing the usual 'morning' of rum and milk that Mabel was accustomed to bring to his bedside, recollected hazily that he had boxed her ears, and called her an assorted lot of bad names, and then got up and went to the window. The schooner's place was empty. He rubbed his eyes and roared for the housekeeper, a decent Scotch body, who had been stewardess with him when he was in steam on the coast, and worshipped Mabel.

'Where's the schooner?' he shouted, and then, instinctively, 'Where's Mabel?'

'Hoo am I to ken whaur the schooner is?' she replied, looking in reprobation at his shirt tails. 'But I'll ca' Mistress Mabel.' Back she came presently, her old face blanched with fear. 'Her bed's no been sleepit in!' she exclaimed. 'Ye miserable auld wretch, ye lifted yer han' to her yester' een, an' noo she's gane, an', wi'out a doubt, drooned hersel. Ye ha' gude cause to be 'shamed o' yersel, ye auld scoundrel.'

At any other time this tirade on the part of one who for years had been submission itself, would have as completely staggered him as Drake's business had done. But, just now, guessing instinctively, as he did, how matters stood, he felt that he had no time to waste over details.

Hurriedly dressing, he rushed down to the port, and on board of the *Bantam*, an old racketty tug that belonged to him. 'Got steam up!' he shouted to the amazed skipper, smoking an early pipe aft. 'I want to catch the *Casuarina*, No steam! Look sharp, then; there's no time to lose if you want to keep your billet.'

'There's the *Stormcock* over yonder,' replied the other, surlily. 'She's got her steam alright, besides going two to our one. Take her.'

For a minute Amos hesitated— but only for a minute. To charter the other boat would mean money. And he believed his own tug quite capable of catching the runaway. Thus it happened that because all hands on the *Bantam*, among whom, owing to the arrival on board of a well-known police officer, a suspicion of the truth had spread, worked with might and main to hang back— here a leaky joint, there a cylinder to be packed— it was midday before the tug was wallowing and wheezing down the harbour.

Meanwhile the *Casuarina*, having cleared the heads, was before a freshening westerly sailing into the wide Pacific.

Quite recently, when the Reverend Henry Spicer— the solitary passenger aforementioned— had waited on Amos Priddy for a subscription to the Melanesian Mission, Amos had repulsed him with such scorn and contumely as made the parson very angry indeed. Thus Drake found him not at all unwilling to

grant the favour he asked at his hands, which was merely to at once marry him and Mabel.

'You see,' said Bob, in homely style, 'the fat's in the fire now. The old man's pretty sure to hunt after us, and perhaps catch us. But when he does, Mabel'll have to be Mrs, Drake, or I'll know the reason why.' And Mr. Spicer, looking at Bob's face as they walked the deck together, decided in his own mind that, had he seen fit to refuse to perform the ceremony, he would have had a very hard time of it.

Coming on deck just after washdown, Mabel found the schooner tearing along with the wind on the quarter, and with every stitch set from fore-royal to flying jib, from top-gallant staysail to gaff topsail, although the wind was evidently strengthening and beginning to sing shrilly through the taut rigging, whilst every now and again a little splash would come over the weather bulwarks and trickle slowly across the white deck into the lee scuppers. The sun shone gloriously, the air was like dry wine, porpoises leapt and gambolled on each bow, the little galley funnel smoked cheerily, and Ah Fee grinned out of the door through which came the smell of breakfast. It was all a familiar enough sight to the girl, who, standing up to windward, a fine, alert, handsome figure of young Australian womanhood, with flushed cheeks and gleaming eyes, had forsaken all for love, and thought all well lost.

During breakfast they could hear the mate—old Harry Howe, who had been mate when Drake was a boy—taking in the foreroyal, flying jib, and gaff topsail; and thus eased, the schooner settled steadily to work on nearly an even keel,

'We'll be married at six bells, dear, said Bob, as they rose to go on deck. And Mabel nodded and blushed, taking it all as a matter of course; for the routine had long been arranged between the lovers.

At 11 o'clock, then, the *Casuarina* was made gay with the Commercial Code, also a sort of reading desk was improvised with packing cases covered with the Australian ensign. At this the Rev. Mr. Spicer officiated, whilst the crew of four men, the cook, and a boy, all in their Sunday go-to-meetings, formed an interested and appreciative audience. Old Howe gave Mabel away; the men cheered; the Reverend Spicer (he was sixty if a day) kissed the bride, and everyone wished the newly-wed ones all sorts of good things, They had just finished drinking the health of Captain and Missus Drake, proposed with solemn incoherence by the mate, when Mabel's quick eye caught sight of a smudge of smoke astern. Her husband, following her gaze, saw it too, and, taking his glass from the cleats, he stared awhile. Then he sent Howe up the main rigging. When the mate returned, he reported with a sympathetic grin: 'It's a tug, Cap'en, and if I'm not mightily mistook, it's the ole *Bantam* a-comin' up as fast as her 'ealth will allow her. Shall we set the kites again, an' give 'em a good run for ther money?'

Drake nodded assent, and looked rather anxiously up at the dog vane, and then he and Mabel and the parson went below to a little feast improvised in their honour by Ah Fee.

ALL ONE DAY AND NIGHT the *Bantam* had bucketed away ere catching sight of the *Casuarina*, and Amos was beginning to think he must have missed the schooner, when the special look-out man picked her up. 'She's a-signallin' of us, sir,' he added, presently, breaking in on Amos's triumphant exclamations. Snatching the glass out of his hands, the old man levelled it across the bridge-rail, and gazed intently. Then, his face growing black with passion, he straightened himself, shook his fist at the schooner, rammed the telegraph over to 'full speed ahead,' and burst into a torrent of imprecations that made the police officer at his side, seasoned vessel though he was, open his eyes in amazement. Amos had suddenly recollected the calling of the *Casuarina's* passenger, and understood the meaning of those flags as well as if he had been there.

'I'll give him seven years' hard,' he yelled; 'take him back in irons, constable. Pity abduction wasn't a capital crime, so as he could swing for it. An', by Gosh!' he concluded, 'the wind's hauling to the east'ard, and in another hour we'll have him. As for that jade, I'll put her in a convent to cool her hot blood a bit.'

But the policeman said nothing. He was very sick, and preferred leaning over the rail to discussing family matters with old Priddy. True enough, the wind was coming dead ahead, and the *Casuarina* could be seen bracing her yards up.

'We've got her,' roared Amos, rubbing his hands in ferocious glee, as the tug approached near enough for the figures on the schooner's deck to be clearly discerned, 'An' by G—d!' he continued, 'if they don't stop we'll run 'em down.'

The *Bantam* was now within a quarter of a mile of the schooner, which was going close hauled, when all at once the latter's yards swung round, over, too, went her main-boom, and back she came, bearing west by north, tearing past the tug at a pace that soon left the latter far astern.

The skipper of the tug grinned, as he muttered to himself: 'You don't catch Bob Drake with a pinch o' salt. It's going to blow like hell, too, or I'm mistook. Stand clear for squalls from the boss now.'

Aloud, he said to the storming owner: 'I reckon, sir, we'd best be getting back. There's a heasterly gale comin'; coal's pretty near out, an' the ole 'Bantam' ain't built for sich 'eavy weather as is brewin'. That there Bob Drake knows all that as well as we does, an' can play hidey go seek with us all over the shop. See, he's shortenin' sail now.' For answer, Priddy consigned him and Drake and the schooner and the tug to the alleged hottest of all known places.

But now a big sea began to get up, and the *Bantam* had her decks swept repeatedly, and every movable thing carried off them, The night fell dark,

dreary, and tempestuous; and the little craft tossed from one great comber to the other with groaning timber and paddles anon whirling in the air, and then buried over their tops, made terrible weather of it. Far on the port bow, as darkness set in, they could catch a glimpse of white, like the wing of a seabird, showing the position of the *Casuarina*. Midnight found the tug in a most perilous state. Her engines had broken down altogether, the starboard paddle-wheel was a wreck, the cabin half full of water, and the only place of refuge was the bridge, to which clung the salt-encrusted, storm-blasted men, whilst the helpless fabric under foot reeled and swung, and was hurled like a cork hither and thither, now in a valley deep down between hills of pouring blackness, now buffeted by their phosphorescent crests, till she appeared part and parcel of themselves.

'For God's sake, sir,' shouted the skipper into old Priddy's ear, 'let me try a blue light. I've got some 'ere dry yet. If the schooner don't help us, we're all dead men.'

'Die, and be damned!' yelled the other, savagely; 'd'ye think I'll knuckle down to him?'

Even as he spoke a roaring comber leapt at them, and tore away the little shade deck under which they had hitherto found scant shelter; tore away, too, the funnel of the tug, and then swept triumphantly into the darkness. Lucky for them that, many years ago, on the banks of a northern river, men had worked well and truly, and for the honour of their craft, on the *Bantam*, or she would have gone to the bottom there and then under the dreadful impact.

But when the water cleared away, and the bruised and dazed men recovered their senses, they found their number two short. The unfortunate policeman had gone, and so had the engineer, their last cries unheard among the dreadful clamour of wind and sea. The locker in which the signals were kept was still intact. And presently a fierce blue glare lit up the disastrous scene. The captain of the tug had at last defied his master. But Amos, his form bowed to the howling blast, lashed to the bridge, and with a life buoy under his arms, said never a word.

It seemed scarce a minute ere there shot up an answering signal, and the hearts of the watchers on death were comforted by the sight of the *Casuarina* under a lower topsail, a storm staysail, and just showing a shred of sail aft, all outlined in vivid fires, and almost, as it seemed, on top of them. A faint cheer broke from the tug's bridge, and her skipper, as he shouted, "Well done, Drake. Oh! the brave lad!" could almost have sworn that among the voices raised in praise was that of old Amos himself.

All through the morning hours the *Casuarina*, handled with most consummate seamanship, kept close to the wrecked tug. And to those miserable ones clinging to their frail holding, now barely visible amidst the fierce waters,

the waves seemed to diminish in violence, and to roll with more rounded summits, until the dawn broke, a result due, as they presently discovered, to Drake's having used every drop of oil he could lay his hands on. Presently the watchers saw the schooner's boat lowered with infinite care and patience into the great seas, and, with Drake at the steering oar, make for all that remained of the tug. Then, one by one, at long intervals, the survivors jumped into the strong arms held out to receive them as the boat alternately came alongside or was swept away to leeward. And at last, after an exhausting, dangerous, and heroic work as ever happened in the history of the sea, the rescue was made, and Amos and his companions landed safe on the *Casuarina's* deck.

Soaked to the skin, his hair and face white with brine, his eyes staring and bloodshot, and with the look in them of the man who has been facing death for hours, Amos, as he was taken out of the canvas sling by which— so weak and worn were the rescued ones— they had been hoisted on board, suddenly felt soft arms round his neck, soft lips pressed to his cracked and crusted ones, whilst his daughter's voice sounded in his ears pleading for forgiveness. Casting a look to where the *Bantam's* mast was now alone visible quivering like a reed against the dull glow of sunrise, the old man smiled sourly; then he held out his hand to Drake, standing near by, and said:

"Well, damn it, Bob, after all, you're a man, an', what's better still, a seaman whose like'd be hard to beat. S'pose we call it a square deal."

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## 12: The Libertine

*With a Gentle Tracing of his Path of Dalliance*

**John B. Dalley**

1876-1935

*The Home: 1 June 1923*

*Dalley was a three-times married Australian journalist and novelist, who was washed out to sea while fishing from the rocks at Sydney's Avalon headland. His boy was never found.*

WHEN William Dobb and Sylvia Mordaunt were married he had £10,000, and she £3,000, a year. (That, of course, was before the war came and multiplied both their incomes by two.) Sylvia was twenty-five, and William two years younger. After the ceremony everyone but William's painfully Dobb-like relations protested that she had thrown herself away on him.

For quite eight years such adjectives as "sweet," "beautiful," "smart" and "lovely" had been applied to her more or less automatically; and if her admirers remembered, they always added, "And so good and clever and artistic, too!"

Right up to the end of last century Woollahra expected her to marry into the peerage; and, indeed, one elderly Scottish baron had nearly committed himself through mistaking a 3, in a carelessly written letter from his sailor-nephew on the Australian station, for an 8.

A caution which was hereditary no less than racial saved him. He submitted the scrawl to his solicitor, who advised him to guard against the possibility of disaster by cabling to Sydney. The flippant and needlessly extravagant reply arrived a few days later. "And the answer's a threesome."

So Lord Auchinlech conferred his name, his weeping eczema, and his mortgages on Miss Gretchen Wegener, of Jaffa City (Pa.), and passed for ever out of Sylvia's life.

It was not her habit, when accused of having thrown herself away on William, to deny it. That might have hurt the feelings of dear friends who meant well. She merely smiled her ineffable smile, a smile so consciously sweet as to be positively saccharine, and cooed apologetically: "But he's such a dear!"

And immediately her friends turned one to the other and cried:

"Isn't she sweet? Did you ever know anyone so good and kind?"

In point of sordid fact William was by far the best thing on offer, so far as she was concerned.

Reggie Burdett had less than half William's income, and was paying out £700 a year in alimony. Charles Courtfield, apart from his notorious attachment to the bottle, was living on an allowance made him by his aunt, who, while old enough to despise Sylvia as one of a family that had been outside the social pale in her day, afforded not the slightest legitimate hope that she would presently die and

leave her money where it would be spent in a manner calculated to give happiness to others.

Sylvia had many more professed admirers, old and young. She had been amassing admirers ever since her school-days— the reaction to her fine eyes, her luxuriant hair, her attractive figure, and, above all, her £3,000 a year — and, as in the case of the British Empire, what she won she liked to hold. Her conquests were of all types, trades, professions, proclivities and nationalities. There were red-faced and partially bald opera-singers, and pale, hairy boys who played in operatic orchestras; there were solicitors and solicitors' clerks; major-generals, majors and sergeant-majors; actors and amateur actors; naval captains, merchant service captains and captains of commerce and industry. There had even been talk of a Salvation Army captain, who, heedless of his uproarious faith and his even more uproarious wife, had laid his soul at her feet on the boat deck of a P. & O. liner, only to have the imperishable offering, metaphorically speaking, kicked overboard.

The trouble with all these devotees was that they were either poverty-stricken, or already married, or, as in the case of the Salvationist, both.

William had an abominable surname. His laugh— loud, untimely and embarrassed — was exasperating. He went far too long between hair-cuts. His hands were red, cold and chronically moist, and he had an ineradicable habit of pawing those he most loved. There was something wrong with his clothes: they had a wooden appearance, and even when gleamingly new, as they usually were, they produced an effect of having been slept in for a week or so. He wore absurd hats: smooth, green hats with grey rims; white, furry hats with large, purposeless bows at the back, and once he had faced her ingratiatingly at the races in a diminutive cloth hat.

In despair, during the early days of their romance, she led him charmingly to a shop and charmingly chose a hat for him.

Three hours later, in the lounge of a great hotel, her ears were affronted by his explosive laugh, and, looking, she saw that the hat— her hat— had been turned up sharply in front and as sharply down behind.

After that she decided that, so far as hats were concerned, he was hopeless.

Nevertheless, with all his faults, he had £10,000 a year. A couple of hundred a week! Between them they should be very comfortable indeed.

So, first stipulating in a maidenly and yet firm manner, that there were to be no children, she married him, and they began to be comfortable.

That is to say, they went straight to London.

IN London William proved even more discreditable than he had been in Sydney.

Those were days when well-to-do London men did almost everything in top-hats but sleep in them. A far-sighted wisdom was displayed by that head master of Eton who decreed that his charges, young and old, should wear top-hats. The top-hat habit, unless acquired in early youth, were best left alone altogether. To the typical Old Etonian, or to any other life-long exponent of the top-hat wearing art, the hats worn by our judges are no less deplorable than those in which our city aldermen occasionally parade the streets, and neither's headgear is more endurable than that of the humblest undertaker's assistant in the land.

To London, then, and not merely to London, but to the most fashionable hotel in the West End, came poor William, who, even in Sydney, had been notorious for his unseemly hats.

It is not necessary to follow his English career in detail. He knew a good deal about sheep and bullocks. He was a fair footballer, and had been played a couple of times for his wicket-keeping in the Second XI, of one of the Sydney Grammar Schools. But he was totally ignorant of salmon-fishing, covert-shooting; fox, stag, drag, beagle, or otter hunting; Wagnerian, Italian or any other variety of opera; pictures, books and paintings, old and new; and he lacked both the disposition and the dishonesty to pretend to the contrary.

All day, and every day, Sylvia's friends flocked to see her. They were men, for the most part — young and extremely supercilious men. And always, on such occasions, William seemed to feel a hand pushing gently, insistently, against his shoulder-blades, and he would respond by moving wretchedly towards the door.

"Are you going to desert me, Willikins, dearest?" Sylvia would ask, with an adorable pout, as the caller put down his hat and stick, lit a cigarette, and dropped with infuriating complacency into a chair.

An inaudible mumble would proceed from William.

"Well, mind you take great, great care of yourself, you dear old stupid darling." And then with delicious archness to her visitor; "Imagine if anything happened to him! Just imagine!"

Nothing ever did.

William would moon up Bond-street in his over-long frock coat and his ruffled silk hat, which somehow never would sit on his head at a comfortable angle; he would gaze dispiritedly at the sporting prints in Piccadilly, at the fish and game in Jermyn-street, and so on through the Haymarket to the Strand.

Once he had a little adventure. He was on top of an omnibus when the unexpected starting of the horses projected a pretty girl into his lap. A conversation began. The mishap had occurred at Hyde Park Corner. By the time they were half-way down the Brompton-road she had told him her life history—how she was on a holiday from Blackpool; was "styng at Kennin'ton" with her

Auntie Flo; was dead sick of London ; had bin engyged but wasn't now; no more men for her, thanks.

And so on.

Eventually, they had gone on to Putney and had spent the afternoon wandering about Richmond Park. As the lengthening shadows warned them it was time to start home again, she had turned to him, saying: "Haven't you got a young lady— a handsome chap like you?"

Handsome! Him! Bill Dobb! He had almost laughed in her face.

"But you are handsome," she insisted. "You have nice eyes and teeth, and you look brown and hard, not pasty like what most of these city weeds do: and your hair 'ud be lovely if you only got it smartened up a bit like "

He never saw her again.

For weeks the memory of his disloyal outing oppressed his conscience.

You see at twenty-six— Sylvia and he had been married over three years now — he was still very, very young.

ABSENTEE taxation, that most dastardly of Labour devices for the oppression of the inoffensive rich, eventually drove them back to Australia— William in an exultant mood, Sylvia in a perfectly fascinating ferment of mock anger against the wretches who had torn her away from her darling, darling London.

William, now thirty, had envisaged a quiet life on his station with Sylvia in the role of helpmeet. The vision soon faded. She caressingly, entrancingly announced her intention of living in Sydney. Her life there was, as nearly as she could manage it, the life she had been living in London— a not unnatural circumstance, seeing it was the only kind of life she had ever lived anywhere. William also lived a life that was very like his London one. He had more men-friends, but then they all worked; Sylvia had fewer, but then they were more devoted. He was as much in the way at her parties as ever— or, rather, he would have been had she asked him to them. She did not; and her friends soon learned that if her Very Latest Young Man (a waggishly daring phrase, which disarmed criticism in respect of fat merchants and slim chorus boys alike) was invited to meet her they would do well not to invite William.

The war found him forty-one and Sylvia— But enough.

In any event, after a massage or two, and a visit to her hairdresser's, she hardly looked a minute over thirty.

And now William proved more profoundly disappointing than ever. He was rejected for active service.

Over and over again Sylvia's Very Latest Young Man— a seasoned Lothario, who was himself well past the military age— expressed disgust at the spectacle of William hanging about the house.

Why not persuade the chap to play a man's part? It was shameful that one in William's social and financial position should cling to a life of ease and safety while the Empire was in peril! God! if he (the Young Man) were only of an age to risk life and limb in the sacred cause!

Sylvia had been growing nervous of her Young Man for some time. He was the only one she had, now. Worshippers were not crowding to the altar as of old; they had to be dragged there, and held down with elaborate dinner-parties and other expensive entertainments, when secured.

She made loyal efforts to induce William to tread the path of Duty; and, to do him justice, he tried hard enough. But, though healthy to outward seeming, the medical profession would have none of him in a military capacity.

He saw the war out at home.

Half-way through it Sylvia's Young Man transferred his errant heart to his typiste, and the deserted lady was unable to find a substitute.

For the first time since the age of thirteen she was cut off from Passion, or the prospect of it.

Remember this, reader, should you be tempted to blame her, in that, as the tragic years dragged on, and Young Men who were in any way tolerable grew more and more evasive, she lost a little of her old amiability.

As the lines on her face put up an ever more successful fight against that dogged *limitaneus*, the masseur; as her hair and hands and teeth and figure called more and more clamantly for help from those who "stand to" against the ceaseless onslaughts made upon the trenches of beauty by the raiding forces of Time— to drop periphrasis, as she grew steadily stouter and plainer, it must be admitted that she became the least little bit peevish.

The select coterie of parlourmaids who indefatigably seek the Blue Bird of increased wages and diminished hours in one Sydney family after another, confiding the secrets of their previous mistresses to their new ones as they circle condescendingly round and round— these traitorous ones, I say, began to speak of Sylvia as a nagger.

The psychological moment had been reached when she was ready, nay eager, to make William a faithful and devoted wife. And lo and behold ! in that supreme crisis of both their lives, he failed her!

INSCRUTABLE Nature often ordains that while a wife, however fiercely she may struggle, shall grow rapidly older, her husband shall grow as rapidly younger. William Dobb at forty-eight looked not a minute over thirty-five. On one of his good days he might have passed for thirty. Gone long ago was his habit of wearing ridiculous hats. His clothes fitted him. When he laughed, which was seldom, he employed restraint. His hands were lean and dry; he had his close, dark hair cut once a week— and he was worth exactly £22,500 a year.

The psychological moment had been reached when he was ready to make someone a devoted lover; and it is perhaps superfluous to mention that the lady immediately appeared.

A thunderous shout of astounded reprobation rent the firmament from Rose Bay to Macquarie-street, and, growing in volume and violence, reverberated through a hundred New South Wales squattages, and so on to Melbourne, London, Paris and wherever else one or two Australians of the £3,000-a-year, and over, class were gathered together. You have heard such moralisings applied to other belated sinners who, during all the years in which their friends were gaily stealing horses, refrained from so much as looking over a fence. Imagine a quiet, decent cove like Bill Dobb doing such a thing!

Disgracing himself and his family!

Who would have believed it? However, it only showed you....

You never knew who you could trust. And with such a wife! A Queen among women— in fact, you might say, a Pearl! One who was well known to have chucked herself away on him in the first instance! Here, on the one hand, was Sylvia— smart, beautiful, charming, a social success wherever she went; and here, on the other, was Bill, an utter old ass, as everyone knew. No brains at all. A bore— in fact a bally nuisance. And he had the cheek to turn down a sweet, good, grand woman like Sylvia!

"IF I HAD my way," said Sylvia's 1914-15 Young Man, wagging a now snow-white head at the typiste, "I'd have the feller flogged— flogged within an inch of his worthless life. First he shirks his duty to the Empire, and now he turns libertine, and deserts one of the sweetest, kindest women God ever made!"

"Is she reely all that?" enquired the typiste, with ominous quiet.

"All that, and more, God bless her!"

"Well, you should know, considering you lived with her for a couple of years, you old devil!"

"Shurrup!" he thundered; and she obeyed.

He called this, "putting over the cave-man stuff," and had found it effective with the generation to which the typiste's grandmother belonged.

THERE is little more to tell,

William continued to play the libertine, seeming to the scandalised eyes of Sylvia's friends to grow younger, cheerier and more debonair as his infamy became more and more widely known. Sylvia declined proudly to sully herself by contact with the Divorce Court; though William asked her for what he cruelly termed his "freedom."

A French philosopher said long ago that a wise man would elect, if given the chance, to be at twenty-five a successful soldier; at forty-five an eminent

diplomat, and at sixty-five a cardinal. The most satisfying line, these days, for a compulsorily-retired Messalina is probably that of domestic martyr.

Sylvia is playing the part, charmingly, sweetly, wistfully, now. She is making William an admirable wife, in the presence of witnesses.

She has become a church-goer.

She devotes herself to good works, with a tendency to concentrate on Homes for Fallen Women.

"After all," she often says, with one of her quiet, brave smiles (not one of the brilliant ones; her masseur has warned her against any but the slow, restricted variety of smiles): "after all, one of them has stolen My Man away from me. It would be wicked to let un-Christian bitterness enter my heart, and so I try to do what I can for the other poor, debased creatures."

And then, perhaps, there will be a plaintive speculation— ever so pathetic, in the circumstances— as to what it is that draws a man from the arms of a pure wife into those of a Bad Woman.

She has had the 17th century four-poster which Feyke & Co. Made for her replaced by a sort of ornate truckle-bed. Under the mullioned windows opposite (also the work of Feyke & Co.'s "period" expert) is a *prie-dieu*, and on a conventual little table nearby lie the *Book of Common Prayer* and a beautifully-bound volume of *à Kempis*.

Round her neck she wears, night and day, a slim platinum chain to which is attached a tiny cross; and at dinner-parties, the theatre and so on, she sometimes takes out the cross and, with closed eyes, gently kisses it, and, for a while, seems to dream.

The tuberculous curate at St. Anthony's is beginning to grow restless and troubled in her presence, and his wife is beginning to notice it. She has described uneasily to her mother the "strange, earthy expression in Samuel's eyes" when their fashionable new friend comes to see them.

And is Sylvia happy?

Thank God, she is!

There are those who hold that, take it for all in all, she was never happier in all her good, sweet, picturesque and altogether gracious life.

## 13: "Floating"

**Arthur J. Rees**

1872-1942

*The Bulletin*, 28 Dec 1911

*Rees was born in Australia but moved to England in his early 20s. He was a successful writer of crime novels, and an occasional writer of short stories. This tale is of two financially precarious friends scraping by in Sydney.*

I SHOULD have known Henry instantly, even if he had not been the first to renew our old friendship with a large, profane shout of welcome. Three additional years of excessive beer had given a beetling protuberance to his stomach, and permanently flushed his fat, hairless face, but otherwise he was unchanged. He was, if anything, a trifle shabbier than of yore; his second-hand beaufort coat might have originally garbed a giant, and his shirt and collar clamored for the laundry, but the difference would not have been marked by the unobservant eye of casual acquaintance.

As in the days of old, he led me into the nearest threepenny bar, and waited for me to shout.

Henry ordered a pint, and asked me what I was doing in Sydney. He listened with sympathetic attention to my story of ill-health and bad luck, but expressed astonishment that one who had always been so bowelless to needy friends should have come to want himself. The fact, he said, restored to him a lost belief in a just Creator.

"How much coin have you got left?" he demanded.

"Four and six," I answered. As a matter of actual fact I had a couple of sovereigns besides, but it would not have done to let Henry know this, for the amount would have represented comparative affluence to him, and he would have insisted on my sharing it with him. Henry's reproof of my improvidence when he learnt I was staying at the Hotel de Monaco was very severe.

He argued that to pay 4s. a day for a room, when beds could be obtained for 6d., was criminal extravagance. He intimated that I would be in an involuntary sitting posture by the following day if I did not husband my capital.

"Why," he expostulated, "there are many men in Sydney who are leading a fast life on what you pay for a bed. This won't do."

I knew it wouldn't, but I explained to Henry that in my weak state of health I lacked the necessary energy to hunt round for cheap lodgings.

Henry frowningly considered the situation. "You must come to my diggings in Darlinghurst," he said at length. "You can raise half a sovereign on that ring you are wearing. That will secure you a roof for a week, bed and breakfast, and

Sunday meals. I'll arrange it with the old woman who runs the hash-house —I have great influence with her."

I felt Henry's old domination overcoming my common sense, but I feebly resisted.

"Are your diggings clean?" I asked.

Henry was obviously hurt. "Cleanliness is the religion of the house," he said. "Have you any luggage?"

"Three bags and a tin box— up at the hotel."

"And you talk about being hard up! It'll cost you three bob to get them away in a cab, and you'll have to give the flunkey a bob to carry them out to the cab. That'll almost wipe you out. I'll tell you what we'll do— we'll cart them down on the tram and save the money. You go up to the hotel and get them downstairs, and when the flunkey wants to call a cab for you. tell him you are waiting for the carriage of a friend. Then, when he is looking after someone else's luggage, I'll come bursting in and tell you the carriage is waiting round the corner. I'll grab hold of two of your bags, and you follow with the others before the flunkey can get to you. We will take the penny tram to Darlinghurst. That will save you 4s. 4d. You can shout again and lend me a bob, and be 2s. 10d. in pocket."

It came off as Henry had said, but I could not help blushing as I caught the reproachful eye of the hotel porter fixed on me. Henry, on the other hand, was jubilant, and declared that by my moral courage I had struck a blow at the iniquitous tipping system which was sapping the manhood of democratic Australia. The victory, he said, clearly demanded another drink, and we had it at my expense as soon as we got to Darlinghurst.

Henry's lodgings in Darlinghurst smelt of stale stew. There was a swarm of infants in the house. We sat down to tea in the kitchen— ten adults and six children— I as Henry's guest. The landlady asked me if I took milk and sugar, and Henry, who presided at the head of the table, over a dish of sausages stewed in onions, assisted me to a portion. Henry monopolised the conversation, till he discovered that one of the boarders was asleep with his head in the sausages. He then haughtily withdrew, requesting my company upstairs.

"Drunken beast!" he ejaculated, as he led the way to the upper regions; "this is the result of unbending and coming down to their level. I was looking forward to the remainder of those sausages for my breakfast. Mind you keep them at a distance. This is your room."

I eyed it dubiously. Respect for Henry's feelings kept me from flippantly remarking that the religion of the house was evidently too sacred a thing for daily use.

Henry glanced around the apartment with some pride.

"This is my own little crib," he said. "I told the old woman to give it to you. I am going to sleep with a couple of the other fellows. By Jove, she has been brightening it up for you. She's hung a text on the wall."

I glanced at "God bless our home" without comment, and Henry took a seat on the bed and asked me what I intended to do. I hadn't the least idea.

"Don't think about it to-night," said Henry; "don't let it worry you, and, above all, don't drink. Come out with me, and I'll see that you don't spend more than eighteenpence. That will be three pints each, and you will have 10d. left. Men have made a fortune on less capital. Then get a good night's rest, and we will discuss your affairs in the morning."

The following day was Sunday. I was awakened in the morning by Henry shaking me. He was arrayed in a suit of pyjamas that might have been worn out by a dustman in active service before they came into his possession.

"Jump up and have a bath," commanded Henry. "I have just had one— very cold, but very bracing. Now I am, dressed for the day. This is Liberty Hall here. Dress as you like. I'll bring up your breakfast, and we will talk things over."

We did so. It appeared my affairs had caused Henry a sleepless night. "Sydney," he said, "is the best place in the world to float in, but you have to learn the ropes first. Why, when I first came here I was reduced to dossing in the Domain for weeks! I assure you it's a fact. It took me years before I got on my present wicket— it will probably take you longer, because you haven't got my resources and adaptability. Always make your 10 bob a week good with the landlady, and you have a home. And although you are extravagant you need not throw away a shilling on lunch. For 3d. you can get as much counter lunch as you want and a pint of beer. When you are in funds you can patronise the 6d. bars— it looks better, and it will really pay you because, of the extra quality of the lunch. If you must have tea you can get a very nice little snack at lots of places for 6d., but I should advise you to wait for the hotel supper and have another pint."

"But I've got to earn the money to pay for all this."

Henry intimated that he was going to put me in the way of doing so, though he frankly admitted he did not see his way quite clear just then. He gave me to understand that floating was hampered by unusual difficulties in Sydney at the present time, for divers reasons which he explained at great length. Ordinary canvassing rackets were played out. Then the city was fuller of professional bummers than ever he remembered it, and these parasites were living by tactics which were greatly to the detriment of honest men. It was only through his signal qualities that he was able to float at all just now; times were so bad that several weaker colleagues of his had entirely gone under, and were almost dependent upon a trifle from his bounty. He had generally managed to find them a bob or two each week, but for the last few weeks he had been

reluctantly compelled to refuse, on account of his own parlous condition. The need for action in his own case was almost as imperative as mine, and something would have to be turned up the following day. But he had serene confidence in his ability to meet the position.

"Whenever I'm right up against it, I always manage to float," concluded Henry. "Put me in a corner and you bring out all my best qualities. You'll see tomorrow when we go down to the city and make a reconnaissance in force."

I accompanied Henry to the city the next morning at his command. He was in fine spirits, and informed me that the decks were cleared for action. He halted on a busy Pitt-street corner, and called upon me to admire the strategic strength of the position.

"It commands a view of portions of four of the busiest streets of Sydney. I can think over things and keep an eye out at the same time. There are a number of men in Sydney who owe me money."

Henry walked backwards and forwards across the footpath with his hand thrust in his breast like Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he physically resembles. He cogitated deeply, but not abstractedly, for he continually swept the stream of traffic with a piercing gaze. At the end of half an hour he insisted that I should shout, pointing out that, considered as capital. 4d. was just as good as 10d. The expenditure of 6d. Was also justified as an investment, because a pint of beer would cause his brain to flow and beget a brilliant scheme. Furthermore, it would be an actual saving, for we could have lunch at the same time. He could smell the counter lunch on. I yielded.

As we came out of the hotel Henry's eye fell on an elderly man hoisting an umbrella in the centre of the tram track. "There's old John!" he exclaimed, with a note of joyful anticipation in his voice. "He'll rescue the beleaguered garrison. Wait here till I breast him."

I cannot truthfully say that old John appeared glad to see Henry. He seemed to me to cast a hurried glance round for an avenue of escape when Henry bore down upon him, but I must have been mistaken about that, for Henry assured me subsequently of old John's deep attachment for him. There was an air of fading prosperity about old John, but he was probably still a long way off being penniless. He had the weak face of a man who could not get rid of an impecunious friend without shouting for him. There was, to me, an embarrassing pause as we stood on the corner. The silence was broken by old John— his name was Collett when Henry introduced me— tentatively remarking : "I suppose it's too early for a drink?"

Henry remonstrated with old John for his addiction to the pernicious habit of early drinking, but said he supposed he would have to humor him. He led the way into the bar and called for a pint. Old John paid for the drinks with a two-shilling piece, and I saw that Henry had noted the circumstance.

When the drinks were consumed Henry led me aside, enjoining old John not to move till we came back, under penalty of the loss of his friendship. Henry demanded my 4d. from me in order to shout for old John, who, he said, was a most valuable acquaintance, and would sooner or later be able to put something in my way. It was incumbent upon us to retain old John's respect by shouting for him. One shout would do, and then we could retire with grace. I urged that 4d. was not sufficient for the purpose.

Henry turned on me a look of scorn, and said I would never learn to float in Sydney. He held out his hand, and I put the 4d. into it. We returned to old John, and Henry cordially invited him to drink up and have another.

Old John assented with some surprise, and the barman served the drinks. Henry plunged his hand in his pocket, and there was a pleasing chink of coin. Henry drew out his hand with 4d. reposing on the palm.

"Strange," he muttered; "I thought—"

He went through his other pockets with great care, with no better result, and turned to me imperiously. "Here, you," he said; "have you got that bank draft of yours cashed yet?"

I was about to stupidly ask what bank draft he referred to, but his warning eye stopped me in time. I shook my head instead.

Henry was exasperated at my neglect, and said so. "Here you are, going about with a £50 bank draft in your pocket which is no good to anybody, while I am placed in an awkward position through having changed my trousers this morning. Fortunately, John is a friend. Old John, I am going to take a liberty with you. Lend me a shilling."

Old John parted reluctantly. Henry paid for the drinks and pocketed the change. Then Henry gracefully turned the conversation by asking old John how business was. Old John intimated that it was so-so. I gathered that he was the patentee of a new advertising scheme. Henry was anxious to know whether the prospectus had been written yet. Old John drew a much-worn sheet from his pocket and Henry perused it attentively.

"John," he said; "this won't do at all. To their own merits modest men are dumb. You are too modest. You should expatiate more glowingly on the advantages of your idea. I'll write you up a prospectus that will astonish you. I'll do it for you for nothing, John. At present I am a few shillings in your debt, and if you like to consider the position reversed when I've done the job, why—. No thanks; I am delighted to be able to do you a good turn, John."

Old John sighed, and appeared to be about to speak, but he lacked the courage. We left the hotel, and bade our friend farewell.

"A good old sort," said Henry, watching his retreating figure. "I'll make his fortune with my prospectus, and then I suppose he will forget me. Well, well, it's the way of the world."

I timidly suggested that Henry should return me my fourpence, as he had not spent it. He was shocked at my sordidness.

"Why, good God!!" he exclaimed. "I don't think I deserve this at your hands. You have had three drinks and three lunches for a paltry 6d., and you want 4d. of it back. I am surprised at you."

I had not looked at it in this light, and I hastened to apologise. But Henry darted off round the corner before I had finished.

He returned breathless and indignant.

"There's a man whom I've obliged scores of times in my prosperous days," he said bitterly; "and now he refuses me a shilling. Told me to go and drink from the horse trough! Added insult to injury by suggesting that I was an alcoholic fiend. Ah, well, man's ingratitude to man makes countless thousands mourn. I told the swab what I thought of him. I said I would yet live to identify his eel-eaten carcase when it was dragged out of the harbor. I told him— hullo, what's that?"

I had pulled out my handkerchief to bury a violent impending sneeze, and with it my little capital, my all, my two golden sovereigns.

They fell side by side on the pavement, and lay there, glittering luxuriously in the sunlight. I made a quick stoop and a convulsive grab, but Henry was there as soon. He got one, and I got the other. Then Henry straightened himself up and looked at me. Contempt, reproach and sorrow were mingled in that gaze.

"What does this mean?" he asked in icy tones.

I lost my head under that look. I equivocated, and was lost. I told Henry that I didn't know I had the money on me. Henry pondered over this explanation for a moment, and then burst into a glad laugh.

"Why, of course," he said; "how foolish of me to think my old friend capable of coming the double like that. Why, I recollect now how carefully you searched your pockets when I asked you if you were down to 4s.6d. Don't you recollect the circumstance?"

I didn't, but, as I was anxious not to hurt Henry's feelings again, I said I did.

"And you remember my placing myself in such an awkward position this morning with old John, when I thought I had left my money in my other trousers pocket? Why, it was in your pocket the whole time!"

"In my pocket!" I gasped.

Henry nodded beamingly. "You know how notoriously careless I always was about money, old chap? I had a couple of sovereigns on me when I came home on Saturday night, and I did not miss them till this morning. You had no money— you said so— but you slept in my room. I went into your room after you were in bed and slipped the two quids into your pants, thinking they were my own. Well, well, talk about absentmindedness! It's as plain as a pike-staff."

I was too stunned to speak.

Henry turned on me a lustrous eye. "I cannot tell you, old man," he said, in tones that vibrated with emotion, "how glad I am that this trifle has turned up., For myself I care nothing about money— my tastes are simple— but I am now able to gratify my hobby of helping a friend in distress. Yes, old chap, you shall share with me— you keep that sovereign you picked up, as a gift from me. It will tide you over a day or two. A sovereign will be plenty for me— after I have paid the trifle I owe the landlady I will still have enough for a box of strawberries for a sick friend. But I advise you to get yours changed. It is very unsafe to carry gold the way you do. You might lose it again."

Henry led the way in, and called for a pint.

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## 14: The Covenant of the Craddocks

*Albert Richard Wetjen*

1900-1948

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HER name was the *Prince Shan*, done in letters of gilt with scrollwork on her bows. She was a beautifully built four-masted schooner, not as splendid to look upon as one of the whitewinged ships of old, but with a certain dignity and a stateliness that could not be denied. She had an air of aloofness, a sort of cool, calm atmosphere, as if with her master she had taken on some of his qualities. He was a Craddock, one of the New Bedford Craddocks that trace back to Devonshire and antecede Drake. Like all the breed he was small and dark and neat, in this generation clean-shaven. The Craddocks were reputed to have no nerves, as they were reputed never to have lost their temper. Neither had they ever lost a ship.

The annals of the sea, which are the kernels of history, take note of many curious incidents befalling a Craddock's vessel, yet never had one of the name left his craft by reef or sandbar or along the iron coast of strange lands. It was rather uncanny but it was fact. It was almost legendary. In an old book— so it was said— there was written that the first sailor of all the Craddocks had made covenant with the sea that he and his seed should serve ships and deep water forever, from cradle to grave, with full loyalty and love, heart, hand and head, without doubt or falter; and in return the sea should render them right of all ocean, wind, wave and tide, and should shelter their bones at the last. Certain it was through all the generations that the Craddocks went quietly about their business, which was the sea, prospered a little and did their duty with rather more success than the average mariner enjoys.

For the present Craddock the *Prince Shan* was his first command. The braid was new on his cuffs, yet he walked the poop calmly, entirely at ease, as the schooner went across the bar at Astoria and started on her long run from Portland to Tokio with lumber and general cargo.

It was a clean and airy day. The sea laughed and ran lazily under the spring sun, rendering spume to the wind that walked between the crests. The canvas swelled to the moving air and every rope and line lifted the old Song of the Trade while about the schooner's bows there grew the misty arc of a rainbow, growing and dying, dying and growing as she lunged across the sea and the green hills of the land faded into the sun-shimmer astern.

"She's logging around ten, sir," said the mate, very pleased, and the captain turned and looked almost through him as if not actually aware of his physical presence.

"Of course," he murmured absently, and the mate shrugged and sighed as he moved away.

It had always been like that when the captain was only a mate himself. Nothing disturbed him. He seemed to take for granted mysterious things to which other men could not grow accustomed— strong winds and fair where calms had always before been encountered, lucky warnings when reefs and bars were approached too closely, mere wild gales when typhoons and hurricanes walked abroad and sent other ships to destruction.

"Of course," Craddock would answer, as if he would have been surprized at anything else, as if he were in communion with forces of which others had no knowledge. It was profoundly irritating to other men whose forebears had made no mysterious covenant and who did not possess the iron, unflinching faith that makes for great command and the accomplishment of impossible things.

Captain Craddock walked his poop alone this morning— the breed was always reserved— and watched his men washing the port grime from the decks. From the galley pans clanged and occasionally some one swore. The wet decks began to steam as the sun gained heat. Some one laughed at his work. The peace of the sea had descended. Captain Craddock drew deep breaths of the winelike air and hoped that he would prove true to his race and tradition. A splendid ship, his ship, his very first. The memory of the land was like a vaguely disconcerting dream. The Craddocks always felt more at home on deep water. He laughed softly and was contented, as sure and confident as any man of twenty years' standing, just as if the braid on his cuff were not new and his pulses not fluttering with the hot pride of command.

The sun set and rose again. The windy, free days slipped by and the rainbow was steady at the *Prince Shan's* bow.

And then the wind left the schooner, died away in fitful gusts and rendered her to the deep heaving of the calm. It grew terrifically hot. The very pitch in the seams lifted and bubbled. The canvas slatted and the booms swung. The hours dragged and the days seemed endless. The monotony fretted men's nerves. The mate, watching the growing irritation, increased the work for each watch to do.

There were occasional fights in the forecabin, complaints about the food and the numerous cockroaches.

Captain Craddock walked his poop unmoved, tranquilly sure of himself and his ship. He sent for'ard lime-juice as a preventive against scurvy. He ordered the men's diet varied somewhat, sent to them many cans of insect powder. Practical things. He had no personal interest in the men but they were essential to his ship and it was a canon of good navigation that they be kept fit and obedient.

The calm persisted. Captain Craddock looked often at the glass. He was not disturbed or worried, only a little regretful that his voyage should be delayed.

He slept fitfully, waking often because of the heat and listening for the musical ripple of water along the hull, to sigh and fall asleep again when no such sound reached his ears. He drew himself then into a sort of vast patience and his firm lips drew into a little twist as if other men's unrest amused him slightly.

One thick, warm night, with hot little gusts of air coming fitfully across the glassy swells to stiffen the sails, to move the schooner a few fathoms and then desert her again, the mate came to the captain as he sat below entering up his private log.

"Will you come 'midships, sir," he said in a voice slightly shaken.

Captain Craddock regarded him patiently and with uplifted brows.

"Midships?"

"The main hatch, sir. There's smoke."

The captain smiled faintly. His pulses fluttered, but that was a mere bracing of the spirit before the promise of action.

"Smoke?" he murmured, and rose to his feet.

"Smoke, sir," insisted the mate.

The captain wiped his lightly perspiring hands with his handkerchief. He made a note of the time, jotted it down in the log and pushed the book away. Then he followed the mate on deck.

The watch stood around the main hatch talking in low tones that fell silent as the captain approached. The men moved their feet in an embarrassed way and their faces looked ghostly pale through the darkness, disembodied sort of things floating above black shapeless bodies.

"It's pretty strong, sir," observed the boatswain, uneasy because of the thick silence. The captain nodded but stood still and looked at the hatch where a corner of the tarpaulin had been flung back. Even from where he stood he could catch a whiff of acrid fumes. He bent over the little opening at last and coughed involuntarily, putting his handkerchief to his lips. When he straightened he brushed his jacket, although he could not see if dirt or a wrinkle had appeared on the cloth. His voice was entirely calm and patient. He might have been ordering his dinner.

"Get the hatches off, men. We'll try and locate it. Break out some of the cargo if you can. Start the hoses. Call all hands. Get some lanterns on deck, bosun."

He appeared so indifferent that one of the men laughed nervously and others followed suit. There was a general movement, a hitching up of belts, a lightening of the spirits. The boatswain spat into the scuppers and took a fresh chew from a gnawed plug. He muttered something and the men separated, some of them grasping the tarpaulin and pulling it clear of the hatch.

The captain turned and walked slowly aft. He mounted the poop companion and stood still and silent for a while by the main cabin scuttle, his eyes scanning

the dark swells that lifted and sank beyond the ship. His lips were firm and a little hard muscle stirred and slid at each side of his jaw. His eyes brooded somberly on the sea of his fathers and he wondered whether, now that the test had come, he would prove worthy. Then he braced his shoulders with a quick little motion, his lips relaxed, the muscles each side of his jaw disappeared and there came to him, as by right, the iron, superbly unyielding spirit of his race to which disaster was a word unknown and failure something that simply didn't occur. He laughed softly and went down to the main cabin.

DAWN found a mushroom of smoke lifting from the *Prince Shan's* midship deck. The hot, infrequent gusts of the night had gone and the mushroom rose steadily and evenly from the main hatch, to break and waver as the ship rolled but to form inexorably again. Enveloping the mushroom, like an enormous pall spread far over the ship and the sea, was a light yellow haze that made the sun rays quiver and seem a sickly orange and blurred the sparkle from the long green swells.

Near the break of the poop men moved up and down at the pumps from which led wet rounds of hose, pulsing as if with life each time the pump handles came down. In the smoke itself men loomed, wavered and disappeared at work. There were chemicals below and something was happening to them, judging from the fumes that made the throat contract and the eyes run. A few minutes of such fumes was enough to drive a man sick and shaking to his knees. A few more minutes sent him unconscious to the deck. Already the cook and a seaman had been carried aft to lie on mattresses and recover.

Captain Craddock watched the scene from his vantage point near the forward poop taffrail. He remained a neat and tranquil figure. He had taken the time to wash and shave and change his linen, as on any normal morning. He gave his orders, when occasion arose, without haste or any change in his quiet voice. The men, sweating and breathing hard at their work, would take a strange fresh courage at the sight of him so cool and collected above them, though they could not tell why they should.

The sun swept upward through the sky and a faint breeze grew from the southeast, sending the mushroom of smoke and the yellow haze sprawling along the forward deck and over the schooner's bows. The ship began to twist somewhat in her rolling.

The captain walked aft, commandeered a seaman and sent him to the wheel. He worked out a careful course, trimmed ship and ran before the stiffening wind. He returned to the taffrail then to watch, like a god looking down upon his world, weighing and judging all things; above fear and excitement, joy and despair, apparently without emotion. No man knew the

keen anxiety gnawing within him. Such things must not be shown. That was one of the penalties of command.

By noon the mushroom of smoke had subsided to a mere thread of vapor and the gases from the chemicals were not so strong. The wind was blowing steadily and the spirits of the tired men were soothed. They ate a hot meal and one watch went below to get some sleep. The other watch pumped an hour or so longer and the thread of vapor gradually died away. The captain walked to the poop companion with the intention of going down and starting the men to breaking out cargo, when the second mate touched his arm and said—

"Glass's dropping, sir."

"Thank you," said the captain and he turned from the companion and went into the little chart-house the schooner carried abaft the main cabin scuttle. The glass was low and dropping lower. The captain nodded to himself and the little muscles appeared each side of his jaw again. He glanced at the chart and wiped his palms that were perspiring slightly. Anxiety gnawed at him but he fought it down and kept his face unchanged. He must have no doubt, no faltering of faith. So ran the old covenant, and whether the tale was true or not he knew his forebears had gone serenely through their duty because they did not doubt their ship or themselves and kept the faith with the sea, which is unfaltering vigilance and truth of plank and spar and salt-water lore.

He went on deck, without haste, smiling a little.

"Get the canvas off her," he said. "And everything battened down."

The mate, who had seen the glass and was standing worriedly amidships, sprang to life with string of oaths and blows, and the tired men went to work. The watch sent below to sleep stumbled on deck again, sullen and dazed and a little stupefied. The captain paced back and forth and watched the sudden vague mist growing on the far horizon, blotting out the sky, growing darker, turning to a leaden hue.

But the blow held off for many hours, hung suspended as it were, a sort of ominous shadow of force over the rim of the world, more felt than seen, more apparent in the uneasy muttering of the swells that began to break white and short than in the look of the lowering sky.

By the time dark fell, however, the sea had risen to long, vicious breakers, kept down somewhat by the force of the wind but sending aboard sheets of warm spume that were hard to face. The *Prince Shan*, heavy with the water that had been pumped into her to quell the fire, sagged badly, yawed, and twice within an hour was swept by towering dullgreen masses of water. Her hull quivered and shook and her scuppers spouted foam, foam shot with phosphorescent lights that seemed like live things.

Captain Craddock stood in his streaming oilskins in the lee of the chart-house with the mate and the second, and watched, apparently undisturbed, the progress of the storm.

It was an incoherent roaring chaos, a thing of thick, driving spume and screaming wind that took the breath. The sea-fires ran along the swells as they loomed out of the darkness and sank back again. The *Prince Shan* writhed and shivered and twisted as if a giant hand was pursuing her below the waves and she strove frantically to escape. It was during a wild yaw caused by her partially waterlogged condition that she was pooped. A giant breaker outstripped the racing ship and topped her stern with a thunderous roaring that numbed the very senses of already dazed men. The two men at the wheel were licked away like straws and sent helplessly to the very forward taffrail, The captain and the mates mingled with each other and jarred in a knot at the head of the port companion. The sailmaker, who was just ascending to the poop, went overside on a sleek boil of foam, screaming in a thin, piping voice that somehow pierced the roaring. All this in the thick dark, riven with shimmers of white and sudden sea-fires so that no man saw.

The *Prince Shan* staggered, sank in the trough as if she intended to go down, and then, rising like a cork, shook the water from her decks so that it roared in cataracts and smaller waves about her masts and houses. She staggered again, quivered as if from some shrewd and secret blow, and swung broadside to the sea, wallowing in the trough. The next breaker swept her starboard to port, breached her clean and sent her on her beam ends so that everything movable and a great deal that supposedly was not went to leeward with a crash.

There was a period of quiet, a lull almost, though that was caused because the reeling hull shut off temporarily the scream of the wind and spume. The *Prince Shan* remained on one side for ages. It seemed as if she never intended to recover her even keel again. She hung suspended, as it were, her safety to be determined by a hair's breadth either way. An extra gust of wind— an extra drop of water, it seemed— and she would roll right over. Had another sea struck her then she would unquestionably have gone.

From the port companion-head where he had been washed Captain Craddock fought to his feet, choking and spitting salt water. He clawed and fought a tremendous way up a slanting, slippery deck toward the wheel, almost without volition, only half-conscious of what he was doing, as an animal by instinct dies fighting. He reached the madly kicking spokes after what seemed an eternity. They bruised and bloodied him some more before he steadied them. He stood straining against the thrust of the rudder, facing into the utter dark, his ship on her beam ends, no man near him, and a dying cyclone roaring by his ears.

There was scarcely a chance in a thousand the *Prince Shan* would lift before she was breached again and Captain Craddock's face was ashen and the little muscles were set and hard each side of his jaw. Yet he must not doubt, must not falter. He belonged to the sea, the sea was his and only she could help him in this moment. Brain, heart and sinew had done what they could. He faced it unflinching, his shoulders braced, and the grim, calm patience of his kind coming to uphold him. And she lifted, lifted wearily and slowly and with a terrifying list remaining, but lifted enough to ride the next sea that barely foamed along her scuppers.

She swung before the wind, and Captain Craddock laughed as his sea drove stinging spume across his face.

Came the helmsman, bruised and bloody, clawing up to the wheel, taking the spokes into his hands and cursing thickly. The captain spoke quiet reassuring words and left him to fight the spokes while he went forward to find the second mate and tell him to try to get the smallest rag of canvas raised. The mate, rocking upright, his head split open and blood running down his face, collided with the captain in the lee of the chart-house.

"She should have gone!" the mate roared, gasping and clutching the captain's arm. "This's the luckiest bloody ship I ever sailed! By God!"

"Of course," shouted the captain above the noise, and he laughed again and went on to the companion. But the second mate had gathered men on his own initiative and was driving them to work. There was no further mishap during the night.

The dawn came thin and wan and gray, and the sea moved monstrosly across the world, angry white on the crests and dull leaden and black in the hollows. But the storm was going down and the sun was trying to struggle through the misty sky. The wind was a mere hard gale and the *Prince Shan* was not laboring as heavily as she had. Captain Craddock was on the poop surveying his ruined main deck, a welter of loose rope ends and splinters from the galley-house and a stretch of the starboard rail. Of the galley-house there was no sign. It had gone with the cook, his pans and pots and his stove, vanished utterly away.

The captain went down to the weary men. One was fumbling with matches, trying to start a fire in a bucket punched full of holes so that he could heat coffee and perhaps fry some salt pork and biscuit. Two other man were aloft clearing raveled gear and others were throwing the rubbish off the deck. The captain talked to them, quietly, cheerfully, quite as though there had been no storm and fire and they were clearing the port grime away that the stevedores had left. The second mate joined the captain. He was a stocky, sturdy and efficient young man and his gray eyes were somber as he surveyed the ship.

"Lucky t' get off light as we did," he commented at last.

The captain smiled faintly and said, "Of course," in his absent way. The second mate muttered and wondered whether nothing would move this man into an expression of rage or pleasure. He started to add, "Well, the men'll want some sleep, sir," when there was a thunderous knocking roar that deafened him.

Midship a red eye glowed and disappeared. A huge gout of smoke shot up, spread and for a moment covered the ship before the wind could rip it away. The captain staggered and the second mate fell on one knee and with quick horror put an arm over his eyes. Then fragments began to dapple to sea, began to patter and thud on the deck. A hatch, split endways, slammed on the poop, sending a shower of hot charred splinters through the air. One ripped the captain's cheek so that he instinctively clapped a hand to the wound and looked surprised to find blood on his fingers. Two splinters buried themselves in the second mate's back and he jerked to his feet with a cry of pain. A block smashed on the after hatch and then a piece of broken batten whizzed down, flicked the captain just above the left ear, and dropped him without a groan to the deck so that he rolled on his back and was still.

The second mate cried—

"Well, now! Well, now!"

He stared stupidly at the white face against the wet planking, and swore shakily, fumbled with his own wounds. Then he choked—

"Main hatch, by God! fire wasn't out!"

He started running then to where the mate was braced back against the rail staring with popping eyes at the belching smoke even as he yelled for men to come to him. The captain lay injured, perhaps dead, but the ship came first. Flame shot up and wavered. Some of the rigging began to steam.

Blown to — —!

WHEN Captain Craddock came to his senses he found himself on the bottom boards of a ship's boat, his back and head resting against some one's knees, and many men watching him. He stirred and tried to lick his dry lips and some one held a dipper of lukewarm water to them.

He shook his head, forcing it to clear. He remembered things, his ship, the storm, the fire, the explosion. Life flooded in his veins, called up from some mysterious reserve of energy as he automatically took up again the strain of command. He sat up straight and after a moment's giddiness looked around. He was resting against the boatswain's knees and the boatswain was holding the boat's tiller.

"What is this?" he asked weakly.

The boatswain rubbed a knotted hand up and down one thigh and attempted a grin.

"You been 'elpless since yesterday morning, sir, an' th' ship's \*bout done. We thought we'd best get away. We jest pulled clear."

A slow astonishment grew in the captain as the words sank home. Why, he was a Craddock. He couldn't leave his ship. He stared over the slow, heaving swells and saw the *Prince Shan*, with black smoke still oozing from her, down by the bows so that the water washed her forward scuppers and her stern squattered solidly every time she sank into the trough. She was flat aback and her booms were swinging crazily.

"We tried t get th' fire under control, sir," the boatswain was explaining. "But 'tain't no use. She's got s' much water in 'er now she's ready t' founder."

"Where's the mate?" said the captain gently, struggling to his feet despite warning cries from alarmed men as the boat rocked. The boatswain grinned sheepishly.

"Th' mate's been flopped out pretty near as long as you was. The second didn't wanta come along so we sorta jest took him." He jerked a tar-stained thumb downward and the captain saw the mate lying still and white with a bandaged head on the bottom boards. Near him was the second mate with a big blue bruise on his forehead where something heavy had struck him.

"You're mutineers," said the captain, smiling faintly. "Put this boat about."

"It ain't safe, sir," the boatswain said uncomfortably. "She's'ad a coupla small explosions since you wus hurt. She'll founder next blow. We gotta chance t' make land, an' we can't work much longer anyways without sleep."

"Put about," repeated the captain patiently. He was a little regretful that they couldn't understand he was a Craddock and must not leave his ship. He turned and estimated the distance to the schooner. A little over a mile perhaps. A long swim fora weak man. But luckily the sea was calm and the wind gentle and cool.

Men cried out, supporting the boatswain. They were half-dead with fatigue. If they ever got enough water in the ship to put out the fire she'd founder. She was foundering now for that matter. They'd worked hard enough to save her. They wouldn't go back. They were tired, disheartened men.

The captain sighed. He was in no position to use force. He stripped off his jacket, calmly, deliberately, and stood in his singlet, serge pants and canvas shoes. The men watched him, falling silent.

The boatswain said at last, in an awed voice—

"You're going back, sir?"

"Of course," said the captain, vaguely astonished at the question.

The men cried out again. He was crazy. A dozen hands went to stop him but he plunged overside and reappeared swimming slowly toward the schooner.

For a moment the boat was chaos. Some wanted to pull after him and pick him up. Others said to let him go. He was crazy anyway and it would be one less

to share the water. The boatswain agreed at last but stood up and hurled a life-belt after the swimming man. The splash made the captain turn his head. He saw the floating belt, stopped long enough to secure it, waved acknowledgment and thanks, and then resumed his swimming. A brief discussion, and the boat started to crawl slowly to the westward.

The captain had gone perhaps a hundred yards when his strength began to fail. The first spasm of his nervous energy expended, he stopped swimming and rested on the life-belt, putting it on after some difficulty and with many contortions. He floated exhausted, stirring only when a wind-crinkle in the water slapped against his face. He was extremely weak. He must have lost some blood. The boatswain had said he had been unconscious since the previous day, which meant he had been without food for longer than that.

He swam again, gritting his teeth. He had no doubt that he would reach the schooner. It was unthinkable that he shouldn't. He knew no fear. The colossal confidence of the Craddocks indeed may have been the germ from which grew that tale of the old book where it was written —so it was said— that the first of the family had made covenant with the sea.

It was perhaps three hours later, when the sun was on the very rim of the world, before the captain's tired hands touched the *Prince Shan's* hull and he pulled himself with a last effort over the forward rail that was almost submerged when the ship gave a long and lazy plunge. He half-rolled and was half-washed to the foremast and rested there a while, continuing on hands and knees to where the deck was scarred near the main hatch. He coughed in the fumes but crept on until he was clear of them.

The life-belt was in his way now, a sodden thing that seemed as heavy as a jacket of iron. He tried to get it off but his hasty knots, tied in the water, he could not undo. He crept up the port companion to the poop, rested against the main cabin scuttle and then with a feeling of relief half-slipped, half-fell below. He huddled on the water-stained rug at the companion foot until strength returned for him to rise. He got up then and reached the locker where the whisky was kept. There was a bottle within, secure in its rack, and he drew the cork with his teeth and drank slowly.

The spirit gave him new heart. He stood upright and walked uncertainly to the desk against the starboard bulkhead, and cut free his life-belt with the razor-edged Malay kris that was normally used as a paper-weight.

He dropped to the swivel chair before the desk and relaxed all of his aching, tired body, vaguely annoyed because one of the cabin doors was loose and banging back and forth, rattling its brass ringhandle every time the ship rolled. The first thing he must do was to eat and drink to keep up his strength. He could decide what came next later.

He rose at last and stumbled to the lazaret and found beef cubes, oatmeal biscuits and some tea. He fortified himself with more whisky and then made a simple meal over the primus stove kept in the little pantry right abaft the main cabin. He ate without zest, an ashenfaced, drawn figure of a weary, injured man, blood and drying salt on his face and clothes, unshaven and unwashed, alone at his own great table. His eyes were tired somber things that stared into vacancy.

When he had finished eating he stared vaguely at the bulkhead before him and wondered why he had come back. What could he do on a slowly foundering ship, alone, tired and weak as he was? Was this the friendliness of the sea, the sea his fathers had served all their lives? To break him and his ship and cast them crippled and alone together into the desolate vastness of an immense ocean?

Deep within him something stirred in protest. Something fluttered and tried to surge in his veins, forcing him to calmness, forcing him to have done with doubt and to regain the simple faith of a sailor in his ship and himself. But he was too tired, too exhausted. The very last of his strength had been used up in the terrible swim from the boat. He felt he didn't care at all. He should have gone with the men, to safety and sleep.

Still, he was a Craddock— yes, a Craddock. Without doubt or falter, heart, hand and head. So ran the covenant. He laughed and even as his head dropped in sleep a flash of the old calm and tranquil light came to his blurred eyes—

"SHE'S in a bad way. No doubt about it," said a voice.

The captain lifted his head, mildly surprized. A man was walking briskly round the main cabin, opening the doors and peering into the smaller cabins that led from it. When he came to the one that had the loose door, slamming and rattling back and forth, he methodically fastened it back by the brass hook so that the noise ceased.

"Yes," answered the captain, "I suppose she is."

The stranger nodded pleasantly and dropped to a chair across the table. He was about the same height as the captain and had the same eyes, but he wore a neat pointed beard and mustaches and bore a scar across his forehead.

"I doubt I've seen a vessel so badly off," the stranger went on affably.

"Cyclone and a fire," the captain explained. It all seemed very usual but he did wonder who the stranger was. "My crew deserted. What ship was yours?"

"Oh, the *Travancore*. I traded to Stamboul, sometimes as far as Cathay. I'm a Craddock, you know."

"Funny we haven't met before. I thought I knew all the family." The captain frowned. "Of course there's the Devonshire branch."

"I belonged to that. No, not so very funny. I only drop in when some of you youngsters need advice. Peter Craddock used to come, but in his day they didn't

use sail much so his advice was a little— er— out of date. They send me now. This is your first ship? Ah, yes. It's usually on the first that you need advice most."

The captain rested his face on his hands and said:

"I seem to remember the *Travancore*. She's in the old book isn't she?"

"There was a clerk of Oxford wrote something of the matter," the stranger assented. "That was after my journey to Cathay. I brought home a great ape and certain precious stones. I call to mind the ape upset a lanthorn one night and we took fire. Most serious though we poured half the sea in the ship, but happily there came a pot-bellied Tangier pirate to see what loot there was and we carried him with much slaughter, being desperate. My company was all for taking to our small galleys but I broke them with an ax and there was only the Tangier ship left. I counsel such a means if a foreign craft should come along."

"I have no men, though," the captain reminded him. "And you can't do that anyway these times." He was almost apologetic.

"I had forgotten. Well, I recall a mariner in my day named Taplow— or it may be Tarpo— who, when afire, took his ship inshore and staved her planks so that she sank but took no harm. Swimmers afterward plugged the holes and Tarpo— or it may be Taplow— emptied her then. 'T'was a long job, as I remember, but sound. His decks stood perhaps half a fathom above water while his keel rested on white sand."

"I'm a long way from sand," reminded the captain, laughing a little, "Still, one never knows. I may be able to make land and beach her. You see, the timber she's carrying ought to keep her afloat however much water she takes. It'll be a big job, though, single-handed."

"The more honor," the stranger declared. "And you're a Craddock. Still, if I should counsel a raft, well-provisioned—"

The captain shook his head.

"I don't know just what I can do alone but it'll be my best. She's my first ship and I can't let her go without me. I know what my father would have done and I can't let the family down."

"I did but jest. So you will stay with her, sink or float?"

"Of course."

The stranger rose and nodded.

"The sea does not change as much as I thought, and the Craddocks not at all."

The captain moved uncomfortably.

"I suppose you think I'm a pretty poor specimen to get in a mess like this? And I can't say I'm any too sure of getting out of it."

The stranger laughed again and fingered his beard.

"You have read and heard what the Craddocks have done and what is written and said is only what the world knows. But I could tell you things. Men are not born to command well and to keep covenants, not even the Craddocks, no more than men are born swordsmen. One must learn, slowly, and with much sweat and heartache. This I tell you to help you in the days ahead. I have seen your grandfather shake all over and like to die for terror when the guns talked at Trafalgar and his captain was slain and left him to command alone. But I stood by his side through the smoke until it was over and he was never bothered again. His grandfather, as I remember, had a grievous lack of judgment with his liquor so that his ship had no proper care. Peter Craddock and I talked with him all one night and he afterward mended. He became a great man."

"With Cook, so I have heard." The captain nodded and his eyes brightened. "He explored the Sandwich Islands."

"As you say, but remember neither he nor any other Craddock, nor any man at all made his name save through sweat and heartache and fears that he conquered. However, I counsel you to remember what Tarpo did— or it may be Taplow. The name has always escaped me."

"Yes, I'll try and beach her—" started the captain and looked up and down the empty main cabin to see where the stranger had gone. He rubbed his arms which were numb where he had been lying on them. Through the skylight the sun streamed warmly and he rose to his feet and stretched, rather surprized. Now, had he been dreaming?

He went up on deck with his head a little foggy, but feeling very refreshed and light-hearted. The sea was crisp and blue with the gentle wind and the sun was well over the horizon. The *Prince Shan* had not sunk any lower that he could see, but smoke was still oozing from the main hatch into the morning air. He nodded contentedly to himself and went below to prepare breakfast.

It was not until he had started water to boiling over the primus stove that it occurred to him that the cabin door which had been loose and slamming back and forth the previous evening was now silent. A little eerie feeling came over him as he inspected it and found it hooked back, and he stood for a long minute gazing at the chair where the stranger had sat. Then very thoughtfully he went about shaving and bathing and changing while his tea brewed.

He was standing up after breakfast, lighting a cigar, when there came a distinct scraping feeling underfoot, a slight shock, and the *Prince Shan* jarred a little and heeled while resuming a fore and aft keel. The sails made a great noise on deck. Captain Craddock looked surprized and throwing the match aside went up on the poop and there stopped.

There was a clear murmur of surf in his ears and he saw patches of white perhaps two miles or so to starboard. Between the patches and the schooner

rose a little low islet, a rocky weed-covered patch scarcely above the level of the water. The captain walked slowly to the schooner's side and, as the swell piled easily against the hull subsided, he caught a glimpse of white sand with a few dark patches of rock. The *Prince Shan* had drifted into a small sort of submerged cove on the leeward side of an islet that was certainly not on the charts.

Captain Craddock stood for a long time, gazing at the smooth sea that heaved gently about him. He may have had doubts but he had fought them down. He may not have held to an immense faith in himself, in the sea and in his ship. But at least he had returned to her, had come back to face it with her, whatever might come, and the sea had rendered him aid in his stress. The covenant was fulfilled. He would never doubt or falter again. The captain remembered Tarpo— or it may have been Taplow— and what he had done to his ship, and he laughed.

IT WAS nearly two months later when the *Cormorant*, government survey ship, coming up from the south after a week-long struggle with gales and hurricanes, ran into an area of sea literally dotted with lumber. Here and there between great planks and bulks were curiously swollen bales, and once or twice a metal drum that emitted vapor and an acrid odor.

"A bad wreck," said the survey ship captain, scanning the sea through his glasses. "The City of Hong Kong's report was correct but some other poor devil didn't see the breakers in time."

Half a day of steaming through the wreckage-strewn sea and the *Cormorant* lifted a low, dark patch of rock, hardly to be distinguished as an islet. Here she went slow ahead with her hand lead going and her officers taking copious notes and bearings. The man in the crow's-nest called out after a while and the captain lifted his glasses and stared away to starboard where presently into the focus there came the tops of four slender masts

It was two hours or more later before the *Prince Shan's* hull could be distinguished and longer even than that before the survey ship's boat brought its captain to the schooner's side.

"Good lord," he said, utterly amazed. Instead of a deck covered with wreckage his eyes met washed planking, neatly coiled gear, stowed sails and lashed spars. He walked slowly forward, stared a while down the main hold that smelled rankly of old fire and then peered down into the forehold, whence came strange noises.

A man stood below on neat piles of wet new lumber, a man attired in a clean white shirt, open at the throat and rolled up at the sleeves; a man in a blue-peak uniform cap, thin working serge and white canvas shoes. He was engaged in lifting planks from under him and thrusting them out of the ship's side through a ragged square hole of some considerable size.

"Below there!" said the amazed survey man at last.

Captain Craddock finished thrusting clear a long two-by-four and then looked up.

"Oh, hello," he said. He calmly ascended to the main deck and shook hands.

"Who the — — are you?" exploded the survey man at last, very red in the face. He would have thought that a castaway would show some signs of emotion.

"This is the *Prince Shan*, Portland to Tokio," answered Captain Craddock with mild surprize. "I'm Captain Craddock."

"— —!" said the survey man and swallowed. "Aren't you glad to see me? Your crew was picked up weeks ago by the *Empress of Asia* an' you're supposed to be dead." He went on more calmly, "You've had a tough time, eh?"

"Fairly," said Captain Craddock. "How did you happen to get here?"

"Well," mumbled the survey man, "well." He hardly knew what to say. He had a feeling that his presence was only just as welcome as it would have been had he called upon Captain Craddock in port. "Well," he managed at last, "the *City of Hong Kong* reported a new reef last year and I'm supposed to be surveying it. What the were you doing with that lumber?"

"Oh, I had to lighten ship," Captain Craddock explained, regarding the other as if he were mildly insane. He caught his arm and drew him to the side to show him the big hole cut there. "You see when I grounded she was afire so I cut that hole at low tide and at high tide she filled. Put the fire out very neatly. She stayed on the bottom of course and I can only work a few hours a day. I figured on getting her light enough, then plugging the holes and pumping her dry. She isn't strained below. A fine built ship. Quite simple really."

"Yes," choked the survey man. "Quite simple." His face was the color of a beetroot, as if his intelligence had been insulted. "An' you figured on getting this packet unloaded and afloat single-handed, eh? It's a year's work." He paused, choked again and then burst out, "Why any sort of a sea would have knocked you to pieces. There's been gales and hurricanes all between Hawaii and Samoa for the past five weeks. I don't understand it. You must have had calm weather here right along."

"Of course," murmured Captain Craddock absently. "I figured on that."

## 15: Beyond the Sunset

*Margaret Cox Taylor (as by "Vandorian")*

1864-1939

*The Lone Hand, 2 Nov 1908*

*Australian author, and visitor to New Zealand where this story is set.*

SMART was inhaling mountain air, and kicking his heels on the edge of nothing. He had a steady head, the jaw of a bull-dog, and no imagination. Therefore he rather relished the sensation of hanging on to Life as he stared into Eternity. It tickled his vanity to feel that he was sitting cheek-by-jowl with Death, by way of passing an hour or two on Sunday afternoon. For immediately under Surveyor Smart's nose was a drop of eighteen-hundred feet into the Valley of Waimangaroa. His conversation became pleasantly discursive.

"It's a curious thing, when you come to think of it, that no one has ever located that pool which is exactly under the soles of my boots."

"Perhaps no one was ever fool enough to try. Dropping off the ledge you're sitting on seems to be the most direct route. What does it matter? There are plenty of pools in Maoriland; one more or less doesn't signify."

Mr. Smart's thoughts were his own. It was a coincidence that he remembered there were many mine managers. One less might even be an advantage.

"It doesn't matter, as you say. But I don't like to look for a thing and not find it, any more than I believe in wanting a thing and seeing someone else get it. My camp can't be far from that pool, as I judge its position from this rock, yet I'm hanged if I can ever see any water except the river, half a mile beyond that gully. Of course, the undergrowth is baffling."

The mine manager, a recent importation from Australia, only nodded his head in reply. Felix Blundell seldom wasted words. He watched the upper curve of the little corkscrew street which climbed between two rows of red-roofed cottages— miners' homes perched on the bald, grey top of Denniston Hill.

Denniston grew nothing of any consequence except coal. Of the sixteen hundred souls who existed in that sky-line village, every man, woman and child lived, directly or indirectly, by coal. On a clear day, the squat hulls of the colliers bumping against Westport pier— inky splashes on a sunlit sea— could be pointed out with pride by the youngest inhabitants. But the mine manager was not looking for coal-hulks. And having found that which he had been waiting to see, he stared across the valley. It lay like an open map, nearly two thousand feet below. Forest trees towered high above jungle undergrowth. Tropical in the prolific profusion of swinging vines, terraced fern groves, and tangled ropes of

coarse, green vegetation, Waimangaroa showed a bare patch where the river crept stealthily by low sand-banks to the sea.

Beyond the sea was the sunset. Beyond the sunset— what?

Mary Birrell taught her young brothers and sisters out of an old-fashioned book on Sunday evenings. The two men who loved her might laugh at her simple faith, but they loved her, perhaps, so much the better because of it.

Streets of gold, gates of pearl, and walls of jasper were in that strange city beyond the sunset. Juvenile members of the Birrell family believed this as firmly as they believed that the whole duty of man was to keep up the price of coal. The youngest hope, recently emancipated from the thralldom of petticoats, had even lisped out, on that very Sunday, an ardent desire to go prospecting in the Golden City— a desire he had made a futile attempt to realise by falling off two sets of steep steps into the corkscrew street. He had his forehead bandaged, and came along tugging at his sister's hand, and trying to get two different views (fore and aft) of his new knickerbockers, out of the tail of one eye.

The sister blushed prettily enough, and made a poor pretence of being immensely surprised to see the mine manager.

"Who'd have thought to see you sitting on the cliff side, Mr. Blundell! Such a busy man, too! But it's Sunday— so it is. And I quite forgot to say good afternoon to Mr. Smart."

He felt a savage sense of injury in playing second fiddle. Yet he had forced his company on the manager. Effusively he welcomed miner Birrell's daughter.

"That's genuine mountain bloom of roses you're wearing, Miss Mary! I believe you grow handsomer every day, upon my word I do!"

"Your word is, of course, a final court of appeal!"

Blundell spoke pleasantly. He wished to convey in an amicable manner the fact that the property in question might be very handsome and most desirable, but it was not for Surveyor Smart.

Johnny Birrell, an indifferent chaperon, had again taken his new pants to the edge of things. But he understood precipices better than he understood steps, and he knew how to take care of himself. He wept quietly, having suddenly remembered that one pair of knickerbockers only contained two pockets.

"Don't cry— I'll put some more pockets in them to-morrow— and keep away from that edge! What brought you up to Denniston today, Mr. Smart?"

"The same attraction that brings me always— draws me like a magnet week days and Sundays."

His voice was passionate. He loved this girl better than he had ever loved any living creature— except himself. As he looked at her, with the sunset making a golden glory of her bright hair, and the tender curves of her figure rounded against the sky-line, Mr. Smart swore to himself that no man living should steal Mary Birrell from him. Of the dead he would have no fear.

"Just as you came along, Miss Mary, we were having an argument about that pool, you know."

"Were we? I had forgotten it?"

"There's one thing you're never likely to forget, old chap— to take care of yourself! I never saw a man so—"

"Frightened," said Blundell. He showed no sign of annoyance.

"Not exactly frightened— but— er— nervous. That's a better word! You've been a working miner, too. Yet I'll swear you wouldn't look over that edge where the kiddie's craning his neck, for any sum of money. I'll bet you fifty pounds you wouldn't!"

It was quite true. Felix Blundell had lost his nerve and two fingers in the Mount Kembla mine disaster. But the disaster was now a back number. Time had healed the shattered nerves, leaving only one weak place. Again and again this strong man had fought it. Again and again it had baffled and eluded him. He was beaten by a shadow that seemed to lie in waiting for him on every cliff-side. Looking over a precipice gave him a convulsive desire to fling himself forward— to leap into space— to bridge the gulf of his own fears— to realise the instant of annihilation, an acute form of nervousness not uncommon in imaginative temperaments. Yet no man on Denniston Hill felt that life was better worth living than Felix Blundell at that moment.

Mary Birrell's face was full of fear.

Tactless, she showed her heart, and drove a fool faster to his folly. Was he the man to shelter himself behind a woman's petticoats?

"Take your hand off my arm, dear. I'm going to win fifty pounds, very easily, by dropping a clod of earth into the Mirror Pool! "

"No—I won't let you do it? There's something I don't understand about it. This is Sunday, too! Wait till to-morrow! "

Blundell smiled at such simple craft.

"Sunday's as good a day to win fifty pounds as Monday would be. Better. I shall have other things to think about to-morrow."

"It's a foolish bet after all," said Mr. Smart, with a smile on his face, and murder in his heart. "If you feel afraid,

Mr. Blundell, or if Miss Birrell is afraid for you— she'd do it herself a dozen times a day, and think nothing of it— don't make a fool of yourself, man! "

"This is a quarrel! Oh, what is it all about?"

"A quarrel! Oh dear, no! Surveyor Smart has lost much more than his fifty pounds, and he has lost his temper, too, perhaps."

Blundell had lost his head and kept his temper— a more fatal mistake. His coolness deceived his rival.

Raging, he begged the mine manager to take care of himself— to remember that he was tied to a woman's apron-strings. Felix Blundell picked up a small

clod of earth, and pushing away the clinging hands that tried to hold him back, he walked quietly to the edge. He looked down. Then the sky reeled and the flaming West seemed to dip lower into the sea. The valley rocked and the sunset chased the mountains.

Beyond the sunset —what? A blurred mist hung like a fog before his eyesight. He saw nothing— yes something to clutch at!

"Keep back, Mary! He's all right, I tell you! He'll drag you over! My God!"

THEN Surveyor Smart hunted for the right words that should call the child back from the cliff-edge. But his mind was only a butcher's shop. The shutters had closed suddenly, without warning. Why had he rushed into the butchery business so hastily?

Blood-red the sun dipped behind an ocean of flame.

The child needed no words to call him back from the edge. Screaming, he rushed away from the man, who walked slowly backwards, gibbering as he looked at the darkening West.

Someone had gone beyond the sunset.

Surveyor Smart was trying to remember her name.

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## 16: My Interrupted Demise

*Bartlett Adamson*

George Ernest Adamson, 1884-1951

*The Bulletin*, 15 Jul 1926

WHILE I was occupied, in my own quiet way, with the unpleasant business of dying slowly from the feet upwards, there were two things that

greatly irritated me. One was love's young dream, which quite ignored my existence. The other was the offside front wheel of the coach. Far from ignoring me, it kept popping inside the vehicle, like an officious neighbor, as though eager to see how my demise was progressing. These two aggravations between them at last interrupted my death altogether. Not that I greatly minded, because I was on holiday at the time, and it is so annoying to die on holiday. I hold that if one must die it should be done in the boss's time.

There was a reason for the holiday. I was ill. Even the boss had noticed it.

"You're looking a bit off color," he remarked. "Need a spell. Better, take a fortnight off."

A bit off color! I was a nervous wreck— a physical dilapidation. I went off to see a doctor, convinced that the boss had given me a holiday for the sole purpose of letting me do my demising in my own time. The doctor, however, refused to share this view, lie felt convinced I would pull through.

"But what you must have is a change of temperature— the more violent the better. Something cold and bracing. This coastal heat has depleted you. Your nerves want a jolt. Get cold."

Get cold! Where is a man to get cold within a fortnight of Sydney in February— real cold? What I wanted was a month in the Antarctic or a refrigerator. But I hadn't enough cash to take me even to Tasmania. The only hope was to get somewhere under the shadow of Kosciusko. I looked at a map. Coomut was the likeliest spot. The railway went that far, and the dot which indicated the place looked inviting, as though it would be a town not devoid of such amenities of civilisation as a bathroom and a bar-room and an ice-supply to cool the beer. After all, the doctor had ordered "something cold."

They sold me a ticket alleged to be for the Coomut express. It proved to be the Coomut incinerator. I arrived late at night, roasted, suffocated, almost in a state of collapse. Heat! But Coomut itself was even hotter. By morning I was just smouldering ruins. The proprietor, when he thought I was out of hearing after breakfast, remarked to the head-waitress: "That new chap looks crook. Hope he don't die on me hands."

In the bar, where the barmaid was cool enough to keep any temperature in its place, I mentioned that I had been ordered something cold.

"Better take the coach to-morrow morning to Murphy's, on the Saddleback. It's half-way to Kossy. You'll get it cold up there," the proprietor, with unkind eagerness, suggested.

All that night I prayed for morning and Murphy's. Morning and Murphy's and something cold!

The coach left at 7 a.m., a cranky old thing of an epoch prior to Cobb, drawn by four skeletons and held together by bits of wire. The driver was Sandy, about six feet eight and of loose build. I suspected that under his togs he too was held together by bits of wire, like an osteological specimen in a medical college. My thoughts were running to lugubrious similes. I was demising rapidly. There was one other passenger beside myself, a pretty girl. She sat on the box-seat by Sandy, close by Sandy, who, as he took hold of the reins swung his head half round on his elastic neck and warned me to "mind that there wheel." I was too ill to mind anything.

The coach had no hood. By the time we got clear of the town the temperature must have been 150. Hot! Sandy put his spare arm round the girl's waist.

Then the good patch of road ended, and "that there wheel" revealed its true nature.

The route was like a river-bed in granite country and the axle-box must have been badly worn. The resultant wobbings had rubbed a hole through the side of the coach, and at every alternate jolt the top of the wheel swung in so far that an arc of it came clean into the vehicle.

It was slow going, uphill. It was getting hotter all the time, and I was getting worse. A nightmare journey!

A new sensation was troubling me. but I could not instantly identify it. I only knew I felt as though the end must be near. And there in front of me were those two damned lovers, Sandy manipulating four horses round dizzy bends with one hand and the girl's waist with the other— a sort of five in hand. And everlastingly that there wheel buzzed in for a look at me, and out again. I began to think of it as the wheel of time, inexorably whirling me on to my doom.

Then suddenly I identified the new discomfort which was troubling me. In the midst of all that sizzling heat I was getting cold— cold! It was a curious unnatural coldness, a deathly coldness. My legs were growing numb— there was no feeling of life in them. They were so cold that my trousers felt chilly to touch. It was like the fingers of death fumbling up and up toward my heart. It reached my knees— was creeping up past my knees, up and up, like the old coach climbing up and up to a haven which, I realised, we would reach too late.

And all the time that there wheel popped in and out, squeaking everlastingly, as I fancied: "Not dead yet! Not yet!" It was maddening. Especially as I had by this time diagnosed the trouble. I had heard of it— creeping

paralysis. I could not move my feet. And still I had to watch those damned lovers, indifferent to my existence, forgetful of that wheel of time whirling on and on, with inevitable death at the end— those damned lovers, instinct with the urge of new life.

The paralysis as well as the coldness was well above my knees, and still creeping. I could stand it no longer. "Stop!" I gasped. "I'm dying!"

Sandy pulled up, turned his head round on the elastic neck, and agreed. "My Gawd! He's dyin' all right. You do look bad. Mister!"

They thought it would be more comfortable to die in the shade of the vehicle. Sandy lifted me down— I could not stand on those dead limbs beneath me. He placed me on the grass and produced some whisky.

'AY hat's the trouble, Mister?" he inquired.

"Heart!"

"Creeping paralysis," I explained. "I'm going cold from the feet up."

He felt my ankles and agreed: "They're cold all right. Mister!" With no change in his drawling voice, he added: "But that ain't creeping paralysis, sir! I know what it'll be— warming up a bit, ain't you?"

Strange to say, I was. A genial warmth. A feeling that I no longer wanted something cold. And Sandy continued with the information which quite postponed my untimely demise:

"That's not creeping paralysis, sir! You've been riding with your feet on Murphy's block of ice.

## 17: The Philosopher

*Peter Cheyney*

1896-1951

*Telegraph* (Brisbane) 5 May 1936

PURE HAY SEED! And he certainly looked every grain of it as he stood there, gazing with a sort of rapt curiosity at the stupendous pile of the Dorchester Hotel. Not that he looked— at any rate to the observer who possessed any sense of psychology— in any way foolish. Oh, no! Plainly he was of the village, but he was equally not its idiot!

The tanned face, with its hint of ruddy, healthy colour beneath the brown, wore a simple enough expression, but in the grey eyes there was more than a hint of shrewdness, and in the lines that showed in the corners of those eyes, and around the big, good-tempered mouth, a gentle sense of humour was plainly to be observed.

But in the rather aged bowler hat, with its oval crown, and its wide brim, curled at the sides; in his rather bright blue suit, in the ill-fitting clasp of which he looked definitely uncomfortable; in the stand-up collar, and the big white satin tie, with its silver horse-shoe stickpin; in the big silver albert watch-guard, with its dangling football medals, and in the clumsy, rather over-polished black boots, the whole life and soul of Little Muddlecombe-on-the-Splash could be seen incarnate.

Indeed, so plainly could it be seen that during his short stay In London the attention of several of the more zealous plain-clothes police officers had been definitely attracted. He looked so much too good to be true! Some of these had shadowed him for a bit; others had got into conversation with him. But in, every case the result had been the same— they had been reluctantly forced to pass him out as true-blue.

Equally with the police, the gentlemen of the opposite fraternity had been tickled by him. The expert pickpockets had passed by him knowing that yokels such as this, forewarned to the dangers of London, invariably keep their money in an un-get-at-able place.

Of the "con-men" many had taken him (as the police had done) to be a colleague; others had decided that it was too much like robbing a blind man. The findings of the third, and more business-like, contingent may be summed up in the words of "Dutch Sam," one of the cleverest of the fraternity.

He rejoined his two confederates, after a short conversation with the intended victim:

"No good to us, boys!" was his curt verdict.

"Why not Sam? No dough?"

"Oh, yes— he's got a bit of dough, all right!" Sam laughed, and the others looked at him inquiringly. "He told me all about himself— or most things, anyway. Says that twenty years ago 'ole Garge Bassett' paid a visit to London, and came back with such a wonderful yarn about all he'd seen here, that then and there our friend decided he'd pay a visit too. He started to save that very week. He was a farm-boy then, earning four-and-six a week. He put aside sixpence exery week-ever since. Sixpence a week for twenty years amounts to £26. His fare and lodgings have cost him four pounds— 'and so' (says he, slapping himself), 'I got more'n twenty pound left to spend, like-only' (and he laughs like fun) 'I can't find nothln' to spend it on! Ain't that danged funny?"

"Well, what's, the matter with that?" inquired one of Dutch Sam's confederates. "Reckon we can show him, can't we? And, after all, twenty smackers is better than nothing!"

"Maybe," said Sam. " But it can't be done— he's no good to us !"

"Why not?"

"Because— as his Nibs on the Bench pointed out the last time he sent me down — the confidence trick only appeals to men who are naturally greedy— why want to get something for nothing. See? And this guy doesn't— he just ain't interested, any more than he is in that flash girl who's trying to get off with him now! Come on, boys, we're wasting time here— and we've got to find a mug somewhere!"

It was the following day— his last In London, for the coach that took him home left the Victoria Coach Station at six o'clock— that Garge was caught. His captor was little Jerry Sline, who touted for a number of clubs, gambling hells, and less savoury places. Jerry saw Garge standing in Leicester Square, gazing around him, and Jerry promptly swooped.

"Excuse me, but could you direct me to Green Street?"

"I be sorry, sir, but ye see I be a stranger here myself, like!"

Garge's , beaming and childlike smile convinced Jerry he was a winner.

"Indeed? Well, never mind! Ah, here's a pub— they'll be bound to know in there. Would you care to take a little refreshment with me, sir?"

The genial eye of Garge gleamed, responsive to the hospitality offered.

"Glad to, sir — if so be as ye'd take a glass with me after?"

"Sure I will! Come on, let's get to it!"

Jerry knew his business! In less than five minutes they were talking like old friends. Over the second glass Jerry remarked:— "Twenty years' savings, eh? My word, that must amount to something useful?"

Garge grinned, and blushed a little; "Tidy bit, sir— at least, it seems so to me. Us doan't earn a mortal lot, though, down country— an' I be a married man now. Still I got twenty pound in my pocket, so I 'ave!"

"Have you though?" Jerry hid his disappointment cleverly— he had hoped for more. "And — you're returning this evening, you say?"

"Aye, sir!"

"Got your ticket, of course?"

"Aye, sir, surely!"

"Ah, well, well....!" Jerry seemed to be suddenly smitten by a bright idea. "By the way, doing anything special this afternoon?"

"Why, no, sir!"

"Good! Then why not come along to my club, eh? You'll find club life in London quite interesting, if you've never visited one before. Have you?"

"Why, no, sir. I— I've read about they places, though!"

The grin on Garge's face was encouraging.

"Well, you come along, then. You'll find it interesting all right. Plenty of pretty girls— drinks all the afternoon. Have a flutter on the tables, too, if you like!"

"Eh? Flutter on the tables?"

"Little gamble, you know! Roulette — chemie, if you care for it?"

Garge's honest grey eyes were sparkling, and there was a sudden eagerness in his tone:

"What, like they do at Monte Carlo? I've always wanted to have a look at that there Cas-i-no....?"

"My boy," quoth Jerry, clapping him on the back, "You won't know you're not at Monte itself, once you're inside there! You come right along— now!"

GARGE, having reluctantly allowed his hat to be taken from him by a uniformed attendant (who had some difficulty in hiding his grin at that wonderful piece of headgear), stared around him in gentle amazement.

Certainly, it was a wonderful place, all right! Just like the real Monte Carlo, he thought. Smartly dressed men, who carelessly produced great wads of notes when they paid for drinks. And the women. Slim, satin-clad forms— hair of lustrous black; gleaming gold and flaring red— wonderful jewellery— neat, silken ankles— marvellous high-heeled shoes! Just like the pictures, so 11 His3 friend— who seemed to know everybody there, and was cheerily hailed as "Jerry-old-boy!" by the men, and "Jerry-darling!" by the women— took him to the bar, and bought him a bottled beer. Then Jerry whispered to the waiter, and the waiter hurried off and whispered to a wonderful creature with almost silver-coloured hair. Presently the wonderful creature rose, and walked towards the bar.

Garge watched her approach with something like awe. She was sheathed in blue silk that shimmered as she glided across the floor. She was slim as a young reed, with a marvellous complexion and a cupid-bow mouth of deepest scarlet.

Her arms were bare, and as white as marble, and her frock— an afternoon one actually— seemed to Garge to be an infinitely daring evening one. Jewels flashed on her hands, around her neck, and dangled daringly from her ears.

"Hey, Eve...!" called Jerry. She gave a little start, and then came towards them, smiling. By gum, Eve was the right name for her, too— a pretty one, she was.

"'Lo Eve!" quoth Jerry. "What's the poison? Say, meet my friend, Mr. George Dimmock, will you? I want You to look after him for a bit— I got to see a feller about something!"

Her hand was marvellously soft and cool; her smile radiant; her eyes blue pools of invitation.

"Mr. Dimmock might like a little flutter!" said Jerry, as he hurried off.

"Shall we?" murmured Eve, slipping a bare arm through George's. As in a dream he allowed her to lead him to the tables. On the way he giggled once.

"What's the joke?" asked Eve.

"If Mary Ellen could see me now!" grinned George.

"Who's Mary Ellen?"

"My missus!"

"Oh!" said Eve, and pouted adorably. At the tables she made him sit on a chair, and then she sat, bold as brass, on his lap. Garge was near mazed— just like on the pictures, it was. He'd never thought he'd ever be like this...! She initiated him into the mysteries of roulette— still sitting 'On his knee, with one bare, cool arm around his shoulders— touching his brown, sun-roughened neck. Garge decided that this must be a dream— rather a nice one, though.

"By gum," said Garge, as he put another pound note in her hand. "That be the last of 'em!"

"Mean you're broke?" asked Eve sharply.

"Aye, for sure!" grinned Garge. Five minutes later that had gone, top.

"Really broke, are you?" queried Eve.

"Surely!" agreed Garge.

"Hard luck, chummy!" said Eve, and, bending, she actually kissed him— lightly, like the touch of a butterfly. Garge gasped, then grinned again.

Eve rose, and glanced up the room meaningly. The manager made a sign to a couple of big husky looking fellows with hard faces, and they followed him unobtrusively to the table. Garge was still sitting there.

"Finished playing, Sir?" asked the manager, in his ear.

"Aye!" said Garge, and then grinned: "I be broke!"

"If you don't mind, then— somebody else will need your chair...?"

"Surely!" said Garge, and rose.

"Any drinks, Sir?"

"I can't!" said Garge. "I jest told 'ee — I be clean broke!"

The manager had heard all about this strange country cousin, and had thought him rather pathetic. Also, he wasn't a bad sort of chap in his way.

"If a little loan's any use...?" he pulled a couple of pound notes from his pocket.

Garge reddened: "Why, thank'ee kindly, Sir, but I ain't never 'ad no need to take charity yet, an' I bean't thinking of starting now— If you'll pardon me, Sir!"

"That's all right! But— I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave the premises, now, Sir!" He glanced at the two big men, who closed in a little.

"Surely!" said Garge. "If I could have me hat...?" Almost magically the weird contraption was in his hands. At the door, he hesitated, then thrust out a horny, work-worn hand to the manager:

"Well, thank 'ee kindly. Sir, fur a very nice afternoon. Maybe I'll be seeing 'ee again, sir— in about ten years time. I reckon. Ye see, I be earning' bit more now, an' I reckon I can save a bob a week, maybe!"

"That'll be fine!" smiled the manager.

"Now I'll be getting home, an' tell my missus. She will laugh!"

"Will she, though!" said the manager. "Well, I'm sorry you had such bad luck"— he was quite sincere for once— "twenty years savings, eh?"

"Ah, well, sir," grinned Garge, from the doorway. " 'Twern't so bad, sir, not really! 'Twill be something to tell the boys in the 'Plough'— and no doubt ye know the old saying, sir — easy come, easy go! Good arternoon to ye, sir!"

And the door swung to, blotting out Garge's good-humoured smile from beneath the quaint old bowler hat.

## 18: Button, Button

*Arthur Somers Roche*

1883-1935

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DESTRUCTIVE brains! Slowly I opened my eyes; I yawned gloriously, drawing deep down into my lungs the winelike air; I raised my hands over my head and stretched until my toes touched the foot of the bed. I was conscious of my silk pajamas, the linen sheets, the silken coverlet. Through the open window I could see, in the distance, the green-clad mountains; closer, I could observe the seventh green of the golf course. I rolled over on one side, burying my face in the downy pillow, to hide from the obsequious waiter the sudden mirth that had overwhelmed me. The lifting, ten minutes ago, of the telephone that stood on a table by my bed, had been enough to wake into activity not merely this man, but half a dozen others, all of whose energies and thoughts had been directed toward the satisfaction of my wants. Oh, I tell you, I who have known direst poverty, that luxurious ease is worth the sacrifice of any principle.

And I should know! Had I not followed the path of honor across a bloody field in France, to learn that honor mocked me? Had I not adhered to all those righteous rules which the strong have laid down for the enslavement of the weak, and seen that adherence lead me from boarding-house to tenement, from tenement to slum, and from slum to the edge of the grave?

Honor had brought me starvation. What cant would term dishonor, had brought me a full stomach. Well, I had done with cant. The world had its rules; one must be productive or constructive, said the world. There was no place for those who belonged in neither class. And yet the lying world gave its best in place, in esteem, in what it terms success, to those outside those rigid categories. Steal, and be jailed: but steal enough, and be honored. Kill, and be hanged: but kill sufficiently, and be enthroned. The rules were made for the herd; but I, John Ainsley, was no lamb to be shepherded. I was the wolf who preyed outside the fold, and I had tasted meat. No more, while rascals stuffed themselves, would I go hungry. I had destructive brains. I would use them.

Yet I would use them as a gentleman must always use his strength, for though I discarded morality, breeding could never leave me. Not upon the lambs, nor upon the shepherd, but upon the beasts of prey who lurked outside, would I feed.

And I was savoring now the luxury of my first kill. In New York the famous jeweler Daragon— a cur at heart— mourned the loss of a bauble wherewith he had hoped to force a woman to his will, but with which I had forced the world to my will. Here in this resort hotel, I rallied forces that had been exhausted by

months of suffering when I had played the game according to the silly rules that I now derided.

For a moment or two, after the waiter had gone, I merely looked at my breakfast. There was a certain joy, not explainable to those who have never starved, in looking at the iced grapefruit, the yellow omelet and the golden toast. And then eager appetite mastered me. I laughed as I found myself reaching for a fifth slice of toast. I must remember that times had changed, and that it was not necessary for me to overeat; as inevitably as the hotel clock struck one, so would I lunch. Last year, when the scanty, coarse meal before me must do me a day, or two days, or even three, it was all very well, even vitally necessary, that I clean the plate. But now I could permit myself a daintiness forbidden not so long ago. And as I replaced the toast upon the dish, I remembered that I had promised to be on the first tee at ten o'clock. I looked at the clock on the wall, found that I had but a half-hour in which to dress, and leaped from the bed. I was shaved and bathed, and attired with a certain correctness possible only to a gentleman born, and was at the appointed place, exactly on the hour. My opponent was awaiting me, watch in hand.

"Thought you might have changed your mind, Mr. Ainsley," he said to me.

"Am I late?" I asked.

He grinned offensively. "Oh, you're in plenty of time," he answered. "For a beating!" he added.

I looked at him; a tall, burly man, with protruding blue eyes, and thin sandy hair, he was exactly the type which, for some reason, is most offensive to me. I find that men with those characteristics, especially if their Adam's apples are very large, are usually vulgar braggarts. He was not the person whom I would have selected as my opponent. But last night, in the dining-room, an elderly gentleman with whom I had struck up a casual acquaintance on the course— I had played the last nine holes with him, and he had complimented me on my play— asked me to his table for coffee. He introduced me to his wife and to his daughter, and to my opponent of today, Ernest Vantine, whom I took to be the fiancé of the daughter. Kernochan, my elderly friend, expatiated on my prowess to his prospective son-in-law. Whereupon Vantine promptly challenged me to a match. In the course of our conversation I mentioned that, during a leave of absence in the war, I had played Westward Ho, in England, in eighty-one. Vantine had shown an immediate disbelief in my statement. He remarked that he had seen me driving, and that I didn't look like an eighty-one player to him.

"In fact," he had added insolently, "I'd be willing to bet five hundred dollars that you can't beat me, and I'm never below eighty-five."

I reminded him that I had played but little in recent years, and that I had no doubt that he could beat me. Whereupon he had sneered and remarked that he always found it thus: people talked low golf-scores, but when it came to

reinforcing conversation with money, they usually crawled into their holes. His fiancée, Miss Kernochan, applauded his statement. I regretted that courtesy toward an elderly man had led me into the indiscretion of joining his table. For Kernochan was as vulgar as his daughter's lover. And suddenly, when Vantine began telling everyone within earshot that he had "called my bluff," an unreasoning anger possessed me. I accepted his challenge.

So, here I was upon the first tee, the cynosure of a large gallery, many of whom privately wished me luck, but all of whom were hopeless of my ability to defeat a man who I had learned last night was the best player in the resort. He had lied when he stated that his best game was eighty-five. According to my informants, and well-wishers of today, Vantine was capable of seventy-eight. He had won a great deal of money by making unfair matches with strangers, goading them into wagers.

Well, it was my own fault. I asked sympathy neither from the gallery nor from myself, but played the best golf I knew. It was not good enough to beat Vantine; it was not good enough, so lacking was I in practice, even to give him an argument. The match ended six and five, on the thirteenth green. I acted becomingly, I hope. I promptly congratulated Vantine, and immediately paid him the wager. He took it without shame. Nor did Kernochan or his daughter seem to think that Vantine had acted otherwise than as a gentleman should. In fact, people told me that it was Kernochan's habit to engage in a match with any newcomer to the hotel, and then praise the stranger's play to Vantine, who would promptly badger him into a match and a bet.

But I smiled as these things were told to me. I had been silly, and being silly is apt to prove expensive. I never mourn spilled milk. Instead, I look for a dairy.

That night I was as cordial at dinner as though nothing untoward had occurred. Miss Kernochan invited me to make a fourth at bridge, and I accepted. We played in the Kernochan apartment, and I won a few dollars. But I did more than that. I won the liking of old Kernochan, and even the sour-featured daughter and her pop-eyed lover were quite cordial. Kernochan, like all parvenus,— he was obviously that,— talked continuously of his wealth. I learned that he was a retired broker, and that Vantine was the chief owner of a detective-agency that bore his name. This latter fact came out when Kernochan showed me, as proof of his great wealth, a ring which he had given his daughter upon her engagement to Vantine. He brought it from an inner room.

"The setting is a little loose, so Alice isn't wearing it," he told me. "I shall have it fixed in New York next week."

I admired the ring. An enormous ruby, it was worthy of the warmest admiration. And I, who had dealt so successfully with another ring not so long ago, eyed it with longing appreciation. I encouraged the old vulgarian to tell me

about the stone. He was not loath to do so, and I learned that the jewel had a history. It had been owned by a Russian grand duke who had fled to Italy when Kerenski came into power. He had disposed of it to an American millionaire by the name of Adams, who had died shortly afterward, leaving his affairs much involved.

"I had a claim against his estate, and I took this stone in settlement from his widow," said Kernochan.

I wondered, looking at his smug face, with the pious side-whiskers and the mean, hard mouth, how just had been his claim against the estate. Idly, I questioned him— yet not too idly, for the stone attracted me. I learned that Adams had left a widow, who now resided in Boston and who was in rather straitened circumstances. Thinking of how comfortably that widow might live upon the proceeds of the sale of the ruby, I felt my distaste for Kernochan increasing. I made up my mind that I would have that ruby.

But next morning, starting for the second fairway, where the professional was awaiting me to correct a nasty slice that long absence from the game had produced in my drive, I came upon the Kernochans and Vantine in the lobby. They were dressed for travel, and porters were laden with bags. I stopped beside them.

"Yes, we're leaving," Kernochan told me in reply to my polite question. "A telegram late last night— sudden death of a former partner of mine; inconsiderate of him to die just now, when I am enjoying the golf, but it can't be helped."

His callous brutality should not have affected me, but I marked it up against him. I too felt that his partner was inconsiderate; I wanted the ruby, and it was going away. I murmured an insincere condolence. I turned to Vantine.

"I'd hoped, with a little practice, to take you on again," I told him.

"Well, there are other golfcourses," he leered.

"I live at Greenwich, Mr. Ainsley," said Kernochan. "In a few weeks the courses around there will be in good condition. If you're in New York—"

"Thank you very much," I told him warmly.

And the next day I too left Pinehurst. Two evenings later I was in Boston; and twenty-four hours after my arrival I had read and digested, in newspaper files, the life and death of the Henry Adams whose widow had surrendered the great ruby to Benjamin Kernochan. For you see, when I make up my mind, I am very much in earnest.

I had read of supercrooks; I had met one in the flesh, and almost under his eyes had abstracted a jewel for the possession of which he had made his supercreek plans. I had told myself then that the so-called supercrooks succeeded merely because of the low intelligence of the police opposed to

them. If low cunning— which was all my supercreek possessed— could achieve success, what would the intelligence of a gentleman achieve?

I had answered that question satisfactorily. By one bit of sleight-of-hand I had made more money than honest drudgery would have earned me in a lifetime. For I had no profession. Born to expectations which had not been fulfilled, I found myself, at thirty, possessed of an aristocratic birth, a cosmopolitan education and— nothing else. I was a living sermon of the futility of the gentleman. For the day when the mere being a gentleman entitled one to a decent and honorable living has passed forever. The world has no respect for fine instincts; it pays its tribute to fine gold.

I had intelligence; that I knew. But in addition to a good mind— which had never been used— I had only a gift for sleight-of-hand, assiduously cultivated during my youth. That contemptible accomplishment, however, had been sufficient, coupled with a quick wit, to enable me to do what a supercreek had failed to achieve.

Yet, with all my contempt for the intelligence of the police, I had vowed that I would, if possible, confine my efforts to fields in which the police had no concern. I would rob thieves. But here, at the very outset of my new career, I found myself planning to steal from one who was not a thief. Pride entered into the affair. Kernochan and Vantine thought me a wealthy fool who could be rooked with impunity. I would endeavor to show them that they had been mistaken. And in furtherance of that endeavor, I made a call upon Mrs. Henry Adams.

I found her in a modest boarding-house on Beacon Hill. I introduced myself as one who planned writing a book on historic jewels. Two days of hasty reading in the Public Library had qualified me to speak learnedly upon the subject of precious stones— wisely enough, at least, to deceive any but a jeweler. Furthermore, as I explained to Mrs. Adams, my book was to deal with the romance of jewels, rather than with technicalities.

"But why come to me, Mr. Ainsley?" she asked.

"You are the owner of the Grand Duke's ruby," I replied.

"Not any longer," she told me, shaking her white head.

I assumed an expression of surprise. "I understood that your husband had acquired it," said I.

"That is true; but since my husband's death, the stone has passed from my possession," she informed me. Then, in response to my questioning look, she told me the things that I wished to know. "My husband and I, Mr. Ainsley, have always been simple people. We never expected to own such a thing as the Grand Duke's ruby, and we acquired it almost accidentally. My husband was a broker. He was in Italy, arranging for the flotation of some Italian bank-stock in this country. While there, he met the Duke, who was in great need of money. He

wished to sell the ruby, and experts assured my husband that the price, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, was hardly half the jewel's real value. My husband had considerable cash available at the time. It looked like a good investment, and so he bought it. But neither of us ever intended that I should wear it. I am afraid,"— and she smiled whimsically— "that I am not the type of woman who could successfully wear such a ring."

I agreed with her, although I protested otherwise. But she laughed at me.

"I am a simple countrywoman, Mr. Ainsley. I never could be a grand lady, and never wanted to be one. And Henry; my husband, was a countryman. In search of a living, Henry came to Boston when he was a boy; he always hoped to save enough to buy a farm. You know how those things are. By the time Henry had ten thousand dollars, he was involved in business. By the time he possessed one hundred thousand, he was more deeply involved in affairs. Then, when his fortune amounted to more than a million, his entanglements were so great that his withdrawal from business might have injured scores of other people. We bought the farm, but how seldom we saw it! And then, just before he died, he determined definitely to get out of the city. I don't understand business, Mr. Ainsley, and so I cannot tell you just how it was that Henry's estate, which I had thought to be worth at least three million dollars, amounted, when all the claims against it were settled, to less than twenty thousand.

"But he had entered into some sort of an arrangement with another broker named Kernochan; and Kernochan had papers that seemed to prove that Henry was entirely responsible for certain vast debts incurred under that arrangement." Her gray eyes gleamed. I sensed the fire within this sweet and simple lady.

"You say those papers *seemed* to prove certain things," I commented.

"I was wrong," she corrected herself. "I understand law no more than I understand business. And the courts decided that Mr. Kernochan's claim was just. So it is not becoming in me to discuss the matter. But,"— and she smiled again,— "you see that I no longer own the ruby."

"I am sorry," I told her. And indeed I was. She was so courageous, and her voice when she mentioned her husband's name was so sad, that my heart went out to her. I have known widows who would have berated their husbands for leaving them unprovided for, but Mrs. Adams was not that kind. The memory of her husband was her dearest possession, infinitely more valuable than the Grand Duke's jewel. I felt a wave of sentiment engulfing me; but I metaphorically swam to shore. My business held no room for sentiment. And so I broached the real reason for my call.

"I had hoped," I said, "to obtain a photograph of the ruby ring. I plan to illustrate my text."

I waited for her reply; upon it everything depended. And luck was with me.

"I have a paste copy of the ring," she told me. "Henry had it made immediately upon his return to America with the stone. You see," — and her faded cheeks colored prettily — "I wasn't quite honest a moment ago. I am a countrywoman; but still, I am a woman. And I did want to wear that ring. Everyone knew that Henry owned it, and — one is as silly at sixty as at sixteen. Silly! And yet the jewel was too precious. So Henry had the copy made, and once or twice I wore it. I wonder if all realities are shams, and all shams realities. Anyway, I have the copy, and if that would do you any good, I am quite sure that you are welcome to it."

I turned my head away, lest she observe the gleam in my eye. It was with difficulty that I kept my voice steady, as I assured her that I would be most grateful if she would lend me the imitation for a few weeks.

Half an hour later I left her. For the first time since I had definitely adopted my new profession, I felt sick at heart. For Mrs. Adams had insisted that I stay to tea with her. Knowing her poverty, I was loath to add the slightest expense to her straitened budget. Yet it was not that which made me swallow her food and drink with effort: it was the fact that this brave old lady, who somehow made me think of a russet apple, wrinkled as to skin, but sound and sweet within, thought me to be as honest as herself. She questioned me about my life, my family, and I fed her lies. I was sick and ashamed, and wrathful at the weakness which made me feel this way when I left her. I sent her the finest box of candy the city could provide, yet somehow seemed to feel that my gift was an insult. For a moment I was tempted to abandon my project; then my own self-disgust roused in me an anger toward Kernochan.

For some things we need no proof susceptible to analysis by the five senses. A sixth sense tells us truth. Just as a child somehow knows truth, by instinct, so we adults occasionally preserve the gift of childhood. I say that instinct lives within us all, the heritage of a thousand generations, and that we are fools who disdain it and prefer our lying senses. I knew, as definitely as though I had witnessed the performance of the chicanery, that Kernochan had swindled Adams' widow. He deserved to lose the ruby.

There was something else, too. Vantine was a famous detective, as well as a boorish cheat. At least, he had inherited a great detective-agency. He had thought me a stupid gull; it would afford me a certain peculiar satisfaction if I repaid his opinion of me by taking his fiancée's ring. I do not mind losing a wager to a gentleman; but a man who will inveigle strangers into unfair speculation, is a cad and deserves punishment.

Besides, if I must be honest, — and it affords me, who am a thief, a peculiar joy to indulge myself, in these memoirs, in the unusual luxury of honesty — the Grand Duke's ruby was worth three hundred thousand dollars. I know no arguments that could seem so potent to me.

So behold me, two weeks later, driving into the Kernochan estate at Greenwich. I, who had gone a year without being able to afford a ride in a taxicab, now sat behind the wheel of my roadster. On the trunk-rack behind was a box in which were evening clothes, lounge-suits, shirts of finest linen, silken socks, and all those other concomitants of wealth. Wedged in the seat beside me were my golf-sticks. I looked, with all my furnishings, what I was: a gentleman. I also looked what I was not: a millionaire.

I had taken the precaution of telephoning from the near-by town of Stamford; and so, when I arrived at the vulgarly ostentatious residence of Kernochan, Vantine was there. It was a Saturday, and I had felt fairly certain that the detective would spend a week-end at the home of his fiancée.

My logic was justified by the event. For Miss Kernochan had answered my telephone call. had invited me to luncheon, and had assured me that Vantine would doubtless be willing to offer me revenge.

Vantine was willing; indeed, he was anxious. We arranged that we should play on the course of a near-by club, immediately after luncheon.

It irked me to accept the Kernochan hospitality; but all professions have their disagreeable sides. And so I ate their food with relish. I will say for Kernochan that his cook was good. That is about all I can say for him. For not merely was he boastful as to his wealth, but he showed an unpardonable curiosity toward myself. I indulged myself in a certain gift for fiction. I named a city in the West as my home. I skillfully created the impression that I was immensely rich, that a wound received in the war had incapacitated me for active work, and that I divided my time between America and Europe, wandering wherever I thought I might find amusement. I told them that I had acquired my car at Pinehurst and had motored north, golfing on the way. Also I warned Vantine that my game had improved, and suggested that we make the stakes a thousand dollars this time. He accepted with elation.

Three hours later, on the fifteenth green, I handed him a thousand dollars.

"I can't understand it," I said pettishly. "I just can't get going today."

He grinned. Had he chosen, he could have won earlier, and my excuse was ridiculous. "We might play again tomorrow," he suggested.

"For two thousand dollars," I cried.

He turned away to hide a smirk. "Just as you say," he replied.

I had yielded to Kernochan's solicitous invitation that I dine with them and play some bridge later. In addition to his other disqualifications, Kernochan was a snob. And I fear that my careless mention of certain names highly placed in international society had given the Kernochans a false idea of my own social position. They were not going to let depart, too easily, one who might graciously open doors forever barred to a certain class of broker, and to detectives.

At dinner Miss Kernochan wore her ruby ring. I had not invested in a motorcar, nor in a golf-match with Vantine, in vain. Before dinner was half over, Kernochan, learning of tomorrow's match, insisted that I must spend the night in his house. I could offer no valid excuse; and so upon my acceptance, the matter was settled.

Not until, Miss Kernochan and myself having lost a rubber, we were cutting again for partners, did I appear to notice the ruby ring.

"I see that you've had the setting fixed," I then remarked.

Kernochan nodded. "Daragon's offered me three hundred and twenty-five thousand for that ring," he declared. "But it aint for sale. I guess my girl is good enough to have a ring like that for herself."

She simpered, not prettily. I could not but contrast this insolent and commonlooking woman with the sweetly dignified lady from whom, by chicanery, the ring had been taken.

I whistled. "Three hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars!" I exclaimed. "It doesn't seem possible. Still, it is beautiful." I leaned over, looking at the stone. Miss Kernochan did the obvious thing. She slipped the ring from her finger and handed it to me. Now, I had not intended to put into effect certain plans, which had brought me to this house, so soon. But a storm had been brewing during dinner; it burst now with a clap of thunder and a flash of lightning. And a moment later the lights in the library went out. Miss Kernochan screamed in alarm. Her father laughed.

"They'll be on again in a minute, Alice," he told her. "This often happens during a storm, Mr. Ainsley," he said to me.

I made some reply, trying to keep my voice from shaking. For under cover of the darkness I was substituting the paste ring which Mrs. Adams had so sweetly loaned me, for the Grand Duke's ruby.

But in the darkness my fingers were clumsy. True, I managed to put the genuine stone in my waistcoat pocket, but the imitation slipped from my grasp, and fell upon the table.

"What was that?" asked Miss Kernochan nervously as the ring hit the table-top.

"I dropped your ring; I am sorry," I replied.

As I spoke, the lights came on again. The ring was not upon the table. For a moment there was silence; then Vantine's pop eyes grew hard.

"I don't see the ruby, Mr. Ainsley," he said suspiciously.

"It must be upon the floor," I replied. I tried to keep my voice steady, but failed lamentably. At any rate, Vantine crossed the room, and before I realized his intention, had locked the one door of the room.

"It will have to be on the floor," he said.

I stared at him. "What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Nothing— if the ring is on the floor," he retorted.

I will say for the Kernochans that they were embarrassed by the sudden situation. The daughter spoke. "Of course it's on the floor, Ernest. We'll find it—"

"You bet we will," asserted Vantine.

I had not liked him before; I hated him now. Yet, trying to assume an air of injured innocence, I joined the others in their search. And there was no make-believe in my aid. I knew that unless one of us found the imitation ring, I would not be permitted to leave this house. I would be searched, and that might be dangerous.

Yet after fifteen minutes in which all four of us had combed the rugs and the corners of the room, Vantine straightened up.

"Well, we've given you a fair chance, Ainsley," he said. "Now we'll really look for it." He advanced toward me.

I blustered, but he cried me down. His hands were reaching for me, and I cursed the greediness that had made me retain the ring. I could have slipped it out of my pocket at any time during this past quarter of an hour, but I had been certain that we would find the paste copy. And then, just as I was tightening my muscles, prepared to fight my way out of the situation from which wit had failed to extricate me, Kernochan cried out in excitement. He was wearing an informal sort of evening dress, a baggy affair of heavy material, the dinner suit of a man who wishes to accent the difference between night and day, but who also wishes to be extremely comfortable. The soft material had cuffs on sleeves and trousers, and into one of these latter my paste ring had fallen. Kernochan bent over and retrieved it. There was an embarrassed silence, during which my pulse stood still. Then Vantine grinned feebly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ainsley," he said sheepishly.

I stared at him. "I fear that it cannot be granted," I said stiffly. I turned to my host. "You will forgive me if, under the circumstances, I am forced to withdraw my acceptance of your invitation to spend the night."

It was a situation to which Kernochan was unequal. He had been just as suspicious of me as his prospective son-in-law, and he had not the tact wherewith to meet my attitude. He looked helplessly at Vantine. I also looked at Vantine.

"Unlock the door," I ordered the detective.

He shrugged. flushed more redly, and walked to the door. The key was almost in the lock when his fiancée screamed.

"This isn't my ruby," she cried.

FOR all his clumsy bulk, Vantine was quick of movement. Key in hand, he leaped to her side. "It's an imitation," he declared. He glared at me. "Very

clever— almost clever enough, my sneakthief! But you're dealing with Ernest Vantine. Now, will you be searched here or at the police station?"

I flatter myself that it is in moments like this that I rise to my greatest heights. I simulated a weary contempt. I walked across the room, and if my brain seethed with wrath at myself because I had been fool enough to think that the imitation could deceive people who had held the original in their hands a moment before. I do not believe that my face reflected my thoughts.

Upon the table lay a vanity bag that Miss Kernochan had carried. I put myself between my three accusers and the table, half turning, as I did so. My right hand was hidden from their view for less than a quarter of a second, yet that was time enough for me to effect a transfer of the Grand Duke's ruby from my waistcoat pocket to the vanity bag. Then, contemptuously, facing them all, I told Vantine to search me.

AN hour later Vantine gave it up. He had summoned the butler, sent his fiancée from the room, and the three men had stripped me. Failing to discover the authentic ring, they had\_ repeatedly searched the room. But Miss Kernochan had taken her vanity bag with her when she left the room. I could only pray that in the excitement she would forget to powder her nose. And when at length Vantine and Kernochan despaired of finding the ring, they sent the butler for the young woman. In my presence they held a council of war, and the upshot of their conversation was that Vantine started for the telephone, to call the police. Speaking mildly, I stopped him.

"Of course you understand," I said. "that I shall bring suit for criminal slander and for false imprisonment. It seems to me that a man in my position ought to be able to collect substantial damages— say, a quarter of a million."

"A damned sneak-thief would collect nothing." snarled Vantine. Yet he paused.

"Quite true," said I. "But we are not discussing a criminal; we are discussing a gentleman of position."

"You have that ring; at least, you know where it is," declared Vantine. "It didn't vanish into thin air. And this is paste." He indicated the copy which lay upon the card table.

"And aside from the large sum which I shall certainly collect as damages," I went on, calmly, "there is something else to be considered. You are the head of a famous detective-agency which bears your name. If you declare that I have stolen a ring in your very presence, and are unable to prove the theft,— and you can only prove it by finding the ring,— what sort of an advertisement will it be for your agency?"

I let this sink in: I enjoyed the expression on Vantine's face. Pop-eyed men should never permit themselves to look angry. They are unbeautiful at best. and at their worst they are extremely offensive.

"You don't think we're going to let you go?" blustered Vantine.

"I don't think it; I know it," I replied. "And if this nonsense ceases at once, I shall let the matter drop. Otherwise—" My pause was a threat.

I saw the cunning in Vantine's eyes Yet I despised him so thoroughly that I underrated his abilities. He whispered a moment with Kernochan, but I thought that they were merely arguing the advisability of risking the suit which I threatened to bring. So, when Vantine turned to me and gruffly stated that I was at liberty to leave, I bowed, and in turning to go. abstracted the ring from the vanity bag which Miss Kernochan had placed again upon the table. Oh, I was still an amateur in those days. Also, I was too confident in my own wit, and too given to contemptuous appraisal of the wit of others. For, just as we reached the door, Vantine said:

"I think we'd better search you once again, Ainsley."

I suppose I went white. I should have known that no one but an utter fool would have permitted me to depart so easily, and Vantine read my horror. He turned to his fiancée. "If you'll leave us again, Alice, we'll search this man."

"But you have searched him," she said, bewildered.

VANTINE smirked. "I am dealing with a desperate criminal, Alice. But Ainsley is dealing with a detective of some reputation. Would a criminal, as daring as this man, leave this house without the object for which he has risked his liberty? Certainly not. Look at his face. The ring is somewhere in this room; he picked it up—"

"Oh, end this farce!" I cried. I stretched my hands wide. The girl was seated in a chair. She wore an elaborate coiffure, piled high upon her head. In the depression above her crown, formed by a coil of chestnut hair— her only attractive possession— I placed the Grand Duke's ring. My hands were quicker than their eyes, and I stepped closer to Vantine, saying wearily: "Search me!"

Twenty minutes later I was dressed Miss Kernochan had returned. She had sat down again in the chair. I had plucked the ring from her hair and it reposed snugly in my waistcoat pocket once again. Yes, in those days I was an amateur; but I leave it to you who read my memoirs, to decide whether or not I showed, even at the outset of my career, flashes of that genius which since have rendered me incomparable.

"Let's talk this over," suggested Kernochan. He made a wry mouth. "You have us on the hip, Mr. Ainsley. .But you must realize that you can never take the ring out of this room. And we are convinced that it is somewhere in this room."

"So am I," I declared. "I think it's about time that you and I searched Vantine."

Vantine laughed, but there was anger in his mirth. "You're welcome, Mr. Kernochan," he said.

But the suggestion was too absurd for Kernochan to entertain. I give you my word, had Vantine been searched I would have found the ring upon him. But in that event I might have lost the ruby ring.

"Let's sit down, have some coffee and talk this over," persisted Kernochan. "I won't use harsh words, Mr. Ainsley. But that ring is here. You brought a paste copy—"

I raised my hand. "All of this, Mr. Kernochan, this unfounded libel, will be paid for in court."

"I don't want a lawsuit any more than you want a criminal prosecution," he said. "And we'll hardly have one without the other. But I do want the ring." He ordered the butler, who had assisted in the second search of me, to bring coffee. "We're all excited and under a strain, and a cup of coffee will help us to look at the matter sensibly."

The butler left; I sat down. "Go ahead," I said to Kernochan.

He argued, pleaded and threatened. I was adamant. I told him that I had been insulted, and that if my departure were much longer impeded, I would have satisfaction in the courts. The butler entered, bringing coffee. I refused to partake, and started boldly for the door. Vantine leaped to his feet.

"You can't go," he cried.

I turned and advanced to the table on which were set the cups of coffee. I guessed, I thought, his intention.

"I suppose," I said, "that you are going to search me again."

I really thought that he was; mind you, the man was beside himself in wrathful humiliation. Only the fear that I might after all be what I claimed to be, and the fear of ridicule which I had promised, restrained him. But I did not know that he would be restrained, and so I slipped the ring into a cup of coffee—not, however, into the cup that had been set at the vacant place at the table which was meant for me: I slipped it into Vantine's.

He colored furiously. He felt as ridiculous as he was. "No, I'm not going to search you," he almost roared.

I bowed to him. "In that case," I said, "I shall drink Mr. Kernochan's coffee."

SOMETHING within me gave warning; instead of picking up Vantine's cup, I chose the one meant for me. And before I could put it to my lips, Vantine's fingers gripped my wrist.

"So, that's where you hid it!" he cried.

"Don't be absurd, Ernest," said Miss Kernochan petulantly. 'The coffee was just brought in."

But Vantine must have seen something triumphant in my eyes, for he poured the coffee out, part of it, into the saucer, and then groped in the liquid remaining in the cup. Then, forgetful of the presence of his fiancée, he cursed angrily.

"If all detectives are as stupid as you, Vantine," I told him, "I wonder that more people don't go in for theft." I reached for his cup. "I don't propose to be denied my drink because you are a jackass," I remarked. With that I put his cup to my lips; the ruby ring passed into my mouth; I put the cup down, and wiped my mouth with a napkin. A second later the ruby ring had once again returned to my waistcoat pocket. I nodded coldly to Kernochan and his daughter.

"Now, then," I said to Vantine, "if you will kindly unlock the door, I will go upstairs, get my things and leave."

The sweat stood on Kernochan's forehead, but he nodded to Vantine to acquiesce in my demand. The detective opened the door for me; I walked calmly through it, and began mounting the stairs in the hall outside.

Now, I have said that at this period in my career I was an amateur. This account of my recklessness is proof that I tell the truth. But do not do me the injustice to suppose that I thought for one minute that, though I was permitted to leave the room, I would be permitted to leave the house. I heard the telephone click as I set my foot on the first step. Rather than risk a brawl, I would be permitted to go upstairs. By the time I would have packed my bags, policemen would be in the house. Only Vantine's pride had caused this much delay in summoning the police. For their arrival meant publicity and consequent ridicule, in the press, for the great detective who must call in village policemen to recover a jewel stolen under his eyes. But Vantine's pride was not too elastic; it had snapped now. He would risk ridicule, and Kernochan would risk a libel suit. The jewel was worth these risks.

Yet, knowing what they were doing, I managed to restrain myself until I reached my room. Then I acted as swiftly as ever a man, in a similar predicament, could hope to act. I snatched up hat and coat, crossed my room in a bound, threw open the French window that led to a balcony, and vaulted to the ground twelve feet below. True, I risked a broken leg, but it was only a chance. Arrest meant certain imprisonment. My recent past could afford no disclosures. And luck was with me. I was shaken up, but uninjured. In thirty seconds I was in the garage, at the wheel of my car. Cries from the house— they had heard my impact with the ground— alarmed a lounging chauffeur. But he was not quick enough; I was away at once.

And I was not captured. I reached New York, abandoned my car, purchased clothing— even late at night it is possible to buy apparel in the great city— and

within an hour after that I had eliminated, I felt certain, any possibility of capture. For I am of undistinguished appearance, and the description meant for me would fit a thousand other men.

Yes, I was safe— safe, I mean, from the pursuit of the clumsy Vantine and the ex-policemen who make up the staff of his agency. But I was not safe from something else.

Once again I tell you that at this time I was an amateur, cursed with sentiment — aye, sentimentality. For I could not help but think of the sweet-faced widow in Boston. The Grand Duke's ring should have been hers. Somehow I felt that I had robbed her, not the grossly rich Benjamin Kernochan. And so— I turned the ruby into cash, engaged a discreet lawyer, and Mrs. Henry Adams learned that certain stock which she did not know belonged to her husband was hers. She lives, I believe, in comparative luxury upon a farm in Massachusetts. She should live well; the income from one hundred and fifty thousand dollars— the price paid me for the Grand Duke's ruby by a dealer in stolen stones— is ample for a widowed lady of simple tastes.

Yes, I was an amateur. Thank God, I had not yet forgotten that I was also a gentleman.

The adventure of the Grand Duke's ruby had cost me money, instead of showing me a profit. Yet if by that adventure I was lighter in my pocket, I was also light in heart, thinking of Mrs. Adams, as I sailed the following week for Europe.

## 19: Hoop-te-do!

*Booth Tarkington*

1869-1946

*Redbook* July 1935

IN the morning, on the veranda of my small cottage at Cobble Reef, I'd been trying to read a heavy book, and making little progress. The cottage is on a crest of rock, and the surf below was loud and distracting; but beating more sharply upon my consciousness was another sound— the high-pitched voice of a denunciatory woman nagging somebody interminably. She was not within my view, yet the shrill noise of her seemed to come from the premises of my neighbor Captain Ambrose Valentine, retired, upon the roof of whose shack my windows looked down, and after lunch, when the neighborhood was again quiet, I had enough curiosity to descend to his cluttered little yard and make inquiries. Seated, whittling, among weeds and the remains of a totally collapsed buckboard, he replied; and the rest of this narrative would best be heard in his own plaintive voice:

ALL THAT UPROAR and catterwilling 't went on all morning and that you might heard a little part of it, why, it was due to that there Sarah Bazz. Come right in my house and commenced, and never stopped. All because Bazz, her husband, told her he was out with me Saturday night when he never got home, and if I'd a once told her the truth that I never see no Bazz no Saturday night, why, it would made an enemy of him and cost me dear— like him poisoning my chickens or something— so I didn't dare to and simply had to suffer till a coupla her children come and got her to go home and cook dinner.

On the other hands, it's happened to me before now and only a sample of how this world treats a bachelor. Take if a bachelor goes to a church supper, don't they all expect him to buy everything on account of him supposed to have no family to support? Yes, and take if there's sick people or even a corpse to be set up with, don't they pic'k on a bachelor to do it? As if he didn't need no sleep same as anybody else!

Women hate bachelors— single women and women that got their own spouses, and women that have lost 'em, too, widows-like; they all hate bachelors, and the elderlier a bachelor gets, the worst they hate him. It don't help him none to hold strictly aloop from 'em; they'll hate him just as bad as if you had a good deal to do with 'em.

Preachers don't like bachelors neither, you can see why, and the Guvment hates 'em, slams taxes on 'em; and on a railroad if a bachelor hires a bunk to sleep in, they charge him just as much as if he was married and had a wife with him. Even little children got an instinct against bachelors, on account of the

philosophy being that the more bachelors, why, likely, the less children. What's worse yet, why, bachelors'll hang together some maybe, if they got to; but they don't get no enjoyment out of it— it's just the need for shelter— and, with only one or two exceptions like me, they rather be around where there's women that revile 'em behind their backs.

PRACKLY the hull human kingdom treats a bachelor like he was outside the bale; but the ones that do the worst to him, it's the married men.

When one of them that's married gets caught or anything, he's too cowardly to tell his wife some other married man was in it, too, on account the women would compare their notes together and get the other man in trouble he maybe was escaping and make an enemy of him; but nobody don't mind if a bachelor's their enemy. Right here in Cobble Reef there aint been a married man in the last eighteen years got drunk he didn't tell his wife he was out with me.

I've had married men heap their burdens and falsifyings on me that the highest repatation I ever built up would get smears. This Bazz case this morning wouldn't be nothing, moored alongside some I've underwent. Take the case of when I first retired from the tug-boat calling, for instance, and went to live up Lemport way at Cosy's Island. I thought Cosy's Island was going to be a bower of rest after my toils on the deep, because for one thing Cosy's Island aint no island; it's a beautiful little city with a splendid sardine canning factory, and White's and Goltz's Salt Codfish comes from there, too, that you can eat all over the United States.

I'd saved a sum of some money; so I up and chartered the half of a double cottage belonged to some good 'quaintances of mine near the sardine wharf and took light jobs as a caulker sometimes. So there I was at last, thinks I, after all my storms, come to nice anchorage in an elegant haven.

My 'quaintances in Cosy's Island, both male and female, had encouraged me to come and live among 'em, saying oh, Captain this! and oh, Captain that! and how high they'd 'steem me if I would settle down there to be their fellow-countryman. So now I was cheap by jowl with 'em in my half a cottage, and right away I was a sought-for popular man. There wouldn't be a day I couldn't had a meal at some family's expense, and all bright smiles and, "Pass Captain the stew first; let Grandma wait!"

Fair words! Fair words every one of 'em holler, not a thing below the water line, and all because I was a bachelor more less over thirty or forty year old. That's the way. All hoop-te-do and oh, what an addition he is! So's a bachelor can hear 'em saying it, and all the time they hate him worse'n roaches; but take and hide and conceal their true sediments towards him until they find out he aint going to let 'em do every last thing they want to to him, and got a mind of

his own and won't behave like nobody's fool just on their sakes. So then they show their true worth like so much poison.

The ones that made the most over me was this Mrs. Orene Willis and Ernie Willis, her husband, that she owned this double cottage I was in the one side of, and they lived in the other half of. Ernie Willis I'd knowed many's the year; he'd sailed mate under me on the *W. H. Holker* in the New England Dredging Corporation before he settled ashore at Cosy's Island and married this Mrs. Orene Willis that was his wife now, and, while and all as to brains he never set low in the water account of cargo, my big mistake was letting him worm around into my trustingsness as a faithful friend.

This Mrs. Orene Willis, she done worming into my confidence, too, being an experienced married woman and had been married before Ernie, with a husband that run away; but she had propaty, so I thought no harm to act more less kittenish with her to maybe aid getting the rent for my half reduced down some day.

Right at the start the biggest compation over me come from across the street; a young couple named Medger that had a widow-lady aunt living on 'em they says was going on thirty-seven or -eight but uppards of fifty-five or -six, true rating. Awful heavy tonnage, too, and there was big gossip about her eating, that she would eat amounts nobody ever see before nor since.

This young Mr. and Mrs. Medger, they claimed to be giving me a supper party; but when I got there, it was only them and this big-eating aunt, and they kep' hinting behind their hand at her to go lighter during table, and thinking they was covering it up; but I heard them, and anyways, after she made a couple efforts to not, she give 'way to her instincts and went to eating right before me just like Mrs. Orene Willis, Ernie's wife, had told me private beforehand she would.

This young Mrs. Medger kep' pointing to some pictures on the wall and a couple ornaments they had on the mantelpiece and talking about 'em to abstract my attention; but you might as well invited somebody to the circus and then ask him not to look at the bareback riding and elephants when they was right before his eyes After supper Mr. and Mrs. Medger says they had to go to a business meeting of the Jolly Dozen, only members allowed, and went off and left me alone with her in their setting-room. Then she was still swallering at something to get it down; but she says she will tell my fortune with a pack of cards and commenced shuffling 'em. But I says, "Don't lay 'em out on my account." and let on like something must disagreed with me bad, and says I better start quick and run for a drug-store. By this means I got away and never come back, and so the Medgers was the first that turned tail, working against me and showing theirselves in their true light as scandalmonkers against a bachelor they couldn't discumber theirselves of their big aunt on.

THERE was still plenty after me; and I could afford to laugh at the scandal-monking them Medgers started round on me that I was a skimflint and would accept all treats without making no return. "Return?" I says to Mrs. Orene Willis when she told me what they was circulating on me. "Return? Would I marry their big aunt for a piece of ham, some hominy and potatoes and one slice of lemon pie just to keep them from saying I wouldn't make no return? What do they expect of a man?" I says; and yet I was wasting my breath because plenty people expect that much of a bachelor time and again, and are ready to turn tail and prackly devour him when he shows too much backbone to do it.

Orene says not mind how them Medgers was talking because there was plenty better fish in the sea than their aunt, and she knowed one that already thought the world and all of me; but I would haf to guess who it was. I says no, I was settled into a bachelor and didn't care about guessing; I just desired a pleasant time in a general sociable way, as kind to one as I was to another. She says wait, the day would come when I would change my mind; but she wouldn't say now who she meant. Then, a couple evenings later, Ernie and Orene give a liver and onions party in their half on my honor, and I got the idea she meant a black-haired, switch-around young lady that was there by the name of Charlotta Trout.

This here Miss Charlotta Prout had a dark swartish complexion with great big Spanish eyes and teeth glittering like china when she yelled and laughed. I judged her to run about a hundred and fifty pounds, but all good plump lines and swishing her form every which way to get them noted, and if you was standing by her she would be whooping at somebody else but kind of rest herself against you like she didn't hardly know it wasn't the wall. Heartylike, too, giving you pushes when you and her was laughing and joking, or whacking you on the back maybe, or even wanting to bet a box of candy she wasn't ticklish.

So of course she right away made a good deal over me and set by me during while there was music to commence with, because it seems a Mrs. R. H. Carter that was there always brought her sither; so this Mrs. R. H. Carter got out her notes and played on it fairly good a while, and her and a gentleman from Ipswich by the name of Mr. Frank Smith with a comb and paper give kind of a duet. Then nothing would do but the Captain must sing. So I give 'em the *Warrior Bold* and *We Never Speak as We Pass By*, and Miss Charlotta Prout carried on so hoop-te-do over it, how I couldn't stop now and all such, I had to try again and sung all I could recklect of *The Star Spangled Banner*.

Miss Charlotta Prout kep' cn egging me to recklect some more of it and go on, and I see Mrs. Orene Willis casting me knowing glances over the shoulder, so I give a good guess and was sure this here Charlotta was the one she meant already thought the world and all of me. So of course then I commenced holding

off from Miss Charlotta Prout, not insulting her but just tacking off in order nobody would think I was letting myself get unsettled as a bachelor on account of her sakes.

Then something happened I didn't take no special note of at the time; but it come to bear on the case afterwards. Come the refreshments got over, we was playing games and pastimes, and Miss Charlotta Prout says we must play the game of Lapland, which was the gentlemen set in the middle the room in chairs with an empty chair beside each of 'em, and this Mrs. R. H. Carter set to one side playing her sither, while the ladies circle round the gentlemen and the extra chairs, and then all of a sudden, poom! Mrs. R. H. Carter would stop the sither and the ladies would scramble to set down in the extra chairs; but there's one chair too few, so one lady would haf to set on whatever gentleman's lap she was in front of when the music stopped.

Well, all hoop-te-do, and then the music stopped, and the lady that got caught was this Miss Charlotta Prout. She was mostly in front of me; but I wished to keep on tacking off, so I set in such a way as she could not set down on me, and so she had to slide over next and set on Ernie Willis, instead.

It seemed like a big success because everybody hollered and joked, and Charlotta acted like she was all dismayed and that Ernie wouldn't let her get up and screamed, and then the music commenced again, and this time I was the gentleman got caught and it was Mrs. Orene Willis set down in my lap, and I let her, thinking no harm there. I entered in the spirit of it, too, and tickled Orene in her sides, same as Ernie done Miss Charlotta Prout, and everybody happy and hollering and I didn't think nothing of anything, and after the party was over went home next door just feeling it'd been a general sociable evening, as kind to the one as the other and nobody the worse.

I slept nice, all peaceful dreams; but the next morning being a Sunday, Ernie come in my half while I was cleaning up breakfast and give me a surprise.

He looked all soured up, and, what was less to be excused, he commenced picking on me.

"Thought you was my good old shipmate," he says.

"Thought you would stand by a man; but look what you went and done last night!"

"Last night? Me?" I asked him. "When last night? Tell me that!"

"First time the music stopped," he says, using an accusing voice. "Charlotta was going to set down on your lap, but you had your knee all humped up so, why, she couldn't and had to set down on me; so her and I had to make the best of it. What did you want to go and hump up your knee against her for?"

"Listen!" I says. "Your own wife was casting me arched glances over Miss Charlotta Prout, and I can't afford to have no one suspicioning I would ever give way to the altar. Look at the Medgers and that big aunt of theirs!" I says. "The

same kind of talk might got started on me over this Miss Charlotta Prout if I wasn't careful."

"LISTEN," Ernie says. "Be a shipmate! Be a shipmate!" He went on and says his wife kep' him awake hours and hours account of Charlotta setting on him, and it was far from the first time this Mrs. Orene Willis had got upset over him and Miss Charlotta Prout. "Excepting the house is in Orene's name," he says, in a low voice on account the pa'tition would sometimes let sounds through, "I would gone away long ago," he says, "and passed out of Orene's life some place she'd never find me." If it wasn't for Orene owning all her propaty herself, he says, he would go away right today under a new name, because by not letting Charlotta set on me I'd got Orene all started up again and who could tell when she would ever quit?

"But look here, Ernie!" I says. "This here Miss Charlotta Prout was acting pretty excited over me right out in the open. I had to stop her, didn't I?"

"No, you didn't," he says, and he give kind of a stupid smile. "It's me she likes," he says. Then he says he will confide in me, and the upshoot o' the hull matter was, he says Charlotta was just letting on to make over me to throw a screen in people's eyes and account of Mrs. Orene Willis having been jealous over her before. He says Mrs. Orene Willis was always trying to get somebody to marry this Miss Charlotta Prout so Charlotta would quit running after him. "She's wild over me," he says, and give that kind of a stupid smile again. "Charlotta Prout, I mean," he says. "She wouldn't look at no other man but me if there was a million of 'em, all handsome and captains in the Navy instead of just ex-tugboat," he says. "So look what you done," he says, "Got everything all stirred up just after it'd commenced to summer down. You got me in it," he says. "You got to get me out of it."

"Get you out of it?" I asked him. "My soul! Get you out of it!"

"Why, certainly," he says, and he started rambling on in a long riggarmarony about favors he claimed he'd done me when we was shipmates, and one special time he dwelled on, claiming he saved my repatation once in Boston harbor, and going on and dwelling on all thus and so he claimed he knowed about me from old times. So it commenced coming over me if I didn't do everything he asked me he would go spreading all this and that to my dirtament all over Cosy's Island. Then he says, "You can do it easy," he says.

"Do what easy?" I asked him.

"Make love to Charlotta," he says.

"Listen!" I told him. "Listen!"

"It aint going to hurt you," he says. "Why, you can injoy it," he says.

"Wouldn't it be a pleasure to set up to a fine active young lady like Charlotta and have her behave crazy over you without no danger in it? I'll tell her to," he says.

"If I tell her to, she will," he says. "She won't like it much," he says; "but she done it last night because I told her to and you couldn't hardly noted it wasn't real," he says. "If I tell her to keep on, she'll even do that," he says.

"Listen!" I told him. "You don't know women," I told him. "The way she acted over me last night was gennawine."

Ernie laughed. "No, it wasn't; it was all a screen just the same as it'll be this afternoon."

"This afternoon?" I asked him. "A screen this afternoon?"

"Why, certainly," he told me. "You go and get Charlotta and bring her to our house to pay your party-call together, and the four of us'll set around and talk and then go somewheres for supper and then to a movie. You can hold Charlotta's hand a little and have Orene see it; I'll let you do that much. We'll get up kind of a quartet," he says. "The four of us'll commence and get to going everywheres together, and all the time you got to play your part of being all wild in love with Charlotta, and in a-couple months or so Orene'll be summered down again."

"A couple months?" I says. "Listen here!"

But he wouldn't pay no 'tention. "I'll go telephone Charlotta from the drug-store you're coming around for her this afternoon," he says. "And I'll order her to keep on letting on she likes you. You get kind of fighting to hold her hand whenever Orene's looking," he says. "Are you a true shipmate, or ought this community to know about all them old troubles around Boston harbor?" he says.

Well, the upshoot of it was, I didn't want to be charged no true shipmate and would take pleasure to hold her hand all right if no serious bond expected. So I went around for Miss Charlotta Prout at her aunt's boarding-house that afternoon, and she was waiting for me. "Ernie telephone to you, did he?" I asked her when we come out the gate. "He told you the fix he's in, didn't he?"

"Well," she says, "he told me you'd be around for me." Then she kind of laughed and went on, "Ernie told me he hoped I and you wouldn't mind Orene and everybody noting you and me seem to kind of taken to each other," she says.

She spoke kind of bashful, so it looked to me maybe she felt more gennawine over me than Ernie says and maybe I better hold off from her, after all— excepting when maybe Ernie would be looking or egging me to play the part of a lover. So I just commenced talking about it looking more less like a thickening up sou'west and maybe rain tomorrow and so on, till we got to Ernie's and went in.

Well, so when Orene see Charlotta, she was all false smiles and "Glad you come," like women do when they're all salty with spite but there's company. "My, what a perfect fit!" she says, meaning Charlotta's clothes. "Shows it all,

don't it?" she says, like if everything jolly but with biting below decks. Then she took hold my arm. "You set here on the davenport with me, Captain," she says. "Ernie and Charlotta can take them two chairs over there that's so close together." She give a couple titters. "Maybe they'd p'fer to use only one chair like the way they done last night when she sat on him."

"Listen!" Ernie says. "Aint I told you ten thousand times it wasn't only a game, and didn't you go and set on the Captain yourself during it?"

She didn't pay no 'tention. "You set here with me, Captain," she says.

Ernie was standing aft of her and he motioned me not to; but she already had my arm awful affectionate and commenced pulling, so I had to go and set down with her on the davenport like she says.

"You was certainly the life of the party last night, Captain," she told me right out. "I felt terrible when you'd went home and I see I wasn't going to lay eyes on you again until some time today. I bet you didn't lay awake missing nobody though yourself. Captain, did you?"

IT seems right away my brains got the feeling of being more less confused. Here last night she was all arched glances at me over Charlotta Prout; but now making me set by herself on the davenport and saying things right before her husband that would make anybody red. She was one them cacklish-voiced women, Orene, thin and holler-eyed, but all knotty and awful strong. Still and all, no matter if they're kind of homely now and then, you got to take the good with the bad in this world, and, her being married, why, if she felt that way, it was safe to come back at her as good as she sent.

"Yes, I did," I says. "I missed somebody terrible all the long night."

"Who?" she asked me. "Who?"

"You," I says. "You, only I expect Ernie'd be mad if I told you how much."

"No, I wouldn't," Ernie says. "We heard you going to sleep right after you went home," he says, "through the pa'tition," he says.

I come right back. "I do my missing in my dreams," I says. "I missed Orene," I says, "in all I had," I says.

So it seems Ernie and Charlotta hadn't set down yet, but was standing up looking at us. "Listen!" Ernie says. "I was just thinking of telling you all a good funny story about something the Captain done )nce in Boston harbor when if it hadn't been for me—"

"Listen!" I says, wishing to stop him before he got to going all over them old times again. "Listen!"

"Well then," he says, "ain't you forgot something, Captain? Ain't you forgot about—"

"What?" I asked him. "What?" He give me a look, and I recklected how he'd talked me into the 'greement I would play the part of a lover towards Miss Charlotta Prout. "Oh, yes," I says, getting up. "I forgot."

Then, lo and beholden, it was Orene's turn. "What?" she says, awful eager. "What is it you forgot, Captain?" Then she grabbed my hand and pulled me down beside her again and didn't let go of me. "Tell Orene, Captain," she says. "Tell Orene."

"Tell her what?" I says.

"What you just forgot," she says. "Tell Orene what you forgot, Captain."

Well, I knowed it wouldn't do to tell her, so I hardly see what to say; but right away Miss Charlotta Prout come forrud and set on the other side of me on the davenport. "Guess Captain pretty near forgot me!" she says, all hoop-te-do and laughing. "Looks like I would have to train him better if things is going to be in the future like he seems to want," she says.

"Here!" I says, because that give me a scare, her putting it so plain and prackly leaning on my chest while saying it. "Here!"

"Here what?" Ernie says, and he walked around behind the davenport right quick, like he was looking for matches or something on a table that was there, and give me a poke between the shoulders; so I recklected to play my part again. "Aint it prackly almost fixed up between you and Charlotta already, Captain?" he says in a pretended voice. "Ain't it, Captain?"

"What?" I says. "Oh, yes," I says. "Maybe it might be that way some day—almost," I says. "Not right now but some day, maybe. I don't say it will or it won't." I says.

SO this Mrs. Orene Willis, she leaned against me on the other side. "No," she says. "Captain knows there's lots of fish in the sea," she says. She leaned her face around kind of in front of mine, all bright eyes and smiling. "Captain aint going to put all his eggs in one basket," she says. "Not my cute Captain!" she says.

So all this time Charlotta was kind of h'isting up her hand in front of me where I could see it, and I recklected my 'greement to hold it and I give it kind of a flirtish slap, and she says, oh, oh, I would haf to learn to stop that during while we was out calling, excepting just only a little sometimes among good friends of ours like Ernie and Orene.

Orene give another couple spiteful titters and says yes, but they needn't think she was born yesterday, and anyways Ernie and Charlotta better go set on them chairs because Captain and her liked tfie davenport to ourselves. So it went on; we set there as much as an hour, me between 'em, during while I just give myself up to injoyment of the occasion. This Mrs. Orene Willis and Miss Charlotta Prout plied me with every female form of pressing their suit on me.

THEN, after all this and that, Mrs. Orene Willis finally at last says again, "Tell Orene what you says you forgot when we first set down here, Captain. Tell Orene."

I give her a couple winks. "I can't," I says. "It's a secret. It's a secret between me and Ernie."

She give a holler. "I bet it is! I knowed it!"

"It aint neither," Ernie says, and he looked mad. "I aint got no secrets with him— excepting something I could tell on him that took place once in Boston harbor. If he's got a secret since then it's one between him and Charlotta. That's what you meant, wasn't it, Captain? You and Charlotta got a secret, aint you, Captain?— or else Boston harbor, Captain!"

I see he meant it for a threat, so I says yes, I meant a secret I and Charlotta was having, and Charlotta says oh, Captain ! and how her and I mustn't tell right out until we'd settled on the day, but just could let a few close friends guess, and got so affectionate it made Mrs. Orene Willis crazier than ever over me. Orene says she wished it was last night all over again, when she set on me during Lapland, because she hadn't never felt so at home until then. Charlotta says no, if there was going to be any more setting on her little Captain take place, she would be the one.

They was sweet as daisies of the field to me; but letting off outcries like covering up scorn when they talked towards each other across me. Long before we got up from the davenport and all went out to Earl's Place next the sardine wharf for supper, it come over my brains Ernie was even a poorer hand at studying out women than I'd time and again told him he was. Women having a double nature, he would believe their outside behavior, while the truth about a woman is, it takes a man that can see through them, which you got to get partly by gift and partly by experience; whereby I was settled into a bachelor account of having both. So my brains took in that no two females would ever behave like that over any man without it being gennawine.

IN the first place, take the case of Ernie— he was only a foreman in the sardine cannery and it's natural to women to like a captain. Then again there was lots of points Ernie didn't have; he was just more less like anybody you'd pass on the street and not give thought to, just a more less ordinary man, about six foot and blondy, like you see hundreds of. Women'll only give way to their feelings over a man like that lessen there aint nobody special on hand, so there was all the difference in the world, and no wonder Ernie was more less the gooseberry of the party.

He got kind of brooding and ugly, and when the time come to pay for supper for the four of us at Earl's Place, forced me into settling by means of hinting

about Boston harbor, and the same for all four tickets to the movies afterwards; though by that time, after what the supper cost me, I was pretty near ready to let him tell it, come what may. It wasn't nothing I could ever be arrested for—anyways not now, because excepting Ernie all the rest that knowed it was prackly disappeared, and on the witness box my word would be as good as his.

Well, it didn't come to that, and in the movies where it was dark I was setting between them again, and, the way they was whispering, there couldn't been any people in forty feet didn't know the audience had a captain in it. Them two didn't pay no 'tention to the actors that was acting the theater up there before 'em. Almost the hull time they was both whispering in my ears so's the other one could hear 'em, terrible embarrassing, and I commenced getting scared again about the position I would be in if I didn't look out mighty careful.

Mrs. Orene Willis, being already married, why, she wouldn't never be no trouble to me partycourly, no matter how strong I let her feelings get; but Miss Charlotta Prout was carrying it 'way beyond any part she could been acting, like she let Ernie think; so I better shift my course and take it over the quarter.

"Where's your hand on this side, Captain?" she whispers afterwhile. "I can't find it no more."

"It's safe," I says, not mean but more less rebuking. "If the lights was turned on you'd see it was all safe," I says, so she would understand by this time I was letting Mrs. Orene Willis hold both.

Well and so, this Mrs. Orene Willis, she was in big spirits and when we come out nothing would do but I and her and Ernie must all leave Charlotta at her aunt's boarding-house first; and then, when the three of us got back home, Orene kep' saying good night about a hundred times, and afterwards, when I went in my half and them in theirs, she knocked on the pa'tition and must put her face up against it, because I could hear her plain, and she hollered, "Good night, Captain!" through the pa'tition about twenty-thirty times more.

THEN, lo and beholden, next morning as he was starting for the cannery, Ernie come in and waked me up and stood over my bed and berated me, and all thus and so, and would I do like I give my word to or have the hull Cosy's Island hear the plain truth about Boston harbor once for all?

I done my best to keep on sleeping; but he would jerk the bedclothes away and talk in a low mean husky voice up close to my face, bent over, so's Orene couldn't hear him through the pa'tition. "Set up and listen to me," he says. "Set up and listen or I'll march straight on to my work and tell every soul in the cannery every last thing about Boston harbor!"

"Go on away," I says. "Can't you see I'm trying to get a little sleep?" I asked him.

"You listen!" he says. "Yesterday you give me your word you'd play the part of a lover to Charlotta, and all you done you let Orene pull the wool over you."

"Go away!" I says. "There's something in this case you don't understand," I says, and I come out with it. "I ain't a-going to go on and play the part of a lover towards Miss Charlotta Prout because it gets her too excited over me, and pretty soon she'd hold me to it and have you and Orene for witnesses— yes, and that girl what waited on us at Earl's Place and them people setting all around us at the movies, too!"

"She wouldn't unless I'd tell her to," he says. "She was only acting a part and you done everything on earth to spoil it. Yes, and as soon as I and Orene heard you go to sleep last night, Orene commenced and give me worse than ever. Are you going to play your part like a man from now on, or what about Boston harbor?"

I set up. "I'm sick and tired o' Boston harbor," I told him. "I don't want to hear no more about Boston harbor long's I live, and if I ever do and I get pushed, I'm going to tell everybody it was you. Besides," I says, "after a thing like that, if they don't do nothing about it, why, after a certain length of time, the law dies out," I says. "Them laws is all died out long ago," I says, "and the hull business never 'mounted to nothing in the first place," I says. "Looking back on it now," I says, "I wonder I ever let it worry me, even at the time it took place."

"Is that so?" he asked me, and put on a pretty ugly look on his face. "Oh, all right! Then I'll walk straight across the street and tell the Medgers first."

"Listen!" I says. "What's the use of all this and that? My goodness, aint the Medgers stirred up enough already on account their doggone big aunt?" I says.

"They'll like this," he says, and acted like he was starting for the door. "I don't know how they'll use it on you; but I expect they'll think up a way."

"Wait," I says. "I didn't say I wasn't willing to argue, did I?"

So he come back and set by the bed and we commenced arguing. Well and all, so the upshoot o' the hull matter was simply I would be willing to go on ahead and act the part of a lover; but only in the condition I would have black on white to protect my future from Miss Charlotta Prout. If he would bring me a paper signed black on white by Miss Charlotta Prout swearing she promised never to take no advantage of nothing I says or done in acting the part of a lover towards her, and will regard me as a bachelor pure and simple from this day forth, no matter what, why, then I will continue the work.

Ernie says all right, that was fair and he would have her sign it; so that afternoon he went around there soon's he got off and brought me the paper before supper. The part where it says what she will do was in pencil and in his writing; but she had signed it with her own signature in ink, and he had put his name under to be a witness. This is the way it read— Ernie read it off to me:

*" 'I swear to all parties may be concerned I do not care a red cent what Captain Ambrose Valentine ever does towards me or towards anybody else, or anything he says to me or anybody else, no matter what or where and do not even like him much and would never be able to either no matter what. If I would have to let him hold my hand for a certain purpose and have to listen to him trying to make love or even have to stand him putting his arm around me a minute sometimes, I state and swear and doubleswear it would not be for any pleasure I could take and must be solely in public and would only agree to it for certain reasons. I state and swear and doubleswear I would not be married to him or even have very little to do with him if he was the last man on earth excepting I am forced to let on a while like I kind of like him on account of certain reasons but don't. I state and declare and promise and swear and double-swear black on white to give him the grand go-by as soon as these troubles are over as he will find out after that mighty quick you bet.*

*" 'Signed*

*" 'Charlotta Prout." 'Witness she signed it " 'Ernest Willis' "*

SO that evening we was all at a music party at Mrs. R. H. Carter's of the sither, and I had a chance to whisper to Charlotta during the sither when Orene was holding Mrs. R. H. Carter's notes up before her. I wasn't going to take no chances Ernie would fool me with a false writing in her name, so I had the paper in my pocket and I showed it to Charlotta and asked her if all aboveboard and her own writing where she signed it, and she says, "You bet your life!" right quick. And so then I could breathe a big sigh of relief and know all safe again. She give me sweet smiles and I could accept them, and also her setting against me the way she was, and not feel a qualm.

Soon as Orene could get away from holding the notes for Mrs. R. H. Carter, she bounced back, too, on my other side; and this was the commencing of what you might call a round of pleasure. Since the world got started with the sky up overhead and the seasons working round one after the other like they do, and the bees and flowers and birds singing and the ocean and all them rivers, I don't expect no man was ever more made over or more set up against, and hand-holding every minute or two if the slightest chance, and whispering going on in his ears that would make people stare, and other compliments besides, said right out to my face.

No, sir, when two females get a-going it over a man, seems they don't care who notes 'em at it and prackly willing to show the public. Because this hull business was prackly in public, and, in all the time I was undergoing their struggle, I was only alone with this Mrs. Orene Willis two-three times and never once with Miss Charlotta Prout. Orene would always say, "No, the three of us'll see Charlotta home," and both of 'em would walk 'longside me holding onto both my arms, with Ernie behind kind of muttering, all the way right to Charlotta's aunt's boarding-house door.

ONE them two-three times when Mrs. Orene Willis didn't have nobody else around, she come in my half herself to see about some plaster I complained had fell off. She says I must done it with a chair myself and showed me lots of smiles and soft words and says she would get it fixed but would haf to charge it on the rent extra or else Ernie would suspicion she was favoring me. So, one the other times was when I went in her half to pay the rent and she says this plaster cost seven dollars repair it was better for me to pay on account of Ernie, and I was arguing look how Ernie never showed no interest how much she took on over me, and she says well, he better because she would make him yet, and in regards to this seven dollars she thought the world and all of my wishes and was trying her best day after day to follow them and turn into my idol of a woman, and then put her hand on top of my head so I would look up at her and says, kind of bird-like, didn't I wish her to be my good little business w.oman?

So this plaster cost me the sum of seven dollars, and she says if she had knowed in time there was a man in the world like me she certainly would never have give the slightest glance at Ernie Willis.

How I looked at it, Ernie was getting more the gooseberry than ever. There was a few times at parties or before company if Orene wasn't looking I see him whisper something quick in Charlotta's ear; but she would be smiling at me and maybe brushing off my coat collar with her handkerchief or scratching a spot off of my vest with her fingernail and rebuke him by not even giving no sign she as much as heard him. The way it commenced looking to my brains, why, he was a man that had such a big notion of himself— how she was all wild in a state over him— he had made a big mistake on that question.

Like I already says, he hadn't no looks I ever see nothing in, just blondy with ordinary curly hair, and more'n once his own wife says to me right before him and other people, too, the kind of eyes she liked on a man had some yellowish in 'em, like mine; she didn't like to see them eyes on a man that was too blue, she says, and you could tell she was hitting at Ernie. Yet and all, wherever there was a looking-glass you would catch him slipping it glances, so he would think prackly every female that didn't insult him was wild over him, while all the time in their heart they would really be after somebody else.

Then take the case of this paper I had got signed black on white by Miss Charlotta Prout she would never hold me to no bonds, no matter what. In the first place, you take a woman and she will sign anything and expect to get out of it if she wants to, and in the second place,

I had up and sent word to Miss Charlotta Prout I would prackly not have nothing to do with her lessen she signed it, so it was the only way in the world she would have the least oppatunity. Well, she might think she could get out of that paper; but she couldn't, and I kep' it in my sea-chest, not taking no chances

on her slipping it out my pocket when maybe she was dusting me off sometimes or something, or maybe just tickling.

SO, with that paper all safe, I give her free reins and would wink at her half the time and compliments right back at her and always tickle her as much as she done me. If at parties with Lapland again, I would let her set on me and never fail to set back on her when it was the gentlemen's turn. I would set on Orene, too, to keep the peace; but not as much as Charlotta. The truth is, I would never risked setting on Orene once or anything if it hadn't been for her being married. Orene was one them women with an expression on their face you see would be all right as long as there was company, or you was company yourself; but otherwise look out, because if ever under her claws, why, you will walk the chalk every minute but even then get hollered at and raked over from morning till night and long after.

So whenever he could get the chance Ernie would come in my half and complain of her till I would get mostly to sleep, yet I would still go on kind of hearing him complain until I would haf to open my eyes sometimes again a little. One night like that, he got to taking on so he got me clear all wide awake again. He was in a hoarse voice and setting up close to my chair so's Orene wouldn't hear nothing through the pa'tition; but what you might call his language got to beating up against my brains, you might put it.

"Well, but see here!" I says. "Didn't you tell me Orene would all summer down if I done like I been doing in regards to Charlotta?"

"Summer down!" he says. "If you would ever stay awake awhile so we couldn't tell you was asleep on the other side the pa'tition, maybe some night I could get a little sleep myself," he says.

"I won't do it," I says. "I aint a-going to give up my sleep for no man— Boston harbor or no Boston harbor!"

He looked awful bitter. "You're a shipmate!" he says. "You're a shipmate!" Then he got up and kind of walked up and down. "I aint got a true friend in the world," he says. "Right now, excepting Charlotta Prout, there ain't hardly a creature loves me."

"Charlotta Prout," I says. "I bet she don't."

"She does, too," he says. "She's pretty near the last of many," he says. "Excepting for the propaty being in Orene's name," he says, "I would take Charlotta tomorrow and go seek the fur Northwest and join the canning industry out there," he says.

"I bet Charlotta wouldn't go," I told him.

"She would, too," he says. "If matters don't summer down pretty soon, I'll do it anyways," he says. "They want men like me out there in the Northwest," he

says, "in them canneries. Charlotta would make a good cannery hand, too," he says. "A man's got to sleep sometime," he says.

Just like him, that was— talking about him needing sleep and all the time me setting there on a hard chair in my nightgown wanting to get in bed and him walking up and down between me and it. The more he talked, the worse condition he got in and even pointed his finger in my face and accused me of being a failure. He called me a puffick failure over and over; says he ought to knowed Orene nor nobody else wouldn't never believe Miss Charlotta Prout could ever give me the slightest smile that wasn't false.

"Failure!" I says. "I aint neither no failure!" I was mad, yet by this time got so sleepy again I couldn't hold but one eye partly open. Then I give kind of a wriggle around him and got in bed. "Ask them women," I says. "Ask them women if I'm a failure. I like Charlotta a lot the best and she does me; but ask both of 'em!" I says. "Put out that light and go on away and ask 'em now," I says.

HE kep' stooping over me and talking some more; but by this time I hardly knowed what he was saying, yet seems I kind of made out he was calling me a failure some more. Then I partly come to again and seems like he was talking desperate and says come what may, he'd made up his mind him and Charlotta would make their way inland to them Northwest canneries where he could get some sleep himself. The next morning seemed like I could recklect a knocking and knocking on the pa'tition from the other side, like Orene was signaling him he better come back in their half and hear what she had to say.

So of course and all, I didn't lay no importance on all this and that he says about him and Charlotta leaving the home-ties together, on account in the first place I was living in Cosy's Island and she knowed I had enough for two if she could ever make it— though I wasn't ever going to let her, of course. On the other hands, besides, I see by this time Ernie was a man you couldn't put no trust in, so, whatever he says, I'd commenced believing exactly the opposition.

Looking back on old times when him and me was shipmates, I couldn't hardly recklect a single time he ever done what he says he would, excepting once when he had a half dollar that was heads on both sides and he says he would win all of Mr. Benn the engineer's pay, and done it.

That's the trouble with a man you can't trust; he tells you he will do something and you don't pay no 'tention because you know he won't, and then he takes and does it. Always just the wrong time, too. There I was, he'd got me all complicated up with them two women, excepting for the paper I had on Miss Charlotta Prout, and then, me never suspicioning, didn't he turn right around and take and do exactly what he says he was a-going to!

It was late a Sunday night I had the canvasation with him when he says him and her would light out to join the Northwest canning industry, and on the

Monday I had to go 'way up inland myself to Dover, New Hampshire, account of having to be a witness where it laid between the freight-cars and a tugboat, which of the two done damage three years before to a shipping company, and I never got back till the Wednesday, when, lo and beholden, the hull beautiful little city of Cosy's Island was all agogs. This here Ernie Willis and Miss Charlotta Prout had took the law in their own hands, slipped off their mooring to the home-ties and run away nobody in Cosy's Island knowed where, and with only a short note to Mrs. Orene Willis that says flesh and blood could stand just so much gab and then it would haf to leave.

THE first that told me about it was Francis Ferguson that handles baggage, right when I got off the train, and at least eight more stopped me to talk about it as I come along Water Street on the way home. Many of 'em says it must be a terrible blow to me and all such and so on. Says they cal'lated this Miss Charlotta Prout meant the world and all to me; but I didn't give 'em no satisfaction and says no, the woman was not created yet could wring regrets out o' me, and so ha-ha! Little would I worry what would ever become of any of 'em.

The way my brains looked at this matter, why, I hadn't told Charlotta I had to go to Dover or good-by or anything, because I'd forgot about it myself till breakfast time Monday morning when I see the date on a newspaper and had to hurry. She might thought I wasn't never coming back, and anyways had likely give up hopes of ever getting that paper she signed away from me, and maybe commenced brooding and all at just the time the tempter come in and says he see he wasn't never going to get a-hold of Orene's propaty, so come on let's go!

That's how it got looking to me as I come towards home from Water Street, and I hadn't caught a glimpse the bad side of this business at all or even snifted the slightest smell of the danger until I was opening the gate of my half to go in, and here, lo and beholden, come this small young spitty-fire, Mrs. Medger of the big aunt. She come running across the street, a-hollering and squeaking at me.

"Wait, Captain!" she says. "I got something to tell you, Captain!"

"I don't want to hear it," I says, because since that night of her aunt I never heard one thing from her excepting what I rather not. She would always tell me where there was some new spot on my clothes she hadn't noted yesterday and twitter like an English sparrow, giving me mean glances like one, too. "I already heard it," I told her. "I'm tired of hearing it," I told her.

"Oh," she says. "Is that so, Captain? I guess you aint heard it all, though, in additions to just the news of the 'lopelement. I guess you aint heard what the hull town's saying about you, Captain."

"About me?" I says. "About me?"

"Oh, my goodness, yes!" she says, and commenced. "Everybody says they knowed you was a fortune hunter from the first you come here, Captain."

"Fortune hunter? What you mean, me a fortune hunter?"

"Orene's propaty," she says, and give her head a lot of them twitterings like as if laughing and teasing. "Oh, yes, the hull town says that's why you made all this trouble between the Willises, Captain, and played the snake in the grass and double-faced false friend in the home, working up Orene to be jealous of Ernie account of Charlotta Prout, and you all the time paying your suit to Orene, setting on each other in Lapland and always whispering and carrying on and working in the dark to replant her husband. Don't pretend no innocence, Captain! Everybody knows what's going to happen now."

"Now?" I says. "Happen now?" I says. "What's going to happen now?" I says; and all of a sudden a creeping feeling come over my spinal cords. "What you mean, what's going to happen now?"

"You and Orene," Mrs. Medger twitters. "Of course you and her have got your way and it's all plain sailing now for you and Orene."

"Me and Orene?" I says; but I was weak as water and sprung all moist from head to foot. "Me and Orene?"

"Why, of course!" Mrs. Medger says. "Orene will have her freedom now, so of course her and you can go prackly straight to the altar soon's she gets her papers. She's uptown now at Lawyer Wells's; but I expect you know all about that a lot better'n I do, don't you, Captain?"

I DIDN'T say anything; I turned my back on her. and kind of staggered into my half and got the front door shut and bolted like one in a doze; then I went to the back door where there wasn't no bolt and the key was lost, and piled everything in the kitchen up against it excepting the stove.

About half an hour afterwards, during while I was packing, I hear a twittering and hollering outside, awful spitty-fire and shrill, and a cacklish voice answering back like a couple dozen crows in a tree top. Right away my blood run cold as ice and I looked out a hole in the front window-shade and see Orene coming in the gate of my half, and her and this young small Mrs. Medger spitty-firing across the street at each other. Then Orene come towards the front door, fixing her face from the way she had been having it towards Mrs. Medger and working it round into a sweet welcoming smile.

She knocked and tried the knob and then she went around to the back door and tried it and hollered "Oh, Captain!" a good many times in as nice a voice as she could manage, and then she must thought maybe I had went out a while, because she went over in her half. So I figured she would be setting at the window waiting to see when I come back, and there couldn't been a mouse in the world could finished packing quieter than what I done.

She'd already c'lected the full amount of the leash for my half a month back, so my conscious was clear on money matters, and, come the first dark, I hove

my chest and valise .out the side window away from her half, and over the fence and down through the next yard to the alley and left 'em there against the back fence, and worked my way to a public garage and hired me a truck, and come back for 'em and had the truck haul me clear to Lemport Junction and took the first train, no matter where it was going.

SO that's how I come to settle in Cobble Reef after my wanderings had lasted some two-three weeks, under the name of Frank Johnson. Cobble Reef's a place where a man would be hated for a bachelor, of course, same as anywheres else; but, on the other hands, nobody wouldn't expect to find nobody here, on account nobody excepting summer people would dream of picking it out to come to.

I never see nobody from Cosy's Island again for five years, and then it was this old Francis Ferguson, the baggage man, had a vacation fishing and put in here from a sou'wester. He says two more men had got married to Orene on account of her propaty, and the second one still steadfast; but he says there wasn't no news ever come of where the other one went or of Ernie Willis and Miss Charlotta Prout— though I didn't care whether there was or not, particyourly not about Ernie.

Like I says, any married man will work against a bachelor; it's their nature, so you got to expect it; but take where Ernie had wormed this case around so as to go spot-free himself and leave me behind all insnared to this Mrs. Orene Willis, I considered he put himself outside the bale of manhood, even for a married man.

Looking back over the hull business, though, I see where I had showed a mite o' weakness myself. It was being scared of him coming out and telling everybody them pickadillies of Boston harbor. They didn't 'mount to nothing at all, and, though they are something I wouldn't tell nobody myself on account I might get misunderstood, I needn't been scared of him, because, the way things worked out like I been telling you, I had to leave Cosy's Island anyways.

## 20: The Open Door

*Rafael Sabatini*

1875-1950

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'THE OPEN DOOR,' says the Castilian proverb, 'will tempt a I saint,' which is only the Spanish way of saying that opportunity makes the thief.

It is not pretended that Florimond Souverain de la Galette was a saint, or that only exceptional temptation would lead him to seize an opportunity of profit, whatever the moral considerations involved. Nor did the discerning suppose that he had any right to that too high-sounding name of his, or that it was anything more than one of the theatrical properties calculated to create the romantic background which he conceived proper to his profession. It was of a piece with his favourite description of himself:

'I live by the sword.'

This being translated into vulgar terms meant no more than that he was a fencing-master. The sword by which he lived was buttoned and padded at the point, otherwise he would not have lived by it long. For, in fact, he was an indifferent performer; and if he drove even a precarious trade in the exercise of his art, this was because a great vogue of swordsmanship had been created in the declining lustres of the Eighteenth Century by the *Art des Armes*, that revolutionary and widely-read treatise on fencing by the great Parisian master, Guillaume Danet.

Those were days in which the name of Guillaume Danet was on every lip. His methods were discussed wherever gentlemen assembled, and fantastic tales were told of his wizardry with the blade.

It was Florimond's pretence that he had studied under Danet. The truth was that he had learnt what swordsmanship he knew in a third-rate Paris fencing-school, where, in addition to sweeping up the floor and furbishing the foils, it had been his function to instruct the beginners in the various guards. He had read Guillaume Danet's famous treatise assiduously, and, having scraped together a few louis, the little rascal had gone off to Rheims to set up as a master-at-arms. Over his door he hung a shield, bearing the conventional but in his case unauthorised and inaccurate legend, '*Maitre en fait d' Armes des Academies de S.M. le Roi.*' And he appropriated some of the lustre of the great name of Danet by unblushingly proclaiming himself the favourite pupil of that master.

That magical name accomplished all that Florimond could have hoped, but only until the young gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who had flocked so eagerly to his academy, discovered the falsehood of his pretensions to teach an art of which he himself possessed little more than the rudiments. After that, his

only pupils were a few aspiring younger members of the bourgeoisie, and Florimond fell upon esurient days.

His fortunes were touching their nadir when he became aware of that open door which is said to tempt the saint. He made the discovery, by purest chance, at the inn of the *Sucking Calf*— *Le Veau Qui Tête*— where it was his evening habit to sit over a game of écarté with Philibert the notary, Desjardins the wine merchant, and Fleury the apothecary.

Into that hostelry, on an evening of Spring, came a gaudy, overdressed young man in yellow and silver, with cheap lace at throat and wrist, and a ribbon wherever he could stick one, who had just descended from the Paris stagecoach.

He was the son of a mercer named Desfresnes, of the Rue St. Antoine, and he had lately inherited from his father a modest fortune with which he was setting out upon his travels, proposing to play in the world the careless, glittering role of a man of fashion. With his cheap finery he had put on the insolent airs which he had observed in men of the class of which he aspired to be accounted a member.

There may have been a dozen patrons in the common-room of the *Sucking Calf* when he swaggered in, calling, so as to be heard by all, for the best supper, the best wine, the best room, and the best of anything else the house could supply. In the hush produced by his loud commands, Florimond turned to look him over with an eye of increasing scorn. For Florimond, who, for a time at least, had rubbed shoulders with members of the lesser nobility, knew a gentleman when he saw one.

The day had been a lean one, the cards that evening were not going well for him, and the moment's inattention caused by the noisy advent of this pinchbeck gallant betrayed him into a disadvantageous discard. It was enough to sour his humour.

The newcomer, who had announced his name of Desfresnes in such a way as to make it sound like de Fresnes, conceived it in his role that no pretty woman should be overlooked; and little Paquette of the *Sucking Calf*, with her merry eyes, red lips, plump bosom and tip-tilted nose, suddenly found the young gentleman's arm round her waist and his finger under her chin.

"My dear, I vow to Heaven that you're too dainty a pullet for a provincial inn. I profess to Heaven you'll adorn the Palais Royal. You'd find your fortune there at Février's." With princely condescension he added: "I vow to Heaven you shall wait on me, little one." And in the best manner, as he supposed, of the Palais Royal rake, he placed a kiss, which none could have described as chaste, upon her fresh young lips.

Whether his spuriousness deceived her or not, and whatever may have been her feelings, Paquette knew her duties too well to make a fuss. With a laugh she slipped from his detaining arm, and moved off to prepare a table. Monsieur

Desfresnes was following when Florimond's unkindly comment on a note of mimicry arrested him.

"I vow to Heaven we are to be edified by this canary. He talks of the Palais Royal, of Février's. I vow to Heaven he will have been a waiter there."

The words were bad enough, but carried to every corner of the room by Florimond's thin, piercing voice they aroused a general laugh.

Monsieur Desfresnes stood arrested by this brutal shattering of his proud persuasion that he was dazzling these provincials. He lost his head.

A dark flush on his lumpy countenance, he turned back to the card-players' table. He wore a sword, and, leaning his hand upon the hilt, he thrust it up behind him like the angry tail of a roaring captain. And his tone matched the attitude in truculence. He ransacked his wits for words that should sear and scorch. But, failing to discover them in the little time at his disposal, he contented himself with being haughtily direct.

"Did you talk at me, sir?"

Florimond put down his cards, and swung round on his chair. His glance took in this haughty challenger, from the curls of his cheap wig to the buckles (of gilded brass) on his shoes, and his mouth tightened with malice.

"Now that I behold you better I perceive how little that was worth while."

The intransigence of the phrase should have warned Desfresnes that here was a man who, for all his slight build and the rusty black of his garments, might be dangerous. But, like the fool he was, he allowed himself to be swept forward by his gust of passion. He slapped Florimond's face.

"Let that teach you to mend your manners."

Consternation was followed by hubbub.

Florimond knocked over his chair in his haste to rise, and his three friends rose with him to restrain him. In what he did, however, he was as restrained as he was deadly.

"The lesson calls, I think, for payment. Monsieur Fleury, do me the honour to arrange a meeting for eight o'clock tomorrow morning in the Pré-aux-Chèvres. The length of my blade is twenty-five inches." He bowed with cold formality.

"Not to embarrass you, monsieur, I will withdraw."

He marched out stiff with dignity, leaving consternation in the bosom of the Parisian who found himself so abruptly with a duel on his hands. Reminding himself, however, that he had to deal with a benighted provincial, for whom such elementary swordsmanship as he possessed should be more than enough, Desfresnes recovered his confidence, and sustained the ruler's part.

"I vow to Heaven, sirs, that your friend is in a hurry to get himself killed."

Florimond's three associates regarded him with disconcerting pity. Then Fleury, the apothecary, answered him.

"If he doesn't kill you, sir, you will owe it either to his kindness of heart or to his fear of the consequences. The law is not lenient with a fencing-master, even when he has been provoked."

"A what?"

The three men sighed as one. Philibert shook his big head.

"Ah! You would not know, of course. A fatal ignorance, young sir. The gentleman you have so unpardonably struck is Monsieur Florimond Souverain de la Galette, master-at-arms of the King's Academies."

Desfresnes suddenly felt that the dinner eaten at Epernay had disagreed with him. He stared wide-eyed and pallid, the jauntiness had gone out of him like air from a pricked balloon.

"A fencing-master! But— Sacred-name!— one does not fight a fencing-master!"

"It is not prudent," the lean wine-merchant agreed. "But then neither is it prudent to slap a fencing-master's face."

Fleury however, showed himself brisk and practical. "I trust, sir, that you have a friend to make the necessary arrangements with me?"

"But...but..." Monsieur Desfresnes broke down, and finally demanded: "Where does he live?"

IT WAS A BOY from the inn who conducted him on foot to the shabby house behind the Cathedral where Florimond had his being and his academy.

Florimond's greeting was not encouraging. His scowl was forbidding.

"Monsieur, this is most irregular."

Desfresnes stammered in a nervous flurry. "Mu...Monsieur in ordinary circumstances...But these circumstances are... quite extraordinary. I did not know that you were a fencing-master."

"Ah! Indeed! I am to wear a placard on my breast, for the warning of impertinent cockerels."

But no insult could inflame anew the young Parisian. "It is impossible that I should meet you."

"Of course, if you prefer that I cane you in the streets..."

"Monsieur, I have come to apologize."

"Apologize?" Florimond laughed, and to Desfresnes it was the most dreadful sound that he had ever heard. "But where do you come from, then? From Egypt, or Persia, or perhaps China? For all that I know, it may be possible in some of these places to slap a gentleman's face and avoid the consequences by an apology. But in France, monsieur, we arrange it differently, as you may have heard. For even in the Palais Royal, even at Février's, these things are understood."

The young man abased himself in intercessions. Florimond, with no other end in view but completely to humble the upstart, did not yet choose to be mollified.

"You fetched the blood to my cheek just now. I shall fetch yours to your shirt in the morning. Then we shall be quits, and honour will be satisfied."

Desfresnes was in despair. He thought of flight. But his baggage was at the inn, which, moreover, was the post-house. Surreptitious departure would be impossible. His wandering, fearful eyes observed that the furniture of Florimond's room was shabby, that Florimond, whilst spruce to the casual glance, was threadbare to a close inspection. And so he became by the inspiration that was, in the sequel, to make a rogue of Florimond.

"If I were to offer compensation for the injury, monsieur?"

"Compensation?" Florimond's eye was terrible.

"You live by the sword. You give lessons for money. Why should you not satisfy your honour by...by..." He halted foolishly.

"By what, monsieur?"

Desfresnes took a flying leap at his goal. "By ten louis."

"Leave my house, sir!" roared the incorruptible Florimond.

"Fifteen louis," gasped Desfresnes, putting up his hands as a shield against the other's wrath.

But the fierceness had gone out of the fencing-master's eyes. His lips twitched.

"Fifteen louis! Bah! Name of a name, it costs more than that to smack my face, young sir."

"Twenty, then," Desfresnes said hopefully.

Florimond became suddenly thoughtful. He stroked his chin. Here was a queer, unexpected shaping of events. Twenty louis was as much as he now could earn in a year. For half the sum he would gladly allow himself to be slapped on both cheeks and any other part of his body that might tempt an assailant. He cleared his throat.

"You understand, of course, that in these matters there can be no question of compensation. Honour is not for sale. But a fine, now: that might be different. After all, I do not want your blood. By a fine of, say, twenty louis, I might consider that I had sufficiently mulcted your temerity. Yes, all things considered, I think I might."

Desfresnes lost not an instant, lest Florimond should change his mind. He whipped out a fat purse, bled himself and departed. And from that hour Florimond was a changed man.

An unsuspected source of easy profit had suddenly revealed itself. It was the open door that tempts even the saint. Florimond strangled a conscience that had never been robust, and crossed the threshold.

Twice, in the month that followed, he gave such provocation to travellers resting at the *Sucking Calf* that on each occasion a challenge resulted. True, the meetings provoked never followed. If Florimond, hitherto so gentle and unobtrusive, had suddenly, to the dismay of his three card-playing friends, become truculent and aggressive, at least, to their consolation, he was always to be mollified by a visit from his intended opponent. Commonly the visit was suggested by Fleury. Of the nature of the mollification which Florimond exacted, his honest friends had no suspicion. From the fact that he now spent money more freely, they simply assumed that the affairs of his academy were improving. Nor did these good, dull men draw any inference from the circumstance that his clothes assumed a character of extreme bourgeois simplicity, and that he abandoned the wearing of a sword, which, in the past, had been an integral part of his apparel.

Their suspicions might have been aroused if Florimond's victims had walked less readily into his snares. Shrewd in his judgment of likely subjects, he spread his net only for the obviously self-sufficient numbskull, and he never forced the pace, always leaving it for the victim to commit the extreme provocation.

Subjects such as these were, after all, by no means common. It is certain that at no time did the average run higher than one a fortnight, and with this, Florimond was at first abundantly content. Greed, however, increasing with prosperity, and fostered by the ease with which it could be satisfied, he grew less cautious.

Yet all went smoothly for him until one Autumn evening, when a moon-faced, quiet-mannered man in the plainest of tie-wigs, his sober brown suit almost suggesting a plain livery, descended from a post chaise at the *Sucking Calf*, and mildly ordered himself supper, a bottle of wine and a bed for the night.

From his table in the usual corner Florimond observed him narrowly, and judged him a timid simpleton of the merchant class, yet a man of substance, since he travelled in a chaise and not by the stage. He was an ideal victim, save that his unobtrusiveness opened no avenue of approach.

Demure and self-effacing, he ate his supper and Florimond began to fear that at any moment now he might call for his candle, and so escape. Some departure from ordinary tactics became necessary.

Florimond loaded a pipe, rose and crossed the room in quest of a light.

The stranger, having supped, had slewed his chair round and was sitting at his ease, a little unbuttoned and somnolent, his legs stretched before him. Florimond trod upon the fellow's foot; after that he stood glaring into the moon-face that was raised in a plaintive stare. Thus for a long moment. Then:

"I am waiting, monsieur," said Florimond.

"Faith! So am I!" said Moon-face. "You trod on my foot, monsieur."

"Let it teach you not to sprawl as if the inn belonged to you."

The man sat up. "There was plenty of room to pass, monsieur," he protested, but so mildly plaintive as merely to advertise his timidity.

Florimond had recourse to strong measures. "You are, it seems, not only a clumsy lout, but also a mannerless one. I might have pitched into the fire, yet you have not even the grace to offer your excuses."

"You...you are amazingly uncivil," the other remonstrated. The round face grew pink, and a wrinkle appeared at the base of the nose.

"If you don't like my tone, you have your remedy, monsieur," snapped Florimond.

Rounder grew the eyes in that bland countenance. "I wonder if you are deliberately seeking to provoke me."

Florimond laughed. "Should I waste my time? I know a poltroon when I see one."

"Now that really is going too far." The stranger was obviously and deeply perturbed. "Oh, yes. Much too far. I do not think I could be expected to suffer that." He rose from his chair at last, and called across to a group at a neighbouring table. "You there, messieurs! I take you to witness of the gross provocation I have received from this ill-mannered bully, and..."

Florimond's piercing voice interrupted him.

"Must I box your ears before you will cease your insults?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. So much will not be necessary," He sighed mournfully, in a reluctance almost comical. "If you will send a friend to me we will settle the details."

It came so unexpectedly that, for a moment, Florimond was almost out of countenance. Then he brought his heels together, bowed stiffly from the waist, and stalked off to request of Fleury the usual service. After that, pursuing the tactics long since perfected for these occasions, he departed from the inn. As the unvarying routine of the matter had taught him to expect, it was not long before he was followed. Himself, as usual, he opened to the knock, and with his usual air of indignant surprise admitted the moon-faced gentleman. As usual the victim displayed all the signs of distress proper to these occasions. His nervousness made him falter and stammer.

"Mu...Monsieur, I realize that this is most irregular. But ...but the fact is...I realize that I have been too hasty. It is necessary that I should explain that...that a meeting between us is after all, quite...quite impossible."

He paused there, prematurely as it seemed, and as if fascinated by the wicked smile that was laying bare the swordsman's dogtooth. Into that pause came the sarcastic answer that had done duty on every occasion since Desfresnes':

"Ah! I am to wear a placard on my breast, so as to warn the impertinent that I am a fencing-master."

But the phrase which hitherto had proved so disconcerting proved now the very opposite. The stranger's expression completely changed. It became so quickened by surprise and relief that it entirely lost its foolish vacuity.

"A fencing-master! You are a fencing-master? Oh, but that makes a great difference." The enlivened glance swept round the room, observed its bareness, the lines chalked on the floor, the trophies of foils, plastrons and masks adorning the walls. The man drew himself up. His figure seemed to acquire an access of virility. He actually smiled. "And this, of course, is your school. I see. I see. In that case everything arranges itself."

Heels together, he bowed with the proper stiffness. "Forgive the needless intrusion. We meet, then, at eight o'clock in the Préaux-aux-Chèvres." He turned to depart.

For the first time in one of these affairs it was Florimond who was disconcerted. He set a detaining hand upon the other's shoulder.

"A moment, Monsieur le mystérieux. What the devil do you mean by 'everything arranges itself'?"

"Just that." The eyes in the moon-face twinkled with amusement. "For me, as for you, monsieur, a duel with an ordinary civilian would be a serious matter. If there should be an accident the consequences might be grave. You see, I am, myself, a fencing-master. But since you are of the fraternity there are no grounds whatever for my apprehensions."

A sensation of cold began to creep up Florimond's spine. As a swordsman he knew that whilst among asses he might be a lion, among lions he was certainly an ass. He looked more closely at this stranger in whom he had been so mistaken; he looked beyond the round placidity of that pallid countenance, and observed that the man was moderately tall, well-knit, of a good length of arm and an exceptionally well-turned leg.

"You are, yourself, a fencing-master?" he echoed, and his stare was foolish.

"Even of some little celebrity," was the answer in a tone of mild deprecation. "My name is Danet."

"Danet?" Florimond's voice cracked on the name. "Not...not Guillaume Danet?"

Again the stranger bowed, that stiff bow from the waist so suggestive of the swordsman.

"The same. Very much at your service. I see that you have heard of me. You may even have read my little treatise. It has made some noise in the world. Until to-morrow, then, at eight o'clock, my dear confrere."

"But...a moment, *mon maitre!*"

"Yes?" The other paused, his eyebrows raised.

"I...I did not know..."

He heard his own phrase cast in his teeth.

"Am I to wear the name Guillaume Danet on a placard on my breast as a warning to impertinent little provincial fencing-masters?"

"But to meet you, *mon maitre*...It is not possible. You cannot wish it. It would be my ruin."

"That will not matter since you will probably not survive it."

Wide-eyed, pallid, Florimond stared at this opponent, the very mildness of whose aspect had now become so terrible. Already he had the sensation of a foot or so of cold steel in his vitals. "I will apo...pologize, *mon maitre*."

"Apologize! What poltroonery! You provoke, wantonly you insult the man you suppose to be incapable of defending himself, and you imagine that an apology in private and in secret will adjust the matter. You are caught in your own trap, I think. You had better be making your soul, Monsieur de la Galette. Good night!"

"Wait! Ah, wait! If now...if I were to compensate you..."

"Compensate me? I don't understand."

"If twenty-five louis..."

"You miserable cut-throat, do you dare to offer me money? Not for fifty louis would I forgo the satisfaction of dealing with you as you deserve. To bleed you of a hundred louis might perhaps be to punish you enough. But—"

"I will pay it! Master, I will pay it!" Frantically, Florimond made an offer that would beggar him of almost every louis wrung from the victims of his dishonest practices.

Round grew the eyes and the mouth in the round face that confronted him. "A hundred louis!" The great master's tone reminded Florimond that every man has his price. Slowly Monsieur Danet seemed to resolve. Slowly, with a shrug of the shoulders, he spoke. "After all, why not? The object, when all is said, is to punish your temerity. Since you are penitent, to kill you or even to maim you, might be too much. I am a man of heart, I hope. It is not in my nature to be inclement. I will take your hundred louis, and bestow them on the poor of Paris."

It was of no consolation to Florimond to assure himself that the poor of Paris would never see a sou of the money. With a heart of lead he counted out his hoard, and found to his dismay that ninety-eight louis was his total fortune. But now the great Danet showed himself not only clement, but magnanimous. Far from exacting the last obol, he actually left Florimond three louis for his immediate needs.

YOU CONCEIVE, however, that this generosity did not mitigate the fencing-master's bitter chagrin to see the fruits of months of crafty labour swept away. The only solace he found for his mortification was the reflection that what he had done once he could do again. There would be no lack of pigeons still to be

plucked. In future, however, he must proceed with greater caution and not trust too readily to a mild and simple exterior.

So, putting a brave face on the matter, he resumed his habits, and each evening at the *Sucking Calf* he sat like a spider in its web, waiting for the unwary fly to blunder in.

They were on the threshold of winter, a season of diminished travelling, and for the best part of a fortnight, Florimond's vigilance went unrewarded. Then one evening a traveller arrived whose entrance was like a gust of wind, whose voice, summoning the landlord, was sharp with authority.

The vintner bustled forward, and Florimond could scarcely believe his ears.

"Landlord, I am seeking here in Rheims a rascally fencing-master, who is a disgrace to his calling, and who goes by the flamboyant name of Florimond Souverain de la Galette. Can you tell me at what address he may be found?"

It was Florimond, himself, who answered.

With the feeling that the gods were casting a timely gift into his very lap, he sprang from his chair. He seemed to spin round in the act of leaping, and landed, heels together, in a rectangle before the enquirer.

"He is here."

He was confronted by a tall, lithe gentleman elegantly dressed in black, who regarded him sternly out of an aquiline countenance. A cold stern voice rang upon the awed stillness of the room.

"You are that scoundrel, are you?"

At least a dozen pairs of eyes were turned in pity upon this rash stranger who came thus to skewer himself, as it were, upon the fencing-master's sword. A dozen pairs of ears listened attentively to his further words.

"Another in my place might account himself your debtor. For I have to thank you for four pupils who have sought me in the course of the past two months. Each of them had been craftily entangled by you in a quarrel, so identical in detail as to betray its calculated nature. Each of them, so as to keep a whole skin, paid you in blackmail either ten or fifteen louis. Before the last of them came to me for fencing lessons I had already begun to understand the rascal trade you are driving. I have since assured myself of it, and for the honour of the profession of arms, of which I am a jealous guardian, I account it my duty to put an end to it."

"Who are you?"

"You have the right to know. I am Guillaume Danet, master-at-arms of the King's Academies."

"You? You, Guillaume Danet?" Goggle-eyed, Florimond regarded him; and then his glance was drawn beyond this tall stranger to a man who entered at that moment, carrying a valise: a man in sober brown that looked like a plain

livery; a man with a round, bland, pallid moon-face, hatefully well known to Florimond.

"Then who the devil may that be, that fellow behind you?" The stranger looked over his shoulder.

"That? That is my valet. The man I sent here a couple of weeks ago, to verify my conclusions about you."

And then this poor, rascally Florimond committed his worst blunder. Like all rogues, judging the world to be peopled by rogues having kindred aims, he uttered a snarling laugh.

"He did more than that. He anticipated you. You are behind the fair, Monsieur Danet."

"Behind the fair?"

"That scoundrel had a hundred louis from me. I have absolutely nothing left."

"I see. He played your own game, did he? And you do me the honour to suppose me equally base?"

He laughed, not pleasantly. He raised his cane, and for months thereafter they told the tale in Rheims of the caning administered by the great Danet to Florimond Souverain de la Galette, a caning which made an end of his career as a master-at-arms, at least in that part of France.

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## 21: The Purple Emperor

*Robert W. Chambers*

1865-1933

In: *The Maker of Moons and Other Stories* (1896)

*Un souvenir heureux est peut-être, sur terre.*

*Plus vrai que le bonheur.*

—A. de Musset.

THE Purple Emperor watched me in silence. I cast again, spinning out six feet more of waterproof silk, and, as the line hissed through the air far across the pool, I saw my three flies fall on the water like drifting thistledown. The Purple Emperor sneered.

"You see," he said, "I am right. There is not a trout in Brittany that will rise to a tailed fly."

"They do in America," I replied.

"Zut! for America!" observed the Purple Emperor.

"And trout take a tailed fly in England," I insisted sharply.

"Now do I care what things or people do in England?" demanded the Purple Emperor.

"You don't care for anything except yourself and your wriggling caterpillars," I said, more annoyed than I had yet been.

The Purple Emperor sniffed. His broad, hairless, sunburnt features bore that obstinate expression which always irritated me. Perhaps the manner in which he wore his hat intensified the irritation, for the flapping brim rested on both ears, and the two little velvet ribbons which hung from the silver buckle in front wiggled and fluttered with every trivial breeze. His cunning eyes and sharp-pointed nose were out of all keeping with his fat red face. When he met my eye, he chuckled.

"I know more about insects than any man in Morbihan— or Finistère either, for that matter," he said.

"The Red Admiral knows as much as you do," retorted.

"He doesn't," replied the Purple Emperor angrily.

"And his collection of butterflies is twice as large as yours," I added, moving down the stream to a spot directly opposite him.

"It is, is it?" sneered the Purple Emperor. "Well, let me tell you, Monsieur Darrel, in all his collection he hasn't a specimen, a single specimen, of that magnificent butterfly, *Apatura Iris*, commonly known as the 'Purple Emperor.'"

"Everybody in Brittany knows that," I said, casting across the sparkling water; "but just because you happen to be the only man who ever captured a

'Purple Emperor' in Morbihan, it— doesn't follow that you are an authority on sea-trout flies. Why do you say that a Breton sea-trout won't touch a tailed fly?"

"It's so," he replied.

"Why? There are plenty of May-flies about the stream."

"Let 'em fly!" snarled the Purple Emperor, "you won't see a trout touch 'em."

My arm was aching, but I grasped my split bamboo more firmly, and, half turning, waded out into the stream and began to whip the ripples at the head of the pool. A great green dragon-fly came drifting by on the summer breeze and hung a moment above the pool, glittering like an emerald.

"There's a chance! Where is your butterfly net?" I called across the stream.

"What for? That dragonfly? I've got dozens— Anax Junius, Drury, characteristic, anal angle of posterior wings, in male, round; thorax marked with—"

"That will do," I said fiercely. "Can't I point out an insect in the air without this burst erudition? Can you tell me, in simple everyday French, what this little fly is this one, flitting over the eel grass here beside me? See, it has fallen on the water."

"Huh!" sneered the Purple Emperor, "that's a *Linnobia annulus*."

"What's that?" I demanded.

Before he could answer there came a heavy splash in the pool, and the fly disappeared.

"He! he! he!" tittered the Purple Emperor. "Didn't I tell you the fish knew their business? That was a sea-trout. I hope you don't get him."

He gathered up his butterfly net, collecting box, chloroform bottle, and cyanide jar. Then he rose, swung the box over his shoulder, stuffed the poison bottles into the pockets of his silver-buttoned velvet coat, and lighted his pipe. This latter operation was a demoralizing spectacle, for the Purple Emperor, like all Breton peasants, smoked one of those microscopical Breton pipes which requires ten minutes to find, ten minutes to fill, ten minutes to light, and ten seconds to finish. With true Breton stolidity he went through this solemn rite, blew three puffs of smoke into the air, scratched his pointed nose reflectively, and waddled away, calling back an ironical "Au revoir, and bad luck to all Yankees!"

I watched him out of sight, thinking sadly of the young girl whose life he made a hell upon earth— Lys Trevec, his niece. She never admitted it, but we all knew what the black-and-blue marks meant on her soft, round arm, and it made me sick to see the look of fear come into her eyes when the Purple Emperor waddled into the café of the Groix Inn.

It was commonly said that he half-starved her. This she denied. Marie Joseph and 'Fine Lelocard had seen him strike her the day after the Pardon of the Birds because she had liberated three bullfinches which he had limed the

day before. I asked Lys if this were true, and she refused to speak to me for the rest of the week. There was nothing to do about it. If the Purple Emperor had not been avaricious, I should never have seen Lys at all, but he could not resist the thirty francs a week which I offered him; and Lys posed for me all day long, happy as a linnet in a pink thorn hedge. Nevertheless, the Purple Emperor hated me, and constantly threatened to send Lys back to her dreary flax-spinning. He was suspicious, too, and when he had gulped down the single glass of cider which proves fatal to the sobriety of most Bretons, he would pound the long, discoloured oaken table and roar curses on me, on Yves Terrec, and on the Red Admiral. We were the three objects in the world which he most hated: me, because I was a foreigner, and didn't care a rap for him and his butterflies; and the Red Admiral, because he was a rival entomologist.

He had other reasons for hating Terrec.

The Red Admiral, a little wizened wretch, with a badly adjusted glass eye and a passion for brandy, took his name from a butterfly which predominated in his collection. This butterfly, commonly known to amateurs as the "Red Admiral," and to entomologists as *Vanessa Atalanta*, had been the occasion of scandal among the entomologists of France and Brittany. For the Red Admiral had taken one of these common insects, dyed it a brilliant yellow by the aid of chemicals, and palmed it off on a credulous collector as a South African species, absolutely unique. The fifty francs which he gained by this rascality were, however, absorbed in a suit for damages brought by the outraged amateur month later; and when he had sat in the Quimperlé jail for a month, he reappeared in the little village of St. Gildas soured, thirsty, and burning for revenge. Of course we named him the Red Admiral, and he accepted the name with suppressed fury.

The Purple Emperor, on the other hand, had gained his imperial title legitimately, for it was an undisputed fact that the only specimen of that beautiful butterfly, *Apatura Iris*, or the Purple Emperor, as it is called by amateurs— the only specimen that had ever been taken in Finistère or in Morbihan— was captured and brought home alive by Joseph Marie Gloanec, ever afterward to be known as the Purple Emperor.

When the capture of this rare butterfly became known the Red Admiral nearly went crazy. Every day for a week he trotted over to the Groix Inn, where the Purple Emperor lived with his niece, and brought his microscope to bear on the rare newly captured butterfly, in hopes of detecting a fraud. But this specimen was genuine, and he leered through his microscope in vain.

"No chemicals there, Admiral," grinned the Purple Emperor; and the Red Admiral chattered with rage.

To the scientific world of Brittany and France the capture of an *Apatura Iris* in Morbihan was of great importance. The Museum of Quimper offered to purchase the butterfly, but the Purple Emperor, though a hoarder of gold, was a

monomaniac on butterflies, and he jeered at the Curator of the Museum. From all parts of Brittany and France letters of inquiry and congratulation poured in upon him. The French Academy of Sciences awarded him a prize, and the Paris Entomological Society made him an honorary member. Being a Breton peasant, and a more than commonly pig-headed one at that, these honours did not disturb his equanimity; but when the little hamlet of St. Gildas elected him mayor, and, as is the custom in Brittany under such circumstances, he left his thatched house to take up an official life in the little Groix Inn, his head became completely turned. To be mayor in a village of nearly one hundred and fifty people! It was an empire! So he became unbearable, drinking himself viciously drunk every night of his life, maltreating his niece, Lys Trevec, like the barbarous old wretch that he was, and driving the Red Admiral nearly frantic with his eternal harping, on the capture of *Apatura Iris*. Of course he refused to tell where he had caught the butterfly. The Red Admiral stalked his footsteps, but in vain.

"He! he! he!" nagged the Purple Emperor, cuddling his chin over a glass of cider; "I saw you sneaking about the St. Gildas spinny yesterday morning. So you think you can find another *Apatura Iris* by running after me? It won't do, Admiral, it won't do, d'ye see?"

The Red Admiral turned yellow with mortification and envy, but the next day he actually took to his bed, for the Purple Emperor had brought home not a butterfly but a live chrysalis, which, if successfully hatched, would become a perfect specimen of the invaluable *Apatura Iris*. This was the last straw. The Red Admiral shut himself up in his little stone cottage, and for weeks now he had been invisible to everybody except 'Fine Lelocard who carried him a loaf of bread and a mullet or langouste every morning.

The withdrawal of the Red Admiral from the society of St. Gildas excited first the derision and finally the suspicion of the Purple Emperor. What deviltry could he be hatching? Was he experimenting with chemicals again, or was he engaged in some deeper plot, the object of which was to discredit the Purple Emperor? Roux, the postman, who carried the mail on foot once a day from Bannalec, a distance of fifteen miles each way, had brought several suspicious letters, bearing English stamps, to the Red Admiral, and the next day the Admiral had been observed at his window grinning up into the sky and rubbing his hands together. A night or two after this apparition the postman left two packages at the Groix Inn for a moment while he ran across the way to drink a glass of cider with me. The Purple Emperor, who was roaming about the café, snooping into everything that did not concern him, came upon the packages and examined the postmarks and addresses. One of the packages was square and heavy, and felt like a book. The other was also square, but very light, and felt like a pasteboard

box. They were both addressed to the Red Admiral, and they bore English stamps.

When Roux, the postman, came back, the Purple Emperor tried to pump him, but the poor little postman knew nothing about the contents of the packages, and after he had taken them around the corner to the cottage of the Red Admiral the Purple Emperor ordered a glass of cider, and deliberately fuddled himself until Lys came in and tearfully supported him to his room. Here he became so abusive and brutal that Lys called to me, and I went and settled the trouble without wasting any words. This also the Purple Emperor remembered, and waited his chance to get even with me.

That had happened a week ago, and until to-day he had not deigned to speak to me.

Lys had posed for me all the week, and today being Saturday, and I lazy, we had decided to take a little relaxation, she to visit and gossip with her little black-eyed friend Yvette in the neighbouring hamlet of St. Julien, and I to try the appetites of the Breton trout with the contents of my American fly book.

I had thrashed the stream very conscientiously for three hours, but not a trout had risen to my cast, and I was piqued. I had begun to believe that there were no trout in the St. Gildas stream, and would probably have given up had I not seen the sea trout snap the little fly which the Purple Emperor had named so scientifically. That set me thinking. Probably the Purple Emperor was right, for he certainly was an expert in everything that crawled and wriggled in Brittany. So I matched, from my American fly book, the fly that the sea trout had snapped up, and withdrawing the cast of three, knotted a new leader to the silk and slipped a fly on the loop. It was a queer fly. It was one of those unnameable experiments which fascinate anglers in sporting stores and which generally prove utterly useless. Moreover, it was a tailed fly, but of course I easily remedied that with a stroke of my penknife. Then I was all ready, and I stepped out into the hurrying rapids and cast straight as an arrow to the spot where the sea trout had risen. Lightly as a plume the fly settled on the bosom of the pool; then came a startling splash, a gleam of silver, and the line tightened from the vibrating rod-tip to the shrieking reel. Almost instantly I checked the fish, and as he floundered for a moment, making the water boil along his glittering sides, I sprang to the bank again, for I saw that the fish was a heavy one and I should probably be in for a long run down the stream. The five-ounce rod swept in a splendid circle, quivering under the strain. "Oh, for a gaff-hook!" I said aloud, for I was now firmly convinced that I had a salmon to deal with, and no sea trout at all.

Then as I stood, bringing every ounce to bear on the sulking fish, a lithe, slender girl came hurriedly along the opposite bank calling out to me by name.

"Why, Lys!" I said, glancing up for a second, "I thought you were at St. Julien with Yvette."

"Yvette has gone to Bannalec. I went home and found an awful fight going on at the Groix Inn, and I was so frightened that I came to, tell you."

The fish dashed off at that moment, carrying all the line my reel held, and I was compelled to follow him at a jump. Lys, active and graceful as a young deer, in spite of her Pont-Aven sabots, followed along the opposite bank until the fish settled in a deep pool, shook the line savagely once or twice, and then relapsed into the sulks.

"Fight at the Groix Inn?" I called across the water. "What fight?"

"Not exactly fight," quavered Lys, "but the Red Admiral has come out of his house at last, and he and my uncle are drinking together and disputing about butterflies. I never saw my uncle so angry, and the Red Admiral is sneering and grinning. Oh, it is almost wicked to see such a face!"

"But Lys," I said, scarcely able to repress a smile, "your uncle and the Red Admiral are always quarrelling and drinking."

"I know oh, dear me!— but this is different, Monsieur Darrel. The Red Admiral has grown old and fierce since he shut himself up three weeks ago, and— oh, dear! I never saw such a look in my uncle's eyes before. He seemed insane with fury. His eyes— I can't speak of it— and then Terrec came in."

"Oh," I said more gravely, "that was unfortunate. What did the Red Admiral say to his son?"

Lys sat down on a rock among the ferns, and gave me a mutinous glance from her blue eyes.

Yves Terrec, loafer, poacher, and son of Louis Jean Terrec, otherwise the Red Admiral, had been kicked out by his father, and had also been forbidden the village by the Purple Emperor, in his majestic capacity of mayor. Twice the young ruffian had returned: once to rifle the bedroom of the Purple Emperor— an unsuccessful enterprise— and another time to rob his own father. He succeeded in the latter attempt, but was never caught, although he was frequently seen roving about the forests and moors with his gun. He openly menaced the Purple Emperor; vowed that he would marry Lys in spite of all gendarmes in Quimperlé; and these same gendarmes he led many a long chase through brier-filled swamps and over miles of yellow gorse.

What he did to the Purple Emperor— what he intended to do— disquieted me but little; but I worried over his threat concerning Lys. During the last three months this had bothered me a great deal; for when Lys came to St. Gildas from the convent the first thing she captured was my heart. For a long time I had refused to believe that any tie of blood linked this dainty blue-eyed creature with the Purple Emperor. Although she dressed in the velvet-laced bodice and blue petticoat of Finistère, and wore the bewitching white coiffe of St. Gildas, it

seemed like a pretty masquerade. To me she was as sweet and as gently bred as many a maiden of the noble Faubourg who danced with her cousins at a Louis XV *fête champêtre*. So when Lys said that Yves Terrec had returned openly to St. Gildas, I felt that I had better be there also.

"What did Terrec say, Lys?" I asked, watching the line vibrating above the placid pool.

The wild rose colour crept into her cheeks. "Oh," she answered, with a little toss of her chin, "you know what he always says."

"That he will carry you away?"

"Yes."

"In spite of the Purple Emperor, the Red Admiral, and the gendarmes?"

"Yes."

"And what do you say, Lys?"

"I? Oh, nothing."

"Then let me say it for you."

Lys looked at her delicate pointed sabots, the sabots from Pont-Aven, made to order. They fitted her little foot. They were her only luxury.

"Will you let me answer for you, Lys?" I asked.

"You, Monsieur Darrel?"

"Yes. Will you let me give him his answer?"

"*Mon Dieu*, why should you concern yourself, Monsieur Darrel?"

The fish lay very quiet, but the rod in my hand trembled.

"Because I love you, Lys."

The wild rose colour in her cheeks deepened; she gave a gentle gasp, then hid her curly head in her hands.

"I love you, Lys."

"Do you know what you say?" she stammered.

"Yes, I love you."

She raised her sweet face and looked at me across the pool.

"I love you," she said, while the tears stood like stars in her eyes. "Shall I come over the brook to you?"

ii

THAT NIGHT Yves Terrec left the village of St. Gildas vowing vengeance against his father, who refused him shelter.

I can see him now, standing in the road, his bare legs rising like pillars of bronze from his straw-stuffed sabots, his short velvet jacket torn and soiled by exposure and dissipation, and his eyes, fierce, roving, bloodshot— while the Red Admiral squeaked curses on him, and hobbled away into his little stone cottage.

"I will not forget you!" cried Yves Terrec, and stretched out his hand toward his father with a terrible gesture. Then he whipped his gun to his cheek and took a short step forward, but I caught him by the throat before he could fire, and a second later we were rolling in the dust of Bannalec road. I had to hit him a heavy blow behind the ear before he would let go, and then, rising and shaking myself, I dashed his muzzle-loading fowling piece to bits against a wall, and threw his knife into the river. The Purple Emperor was looking on with a queer light in his eyes. It was plain that he was sorry Terrec had not choked me to death.

"He would have killed his father," I said, as I passed him, going toward the Groix Inn.

"That's his business," snarled the Purple Emperor. There was a deadly light in his eyes. For a moment I thought he was going to attack me; but he was merely viciously drunk, so I shoved him out of my way and went to bed, tired and disgusted.

The worst of it was I couldn't sleep, for I feared that the Purple Emperor might begin to abuse Lys. I lay restlessly tossing among the sheets until I could stay there no longer. I did not dress entirely; I merely slipped on a pair of chaussons and sabots, a pair of knickerbockers, a jersey, and a cap. Then, loosely tying a handkerchief about my throat, I went down the worm-eaten stairs and out into the moonlit road. There was a candle flaring in the Purple Emperor's window, but I could not see him.

"He's probably dead drunk," I thought, and looked up at the window where, three years before, I had first seen Lys.

"Asleep, thank Heaven!" I muttered, and wandered out along the road. Passing the small cottage of the Red Admiral, I saw that it was dark, but the door was open. I stepped inside the hedge to shut it, thinking, in case Yves Terrec should be roving about, his father would lose whatever he had left.

Then after fastening the door with a stone, I wandered on through the dazzling Breton moonlight. A nightingale was singing in a willow swamp below, and from the edge of the mere, among the tall swamp grasses, myriads of frogs chanted a bass chorus.

When I returned, the eastern sky was beginning to lighten, and across the meadows on the cliffs, outlined against the paling horizon, I saw a seaweed gatherer going to his work among the curling breakers on the coast. His long rake was balanced on his shoulder, and the sea wind carried his song across the meadows to me:

*St. Gildas!*  
*St. Gildas!*  
*Pray for us.*

*Shelter us.  
Us who toil in the sea.*

Passing the shrine at the entrance of the village took off my cap and knelt in prayer to Our Lady of Faöuet; and if I neglected myself in that prayer, surely I believed Our Lady of Faöuet would be kinder to Lys. It is said that the shrine casts white shadows. I looked, but saw only the moonlight. Then very peacefully I went to bed again, and was only awakened by the clank of sabres and the trample of horses in the road below my window.

"Good gracious!" I thought, "it must be eleven o'clock, for there are the gendarmes from Quimperlé."

I looked at my watch; it was only half-past eight, and as the gendarmes made their rounds every Thursday at eleven, I wondered what had brought them out so early to St. Gildas.

"Of course," I grumbled, rubbing my eyes, "they are after Terrec," and I jumped into my limited bath.

Before I was completely dressed I heard a timid knock, and opening my door, razor in hand, stood astonished and silent. Lys, her blue eyes wide with terror, leaned on the threshold.

"My darling!" I cried, "what on earth is the matter?" But she only clung to me, panting like a wounded sea gull. At last, when I drew her into the room and raised her face to mine, she spoke in a heart-breaking voice:

"Oh, Dick! they are going to arrest you, but I will die before I believe one word of what they say. No, don't ask me," and she began to sob desperately.

When I found that something really serious was the matter, I flung on my coat and cap, and, slipping one arm about her waist, went down the stairs and out into the road. Four gendarmes sat on their horses in front of the café door; beyond them, the entire population of St. Gildas gaped, ten deep.

"Hello, Durand!" I said to the brigadier, "what the devil is this I hear about arresting me?"

"It's true, *mon ami*," replied Durand with sepulchral sympathy. I looked him over from the tip of his spurred boots to his sulphur-yellow sabre belt, then upward, button by button, to his disconcerted face.

"What for?" I said scornfully. "Don't try any cheap sleuth work on me! Speak up, man, what's the trouble?"

The Emperor, who sat in the doorway staring at me, started to speak, but thought better of it and got up and went into the house. The gendarmes rolled their eyes mysteriously and looked wise.

"Come, Durand," I said impatiently, "what's the charge?"

"Murder," he said in a faint voice.

"What!" I cried incredulously. "Nonsense! Do I look like a murderer? Get off your horse, you stupid, and tell me who's murdered." Durand got down, looking very silly, and came up to me, offering his hand with a propitiatory grin.

"It was the Purple Emperor who denounced you! See, they found your handkerchief at his door—"

"Whose door, for Heaven's sake?" I cried.

"Why, the Red Admiral's!"

"The Red Admiral's? What has he done?"

"Nothing— he's only been murdered."

I could scarcely believe my senses, although they took me over to the little stone cottage and pointed out the blood-spattered room. But the horror of the thing was that the corpse of the murdered man had disappeared, and there only remained a nauseating lake of blood on the stone floor, in the centre of which lay a human hand. There was no doubt as to whom the hand belonged, for everybody who had ever seen the Red Admiral knew that the shrivelled bit of flesh which lay in the thickening blood was the hand of the Red Admiral. To me it looked like the severed claw of some gigantic bird.

"Well," I said, "there's been murder committed. Why don't you do something?"

"What?" asked Durand.

"I don't know. Send for the Commissaire."

"He's at Quimperlé. I telegraphed."

"Then send for a doctor, and find out how long this blood has been coagulating."

"The chemist from Quimperlé is here; he's a doctor."

"What does he say?"

"He says that he doesn't know."

"And who are you going to arrest?" I inquired, turning away from the spectacle on the floor.

"I don't know," said the brigadier solemnly; "you are denounced by the Purple Emperor, because he found your handkerchief at the door when he went out this morning."

"Just like a pig-headed Breton!" I exclaimed thoroughly angry. "Did he not mention Yves Terrec?"

"No."

"Of course not," I said. "He overlooked the fact that Terrec tried to shoot his father last night and that I took away his gun. All that counts for nothing when he finds my handkerchief at the murdered man's door."

"Come into the café," said Durand, much disturbed, "we can talk it over, there. Of course, Monsieur Darrel, I have never had the faintest idea that you were the murderer!"

The four gendarmes and I walked across the the road to the Groix Inn and entered the café. It was crowded with Britons, smoking, drinking, and jabbering in half a dozen dialects, all equally unsatisfactory to a civilized ear; and I pushed through the crowd to where little Max Fortin, the chemist of Quimperlé, stood smoking a vile cigar.

"This is a bad business," he said, shaking hands and offering me the mate to his cigar, which I politely declined.

"Now, Monsieur Fortin," I said, "it appears that the Purple Emperor found my handkerchief near the murdered man's door this morning, and so he concludes"— here I glared at the Purple Emperor— "that I am the assassin. I will now ask him a question," and turning on him suddenly, I shouted, "What were you doing at the Red Admiral's door?"

The Purple Emperor started and turned pale, and I pointed at him triumphantly.

"See what a sudden question will do. Look how embarrassed he is, and yet I do not charge him with murder; and I tell you, gentlemen, that man there knows as well as I do who was the murderer of the Red Admiral!"

"I don't!" bawled the Purple Emperor.

"You do," I said. "It was Yves Terrec."

"I don't believe it," he said obstinately, dropping his voice.

"Of course not, being pig-headed."

"I am not pig-headed," he roared again, "but I am mayor of St. Gildas, and I do not believe that Yves Terrec killed his father."

"You saw him try to kill him last night?"

The mayor grunted.

"And you saw what I did."

He grunted again.

"And," I went on, "you heard Yves Terrec threaten to kill his father. You heard him curse the Red Admiral and swear to kill him. Now the father is murdered and his body is gone."

"And your handkerchief?" sneered the Purple Emperor.

"I dropped it of course."

"And the seaweed gatherer who saw you last night lurking about the Red Admiral's cottage," grinned the Purple Emperor.

I was startled at the man's malice.

"That will do," I said. "It is perfectly true that I was walking on the Bannalec road last night, and that I stopped to close the Red Admiral's door, which was ajar, although his light was not burning. After that I went up the road to the Dinez Woods, and then walked over by St. Julien, whence I saw the seaweed gatherer on the cliffs. He was near enough for me to hear what he sang. What of that?"

"What did you do then?"

"Then I stopped at the shrine and said a prayer, and then I went to bed and slept until Brigadier Durand's gendarmes awoke me with their clatter."

"Now, Monsieur Darrel," said the Purple Emperor, lifting a fat finger and shooting a wicked glance at me, "Now, Monsieur Darrel, which did you wear last night on your midnight stroll— sabots or shoes?"

I thought a moment. "Shoes— no, sabots. I just slipped on my chaussons and went out in my sabots."

"Which was it, shoes or sabots?" snarled the Purple Emperor.

"Sabots, you fool."

"Are these your sabots?" he asked, lifting up a wooden shoe with my initials cut on the instep.

"Yes," I replied.

"Then how did this blood come on the other one?" he shouted, and held up a sabot, the mate to the first, on which a drop of blood had spattered.

"I haven't the least idea," I said calmly; but my heart was beating very fast and I was furiously angry.

"You blockhead!" I said, controlling my rage, "I'll make you pay for this when they catch Yves Terrec and convict him. Brigadier Durand, do your duty if you think I am under suspicion. Arrest me, but grant me one favour. Put me in the Red Admiral's cottage, and I'll see whether I can't find some clew that you have overlooked. Of course, I won't disturb anything until the Commissaire arrives. Bah! You all make me very ill."

"He's hardened," observed the Purple Emperor, wagging his head.

"What motive had I to kill the Red Admiral?" I asked them all scornfully. And they all cried:

"None! Yves Terrec is the man!"

Passing out the door I swung around and shook my finger at the Purple Emperor.

"Oh, I'll make you dance for this, my friend," I said; and I followed Brigadier Durand across the street to the cottage of the murdered man.

iii

THEY TOOK ME AT MY WORD and placed a gendarme with a bared sabre at the gateway by the hedge.

"Give me your parole," said poor Durand, "and I will let you go where you wish." But I refused, and began prowling about the cottage looking for clews. I found lots of things that some people would have considered most important, such as ashes from the Red Admiral's pipe, footprints in a dusty vegetable bin, bottles smelling of Pouldu cider, and dust— oh lots of dust. I was not an expert,

only a stupid, everyday amateur; so I defaced the footprints with my thick shooting boots, and I declined to examine the pipe ashes through a microscope, although the Red Admiral's microscope stood on the table close at hand.

At last I found what I had been looking for, some long wisps of straw, curiously depressed and flattened in the middle, and I was certain I had found the evidence that would settle Yves Terrec for the rest of his life. It was plain as the nose on your face. The straws were sabot straws, flattened where the foot had pressed them, and sticking straight out where they projected beyond the sabot. Now nobody in St. Gildas used straw in sabots except a fisherman who lived near St. Julien, and the straw in his sabots was ordinary yellow wheat straw! This straw, or rather these straws, were from the stalks of the red wheat which only grows inland, and which, everybody in St. Gildas knew, Yves Terrec wore in his sabots. I was perfectly satisfied; and when, three hours later, a hoarse shouting from the Bannalec Road brought me to the window, I was not surprised to see Yves Terrec, bloody, dishevelled, hatless, with his strong arms bound behind him, walking with bent head between two mounted gendarmes. The crowd around him swelled every minute, crying: "Parricide! parricide! Death to the murderer!" As he passed my window I saw great clots of mud on his dusty sabots, from the heels of which projected wisps of red wheat straw. Then I walked back into the Red Admiral's study, determined to find what the microscope would show on the wheat straws. I examined each one very carefully, and then, my eyes aching, I rested my chin on my hand and leaned back in the chair. I had not been as fortunate as some detectives, for there was no evidence that the straws had ever been used in a sabot at all. Furthermore, directly across the hallway stood a carved Breton chest, and now I noticed for the first time that, from beneath the closed lid, dozens of similar red wheat straws projected, bent exactly as mine were bent by the lid.

I yawned in disgust. It was apparent that I was not cut out for a detective, and I bitterly pondered over the difference between clues in real life and clues in a detective story. After a while I rose, walked over to the chest and opened the lid. The interior was wadded with the red wheat straws, and on this wadding lay two curious glass jars, two or three small vials, several empty bottles labelled chloroform, a collecting jar of cyanide of potassium, and a book. In a farther corner of the chest were some letters bearing English stamps, and also the torn coverings of two parcels, all from England, and all directed to the Red Admiral under his proper name of "Sieur Louis Jean Terrec, St. Gildas, par Moëlan, Finistère."

All these traps I carried over to the desk, shut the lid of the chest, and sat down to read the letters. They were written in commercial French, evidently by an Englishman.

Freely translated, the contents of the first letter were as follows:

LONDON, June 12, 1894.

DEAR MONSIEUR (sic): Your kind favour of the 19th inst. received and contents noted. The latest work on the Lepidoptera of England is Blowzer's *How to catch British Butterflies, with notes and tables, and an introduction by Sir Thomas Sniffer*. The price of this work (in one volume, calf) is £5 or 125 francs of French money. A post-office order will receive our prompt attention. We beg to remain.

Yours, etc..

FRADLEY TOOMER.

470 Regent Square, London, S.W.

The next letter was even less interesting. It merely stated that the money had been received and the book would be forwarded. The third engaged my attention, and I shall quote it, the translation being a free one:

DEAR SIR: Your letter of the 1st of July was duly received, and we at once referred it to Mr. Fradley himself. Mr. Fradley being much interested in your question, sent your letter to Professor Schweineri, of the Berlin Entomological Society, whose note Blowzer refers to on page 630, in his *How to catch British Butterflies*. We have just received an answer from Professor Schweineri, which we translate into French— (see inclosed slip). Professor Schweineri begs to present to you two jars of cythyl, prepared under his own supervision. We forward the same to you. Trusting that you will find everything satisfactory, we remain.

Yours sincerely.

FRADLEY TOOMER.

The inclosed slip read as follows:

Messrs. FRADLEY TOOMER.

GENTLEMEN: Cythaline, a complex hydrocarbon. was first used by Professor Schnoot, of Antwerp, a year ago. I discovered an analogous formula about the same time and named it cythyl. I have used it with great success everywhere. It is as certain as a magnet. I beg to present you three small jars, and would be pleased to have you forward two of them to your correspondent in St. Gildas with my compliments. Blowzer's quotation of me on page 630 of his glorious work, *How to catch British Butterflies*, is correct.

Yours, etc.

HEINRICH SCHWEINERI.

P.H.D., D.D., D.S., M.S.

When I had finished this letter I folded it up and put it into my pocket with the others. Then I opened Blowzer's valuable work, *How to catch British Butterflies*, and turned to page 630.

Now, although the Red Admiral could only have acquired the book very recently, and although all the other pages were perfectly clean, this particular page was thumb black, and heavy pencil marks inclosed a paragraph at the bottom of the page. This the paragraph:

*Professor Schweineri says: 'Of the two old methods used by collectors for the capture of the swift-winged, high-flying Apatura Iris, or Purple Emperor, the first, which was using a long-handled net, proved successful once in a thousand times; and the second, the placing of bait upon the ground, such as decayed meat, dead cats, rats, etc., was not only disagreeable. even for an enthusiastic collector, but also very uncertain. Once in five hundred times would the splendid butterfly leave the tops of his favourite oak trees to circle about the fetid bait offered. I have found cythyl a perfectly sure bait to draw this beautiful butterfly to the ground, where it can be easily captured. An ounce of cythyl placed in a yellow saucer under an oak tree, will draw to it every Apatura Iris within a radius of twenty miles. So, if any collector who possesses a little cythyl, even though it be in a sealed bottle in his pocket— if such a collector does not find a single Apatura Iris fluttering close about him within an hour. let him be satisfied that the Apatura Iris does not inhabit his country.'*

When I had finished reading this note I sat for a long while thinking hard. Then I examined the two jars. They were labelled "Cythyl." One was full, the other nearly full. "The rest must be on the corpse of the Red Admiral," I thought, "no matter if it is in a corked bottle— "

I took all the things back to the chest, laid them carefully on the straw, and closed the lid. The gendarme sentinel at the gate saluted me respectfully as I crossed over to the Groix Inn. The inn was surrounded by an excited crowd, and the hallway was choked with gendarmes and peasants. On every side they greeted me cordially, announcing that the real murderer was caught; but I pushed by them without a word and ran upstairs to find Lys. She opened her door when I knocked and threw both arms about my neck. I took her to my breast and kissed her. After a moment I asked her if she would obey me no matter what I commanded, and she said she would, with a proud humility that touched me.

"Then go at once to Yvette in St. Julien," I said. "Ask her to harness the dog-cart and drive to the convent in Quimperlé. Wait for me there. Will you do this without questioning me, my darling?"

She raised her face to mine. "Kiss me," she said innocently; the next moment she had vanished.

I walked deliberately into the Purple Emperor's room and peered into the gauze-covered box which held the chrysalis of Apatura Iris. It was as I expected. The chrysalis was empty and transparent, and a great crack ran down the middle of its back, but, on the netting inside the box, a magnificent butterfly slowly waved its burnished purple wings; for the chrysalis had given up its silent tenant, the butterfly symbol of immortality. Then a great fear fell upon me. I know now that it was the fear of the Black Priest, but neither then nor for years after did I know that the Black Priest had ever lived on earth. As I bent over the box I heard a confused murmur outside the house which ended in a furious shout of "Parricide!" and I heard the gendarmes ride away behind a wagon which rattled

sharply on the flinty highway. I went to the window. In the wagon sat Yves Terrec, bound and wild-eyed, two gendarmes at either side of him, and all around the wagon rode mounted gendarmes whose bared sabres scarcely kept the crowd away.

"Parricide!" they howled. "Let him die!"

I stepped back and opened the gauze-covered box. Very gently but firmly I took the splendid butterfly by its closed fore wings and lifted it unharmed between my thumb and forefinger. Then, holding it concealed behind my back, I went down into the café.

Of all the crowd that had filled it, shouting for the death of Yves Terrec, only three persons remained seated in front of the huge empty fireplace. They were the Brigadier Durand, Max Fortin, the chemist of Quimperlé, and the Purple Emperor. The latter looked abashed when I entered, but I paid no attention to him and walked straight to the chemist.

"Monsieur Fortin," I said, "do you know much about hydrocarbons?"

"They are my specialty," he said astonished.

"Have you ever heard of such thing as cythyl?"

"Schweineri's cythyl? Oh, yes! We use it in perfumery."

"Good!" I said. "Has it an odour?"

"No— and yes. One is always aware of its presence, but nobody can affirm it has an odour. It is curious," he continued, looking at me, "it is very curious you should have asked me that, for all day I have been imagining I detected the presence of cythyl."

"Do you imagine so now?" I asked.

"Yes, more than ever."

I sprang to the front door and tossed out the butterfly. The splendid creature beat the air for a moment, flitted uncertainly hither and thither, and then, to my astonishment, sailed majestically back into the café and alighted on the hearthstone. For a moment I was non-plussed, but when my eyes rested on the Purple Emperor I comprehended in a flash.

"Lift that hearthstone!" I cried to the Brigadier Durand; "pry it up with your scabbard!"

The Purple Emperor suddenly fell forward in his chair, his face ghastly white, his jaw loose with terror.

"What is cythyl?" I shouted, seizing him by the arm; but he plunged heavily from his chair, face downward on the floor, and at the moment a cry from the chemist made me turn. There stood the Brigadier Durand, one hand supporting the hearthstone, one hand raised in horror. There stood Max Fortin, the chemist, rigid with excitement, and below, in the hollow bed where the hearthstone had rested, lay a crushed mass of bleeding human flesh, from the

midst of which stared a cheap glass eye. I seized the Purple Emperor and dragged him to his feet.

"Look!" I cried; "look at your old friend, the Red Admiral!" but he only smiled in a vacant way, and rolled his head muttering; "Bait for butterflies! Cythyl! Oh, no, no, no! You can't do it, Admiral, d'ye see. I alone own the Purple Emperor! I alone am the Purple Emperor!"

And the same carriage that bore me to Quimperlé to claim my bride, carried him to Quimper, gagged and bound, a foaming, howling lunatic.

THIS, THEN, is the story of the Purple Emperor. I might tell you a pleasanter story if I chose; but concerning the fish that I had hold of, whether it was a salmon, a grilse, or a sea trout, I may not say, because I have promised Lys, and she has promised me, that no power on earth shall wring from our lips the mortifying confession that the fish escaped.

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